

Water Ways: Becoming an itinerant boat-dweller on the canals
and rivers of South East England.

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
by
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Abstract: This thesis draws from data collected over thirteen months of fieldwork working with “Boaters”, a boat-dwelling itinerant group on the waterways of Southern England. In the first of three parts, the thesis focusses on the individual motivations (economic, personal and political) behind becoming a travelling Boater, and on how one acquires the requisite skills and knowledge to become part of a community of practice on the waterways. Boaters on the whole do not have a sense of being an ethnically distinct group and, as such, this thesis interrogates what kind of an identity is being created or reinforced when individuals recognise themselves as Boaters. This part further deals with the specific temporal experience of boating (commonly known as “boat time”) that creates a shared experiential pattern between Boaters, and also examines the informal networks of trade, exchange and barter which enmesh Boaters in a web of reciprocal relationships. In the subsequent part, the focus of the thesis widens to take in the boating “community” as it is imagined. It asks how the concept of community is rhetorically constructed and corporately enacted on the inland waterways and identifies the creation of an emic and local conception of community. In the third part, the focus widens further still in order to interrogate the troubled relationships between Boaters and sedentary populations and between Boaters and agents of the State. By looking at Boaters’ different (essentially nomadic) understandings of locality and political organisation, this thesis attempts to more broadly explain the fraught relationship between state agencies and itinerant populations. The thesis concludes that the community of Boaters is constructed through the shared understandings which emerge due to the Boaters experiencing much of their world as being flexible, fluid and unfixed. Boaters are bound by acts of dwelling together on the waterways, acts that emerge from the specific material conditions of boat life, and further from acts of support where Boaters bind together for the security of the group against antagonistic outsiders and the interventions of agencies of the state.

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Glossary and Acronyms

ACC

The Association of Continuous Cruisers: a membership group for Boaters.

Bank

The sides of the channel.

Bargee Traveller

An ethnic category comprised of itinerant boat dwellers. Some argue that the Boaters should adopt this category.

Barges (also Dutch barges)

Boats wider and usually longer than narrowboats, often originally commercial boats. Some originating in the Netherlands and with a distinctive curved shape are known as Dutch Barges.

BCN

The Birmingham Canal Navigations. The mass of canals around the city of Birmingham in the West Midlands.

Bilge

The area underneath the flooring level of the boat where waste water can collect.

Bilge talk

Informal term in the town of Reading area for discussing technical boat matters.

Boat Warden

Boat residents given a mooring spot in return for managing a particular mooring, including moving overstaying boats on to new areas.

Boaters

The itinerant boat-dwellers who are the subject of this study.

Bow (also "front"; (inf.) "the pointy end")

The front end of the boat.

Bow Back Waters

Waterways in the "Bow" area of East London. Closed before the Olympic Games of 2012 and then not subsequently reopened.

British Waterways Act(s) of 1983 and 1995

Important acts of parliament relating to the management of the waterways.

BTC

British Transport Commission. The organisation tasked with the management of the majority of the waterways between 1947 and 1962.

Butty

A boat without an engine. Traditionally one of a “working pair;” the other being a motor boat.

BW

British Waterways: the organisational successor of the BTC. Managed a majority of the waterways between 1962 and 2012. A quango or quasi non-governmental agency.

BWB

British Waterways Board: the successor of the BTC. Was commonly known as and operated as BW.

CaRT

Canal and River Trust: the organisation which took over the management of the majority of the waterways from BW in 2012. A charitable trust.

Chandlery

A shop selling items useful for boating.

Channel

The section of the waterway on which the boat is navigating, e.i., “move to the centre of the channel” would be an instruction to move the boat into the middle of the river or canal.

Coal boats (also working boats, fuel boats)

Boats that travel the waterways selling necessary goods and services to Boaters.

Continuous cruising (also continuous cruiser, C Cer)

The name given to those Boaters and vessels that do not hold a permanent “home” mooring and thus find it necessary to travel from place to place.

CUB

Cowley and Uxbridge Boaters: a Boaters’ advocacy group based in the Cowley and Uxbridge area of West London.

(the) Cut

An informal term for a canal or the canal channel.

DCLG

Department for Communities and Local Government: a government department who have some responsibility for travelling peoples.

EA

Environment Agency: a government agency that manages some waterways, including the majority of those not managed by the main government authority (BW/CaRT). The EA’s responsibility includes the River Thames.

Enforcement Officer

An employee of BW or CaRT. Employed to enforce their employer's mooring rules through a variety of methods, including recording boat positions and issuing letters such as the pre-CC1.

Facilities (also facilities moorings)

Areas provided by BW/CaRT that may contain one or more of the following: a tap for collecting drinking water; an "elsan" point for the disposal of chemical toilet waste; bins; a "pump-out" tank for the removal of sanitary tank waste; toilets; a shower block.

Flip-Flopping

An informal trade in the town of Reading area referring to small flexible exchanges, the barter of goods and the exchange of favours.

(the) Floater

A satirical magazine for Boaters published in London.

Gin Palace(s)

Expensive and luxurious river cruisers, usually owned by wealthy holiday-makers.

Gongoozler (also gongoozling; gongoozled)

A term meaning one who watches a boat, or sits watching a lock being operated. The term has a mildly negative connotation of laziness and idleness.

Grand Union Canal

A canal that runs from Brentford in London to Birmingham. The Paddington Branch of the Grand Union runs to Paddington in Central London and is the home of a number of the Boaters who are participants in this study. Informally known as the "grand onion" or "big onion."

Gunnel

Flat area on the side of boats that one can use for moving between the bow and stern and for embarking and disembarking.

(the) Floating Stage

A venue and party boat that was frequently moored around East London over the period of my fieldwork.

(The) Hertford Union Canal (also "The Duckett's"; "Duckett's Cut")

A short canal in East London which runs along one edge of Victoria Park between Mile End and Hackney Wick.

IWA

The Inland Waterways Association: a group for boat users, but which is thought to privilege the opinions of “shiny Boaters” over those of my participants. Thought to be closely politically affiliated to BW and CaRT.

Houseboat(s)

Frequently used by outsiders as an inaccurate term for narrowboats. Actual houseboats are floating house-shaped constructions which usually cannot move from place-to-place and which are not commonly found on the waterways of London.

JSA

Job Seeker’s Allowance: an amount of money (a benefit) given to those who are unemployed and seeking work.

K & A

The Kennet and Avon Canal: a Canal that runs between Reading in Berkshire and the city of Bath in Somerset.

LB

London Boaters. An online mailing list (maillist) and Facebook group for Boaters in London. Also, at times, a political advocacy group for London’s Boaters.

Line

The term for a rope, particularly a rope with which one moors a boat.

Liveaboard

Anyone who lives permanently aboard their boat.

Lock

A chamber that fills and empties in order to raise or lower a boat to a new water level. A number of locks in succession can help a watercourse to travel up or down gradients.

Lock gate

The gate of a lock, which must be pushed open by a long beam in order to enter or exit the lock.

LVRPA (and LVRP)

Lee Valley Regional Park (Authority): the authority that controls a large area of land around the waterways in the valley of the River Lee in London and Hertfordshire, and the name of the land in question. Also operates two marinas at Springfield and Stanstead Abbots.

Marina

Private location where boats can be moored. Often a location where maintenance and improvement work can be carried out on boats. Often has facilities for boats; supplies such as diesel, gas and coal, and a chandlery.

Mooring

Both the act of securing a boat in a location and the name of that location.

Mooring pin

Long metal stake-like items hammered into the earth to which lines are attached in order to secure a boat.

Mooring ring (also Mooring bollard)

Metal rings or standing bollards to which lines can be attached for mooring purposes. Provided in some locations, such as visitor moorings, by BW, CaRT, or the owners of a particular mooring.

Narrowboat

A boat which is less than 7' wide. Common on the UK waterways. The homes of the majority of my participants.

Narrowboat [book]

A book by L.T.C. Rolt. Described as the Genesis tale of liveaboard boating.

NABO

The National Association of Boat Owners: a membership group for Boaters.

NBTA

The National Bargee Traveller Association: a Boaters' advocacy group who also advocate for the adoption of the "Bargee Traveller" ethnic identity.

New Age Traveller (also Traveller)

Travellers, not ethnic Gypsies, who travelled on the roads of the UK, mainly in the 1980s and 1990s.

NFA

No Fixed Abode: the legal description of being without a permanent address.

Non-compliant continuous cruiser

BW and CaRT's description of continuous cruisers who they deem to have failed to meet their interpretation of the 1995 British Waterways Act by not moving far or frequently enough.

Off-side (Offline)

The side without the towpath. Usually privately owned. Offline refers to moorings on this side.

On-side (Online)

The side with the towpath. Usually owned by BW/CaRT. Online would refer moorings on this side.

Olympic Exclusion Zone

The area from which all boats were cleared over the period of the 2012 London Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Operation Whistle Blower

The scheme whereby, in 2013, Boaters handed out whistles to each other in an attempt to initiate a system for warning of attacks and burglaries in progress.

Paddle

The sliding section in the gate of the lock that is raised in order to allow water in or order to fill or empty the chamber.

Pirate(s) (also Pyrate(s))

Experienced, knowledgeable, and usually outspoken and anti-authoritarian Boaters. The term is usually meant as a sign of respect.

Pound

The level section between two locks.

Pre-CC1 (also CC1, CC2, CC3)

Letters that are given to Boaters as part of the enforcement process when they are not deemed to have moved far or frequently enough. These move from a simple warning to the initiation of legal action.

Project boat

A boat that requires a lot of work in order to be a comfortable prospect to live aboard.

Project Kraken

The Metropolitan Police's dedicated marine crime unit.

RBOA

Residential Boat Owners' Association: a membership group for Boaters.

Regent's Canal

One of the major waterways in London. Runs from Little Venice to Limehouse. Popular areas for boats on the "Regent's" are Little Venice Camden, King's Cross, Angel Islington, Broadway Market, Victoria Park, Mile End, and Limehouse.

River cruiser (also "fibreglass cruiser" "cruiser")

Fibreglass vessels popular as short-term holidaying and trip boats on the rivers, but also a liveaboard option at the cheaper end of a spectrum of boat ownership.

River Lee (also River Lea)

A major river running from East London into Hertfordshire (from Limehouse to Hertford). Popular areas for Boaters to moor on this river are Limehouse, Hackney Wick, The

“Marshes” (Walthamstow Marshes), The Middlesex Filter Beds, Springfield, Tottenham Hale, Stonebridge, Enfield Lock, Cheshunt and Broxbourne.

River Stort

A river north of London. Rural and relatively isolated compared to the main London waterways.

River Thames

South East England’s major watercourse. Home to many Boaters before it becomes tidal at Teddington. Reading, my home over the early part of my fieldwork, is on the Thames. Joins the Grand Union Canal at Brentford.

RMP(s)

Roving Mooring Permits: a scheme initiated by CaRT to make those who want to stay in a particular area buy a permit which allows the Boater to stay for longer at moorings and to move shorter distances.

Roses and Castles

A form of “traditional” narrowboat artwork, painted on boats and on Boaters’ equipment. Includes images of white castles and roses.

Rudder

The steering mechanism used on narrowboats. Moved by the tiller.

SEVMC

South East Visitor Mooring Consultation: a consultation concerning the use of visitor moorings initiated by CaRT whilst I was in the field.

Section eight (also “being section eighted”)

The section of the 1983 British Waterways Act that allows CaRT to remove a boat without a valid license from their waterways. “Being section eighted” means to have one’s boat removed from the waterways.

Shiny Boaters (also “Brass Polishers”, “Rivet Counters”)

Boat users who are seen as being fussy and obsessed with the appearance of their boats. They are usually thought to be occasional boat-users, holidaying aboard rather than living aboard. They are usually described in opposition to that group (“Boaters” or “Dirty Boaters”) who are usually permanent liveaboards and who are usually continuous cruisers.

Stern (also back or aft or (inf.) “blunt end”)

The rear of the boat.

Stern gland (also stern tube)

The point at the stern where the propeller shaft leaves the boat. This is a point of weakness where water can get in unless the gland is filled with a rope “packing” and has waterproof grease properly applied.

Swan's neck

The curved section of the tiller.

Swing Bridge

A bridge across a canal or river that must be swung to the side by the Boater in order to allow the continued passage of the boat along the channel.

Tiller

The entire apparatus that one moves in order to move the rudder and thereby steer a narrowboat.

Tiller Arm

The straight top part of the tiller with which one drives a narrowboat.

Towpath

A path alongside the canal or river that was used for towing the boats in the years before engine power, when horses would pull boats along the watercourse.

Towpath telegraph

The informal name for the waterways network of gossip and information exchange.

“Vicky” “Vicky Park”

Informal term for Victoria Park in East London. Many Boaters moor on or around the park, making it a focal point for the community.

Visitor moorings

Moorings designated for visitors to the area and therefore often restricted to a short mooring time (7 days, 48 hours, 24 hours, or even 4 hours “stop and shop”) and often supplied with mooring rings or mooring bollards.

Waterways

The system of navigable canals and rivers.

Widebeams

Boats similar to narrowboats but wider (up to 14’).

Windlass

An L-shaped metal implement used for hand operation (raising or lowering) the winding gear.

Winding gear (also paddle gear)

The mechanism that raises the paddle in order to allow water in or out of the lock.

Winding Point (also Winding Circle)

A wide part of channel, made wider so that a long narrowboat can turn around.

Winter mooring(s)

Temporary moorings that may be purchased in order to allow the continuous cruiser to remain in one spot for several months over the winter. Sold annually by BW/CaRT.

Working Boater(s) (also "Bargee"; "Boatie"; "Carrying Boater")

Those boat-dwellers who first lived on the canals and were employed in the goods-carrying trade. Lived aboard their boats the waterways from the 1820s to the 1960s. Were often referred to as "water gypsies."

Working Pair

A set of two boats as operated by the Working Boaters. One would be a butty and the other a motorised boat.

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Dedication

For M.S.B and S.V.R, for all your love, and with all my love.

And for A.D.B, who loved the river, and would have found all of this quite hilarious.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Finding my way aboard

When I think about the process that led to my living and undertaking research with itinerant boat-dwelling communities in the South of England, a few pivotal moments, what Davies (2010) would call paradigmatic scenes, come to my mind. It all began with a chance meeting in 2008 when I was not yet eighteen years old. I was at a party in Maidenhead, meeting my best friend's more glamorous and intellectual college mates and feeling thoroughly intimidated. I began talking to a young woman named Asha, who lived on a boat, or more properly she had just recently bought her first boat to live on and was moving it "down" from the midlands to Reading in a matter of days. "You're going to live on a boat?", I asked. "Can people do that?" Asha laughed and explained that she had lived on a boat for some years whilst still a child, "a little plastic boat with my mum and step-dad."

So began my engagement with the waterways. Asha quickly became a firm friend and when it came time to move her boat from Reading to Bath, where she would be attending university, I was invited, along with Tom, a mutual friend, to "crew" her small (26 foot) Springer narrowboat¹ on the journey, covering the complete length of the idyllic Kennet and Avon canal through the Wiltshire countryside. My memories of this journey are addled by time and by the consumption of "cider and black" (cheap cider and blackcurrant squash, a sweet cocktail which we consumed until we fell asleep, top to tail, along the floor of Asha's tiny boat). The memories that come most clearly to the fore are the tiny canal-side pubs, with their main doors at the rear for access from the waterways, and so infrequently accessed from the dirt tracks at their front that they are known locally as "Boaters pubs", and have been since the days of the working or carrying boats² on the canal, or "cut."³

Rural Wiltshire is notable in that one can travel by canal throughout the day and not see anything that will remind the traveller that they are in the 21st century. Roads, modern houses and electricity pylons are rare – the main man-made furniture of the landscape is

¹ See the later section of this chapter concerning types of boat.

² See Chapter 3.

³ The canal is known as the "cut" as it is literally cut out from the earth.

the cut itself, the farmers' swing bridges⁴ and the 19th century locks, the passing of which punctuate the Boater's journey and mark the passage of time and distance. After two weeks without showers, Facebook, or mobile telephone signal, we had succumbed to the rhythm of the waterways.⁵

This trip, and Asha's friends, became the basis for my undergraduate dissertation from Durham University.⁶ After leaving Durham, I was fortunate to be awarded funding from Brunel University to continue working with the boat-dwelling community. Through Asha, I found a 37' narrowboat (this is relatively small, but the size kept the price down and would allow me to "single-handle"⁷ the boat far more easily) which I purchased for £20,000. This boat was named *Me*, a name that I disliked at first but learnt to appreciate.⁸

And so, on the 26th July 2012, after a period of pre-field research into the history of the canals, but with little idea of the practicalities of boat living other than what I had gleaned over my time aboard Asha's little *Springer*, I moved those of my personal possessions that had survived a brutal downsizing "purge" onto *Me* where she lay at a private mooring at the Better Boating Marina in Caversham.⁹ I would not be able to remain in marina-side relative luxury for long; I was to become a "continuous cruiser," a traveling Boater compelled by law to move to a new location every two weeks.¹⁰ Those Boaters who were also bound

⁴ Small bridges designed to allow the passage of cattle and foot travellers and operated (swung across on hinges) by the boat travellers themselves.

⁵ This rhythm, also known as "boat time," is discussed in depth in Chapter 5.

⁶ A dissertation entitled "Mobility, Egalitarianism and Conflict: Features of an emerging community on the waterways of southern England", submitted in the Easter term of 2011.

⁷ The term used for navigating a boat by oneself.

⁸ All boats are named and, as shall be seen in Chapter 4, boat names are an important as it is often through the name of the boat that one is known on the waterways. Boaters tend to think deeply about the name of their boats and what this name may connote, before finding *le mot juste* with which to name their vessel.

⁹ In the English language all boats and ships are traditionally referred to by female-gendered pronouns (Curzan, 2003), which is unusual considering how rare gendered forms are in a language which favours neutral pronouns. The boats of the inland waterways are no exception to this. This appears to be a simple historical convention which has persisted and none of my informants attached much significance to it. When I asked the Boaters whether they saw boats as being female in any meaningful way none of them answered in the affirmative.

¹⁰ This will be fully explained in Chapter 3 and will be a recurrent theme throughout.

to this itinerant lifestyle were to become my research participants, friends and neighbours for at least the next year. This is how, entirely as a product of luck and chance encounters, I came to be a Boater living aboard the waterways of London and south east England.

I began this thesis with an autobiographical account of finding my way aboard as it parallels both the experience of other Boaters I have met and the overall structure and shape of this piece of work. As shown in the following chapters, many Boaters come to the waterways for economic reasons, in order to escape either crippling rent or mortgage payments or even homelessness. They then come to “love the lifestyle”, becoming increasingly embedded in the social life and practices of the waterways. Like these Boaters, I was pushed into boat-dwelling by financial imperative,¹¹ in my case in order to justify my PhD stipend, an income that would not have supported any other dwelling choice in London. I also came to love my time aboard, learning more about my boat as I travelled through new neighbourhoods and discovered those communities and areas of London and the South East that I thought I knew from a new angle, an angle often invisible to those who dwell in the houses and travel on the roads that pass within meters of the canal and river network.

Chapters 4-6 of this thesis deal with these personal narratives of becoming part of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991): a community that arises around the knowledge and practice of similar specialist acts on the waterways, learning to be skilled in the necessary arts of being a liveaboard Boater and becoming the sort of individual who “fits in” to the boat-dwelling community. I ask, essentially, what kind of a person a Boater is and how they are created. In achieving this project, Tim Ingold’s work on dwelling (2000 and 1993) has been invaluable as it allows the researcher to create a framework wherein the landscape and materiality of the world in which the person dwells is central to shaping their worldview, sociality and sense of identity.

The thesis then enters a bridging section in which the Boaters, now introduced to the reader, are described through their interactions, both with each other (Chapter 7: Community) and with individuals based in the sedentary world (Chapter 8: State). This again paral-

¹¹ I do not wish to imply that my financial situation, caused by my indulging academic curiosity and not from actual unemployment, poverty or homelessness is the same as the experiences of my informants, some of whom do come to the waterways in a state of severe financial hardship. I was nonetheless able to experience, as do many of my informants, life in one of the world’s most expensive cities as a person on a seriously limited income.

lets my own experience: I slowly discovered that, as a result of my dwelling choice, I had become a different type of citizen within the neighbourhoods through which I passed. Unable to vote or register with a doctor, viewed as a curiosity by many and as a threat by others, considered by some to be part of an “ethnic category” of “bargee travellers”,¹² I became a marginal presence somewhat outside of the normal sedentary order.

The centre of the thesis, both literally and philosophically, is the chapter on community, the emic use and importance of this term being an important key to understanding the social life of Boaters. “Community”, in the complex way that it is understood by Boaters, connects the community of practice described in the first three chapters with the community of support and protection that marks the boundary between Boaters and outsiders.

The thesis then goes on to interrogate this relationship between the Boaters and the outside world in Chapters 9-11, detailing how Boaters become subject to surveillance, security threats, and political interventions from agents of the state, ending in a description of how and when Boaters organise collectively in response to these threats.

In the second half of the thesis, when the point of view has been widened out in order to look at the Boaters in relation to the wider world, the work of James Scott, particularly his concepts of legibility (1998) and state avoidance (2011) comes to the fore as I attempt to integrate power and politics into my description of life on the waterways. In recent years, critics of Ingold’s dwelling perspective have argued that it does not include the wider networks of power and politics in its frame of analysis (Eric Hirsch, personal communication). This thesis, in moving from an Ingoldian analysis towards a point of view rooted in theories of political economy and statecraft, attempts to show that these two frames are not incompatible and, given enough space for examination and enough ethnographic detail, can be harmoniously combined in order to clearly illustrate complex social realities. Such an expansion in scope – from the individual Boater to the world of the boating community, and onwards to examine opposing forces originating in sedentary world – allows for the cre-

¹² See the later section of this chapter introducing the National Barge Traveller Association (NBTA) and the question of Boater “ethnicity”.

ation of a detailed view of the boating world, situated within the contemporary UK state and not in isolation, to be built up.¹³

Thus, this thesis builds up a picture of a fast-growing “liveaboard” boating community,¹⁴ a community that has adopted an “alternative” (but by no means new) lifestyle, and which has made its members somewhat marginal or liminal from the purview of agents of the UK state and the sedentary neighbourhoods through which they pass. The thesis reaches a conclusion which ties together a thread that can be seen within every chapter; namely that the Boaters have created on the waterways a way of life which privileges an unfixed and flexible mode of being. This is what Turner (1990) would describe as the “subjunctive mood of culture,” where the rigidity of structure gives way to a situation where new possibilities are able to emerge. To this end, the ways in which the Boaters’ position within the nation state or compared to their sedentary neighbours is uncertain or liminal is emphasised throughout the thesis. The conclusion draws these points together in order to show how the Boaters use the emergent features of their choice of dwelling as a way of creatively experimenting with their mode of being in the world and of creating what they see as a better, or even utopian, way of living and interacting.

These chapters describe the “how” and the “why” of life aboard: those important questions with which the ethnographer must deal. Before I address these questions, however, it is necessary to outline the demographic profile of those who live aboard these boats and the nature of the vessels on which they dwell, so that the reader may have a basic understanding of who my participants are before they are introduced properly and in detail through their actions (beginning in Chapter 4).

The Boaters and boats: who and what?

¹³ In utilising this structure, I owe a debt to Sal Buckler, whose “Fire in the Dark” (2007) ethnography of a Gypsy group in North East England similarly focusses its scope narrowly at first, in her case the social life of the community described through the metaphor of the “fire” at the centre of the camp, widening out in perspective to the “wasteland” and the “dark” which are spaces of interaction with the gorgio (non-Gypsy) and the gorgio realm itself.

¹⁴ Officials to whom I have spoken estimate that the number of liveaboard Boaters in London has doubled in two summers (the summers of 2013 and 2014) but, for reasons that will be demonstrated, these are only rough estimates and firm data are not available.

According to the licensing authority's figures, there are approximately 32,500 boats licensed in the UK each year (Damian Kemp,¹⁵ personal communication). Many of these are registered at residential moorings, although a total number of residential boat-dwellers is hard to find. The Canal and River Trust (CaRT), the owners and operators of the majority of the UK waterways and the group I approached to access this information, own only 11% of residential mooring spaces. Approximately 4,500 of these boats are registered without a home mooring and are therefore counted as being for "continuous cruising"¹⁶ (Damian Kemp, personal communication). However, there are several reasons that it is difficult to state how many people actually live on boats.

Firstly, many registered moorings are not officially residential, but do unofficially allow Boaters to live aboard. Secondly, many moorings - residential and non-residential - may not actually be used residentially for even the majority of the year, as Boaters may move between houses and holiday extensively aboard. For example, I have met many retired persons and couples who live in a house or flat over the winter and spend five or six months in the summer aboard their boats; it is hard to know whether or not to count these cases as liveaboard Boaters. Thirdly, many of those with continuous cruising licenses have gained such a license in order to avoid paying for a mooring, or due to a lack of mooring availability, and may move their boats from place to place whilst continuing to live in sedentary dwellings. CaRT employee Damian Kemp (personal communication) listed this as one of the main reasons why it is difficult to estimate liveaboard numbers, as "some CC'ers don't live on their boat; they 'weekend' it around the system." Lastly, there are, certainly in rural and isolated part of the waterways system, a very few cases of license avoidance, whereby Boaters manage to live for months and years without CaRT finding them and demanding that they pay their license fee and become part of the official number of Boaters.

Thus, when I state that my work is with the liveaboard Boaters of the South East of England, as opposed to those who own boats for pleasure and for holidays, this is problematic. Also problematic is the category of "continuous cruiser." Boaters may have an official,

¹⁵ Damian Kemp is the Press and Communications Officer for the Canal and River Trust (CaRT), who own and manage the majority of the waterways of the UK. More information on CaRT is included in Chapter 3.

¹⁶ As described in Chapter 3, those who travel and do not have a home mooring are called "continuous cruisers" in common parlance and in the Canal and River Trust's documentation.

usually cheap, end-of-the-garden mooring and yet cruise frequently; equally they may be “continuous cruisers” in terms of their license, but not live aboard. Travelling, not having a home mooring, and living aboard are not mutually inclusive categories, and so when I describe my participants as being “travelling liveaboard Boaters” without home moorings, I am describing the status of the majority, the community norm, and I am necessarily ignoring a degree of variation. Many of the Boaters who formed part of this study have moorings (although all of them have spent at least some time as continuous cruisers) and even more take temporary moorings, such as CaRT’s “winter moorings,”¹⁷ in order to remain in one spot over the coldest months of the year. The cruising liveaboard Boater is something of an ideal type that I construct here, with people’s license and travelling histories being subject to major change as their circumstances (related, for example, to families, finances and employment) change and develop. As I describe in Chapter 4, more important than mooring type and amount of travel is how much one participates in the life of the waterways, becoming part of the boating community of practice and learning, through one’s boat, the skills required in order to do so successfully. These people who participate and consider themselves to be part of a liveaboard community are those who call themselves Boaters: they are usually permanent liveaboards, they usually hold a continuous cruising license, and they are the participants in my study.

I have not made a demographic study of these Boaters using questionnaires and, as such, I have no statistics concerning their age, gender, ethnic make-up or any other such basic information. Due to the massive scale of the waterways and the complex movements of both myself and the other Boaters from locality to locality, a meaningful demographic study of this type would have been impossible to implement, even within the comparatively limited section of the London and South Eastern quadrant within which I conducted my research. Therefore, I must rely on my observations, based upon the sample of Boaters with whom I met and interacted, and some old data produced and published by CaRT. This data (Canal and River Trust, 2012a) is based upon a self-selecting number of Boaters who were well-disposed enough toward CaRT to answer the authority’s survey. This survey revealed that the overall boating population had the following demographic make-up:

“Two-thirds aged 55 or over, three-quarters are couples, with only 15% travelling with children, just under half have annual household incomes under £30k, make 15

¹⁷ Moorings which allow Boaters to stay at one assignment mooring for three, four or five months over the coldest months, for which they are charged quite a considerable set fee.

trips per year, travel up to 15 miles per day, cruising for 5-6 hours...” (Canal and River Trust, 2012:7) “...Of these only 15% reported their boat as being their residence” (*ibid.*:9).”

Those respondents with continuous cruising licenses, who made up 9% of the total number of respondents (*ibid.*:42), differed in the following ways:

“20% travel alone vs. 5% of other Boaters (but still mainly couples), younger age profile: 48% under 55yrs vs. 28% of other Boaters, lower incomes: 48% less than £20k vs. 20% of other Boaters, less likely to have held license a long time: 53% less than 5 years vs. 36% among other Boaters” (*ibid.*:11).”

What these numbers do not reveal is the difference in demography from area to area on the waterways. For example, outside of London I mainly met liveaboard cruising Boaters who were older couples, often retired, or individual middle-aged people, usually men. In Reading at the early part of my fieldwork, I was enthusiastically taken under the wing of a young couple and two local single male Boaters, one of whom confessed that they were pleased to have me as I was “one of the only young Boaters around” and they were “tired of all of these boring old blokes.” In London, however, particularly on the lower end of the River Lee,¹⁸ a great many Boaters are younger, including many young couples, and many young men and women live on their boats alone. Whereas outside London I met very few liveaboard cruising Boaters who were not born and raised in the UK and of predominantly white British ethnicity, in London there is a growing population of European Boaters, often students, and Boaters who have other non-white British ethnic origins.

Such demographic variations could be seen as (and have been spoken in terms of) a difference between Boaters outside of London who are doing it for the “lifestyle,” and a rapidly increasing set of individuals in London who are being forced into boating for economic reasons, as the recession and the increase in housing prices¹⁹ continue to grip the capital. However, it is not as simple as this. In London, there are canals passing through low-income neighbourhoods, close to where students and young people rent, squat and sofa-surf. Boating represents an obvious route out of the housing problems of the city for these individuals, who see many of their peers doing the same. Outside of London, on the River Thames and in other parts of the waterways system, there are fewer Boaters scattered

¹⁸ The River Lee is also, entirely interchangeably, known and referred to as the River Lea. To avoid confusion I shall use the name “Lee” throughout the thesis.

¹⁹ See The Meikle and Maynard (2014).

across wider distances, and liveaboard boating is less frequently encountered and less likely to be considered a viable option. There is not an immediate need to escape poverty in a city like Reading, where shared house rent costs are comparatively affordable.

As I explain in Chapters 2-4, however, while a Boater's economic situation may provide a catalyst to boat-dwelling, this is simply the first part of the process of becoming part of the community of practice that makes an individual a Boater. Perceived wisdom is that one must be "the right kind of person" in order to live on a boat and that those doing it to escape their council tax and rent bills "won't last" beyond their first winter. What is certain is the rising numbers of young Boaters, affluent or middle-class Boaters, single women Boaters, Boaters of non-white British ethnicity and Boaters of non-British nationality on the canals of the capital. And it is these rising numbers that have led, as will be described, to certain intra-community tensions and prejudices about the quality of these "new" or "newbie" Boaters, and about whether or not they have the ability to become "proper" Boaters given time.

Boats and boating

Having now briefly introduced my participants, I move on here to a description of the boats on which they make their homes. There is no such thing as a "typical boat" on the waterways, although the wide spectrum of vessels represented do fit in to some main categories that are outlined below. I describe the categories of boat in rough order of monetary value, from cruisers through narrowboats to barges, followed by more unusual vessels that do not fit into this pattern. It is important to note that an order of monetary value is not the same as an order of status. As I discuss in Chapters 4-6, what matters most is entry into a community of practice, not material goods (and included in this category of material goods is one's boat).²⁰ Indeed, more expensive boats can often be a marker that a Boater is too affluent and lives in too much luxury to really be part of the social life of the waterways (see Chapter 6). This discussion is important as the material condition of the boat and the particular challenges of life afloat are the central conditions from which all of the later arguments in this thesis stem. Included here are brief discussions of the most common types

²⁰ Visual markers on and the particular appearance of individual's boats are, however, evidence of one's approach to the waterways, including where one lies in respect of the "shiny"/"dirty" Boater distinction outlined in chapter 4.

of boat to be found on the inland waterway, with descriptions of more unusual craft to be found in Appendix I.

Fibreglass cruisers

At the cheapest end of the boating spectrum²¹ lie fibreglass “cruisers,” “cabin cruisers” or “river-cruisers.” Many of these boats are used for their intended purpose when constructed, e.g., for day trips out on the river for pleasure, with maybe the occasional night spent aboard. Smaller fibreglass vessels are vulnerable to damage by larger steel boats; they are not designed for long-term domestic use and so are unlikely to come with sophisticated cooking facilities, powerful domestic batteries, or a stove for warmth in the winter (although these can be fitted). Further, they are susceptible to condensation and the consequences of such trapped moisture. I have heard these boats jokingly called “yogurt pots,” “toasters,” “fridge magnets,” “plastics” and “appliances” due to their being small, plastic-looking and with a white glossy finish.

Boaters often buy a “cruiser” as a first boat due to their comparative cheapness in relation to narrowboats before seeking to upgrade, maybe after “doing up” their cruiser as a first “project boat.” A well-equipped cruiser of 25-30’ length will cost around £5000-£7000, but a friend in Reading managed to purchase a cruiser with a sound hull and an engine for £500 cash, which he succeeded in coaxing into life. He made a rudder out of a bathroom door and a bannister and he was away, with the cheapest floating home on the river. Small cruisers in less-than-peak condition that need a “fit-out” for liveaboard can be purchased for under £3000 from most marinas, offering an entry-level option for many impoverished first-time boat buyers. Because of the relative poverty of many cruiser-dwellers, in London they are most likely to be found on the River Lee, where a cheaper “river only” license is required, as opposed to a “standard” license.²²

²¹ Most Boaters own or co-own their boats, as legal rent agreements on boats are rare. Renting is usually used in order to get a “taste for” boating life and to see whether one is prepared and suitable. The increase of requests for boats to rent in recent years and months has caused many Boaters to frustratingly send e-mails and Facebook posts reminding prospective renters that renting narrowboats is often illegal, dangerous for both renters and landlords, and is very expensive in the long term when compared to the price of buying a boat.

²² License fees for 2014-2015 show that “prompt payment” for twelve months on a boat of between 27’11” and 31’1” will cost £641.89 for a ‘standard license’, as compared with £385.14 for a ‘river only license’ (Canal and River Trust, 2014a).



Figure 1. A river cruiser or cabin cruiser.

Narrowboats

By far the most numerous vessels on the rivers are narrowboats. These boats have a long history and were originally peculiar to the British waterways. This is because, due to the narrow gauge of many of the early canals, particularly narrow boats were required for navigation. The original narrowboats that were used for dwelling date from approximately 1820 (see Chapter 3). Early liveaboard pioneers²³ modified these old “working boats” for residential use, but most Boaters now live aboard boats designed for residential use or for pleasure cruising. Participants told me that narrowboats have been built for residential and holiday use since the late 1960s or early 1970s, with the *Springer* company being an early entrant into the marketplace.

There are now a great variety of boats available for sale, in sizes ranging from the smallest – approximately 20’ long *Springers* and similar variants – up to 72’, the longest a boat can be in order to get through every lock on the system. Some boats designed only for rivers with large locks can be of even greater lengths, up to 90’ or more, but these over-long vessels are rare. The width, however, is more standardised, somewhere in the region of 6’10”-7’ so as to get through the “narrow” single gate locks on the remaining narrow canals, for example, the Huddersfield Narrow and Oxford canals. It is, of course, this long and thin appearance that gives narrowboats their name, and which caused their precursors to be called “starvationers,” due to their skinny or “starved” appearance (Burton, 1989). Many boats in London are now “widebeams,” which are effectively the same as nar-

²³ See Chapter 3.

rowboats, but have a wider width or “beam” (up to 14’ in some cases). A note on these boats is included in Appendix I.

These boats are typically based on a welded steel hull, although narrowboat-shaped vehicles have been produced with fibreglass hulls, wooden hulls, and riveted steel hulls. The cabins above these hulls can also be steel, wood, or fibreglass, each material with distinct advantages and disadvantages. Wooden cabins, for example, need regular maintenance and have a propensity to leak; fibreglass cabins are said to be magnets for condensation; steel cabins are sturdy, but insulate poorly, making them cold in winter and intolerably warm in the height of summer.

Externally, narrowboats are characterised into three rough groups: traditional, semi-trad, and cruiser stern. This distinction refers to the composition of the rear (also stern or aft) of the boat: traditional-stern boats have an enclosed engine room and almost no back deck; semi-trads have a very small back deck and an engine room, and cruiser sterns have a large open back deck which has the engine underneath. In these latter examples, the engine can only be reached by the removal of deck boards and the owner or mechanic descending down in to the “bilge” (the area at the bottom of the boat where waste water can collect). Again, different Boaters are vocal in their preference of different types and there are advantages and disadvantages to each set-up; for example, cruiser stern boats allow a convivial driving experience, whereas “trad” boats have an engine which can be easily accessed for maintenance and checks.

The internal fit-out of narrowboats varies, like any home, according to the preferences and skills of the owner, and the historical choices of all previous owners. They are mosaics of projects, half-formed ideas, ill-judged wallpapering choices, bad carpentry, good carpentry, and myriad other factors. Narrowboats often have a bedroom at the stern (although having a bedroom at the bow, “a reverse fit-out” as it is also known, is becoming increasingly common). They will often also have a galley kitchen, with gas powered cooking appliances, fridges (more rarely, due to the high power requirements of heating and cooling elements), and any of the other accoutrements of the contemporary kitchen, although with far fewer electrical goods. There will also be a toilet room, often doubling up as the shower room, which will have either a chemical toilet (also known as an “elsan,” “cartridge,” or “cassette” toilet), which must be emptied by hand at the geographically-scattered elsan fa-

cilities provided by CaRT, or a pump-out system, which leads to a waste tank which must be “pumped” out by a coal boat (also called “working boats” or “fuel boats”) or at a marina. Less common than these two options is the “composting toilet.” The debate over the relative merits of pump-out vs. cartridge facilities between Boaters is heated but good-natured, and Boaters sometimes describe themselves as split into two “tribes” over their toilet preference.

The boat will also have a solid fuel stove for heat and (frequently) for cooking, in which the Boater will burn smokeless coal, purchased from the “coal boats” and marinas, and wood, much of which is scavenged and split into manageable portions with an axe, which is one of the Boater’s most essential items. Heating may occasionally be supplemented by coal or diesel radiator heating systems (but almost never electrical, due to the power usage). The maintenance of a good store of coal, wood, gas, diesel, and water for the water tank is an important part of the Boater’s daily life and can, if one is of a nervous disposition, be an almost constant preoccupation.

Narrowboats may have “traditional” Roses and Castles artwork decoration²⁴ or, increasingly, a more modern “paint job” or even a money-saving DIY effort. “Traditional” sign painting is increasingly rare, with few practitioners of the art still in business, although boats may still have their old signs visible. Most Boaters display the name of their boat in some way, with stick-on signage, expressive graffiti, stencilled work, or, in some cases, by paying a street artist to paint the boat as a piece of individual floating artwork.

As these variations demonstrate, it would be impossible to describe a “typical” narrowboat. In line with this unpredictability, narrowboats can cost from £5,000 to £100,000 or more, with a 60’ boat, reasonably well-maintained and kitted out for liveaboard use (the closest one could come to describing a “typical” vessel), costing anything from £25,000 to £40,000. Boaters speak of a rule of thumb whereby a reasonably high-quality narrowboat should, as a guide, cost around £1,000 per foot of length. Some narrowboats are “hire craft,” being taken out onto the system as a holiday rental, and these are easily spotted due to their brightly-coloured hire company liveries and signage.

²⁴ For a detailed discussion of rose and castle artwork, its origins and its history see Hill (1983a), de Maré (1950) and Rolt (1999 [1948]).



Figure 2. A 45' cruiser stern narrowboat.



Figure 3. Myself and my own narrowboat, "Me".

Barges (including Dutch barges)

It is common for those who are not Boaters to call all boats "barges" or to ask the Boater "so, you live on a barge?" In reality, barges are a small subsection of boats on the waterways. Barges tend to be converted "working" (commercial) river barges, or "Dutch" barges, typically imported from the Netherlands, where they also had a commercial past. Dutch barges are marked by their curved centre sections and often have a covered "wheelhouse," whereas narrowboats are mainly driven from the stern by a tiller attached to the rudder. Dutch barges can be old, some of them nineteenth-century, and typically have thick riveted steel hulls.

Barges tend to be larger than narrowboats in terms of both width and length. Barges are not necessarily historical vehicles, and some are being made new (including luxury models for very high prices, up to the price of bricks-and-mortar houses); I met a couple who had ordered a barge to be built new for them, with a luxurious design and high-quality fittings they chose themselves, by a company which charged them £250,000 for the project. This is the most expensive boat I have yet encountered and is very much an outlier when compared with the norm.

Due to the relatively high price of barges (well maintained 70' Dutch barges with a good fit-out typically cost £100,000 or more) and the cost of their maintenance and upkeep, they tend to attract an affluent crowd of boat-buyers, although, as I described previously, this does not imply that these individuals are of comparatively high status; indeed it is often the opposite. Some Boaters, however, manage to make enough money from completing projects on their old boats, "doing them up" to be worth more money than they were previously, and thereby climbing up what I have heard called the "boating housing ladder" to higher-value homes, including barges. Barges can also be far cheaper when purchased in the Netherlands and sailed over – often, it is rumoured, around half the price that they would fetch in the UK. Therefore, Boaters who are not particularly affluent when compared to the rest of the community, through clever dealing and getting a cheaper "project" boat, can become barge owners if they feel the need to. Some Boaters have this as a stated intention and a dream for the future, due in part to the degree of personal space afforded by barges and their aesthetically pleasing shapes.

It is recognized, however, that higher-value boats are not intrinsically better. It was deemed sensible, for example, that I purchase a 37' boat for ease of single-handed navigation and turning in mid-stream. In another example, a couple justified "moving up" to a widebeam as they were soon to have a child. In other words, the boat must, first and foremost, suit the needs of the owner. It is also important to note that some Boaters make an income brokering the sale of boats from the Netherlands, taking advantage of this difference in price on either side of the North Sea. This means that barge ownership is often associated with paying too much and not being a canny and knowledgeable Boater unless the owner somehow got "a good deal."



Figure 4. A Dutch barge.

Coal boats and unusual vessels

Coal Boats (or working boats or fuel boats) are old “working pairs” (see Chapter 3), which are now run as businesses in order to provide the Boaters of London with coal, wood, gas, diesel, common chandlery²⁵ items, and pump-out services. They are 70’ long, with the majority of this length being given over to the stores, and with small back cabins in which the modern working Boaters live, either whilst they are on a working “run” of deliveries, or permanently if they do not have another boat as their permanent residence.

In addition to the types of boat described here, other idiosyncratic vessels can be seen on the waterways. Some have been built by the Boaters themselves, either from a hull or even merely from some pieces of wood and barrels. London has a small population of sailing boats, small yachts, tug-boats, tall-ships and other sea-going vessels, which have, through various methods, found their way from the coast onto the inland waterways. Some boats – for example that of a former neighbour of mine, who lives in a Tudor wattle-and-daub vessel with a thatched roof and no obvious engine or steering mechanism, mounted on what is possibly a set of wooden struts – defy categorisation.

Thus, stating that one lives “on a boat” is, to a knowledgeable interlocutor, merely the start of a long conversation and is not an indication of very much at all. Even the follow-up question “what kind of boat?” is not particularly instructive. I could answer that I live aboard a 37’ *Colecraft*-built narrowboat, dating from 1982, with a cruiser stern, a 1500-BMC engine and a pump-out, but this would, again, not reveal more than the basic structural data

²⁵ Shops providing boat items, often housed in marinas, are known as chandleries. Chandleries were the area of the medieval household responsible for candles and candle-making. Ship’s stores would be filled by particular commercial soap and candle dealers, and these became known as “ships-chandleries”. Until now its use in the marine world is the only extant use of the term (Palmer, 1987).

of my idiosyncratic and unique vessel, with its own complicated social history. It would be the rough equivalent of trying to understand a person through their census data. Boaters understand this, knowing instead the deeper questions to ask about the minutiae of boat and engine maintenance, the narratives of boat history and origin, the shared locations and acquaintances, indeed the type of “thick” description that the following chapters attempt to portray. Having introduced the Boaters and their vessels, I move on to describing the limits of my research, the areas that will not be addressed within this thesis, and why these choices have been made.



Figure 5. A pair of working “coal boats” passing through Tottenham locks in North London.



Figure 6. A North London mooring with a number of boats of various types.

The limits of my research

A demographic analysis of the changing make-up of the boating population would be fascinating, but is beyond the scope of this thesis, which relies upon qualitative data, narratives, impressions and understandings and is necessarily lacking in statistical support. I reflect upon these changes and differences here but, like social class (as I describe in Chapter 4), these differences may impact upon one's path of entry into the community of practice, and one's position at the start of this journey, but they do not determine whether or not one can successfully become a Boater. As I came to know, ultimately it is one's understanding of the waterways, one's own boat, the skills required to live aboard, one's social networks, and one's ability to "dwell" aboard, that are of the greatest importance in becoming a respected and influential "proper" Boater with the support and respect of the community. As a male researcher, who has had to introduce more autobiography into his account than may be otherwise be normal for an anthropology thesis due to the nature of my field (see Chapter 2, page 59), I am hesitant to write about the experience of female Boaters, for example, and how these may differ from the experiences of male Boaters. I have interviewed and spent time with Boaters of all ages and genders, living alone, in hetero- and homosexual partnerships, and in larger family units, and I have included throughout the chapters what I feel to be appropriate insights into how these differences may affect one's experience of life aboard. There are not, however, separate sections included here on the importance of gender, or on family life (for example, having children aboard), as examining these facets of life aboard was not my primary research focus, and I would be hesitant to make assumptions in these areas or to step outside of the limits of my collected data into the realm of supposition.

This thesis is primarily concerned with community formation, enskilment and the nature of being a travelling person within contemporary UK politics and, as such, is more concerned with Boaters coming together than with any intra-community variations and differences. This is one of many pieces of work that could have been written on this travelling community and I look forward to reading future authors who focus more explicitly on gender, family life aboard boats, the difference between different age groups of Boaters,²⁶ and on the variable experiences of Boaters of different ethnic origin and affiliation.

²⁶ I use the term "generation" to refer to relative experience rather than age, in keeping with the way it is used by Wenger (1998: 99-101; 1998: 56-158) and thus there are differences in terms of actual chronological age which are not given central attention in this thesis, but which could be analysed in later work.

On the subject of ethnicity, there is the question of whether or not the Boaters constitute an ethnic category or an ethnic minority group. The National Bargee Traveller Association (NBTA) has lobbied successfully for several local councils to accept “Bargee Traveller” as a legal category of traveller, and thus to provide services and take responsibility for the Boaters in their care. Their website states that their aims are “to represent the interests of all live aboard boat dwellers – “Bargee Travellers” – in respect of pursuing the lifestyle, *upholding minority demographic rights*” (National Bargee Traveller Association, 2011; emphasis my own). The question of whether this new ethnic category will prove to be popular in the future and whether it will become an important facet of Boaters’ self-perception is currently uncertain.

This thesis will not deal further with this question of the creation of a Boater “ethnic” category, nor shall I review the extensive anthropological literature on ethnicity. The NBTA and the waterways authorities (primarily CaRT) are currently engaged in a number of ongoing legal disputes, some of which rest on the question of “minority rights,” and I would not want my speculative writing, particularly if taken out of context by biased parties, to interfere with the work of either side. The data that I have collected which may be able to inform the “ethnicity debate” may well form the basis of later papers. For now, it is important to note that, whether or not Boaters use the term “Bargee Traveller” or consider themselves to be of an ethnic category, the sense of deep-seated belonging to a community that I describe in the following chapters, the great extent to which being a “Boater” becomes part of self-ascribed identity, and the willingness of many Boaters to describe themselves as being part of a larger movement of travellers are effective and powerful factors, none of which preclude the idea of ethnic belonging.

Having explained the limitations of this thesis, I now turn to an introduction of the major strands of literature applied within the thesis. I begin with an account of published literature concerning boat-dwelling, before moving on to the theoretical literature that will support my arguments in later chapters.

Guide to the literature used

Literature on boats and boating

It is important to state firstly that there is no current published academic literature within the discipline of anthropology dealing with boat-dwelling populations in the UK. My research and my frequent conversations with informed Boaters, academics who are boat dwellers, and academics researching UK travelling populations have not turned up literature from any other social science discipline or sub-field that makes reference to published ethnography based on research conducted within this population. The Boaters have, however, been researched by anthropologists and other social scientists at undergraduate level, Masters level, and in at least one currently uncompleted PhD (that of an acquaintance formerly of Bristol University, Sam Lewis). I have also read work by and had discussions with Azzurra Muzzonigro, who is researching the Boaters, using a mixture of methods including ethnography, for a PhD focussing on the architecture and social geography of the canals, with *Universita' Roma Tre*. I read and considered the dissertation work of Andrew Campbell, who completed a PhD on the history of the Ashby Canal at the University of Leicester's Centre for English Local History. Further, I use and make occasional reference to fellow London Boater and anthropologist Isabel Ward's Masters dissertation, *The Fluidity of Home*, produced whilst at Goldsmith's University.

Another strong strand of literature from which I quote liberally are the books about the social life of the waterways written for a non-academic audience. These volumes are usually personal travelogues, often written for comedic effect, as in the case of Steve Haywood's *Narrowboat Dreams* (2011) and *One Man and a Narrowboat* (2009), Terry Darlington's *Narrow Dog* series (see *Narrow Dog to Wigan Pier* (2012) and *Narrow Dog to Carcassonne* (2006)), and Trevor Pavitt's *Living the Dream* (2007). Paul Gogarty's *The Water Road* (2011) is a particularly fine example of the genre, as journalist Gogarty stylishly describes his experiences of discovering boating and the Boaters for an interested non-academic audience. Despite being written for a popular audience, these books have often proved to be useful and their authors' experiences similar to my own.

In the absence of ethnographic material related to my fieldsite, I have chosen to review close comparative material, namely ethnographies of other UK-based travelling communities. In this sub-field, Judith Okely's 1983 work with the Traveller-Gypsies (see also Okely, 2014) stands out as a classic and foundational text. This work is now over thirty years old, but still provides a blueprint for how to conduct fieldwork with a travelling population "at

home” in the UK. Other studies of UK travelling populations are also discussed at various points, for example Clark and Greenfield’s *Here to Stay* (2006), which was useful for the legal, historical and sociological overview it provided. Isabel Fonseca’s *Bury Me Standing* (1996) gives an overview of the history and contemporary social lives of “Gypsies” and land-based travellers around Europe. Sal Buckler’s aforementioned *Fire in the Dark* (2007) is an intriguing later study of UK Gypsies in the north of the country, which contradicts many of Okely’s suggestions, particularly her theories concerning the structuralist basis to Traveller-Gypsies’ purity laws and taboos (*ibid.*:195).

The Traveller-Gypsies – apart from the obvious difference that they travel on the roads in caravans and trailers rather than on the waterways in boats – differ from the Boaters in that they identify as a predominantly endogamous ethnic group, with an ethnic origin and a history based in Eastern Europe and, before this, in Egypt or Northern India (Okely, 1983, pp.18-27). The Gypsies are generally considered to be a foreign presence, an ethnic “other”, whereas Boaters, as many Boaters and non-Boaters with whom I have spoken have told me, are just “people who happen to live on boats.” It is testament to anthropology’s almost inseparable association with the exotic and the foreign and with difference (see MacClancey, 2002; Gupta and Ferguson, 1997) that I was frequently asked by those outside the discipline why I was researching a population with no obvious ethnic separation from their sedentary neighbours. Much of the relationship between Gypsies and “gorgios” (non-Gypsies) stems from this idea of difference and associated fears. Indeed, the Gypsies are routinely portrayed as “folk devils” and are subject to moralising in the media and in popular discourse (Morris, 2000).²⁷ In contrast, the Boaters are usually not considered threats in quite the same fashion, although it will be shown in Chapters 8-11 that the relationship between Boaters and non-Boaters is not simple or harmonious.

Traveller-Gypsies are not the only contemporary UK travelling population and, indeed, ethnographies completed with New Age Traveller²⁸ groups (see, for example, Hammersley

²⁷ See also Cohen (1973) for a thorough introduction to and interrogation of the concept of the “folk devil” and the creation of a morally antagonistic cultural “other.”

²⁸ Note that many ethnographers working with New Age Travellers (see Phillips, 2015; Martin, 2002) prefer to simply use the term “Travellers” in reference to this group. This is because “New Age Travellers” is a term that originated in the media and has developed negative connotations. I continue to use the label in this thesis in order to avoid using the term “Traveller,” as I write later about how many Boaters come to use this term and I wish to avoid confusion.

and Traianou, 1993; Hetherington, 2000; Martin, 2014; Phillips, 2015; Blackstone, 2005) reveal some similarities to my own ethnography and are referenced in several chapters. New Age Travellers are similar to the Boaters in that they are not generally thought of as a separate ethnic group, but rather as a group opting into an alternative lifestyle (or having been forced into it by circumstance). Many New Age Travellers, after being forced from “the roads” and the vans and coaches in which they travelled, after the police action known as the “Battle of the Beanfields” in 1985, and then again in the aftermath of the draconian Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994, moved onto boats and became one of the main driving forces behind the rise in the population of Boaters, which began in the 1990s and has continued to the present day.

In addition to this limited comparative literature, I attempt to use examples from ethnographies from beyond the boundaries of contemporary Britain. Indeed, at various points — for example when discussing the effect of mobility and the potential of movement on the Boaters — I explicitly compare the Boaters to other groups who are mobile, such as hunter-gather societies, slash-and-burn horticulturalists and pastoralists (all groups, in fact, apart from settled agricultural or urban communities). This is not to be misunderstood as inappropriate generalisation, but rather as a discussion of the (admittedly limited) commonalities between geographically disconnected and dispersed groups that arise due to their ability to move around the landscape without having to stay bound to a sedentary home.

James Scott is a central influence here, both in terms of his theories of legibility (1998) weapons of the weak (1985) and state evasion (2011), of which I make frequent use, and in terms of his ability to take ethnographies from very different contexts and make them part of a single intellectual endeavour that can cast light on the relationship between states and citizens. Scott began his influential volume *Seeing Like a State* (1998) with a description of a project which he abandoned in favour of the “intellectual detour” to understand why the state has always seemed to be the enemy of “people who move around” (ibid.:1). This question, he argues, “transcend[s] regional geography. Nomads and pastoralists... hunter-gatherers, Gypsies, vagrants, homeless people, itinerants, run-away serfs and slaves have always been a thorn in the side of states” (ibid.). Scott’s interesting detour into the subject of “state legibility” only tangentially or partially answers this question (it is im-

plied that travelling people are not legible in the way that the state desires, but Scott does not interrogate this point in any great detail).

This is the case until his later work, *The Art of Not Being Governed* (2011), in which Scott does closely examine those troubling groups that avoid aspects of the state, including those whose repertoire of responses include mobility. Here again, however, Scott leaves gaps in his analysis; he writes “had I the patience and even more of an impulse to comprehensiveness, there would and should have been a chapter on watery regions of refuge. I mention them only in passing and regret that I haven’t been able to do them justice... I must leave this theme to others more competent to pursue it: a task already excellently begun by Eric Tagliacozzo” (*ibid.*:14).

Tagliacozzo has, indeed, begun such a project, focussing on smuggling and secret trade in South East Asia (2005), but there is still much to be done if anthropologists are to understand the effect that the mobility and freedom afforded by water has on the social lives of mariners. Examples of such a life on the water-bound margins of statecraft are obvious; the alternative sociality offered by the pirate ship has been a constant presence, taunting the edge of monolithic states since the beginning of human recorded history (Konstam, 2008) – although, as Dent (2012) notes, anthropology has, to its detriment, been lacking in its dealing with pirates and piracy.

Anthropologists are, however, increasingly dealing with and taking seriously the idea of life aboard boats and as part of boat-based communities, albeit with an almost exclusive focus on seafarers living aboard transnational fishing and cargo ships (see, for example, Sampson, 2014; Simpson, 2006; Webster, 2013; Ben-Yehoyada, 2012; Markkula, 2011). Further, Bear (2011; 2012) has conducted ethnographic study of mariners and the state on the Hooghly river in India – work which forms the basis of a forthcoming book entitled *Navigating Austerity: Currents of debt along a South Asian River*. At the *Hybridity at Sea: Humanity and Seafaring* panel at the ASA Decennial Conference in Edinburgh (June 2014), organisers Nicolas Argenti and Chryssanthi Papadopoulou argued compellingly for a maritime anthropology examining the unique qualities of boats and how these vessels shape the social lives of those aboard. Central to their proposed maritime anthropology are Foucault’s understanding of ships as heterotopias (Foucault, 1984) and Serres’ theorisation of ships as “hamlet[s]... in a fragile shell” (Serres, 2008:278). Both of these ideas seek to de-

scribe how boats are intriguingly positioned between the wildness of the sea and the human social universe and, as such, are spaces which hold a form of sociality which is qualitatively different from that found on land in the boats' and ships' ports of origin. This thesis aims to add to this ongoing project, despite the fact that boats crewed by my participants belong to the inland waterways as opposed to the high seas.

As has been shown, I have had to cast the net wide in order to find appropriate ethnographies with which to compare my own work; as such I have examined literature concerning travelling populations in the UK, comparative examples of worldwide mobile groups, non-academic work concerning the Boaters, and the growing field of maritime anthropology. Beyond this, the literature surveyed has been predominantly of a theoretical focus as I have tried to apply various theoretical frames to my ethnography and to detail where they fit and where they fail.

Each chapter has a particular strand of theory attached, and these are mainly introduced in the specific chapter for which they are relevant. Certain strands of theory, however, "tent-pole" the three sections of the thesis and, as such, should be introduced here. These three strands narrate the story of the Boaters that I am attempting to tell: how individuals on the waterways become part of a community of practice through enskilment and the gaining of knowledge; how these Boaters act together through a frame which they call "community"; and how they are viewed by outsiders, including agents of the state, to whom the Boaters appear as an itinerant and undesirable element and a cause for concern. Thus, below, in order to provide theoretical groundwork, I review the pertinent anthropological literature on dwelling, apprenticeship and enskilment, community, and the state.

Dwelling, apprenticeship and enskilment

Dwelling and apprenticeship

Central to the first three substantively ethnographic chapters of this thesis (Chapters 4-6) are theories that describe how individuals become particular kinds of persons through the learning of skills and the gaining of knowledge within a particular setting. This process of becoming skilled (enskilment) is what Ingold (2000; 1993) describes as learning to dwell within an environment. For Ingold, this dwelling, the interrelationship between an organism

and their world, is central for understanding human activity, as both sides are shaped by their interaction; for Ingold there is no Cartesian dualism separating the mind from the body, or the human “cultural” world from the “natural” environment. As he summarises, “the study of skill demands a perspective which situates the practitioner, right from the start, in the context of an active engagement with the constituents of his or her surroundings. I call this the ‘dwelling perspective’” (2000:5). This perspective is vital for my examination of how Boaters become part of a community by having to learn particular skills and to adopt certain temporal rhythms and relationships towards consumption and personal economy due to their choice of dwelling.

In order to add to Ingold’s dwelling perspective, I aim to make use of other authors who describe such processes of communities coming into being through attention to a shared repertoire of actions and tasks. Thus I also utilise Lave and Wenger’s (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) theories of “communities of practice” and “legitimate peripheral participation.” These theories outline how individuals who share certain practices (for example, skilled workers on the same team) are bound together by their common activities in communities of practice. They explain how relative mastery is afforded high status by those within the community, and how newcomers into the community are allowed room to learn the requisite skills through mimicry, trial and error, and overt apprenticeship, at a legitimate periphery of relative incompetence, through a process called “legitimate peripheral participation” (LPP). Lave and Wenger almost exactly preempt Ingold when they state that “there is no activity which is not situated” and that the “agent, activity, and the world mutually constitute each other” (Lave and Wenger, 1991:33), causing communities to emerge from the acts of supporting skillful action within environments.

Ethnographic work on apprenticeship relationships can demonstrate parallels with Lave and Wenger’s theories, whereby learners learn by doing, by training their bodies in the interplay of interaction between their selves, more experienced others, and the objects that they are attempting to produce. In several ethnographies of relations of apprenticeship (see, for example, Gatewood, 1985; Hill and Plath, 1998, Marchand, 2001; Argenti, 2008; Prentice, 2008; Portisch, 2009), the ethnographers recognise that apprenticed learning does not involve the rote transmission of knowledge from masters to apprentices, but rather that apprentices are given space to learn by doing and by making errors, through engagement with their materials. The idea that learning is situated in practice has its intel-

lectual roots in Gilbert Ryle's distinction between an abstract "learning that" and a "learning how," which is bound in situated knowledge gained through direct engagement (Ryle, 1948).

Lave and Wenger take their theories beyond what would normally be considered to be apprenticeship situations, for example citing Cain's ethnographic work with members of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) in the USA, whereby new members serve an "apprenticeship" in order to learn the linguistic and behavioural skills required to act as full members who have gained a form of social mastery in the AA group setting (Lave and Wenger, 1991, pp. 79-84). Other ethnographers have also used "apprenticeship" to describe situations that do not have a formal master-apprentice relationship. For example, Simpson (2006) writes of the ethnographer as an apprentice, learning skills over time and through engagement, and compares this relationship with that of the mariners with whom he works in Kachchh, India.

Pálsson also uses this metaphor of the ethnographer as apprentice, gaining their "sea-legs" (Pálsson, 1994:901) over time. He compares this with the process of becoming a skilled worker, learning to live and work on fishing boats in Iceland through a frame that predicts and predates Ingold's dwelling perspective. Pálsson describes how Icelandic fishermen "apply the metaphor of the journey, the fishing trip, to the issue of personal enskilment. This is to suggest that learning is not a purely cognitive or cerebral process, a mental reflection *on* differences in time and space, but is rather grounded in the contexts of practice, involvement and personal engagement" (*ibid.*:920; emphasis in the original). Following this lead, I find it possible to speak of new Boaters as undergoing "apprenticeships" in order to become part of a community of practice as skilled dwelling inhabitants of the waterways, even in the absence of the normal master-apprentice dyad.

Practice and Performance

The concept of identity as arising from particular performances, of being enacted through practice, has an intellectual foundation beyond the learning and apprenticeship approach that influenced Lave and Wenger and beyond the phenomenological tradition that influenced Ingold's dwelling perspective. Bentley (1987 and 1991; cf. Yelvington, 1991) describes how identity (specifically ethnic identification in the case he describes) can come

about through practice as it becomes inseparable from the individual, becoming part of the individual's internal dispositions or habitus. Such theory draws on Bourdieu's practice theory, to which both Ingold and Bentley admit a debt. The habitus, for Bourdieu, is the "system of acquired dispositions functioning on the practical level as categories of perception and assessment or as classificatory principles as well as being the organizing principles of action" (Bourdieu, 1990:13). By this, Bourdieu means that the performance of actions become ingrained in the body and come to determine the habitus and, in return dialectic fashion, the habitus shapes and partially determines subsequent action. With regard to the Boaters, this theory is useful for understanding how the material actions of boat-dwelling become ingrained in the body, leading the Boaters to particular dispositions and preferences, including particular ways of creating temporal maps (see Chapter 5) and practices of consumption (see Chapter 6).

Bourdieu's theories, in turn, are refinements of Mauss' (2007) understanding of "techniques of the body" wherein Mauss describes how, from his work collecting examples of culturally specific actions and gestures, "what emerges very clearly...is the fact that we are everywhere faced with physio-psycho-sociological assemblages of series of actions. These actions are more or less habitual and more or less ancient in the life of the individual and the history of society" (*ibid.*:66). Where Ingold and those who make use of his "dwelling perspective" differ from the theoretical frameworks outlined by Mauss or Bourdieu is that they consider the individual, their task and the human and non-human aspects of their environment to be mutually constitutive. Rather than theorising from the viewpoint of the human actor gaining mastery over their task through perfection of bodily techniques, the dwelling perspective widens the frame to describe how the materials of the task, as existing in what he refers to as a "taskscape" of objects and actors, shape the persons who act as components in what Ingold would call an "ecological" process (Ingold, 2000:60). Ingold defines the taskscape thus: "just as the landscape is an array of related features, so – by analogy – the taskscape is an array of related activities" (2000:195). It is the Boaters' taskscape, the activities that they come to share, and those that come to shape them that I describe in Chapters 4-6.

For Mauss and Bourdieu, and later Ingold, practice is constitutive of one's identity and self and becomes ingrained in the body. In this way, practice and the habitus mediate between the rigid constraint of the individual by structure and their free agentic ability to act; the

habitus shapes dispositions and makes actions of a particular kind more likely, but one is far from predetermined in their actions. The idea of identity as emergent from performance is also evident in the work of Butler (1990), who describes gender as a performed construct that is built up through constitutive action and over many years. A particularly strong ethnographic account of how identity, in certain contexts, comes from the performance of certain tasks is Rita Astuti's (1995) ethnography of the Vezo of Western Madagascar. Here, Astuti describes how Vezo identity is not pre-ascribed, but rather comes about as a result of being performed. To be Vezo is to live by the coast and to struggle with the sea. As Astuti writes, "to be a Vezo is to have learnt Vezo-ness, and to perform it: identity is an activity rather than a state of being" (*ibid.*:2). In this sense, we must be "willing to consider, rather than dismiss out of hand, that what Vezo people do and where they live is sufficient to define and constitute their identity and the difference between themselves and others" (*ibid.*:7; emphasis in the original). Astuti's is an ethnography that takes seriously the idea that performance can constitute identity.

As shall be seen in Chapters 4-6, Boaters can similarly be described as those who have learnt and are able to perform "Boater-ness:" that is, the skills, the knowledge of places and persons, the temporal sense, the correct habitus, and the correct understanding of the use value of goods that allow one to dwell successfully aboard one's idiosyncratic boat (for dwelling is always achieved through the avatar of the specific boat) and on the waterways as a wider environment.

Thus, throughout the thesis (but particularly in Chapters 4-6, where I concentrate on the processes by which one becomes a Boater), I draw upon Ingold's dwelling perspective and Lave and Wenger's concepts of communities of practice and legitimate peripheral participation in order to describe how Boaters are supported to learn the skills of boat-dwelling through immersive attention to their boats and to the waterways. I further note, through the theories that underpin these approaches, including Bourdieu's practice theory, how the performance of certain acts and dwelling in a certain fashion can become part of one's self, one's deeply ingrained habitus and dispositions. Performance can, in turn, as Bentley, Astuti, Butler, and others note, shape identities and create communities and even ethnicities. I argue that the Boaters come to act as they do due to the material conditions they find themselves in and the tasks they find themselves required to master. Such a discussion, particularly the sections that deal with communities of practice, goes some way towards

describing the formation and maintenance of a boating community. However, due to the importance of the term “community” in my fieldsite, where it is invoked with frequency, I also examine anthropology’s theoretical engagement with the term.

Community

Boaters in the South East often cite having “community” or a “strong community” as a particular advantage of life on the waterways. As such, it is important for me to engage with the extensive anthropological and sociological literature dealing with the term. Anthony P. Cohen explained the difficulties of using the term community within anthropology in *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (1985), stating that “Over the years [community] has proved to be highly resistant to satisfactory definition in anthropology and sociology, perhaps for the simple reason that all definitions contain or imply theories, and the theory of community has been very contentious” (*ibid.*:11). Delanty (2010) makes the point, however, that “virtually every term in social science is contested, and if we reject the word ‘community’ we will have to replace it with another term” (*ibid.*:11). Due to such difficulties, community as a term has gone in and out of fashion with the anthropological community, who often find the term too amorphous and hard-to-capture in actual practice and everyday experience.²⁹

Cohen’s attempt to rehabilitate the term involved viewing communities as groups who share a number of symbols that allow a boundary to be created and maintained between the in-group and the out-group. These boundaries are often, but not always, created using rituals. A vital component of Cohen’s conception of community rests in the power of shared symbols to allow participants to invest meaning and a deep sense of their identity and belonging in membership of the group (*ibid.*:71). Such a conception of community preempts in many ways Lave and Wenger’s (1991) communities of practice, which are themselves created through shared practices (such as rituals) and reifications (such as symbols) against boundaries. Lave and Wenger’s concept is broader, however, and includes wider

²⁹ Cohen’s theories are an attempt to distance anthropology’s engagement with community from the early twentieth-century work of the “Chicago school” (see Park, Burgess and McKenzie, 1984). This work tends to see communities as structurally-determined features of rural or village localities that struggle to survive in individualistic city environments. The notion of community is, in this model, seen as a Durkheimian social fact with the emphasis placed far more on structure than on the agency of the individual (Cohen, 1985:38).

and more everyday forms of practice whilst also allowing multiple overlapping and contradicting identities to be simultaneously held.

Further, this conception draws heavily upon Barth's (1998 [1969]) notion of ethnic identity occurring at the marking of boundaries between the self and the other in order to create opposing in-group and out-group identities. In Barth's theories, which have since found widespread appeal in anthropology, ethnic groups are not primordial monoliths but, rather, arise from interaction between groups. Identity, for Barth, rests in the interplay between one group and an ethnic "other" where a group defines itself by the symbols and activities that are shared by its members and against the actions of others.

Such a view of communities, seen as forming around a shared symbolic repertoire and being enacted through practice and ritual, has its roots in the theory of *communitas*. This theory, which refers to the feeling of togetherness created through ritual, marking the boundary of the group in relation to the other, comes from Durkheim's notion of collective effervescence (2008 [1915]), through the later work of Victor Turner (2011 [1969]). I engage with these ideas more substantively in Chapter 7, when I describe how Boaters come to act together around particular symbolic boundaries and begin to enact community in demonstrative acts of food sharing at barbecues and bonfire parties. This is the community as it is referred to when people state that particular areas "have" community or that "there is a strong community in (e.g.) Victoria Park."

This is, however, a traditional view of community, and one that does not resonate with every usage of the term in my fieldsite. Indeed, several authors suggest that such a traditional conception of community does not hold as much relevance in the modern world as it once did. Bauman (2000), for example, argues that the modern fascination for community reflects the search for security in an unsafe world of increasing isolation. For Bauman, our search for community and its centrality in our political rhetoric says more about personal narratives of insecurity and a desire for a return to a fictive era of trust and mutual co-operation than it does about any particular acts of *communitas*. Community is, for Bauman, primarily now best understood as an unfulfilled desire emanating from the modern world.

Gerald Delanty (2010) charts an emergent strand of theory that places the roots of contemporary community not in rituals forming boundaries, but in communication, the building

up of shared life-worlds through dialogue.³⁰ Essentially, here, community is a rhetorical construct created by marginal groups who feel the need for community in a world of atomisation and isolation. Chapter 7 examines the extent to which this form of community exists on the waterways and whether the theories of “communicative community” are useful for understanding why the Boaters speak about community so frequently and yet do not often meet and act corporately.

Delanty’s position asserts that, in the “postmodern” world, where new technologies and urban living has meant that actual bounded unity and togetherness is increasingly rare, communities can appear more as a series of personal narratives concerning one’s identity. This he describes as the “community beyond unity” (Delanty, 2010:104), going on to say that “in postmodern society, marginality is everywhere. Postmodern communities are nomadic, highly mobile, emotional and communicative” (*ibid.*). In this understanding, communities can be called into being either through group action, or through narratives, rhetoric and speech acts that create shared conceptions of belonging as individuals desire a nostalgic communal sense that they feel has been lost.³¹

Beyond such theoretical discussions, Delanty turns to ethnographies of New Age Travelers – a group, as aforementioned, that has some similarities with the Boaters – in order to explore this contemporary understanding of community. Delanty explicitly references New Age Travellers when he describes how postmodernity has created a sense of loss, which many attempt to solve by joining those communicative communities that emphasise the agency of the individual in contrast to the creation of symbolic boundaries against others. This helps to avoid the mistake of seeing these newer communities as a simply nostalgic (or doomed utopian) project that exists purely in a fictional golden age; rather, it is a calculated and peculiarly modern counter-reaction: “The search for community cannot only be seen as a backward-looking rejection of modernity, a hopeless nostalgic plea for the recovery of something lost; it is an expression of very modern values and of a condition that

³⁰ Delanty, in developing his understanding of community as “communicative”, draws on Habermas (1984; 1987), who conceives of community as being fundamentally based upon shared communication. Thus “if community is what is shared, it must take a communicative form... [This] also points to a transformative idea of community as an expression of human potential rooted in the ability to speak and to create a common world. Community is never complete but is always in the process of being made” (Delanty, 2010:89).

³¹ Delanty takes his conception on postmodern or communicative community from a number of theorists, including Nancy (1991), Blanchot (1988), Corlett (1989) Agamben (1993) and Maffesoli (1996). These theorists and the contributions they have made to this intellectual project are summarised within Chapter 7.

is central to the experience of life today, which we may call the experience of communicative belonging in an insecure world” (Delanty, 2010, p.168).

Such an understanding of community allows for a remarkable degree of flexibility when outlining definitions; indeed, in Delanty’s words, “Community is ultimately what people think it is” (Delanty, 2010:11) and “if anything unites [the] very diverse conception of community, it is the idea that community concerns belonging” (*ibid.*:13). I use this notion of community in Chapter 7, in my analysis of a second sense in which the Boaters speak of community as being a thing that you “do” for others; the community of support which exists in the rhetoric of Boater conversation and which is not always seen in action. As we shall see, this second sense of community exists predominantly in the communicative practices of the group and is a promise of support and togetherness against threats from the external world; a world which contains myriad dangers and wherein neighbours cannot be relied upon.

Thus Delaney’s ideas are particularly useful in my analysis as I try to define what, emically, the term “community” means to the Boaters. I argue that community is both enacted, in a way that would be understood by Cohen, in specific, somewhat ritualised, occasions, and yet also exists beyond these rare occasions, in the acts of speaking and creating a rhetoric of communal support. For the Boaters, community is both something that one *has* and that one *does* in certain and specific ways. Delanty’s theories allow for this open, emic, and specific understanding of community. After viewing the community of Boaters from within in this fashion, the thesis turns, in the third part, to a discussion of the interrelation of Boaters and outsiders.

The State

The thesis after Chapter 7 moves beyond an internal description of the boating community and outwards in focus in order to interrogate how the Boaters are viewed by and interact with outsiders. Chapter 8 focuses explicitly on Boaters as citizens within the United Kingdom nation state. Actors representing official power originating from legal and government remit are a key component of the later substantive chapters, from Chapter 9 through to Chapter 11 and, as such, it is important to outline here how I conceive of and seek to investigate state power. This will involve moving beyond viewing the state as one central

force operating through different arms and branches and towards a conception of the state as an ideological construct, in the name of which many institutions and individuals operate, producing different, occasionally contradictory, and unpredictable effects. These changes in conception compel me to closely examine the actual relationship between agents of the state (describing who they are, who they represent, and the powers they can wield) and those who they intend to “interpellate” (Althusser, 1971)³² as citizens, and how successful for either side such interactions are.

First, it is important to note how anthropologists and connected theorists describe the changing nature of the state and how the state has come to operate in the contemporary era. Foucault (1991) innovated on early theories of the state, which saw state power as pushing from a bureaucratic centre, when he moved the analytical focus from the bureaucratic centre into the bodies of citizens. As is well known, these bodies are made disciplined and malleable by various ideological state institutions, from the home, through the education system, and into the adult working world. In his classic work *Governmentality*, Foucault described how the medium for state interaction was transferred from laws to “a series of multiform tactics” (Foucault, 1991, in Sharma and Gupta, 2006:137), a phrase which Foucault leaves undefined here but which, in his work on discipline and bio-politics (Foucault, 1975; Gordon, 1991), is described as the creation of docile and disciplined bodies through diffuse and localised channels of power. Such channels could be present anywhere, for example in the prison, the clinic, the school, the hospital, the church, the courtroom, or in the home. The art of governance – based, as it was, on the flimsy metaphor of the family – was eventually replaced, according to Foucault, by the scientific-positivist approach of the political scientist or political economist: by statistics, as the state gradually became more pervasive in the lives and bodies of citizens.

Later theories have added to and expanded on Foucault’s reformulation of theories of state power. Rose (1996), for example, describes how neo-liberalism has eroded the power of the nation-state. “Advanced liberal rule”, Rose states, “seeks to de-governmentalize the state and to de-statize practices of government, to detach the substantive authority of expertise from the apparatuses of political rule” (Rose, 1996 in Sharma and Gupta,

³² Althusser notes that it is important, rather than writing on the state in the abstract, to observe the ways in which the state hails or “interpellates” persons as citizens. For Althusser, it is in these acts of interpellation that state ideology is spread and that individuals come to understand themselves as particular types of citizen.

2006:147), meaning that increasingly it is the “logic” of the markets and business that are allowed to rule and to govern. With an increase in governments privatising that which was central, including their institutions of governance and management, it is common to find that “the state” – here taken to be those organisations which define the *state of exception* (Agamben, 2005) or that hold the *monopoly on the legitimate use of violence* (Weber, 1968) – is actually a capitalist business that has been handed some or all of the powers of the state. Thus, in the modern world, it is not immediately clear which institutions form the state and which lie outside of it.³³ Nor, under the modern condition, does the state spread its power evenly across its boundaries. Comaroff (2012) describes how the state, especially when dealing with modern capital, often finds itself in borderlands where sovereignties overlap and leave blurred boundaries and significant gaps. She concludes that:

“Ruling regimes have tended to outsource key state functions, from customs and excise to prisons and warfare, rendering borders ambiguously both open (to trade, investment, and favored populations) and closed (to immigrants of less desirable quality). Under these conditions, sovereignty is often blurred or overlapping” (Comaroff, 2012:12)

Kapferer and Bertelson (2012) draw another detailed picture of the state under pressure from other forms of sovereignty and oppositional forces, many of them “nomadic,” in the sense (as understood through the theory of “Nomadism” from Deleuze & Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987)) that they are unconstrained by the rigidity of structure and can spread into those zones unreachable by state forms. Such a conception of the state as under threat and limited is not entirely modern, but is further supported in Scott’s more recent writings (2014), where he describes how states historically spread out from a centre in order to attempt to control those whom they encounter. Here, states found their reach to be limited by stateless borderlands, fleeing peoples, nomads, ungovernable and unpassable areas, and other competing states. It appears, in other words, that the state was never the all-powerful and omnipresent monolithic entity that one may imagine, and that it has always had a limited and contested reach.

From these theorists I take and make use of the idea that the state does not always act through channels that are officially and explicitly linked to government. Indeed, in my field-

³³ Building on this argument, Wendy Brown (2014) has demonstrated that the erosion of state sovereignty and the rise of alternative sovereignties, including multinational corporations, has contributed to the increase in militarisation and wall-building around nation-states, as previously sovereign states seek to shore up their increasingly permeable boundaries.

site, it is a charitable trust (the Canal and River Trust) that is allowed to wield power upon the Boaters and to apply the law in order to limit their movements. Further, I take from these theorists the idea that the power of the state does not reach into every part of every geographical region and is not consistently, logically or comprehensibly experienced by citizens, who may feel state and government institutions applying contradictory pressures to them from several different directions. This becomes key in my discussion, in Chapter 8, of how the Boaters are simultaneously encouraged to become sedentary and to move on to other locations.

How, then, does an ethnographer study the state if it is so chaotic and unpredictable? A way forward is suggested by Mitchell (1999) and Gupta (2012). For Mitchell (1999), it makes little sense to study the state; rather “we must analyze the state as a structural effect... as the powerful, apparently metaphysical effect of practices that make such structures appear to exist” (Mitchell,1999:180). Mitchell believes that we should look at how we divide (both literally and rhetorically) between state and society and how we practice “state.” Further than just spatial and temporal organisation, Mitchell urges us to look at the effects of discipline, supervision and surveillance, and, vitally, representation, which as practices mark a boundary and create space for state to be imagined and reproduced (*ibid.*:185). Thus, we as anthropologists are cautioned against seeing the state as a cohesive whole, as it is, in fact, the function of many complexly allied individuals and institutions sharing an ideology which separates the “public” from “the private”, but which is not a cohesively structured totality. The state is not one entity; it is an emergent set of practices and ideologies that must be examined situationally in the moment that they are imagined and called into being.

The implication of all this is that a careful and nuanced method for studying the state is required. As Mitchell suggests, it is important to examine the ways in which the state is brought into being in everyday practice, including its limits and internal contradictions. Sharma and Gupta (2006) urge a similar method of attending to the everyday interactions between state agents and the people whom they attempt to interpellate as citizens. They wish to move towards a reconceptualisation of states that consists of seeing them as “culturally embedded and discursively constructed ensembles. Instead of viewing states as pre-constituted institutions that perform given functions, we argued that they are produced through everyday practices and encounters and through public cultural representations

and performances” (*ibid.*:27). This method is attempted by Gupta himself in his ethnography of Indian bureaucracies and structural violence (Gupta, 2012:33).

In summary, I conceive of the state as an ideological process spread through various institutions and practices, which is increasingly not the only sovereign force within the nation state, which is contested and limited, and which one must examine at the level of those everyday practices where the state is imagined and called into being. Gupta and Mitchell both compellingly argue that examining the actual affects of state agents upon individuals is the only way to view the state in operation. It is this method of studying the state that is attempted in Chapters 8-11, where I outline the quality of actual interactions and interpellations between Boaters and agents who represent state power. I seek to show how Boaters fail to fit into the state institution’s preferred model of how citizens should be and should act, how representatives working within the logics of these institutions view the Boaters, how the Boaters see their relationship to the state, and how the Boaters desire this relationship to be.

This chapter has introduced the Boaters and their vessels, the basic *who* and *what*, along with the circumstances that led me to begin my research on the waterways. The chapter also outlined the relevant strands of literature that will be used to support the core arguments that will emerge throughout the thesis. The reader is reminded, however, that this literature review has been by no means exhaustive, and that substantive chapters include a more substantive outline of the literature used. I now move on to describe the methodological approach I took over the course of the research and the ethical considerations arising from these decisions. This is followed by a chapter positioning the Boaters within a historical and legal framework, which will complete the three-chapter section that sets up and frames the research so that the ethnography can be presented from Chapter 4 onwards.

Chapter 2: Methodology and Ethics

Officially the fieldwork which makes up this thesis took place between 26th July 2012, when I moved aboard my narrowboat *Me* and began taking daily field notes, and September 2013 when, I returned to Brunel University to begin the process of writing. Unofficially, as described in the previous chapter, my personal history with the waterways began in 2008 and I am, at the time of writing in 2015, still living aboard in “the field.” Thus it could be argued that I have yet to put a stop to the fieldwork process. In order to avoid this causing issues in the write-up, I have overwhelmingly used ethnographic anecdotes, quotes, and case studies from the period of my official fieldwork.

I have not ignored events - particularly legal events that have changed the relationship between Boaters and the waterways authorities³⁴ - that have occurred over the period of my write-up. However, I use them sparingly and for the sake of providing a deeper and more valid historical picture. Events from my earlier travels on the waterways and from my undergraduate research period are also used sparingly; some of the individuals I met in my earlier fieldwork became key informants in this main period of fieldwork and, as such, their stories and perspectives may originate from pre-2012. In short, my continued engagement with the waterways has created a flexibility in the timescale of my work. As a consequence of this, the chapters presented in this thesis are not a chronological description or timeline. While I clearly emphasise the changes that have occurred between the beginning of my engagement with the Boaters and the present day, the chapters are built up in a kind of mosaic from events experienced throughout a long immersion in my field of study.

In addition to this temporal flexibility, there is also a necessary flexibility of geographic focus. As described in the previous chapter I, like my participants, am bound by law to move to a new location every fourteen days as part of a continuous navigation. As such, I did not have the opportunity afforded to Okely (1983) to stay in one site and to meet the traveling

³⁴ As shall be explained in greater detail in Chapter 3, the Boaters use the term “authorities” to refer to the groups who manage and hold legal sway over the waterways. This is, on the majority of UK waterways, Canal and River Trust (CaRT), but on, for example, the **River Thames**, the government’s Environment Authority (EA) have legal responsibility for the waterway, for keeping the current free, for maintaining locks and other equipment, and for the Boaters who live on the watercourse. The term “authorities” may also refer to the **police force** or workers holding the authority of local government (the council) when these groups are making claims over the Boaters.

community as they moved into and out of my location. I could not have afforded a “home mooring”, and even if I’d had one, I would not have met the travelling Boaters I desired to. Equally, I could not stay in or around one location without a mooring as I would have been taken to court by CaRT and ultimately lost my home. I had seen the evasive, generally polite, but closed and private way in which Boaters responded to potential researchers and journalists who were not themselves Boaters, and it was clear from this that I would have to become a liveaboard Boater myself to have any kind of access to my intended participants.

I moved aboard close to Reading and immediately began making friends with members of the close boating community there. I could have stayed around that town for the duration of my fieldwork. However, the large number of Boaters in London, the tales of their recent difficulties caused by London’s hosting of the 2012 Olympic Games, and the contrast I expected to find between the waterways and the crowded urban space of the capital together convinced me to move “up river:” to join the Grand Union canal at Brentford, and to make my way through the Grand Union – the Paddington Arm, the Regent’s Canal, and the River Lee. These are the waterways that are spoken of as the “waterways of London,” and serve as the home of the “London Boaters.” Whilst in London, I could have moved less frequently, but I was scared of legal repercussions and, as such, my cruises around the city’s waterways were extensive. The results of this widespread traveling are discussed below and in Chapter 7.

The map below (Figure 7) shows a portion of the waterways of the South East, just one quadrant of the UK’s 2000 miles of navigable waterways. Missing from this simplified map is the metropolitan sprawl of London which covers the southeast quadrant of this particular projection. Figure 8 is a Google Maps image onto which I have drawn my own journey on the waterways over the course of the fieldwork period as a black line. Figure 9, for comparative purposes, is a map of the entire system of waterways in England and Wales. The Scottish waterways are not included on this map as they are separate to the England and Wales system and cannot be accessed from the main system.



Figure 7. A map of the waterways of the South East.

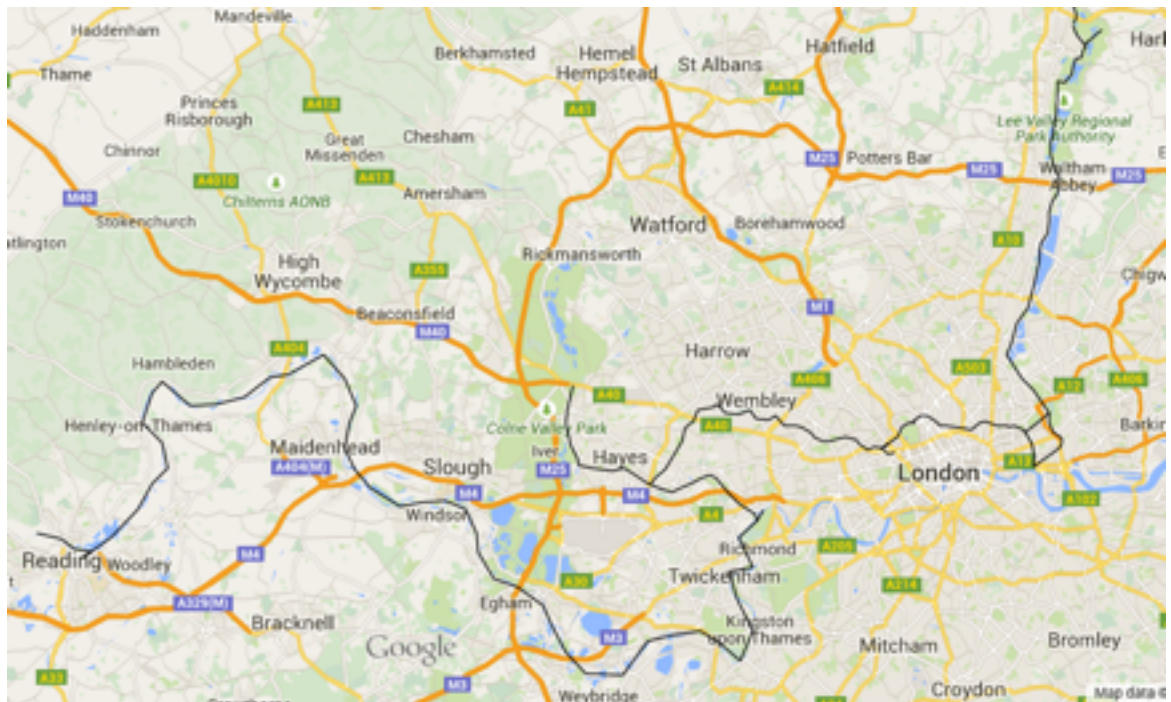


Figure 8. My own waterways journeys



Figure 9. A map of the waterways of England and Wales.

In keeping with traditional ethnographic research, my primary methodology was participant observation: keeping detailed field notes long-hand in field diaries.³⁵ In addition to “hanging out”, informally interviewing my boating neighbours, engaging with those who work on and around the waterways, and attending relevant Boaters’ organisation meetings and consultations (see Chapter 11). I also conducted fifteen semi-structured interviews with Boaters from London, three with Boaters from outside of the capital, and one with a senior member of CaRT. These interviews were mainly conducted in the early period of my time spent in London when, as is described in Chapter 7, I was finding it hard to meet Boaters with whom I could speak without contriving circumstances through which to do so.

³⁵ I could not regularly use my laptop for updating field notes as both using (and charging) it would be wasteful of electricity and put too high a demand on my boat’s batteries.

At this period, around the end of 2012 and the beginning of 2013, as I was progressing forward with my research through what was an isolating period, these interviews and the contacts I met through boating organisation meetings kept me feeling involved in the field. Having to move into new areas constantly and to start afresh, without the circle of close friends I had gained whilst living in the close and immediate social space of the moorings around Reading, meant that I often worried that I would simply not be able to meet enough Boaters or to have sufficiently meaningful interactions with the ones I did meet. Those who did interact with me would often be evasive in the presence of the “professional stranger” (Agar, 1996). Now, from the perspective of over two years of living on the waterways of London, I feel embedded in a network of contacts. This network was built up as I met Boaters on moorings and began to attend London Boaters meetings (see Chapter 12). If I were to begin my fieldwork afresh now, these early interviews would not have been necessary, but at the time they were invaluable and, indeed, many of the insights that led to the particular chapters of this thesis first came from my analyses of these interviews.

These interviews were not recorded, as is suggested in many methodological textbooks (see Bernard, 2006:210-251); rather, I made longhand notes of verbatim quotes and of general topics arising from the interview as it progressed. Having to stop the interviews frequently to take down verbatim quotations led to the interviews not flowing in the form of natural conversation, and also meant that I was already editing at this stage in the process of analysis of what I felt to be the most important words and topics. I recognise that this is not the recommended approach for researchers. I justify this choice for two reasons: firstly, my interviews were meant only to form supplementary material to support and enable my participant observation work and, as such, were as much about making contacts as they were about collecting data; secondly, I have recorded interviews in the past and noted that they can make interviewees nervous and reticent in a way that an everyday notebook being filled with scribbled notes will not, although each interviewee differs in their reaction to being under the scrutiny of any form of recording. The result was that the notes I collected from these interviews were concise and easy to analyse; they were in the same form and the same location as my field notes and, as such, I could include insights from these interviews immediately and reflect upon them in my field notes without having to wait until after the long process of transcription.

A further method upon which I came to rely in those early months in London was “online” data collection. I began to closely follow online forums dealing with canal-boating, including the popular *Narrowboat World* forum, which provides news, opinion and often heated debate. In addition, I began to receive mail from the “London Boaters” mailserv³⁶ (see Chapter 12). On the social networking website Facebook, I became a member of and attended to a number of “groups” set up by Boaters, including “River Lee & Stort Boaters”, “South East Boaters (SEB)”, “London Boaters”, and “Continuous Cruisers”. These groups are a major locus of daily interaction for the Boaters, who may be on moorings where they do not know their neighbours particularly well or where they are prevented by distance from having close contact with any of their closest boating friends. These groups can be great forums on which one can ask advice, share important information and theories, and discuss and debate ideas and ways forward, especially with respect to Boaters’ contentious dealings with the authorities.

These groups and forums are not usually places of particularly violent disagreement, and are generally friendly, lighthearted, and crammed with memes,³⁷ stories and other errata. However, Boaters do also act differently online than they do in real life, perhaps taking advantage of the Internet’s ability to grant the user freedom from face-to-face rules and norms. Thus, Boaters who may be polite and measured in person may use the relative freedom and distance afforded by the Internet to vent their opinions on various annoyances (for example, naive newcomers in the community, bad behaviour by other Boaters, Boaters who encourage or condone overstaying in popular spots which may lead to a backlash for others). These forums become spaces where ideas can be mooted, opinions expressed and tested, and vague consensus judged. Indeed they are the only places, due to the scattered nature of the boating community across the waterways system,³⁸ where these activities can occur with any regularity and with any real size of audience.

³⁶ A mailserv is an e-mail list which one can join. By joining, one receives all e-mails sent to the group and one can send an e-mail to all members of the group. In this way a large number of individuals can be contacted quickly. Similarly the groups can respond to news and suggestions immediately.

³⁷ Recurring jokes and variations on popular images which pass through Internet communities and make up part of the symbolic code and the grammar of the Internet.

³⁸ It is common to speak of the waterways as a “linear village.” It is frequently recognised that maintaining relationships across these distances is very complicated and is made far easier by the Internet.

Given the somewhat unusual nature of my fieldwork, the ethnography on which this thesis is based draws heavily upon my own experiences as an individual learning to be a Boater. I share with Nancy Sheper-Hughes (1992) her “distain for anthropologists who write ethnographies which are essentially autobiographies” (summarised in Skidmore, 2004:34), and yet I recognise, with Skidmore, the need to use the self as a research tool under circumstances where one is attempting to describe the affective experience of life in a particular location. As described in the previous chapter, Boaters learn about the waterways through the medium of their own unique boat and through the course of their own travels around the system, gaining the skills, knowledge and access to networks (the “symbolic” and “cultural” capital; see Bourdieu, 1977) that help them to become a “proper” Boater, embedded in the waterways’ community of practice. Thus, my own journey into this social world became central to my analysis, far beyond the normal level of “reflexivity” expected from the contemporary fieldworker.

In short, my ethnography is based on an unusual admixture of methodology and is not always akin to the anthropological “ideal type”, whereby the ethnographer, after a “stranger” phase, is accepted to the degree that they can achieve meaningful daily interactions with their participants. This does not mean, of course, that my fieldwork should be considered a failure, nor did it prevent me from collecting large amounts of rich data over the course of my thirteen months of travel. But there was no communal centre where I could “hang out” and wait for the local characters to descend: no marketplace, square or primary Boaters’ pub. I had to grasp interactions where I could, wandering along deserted stretches of towpath, loitering at locks, moving my own boat frequently, sitting on my boat roof with my radio on, recording the reactions of passersby and hoping to meet a neighbour. Some busier moorings were intensely sociable, some, for my purposes, unbearably private. Whereas Boaters are quick to help out if one is in need, and are socially compelled to be chatty and forward when meeting another Boater (as shall be seen in Chapter 7), meeting them in the first place can be inordinately difficult. Boaters’ barbecues, parties, informal gatherings, and nights aboard the *Floating Stage*³⁹ became exceptionally important and high-pressure events, as I tried to make as many connections as possible under heavy time constraints, knowing that it may be quiet for some time to come. If one is not obvi-

³⁹ A ramshackle music venue and bar on a boat which was crewed by two self-proclaimed “pirates” and which would stop at various locations in East London, putting on impromptu gigs and entertainments before being moved on by the police to the next spot.

ously a Boater (i.e, aboard one's boat, or if one does not mention one's status as a Boater quickly in the conversation), then Boaters can be disinclined to interact, thinking that the outsider is a nosey "gongoozler"⁴⁰ come to watch their actions. As such, I found that most of my interactions with Boaters would come at rare social gatherings, or when I was myself aboard or just entering or leaving *Me*.

As I describe in Chapter 4, looking like a "proper" Boater by wearing casual and practical clothing or performing maintenance tasks aboard (e.g., checking the water and oil levels in the engine, greasing the stern gland,⁴¹ taking coal from the roof with a coal scuttle) meant that one was more readily recognised and accepted as a Boater. Interaction with other Boaters was also dependent on the passing traffic of Boaters being interested enough to stop and to start up a conversation. Having the deck boards up helped, as most Boaters would stop to ask me about my engine. Their concern would invariably be accompanied by comments about the untidy and unclean state of my engine compartment, the worrying drip coming from my stern gland ("If your bilge pump failed, I reckon you could sink overnight."), or the dangerous nature of the "dodgy lino" (linoleum) covering my deck boards which was, I was repeatedly told, "a water trap" that would "make them rot."

As well as these sorts of methodological constraints, I also had to navigate certain unusual ethical concerns and considerations. Firstly, as many Boaters are engaged with a long-running battle with CaRT over their interpretation of the 1995 British Waterways Act, including a series of outstanding and contentious legal battles, I am acutely aware that I should not write anything that may have the potential to damage the Boaters' case in any current or forthcoming legal battle. If, for example, I wrote with specificity about "overstaying," that is to say staying in one "place" for more than two weeks, this may be used against the Boaters in question in a court of law. If I said that the process was widespread, or that I believe it to be unlawful under the existing legislation (and for clarification, I am not arguing this), then this could also be used as part of a backlash against Boaters. Similarly, if I were to cite any examples of Boaters working for undeclared income, or using "soft"

⁴⁰ A "boatwatcher"; this term will be explained fully in Chapter 9.

⁴¹ At the stern of a boat, where the prop shaft leaves the hull and connects to the propeller, a waterproof seal is ensured by the "stern gland," which must be maintained in order to prevent water from entering the boat via this point of weakness. This join must be "packed" with packing rope and "greased" in order to keep the seal sound.

drugs (e.g., cannabis) - both illegal but common practices which I would argue occur in every community in the UK and are not, I am sure, particularly over-represented in the behaviour of the Boaters - then CaRT or the police may use this information as part of the justification for enforcement crack-downs or invasive investigations of Boaters' behaviours. As such, I have had to ensure that the majority of names in the thesis are anonymised. In addition, some places have been changed, some names of boats and locations occluded, and some quotations left unattributed. I have been deliberately vague in places so as not to allow any readers to pinpoint any Boater who may be engaged in what the authorities may deem to be illegal activity, within their controversial interpretation of the law.

This does not impact the overall description of the range of behaviours and approaches to the law exhibited by Boaters in my fieldsite, which are represented accurately and honestly. The quest to make this thesis what I began thinking of as "CaRT-proof" has meant that I have possibly been overcautious in describing the details of individuals' boat movements, distances covered, and motivations behind moving,⁴² but this is a case of retaining, first and foremost, my ethical commitment towards "protecting research participants and honouring trust" (ASA, 2011:3). Many Boaters do not disclose information concerning their boats movements and distances covered and, as such, it was not appropriate to collect this sort of data from all but my closest informants.

The travelling anthropologist working with a travelling people must overcome certain issues. As already described, one of these is how to gain access to a number of key informants and to maintain relationships. The anthropologist travelling *with* the mobile group of course does not have this issue; the anthropologist staying still whilst their informants move sporadically around them (see Okely, 1983) equally has the ability to have long-term interactions with many informants. It is when the anthropologist and his or her informants have their own private journeys that methodological fixes and patch-ups like those I have outlined above must be attempted. Equally, as already discussed, the traveling anthropologist has the problem of a lack of geographic focus in their work. It is difficult, for example, to answer "where" one completed one's research without sounding as if one's research is "woolly" and lacking focus and validity. This is so despite the problematising, by Marcus (1995) and others, of the idea of the bounded fieldsite and the slow adoption of methods of

⁴² For example, the question of "intention" may turn out to be a key component of CaRT's definition of "bone fide navigation."

“multi-cited fieldwork.” In addition to these two major concerns, a third is that it is difficult to gain and to gauge informed consent in such circumstances. Indeed I was confronted throughout my fieldwork with an ongoing ethical concern over the extent to which I had the informed consent of the Boaters as a group.

According to the ASA (2011:2), informed consent must be granted, and then regularly checked for its continued validity, by each participant in one’s study. Usually this is achieved through the use of “gatekeepers,” important people and officials who have the authority to grant access to the fieldsite and who can, through their tacit approval, encourage individuals within their power and influence to participate in the ethnographer’s study. The gatekeeper presents the ethnographer as legitimate, participants are made aware of the field-worker’s presence and, in the absence of complaint, it is taken that they are supportive of the research being carried out. Those who have regular interactions with the ethnographer, including those being interviewed at any level of formality, can be questioned about their informed consent and can be made to fill in any number of forms that university ethics committees may require. In summary, the “informed” part of informed consent is ensured by the ethnographer’s official presence in the “bounded” fieldsite, as they are presented through the person of the “gatekeeper” or officials with whom they are associated.

As a traveling anthropologist, working with a traveling community, I found that there was no official “gate” to be found for the waterways. There were no powerful gatekeepers or representational bodies, no chiefs, community heads or “big men” through whom I could gain access. This is due, partially, to Boaters’ non-hierarchical political organisation.⁴³ However, this is also due to the geography of the waterways, whereby Boaters are spread out across the long intersecting ribbons of the canals and rivers, with no obvious geographic centre or hub. It is common to meet Boaters once, only to meet them again two or more years later. Under these conditions, it is difficult to speak to Boaters in any way other than just as scattered individuals. Boaters are engaged in their own journeys around the system; they have no clear relationship to any centre of power that may be seen as a “centre” for their operations. As already described, if this centralising force exists at all, it is online, or, as will be shown in Chapter 11, it exists in a few short-lived advocacy groups

⁴³ See Chapter 11, in which I describe how Boaters deliberately eschew representational political forms and attempt to lay low from those ambitious for power in order to avoid having their personal freedoms limited.

that are constantly being torn apart by a desire to resist conformity and to disaggregate in the face of potential hegemony. In the conclusion (Chapter 12) I link these realities to the concept of the “subjunctive mood,” the idea that a particular situation is not fixed and is fluid, capable of instantaneous change. The lack of a centre for the Boaters, and the fact that representative groups can spring up and disaggregate easily, whilst frustrating from a methodological point of view, is a clear example of the “subjunctive mood” in action in my field site.

While the ASA recognises the difficulties of conducting research with mobile populations and writes about the subject of informed consent (ASA, 2011:2), they do not offer any concrete advice as to how to achieve this feat of making oneself visible as a researcher. After purchasing my boat and entering the waterways, I mentioned my presence online in all of the public forums that I would come to regularly observe. I also sent courtesy e-mails to as many groups that I could think of. But I was, essentially, in the field writing about a population who were generally unaware of my presence and who I had no reason to assume would be positive supporters of my desire to write about the Boaters. Those who I met would usually state that it was my choice to become a Boater and to write my thesis if I so wished, and indeed many were supportive and interested. I did not, however, mistake this for the general approval of the community. Indeed, over the course of my fieldwork I met several Boaters who were annoyed to the point of anger by the interventions of journalists, undergraduate researchers, photographers and artists, and who responded to my statement that I was writing a PhD on the Boaters with suspicion, exasperation, or both.

The effects of this unusual condition were many and unfortunate. Firstly, I would find myself unsure before writing any piece or publishing any paper as to whether this work reflected the support of those to whom it was referring. I also had no easy way to check my findings with a significant number of Boaters. As such, I had to spend long periods of time when meeting new Boaters testing my theories and impressions rather than listening to their stories and allowing the conversation to flow organically. In addition, I had the unfortunate experience quite late in my fieldwork of being asked, aggressively, “Why don’t you just leave us alone?” by a Boater who I met when travelling down the River Lee. This Boater had not heard about my research prior to our meeting at Dobb’s Weir lock, and I became acutely aware that my work may not have had the widespread acceptance I had assumed. Indeed, it dawned on me that I would likely be meeting for some time Boaters

who were justifiably angry about my decision to write about their community for what they saw as my own selfish benefit, and potentially to the detriment of the community of Boaters.

In other words, without gatekeeper and official permissions, I am, more than usual, open to their criticisms and must be sensitive to them. This has resulted in my writing with extreme ethical sensitivity and respecting the privacy and desire for occlusion shown by many Boaters on the system. Most importantly, however, this lack of general informed consent meant that I had to gather such permissions piecemeal from those Boaters with whom I did come to interact. Rather than becoming part of the settled “furniture” of my fieldsite, I was constantly having to start conversations with new Boaters I met with a description of my research and a disclaimer concerning their ability to opt out of my data gathering activities. This did not allow conversations to flow naturally and did not help the development of rapport and deeply held friendships. Indeed, it became hard for me to leave the “stranger phase” of research as I was constantly having to reintroduce myself and to gain *ad hoc* permissions, from the towpath, even into the last months of my research.

There is, however, no way to create a short-cut around such difficulties, such is the importance of proper informed consent and, as such, I am still attempting to contact as many Boaters as possible, to attend as many meetings as possible, and to let it be known that I am an active ethnographer in the fieldsite, open to the approach of individual Boaters if they have concerns, queries, or a desire for me to omit any particular information from my thesis. This discussion may seem somewhat specific and limited to my own work, or to the work of ethnographers working with scattered and travelling populations, but I feel that the questions raised here are going to become increasingly relevant to more and more ethnographers in the contemporary and interconnected world.

The bounded fieldsite, which ended at the boundary of the village or the tribal settlement, was always something of an idealised construct, and many contemporary ethnographers have tried to deconstruct the boundedness of the modern ethnographic site (see Falzon, 2009). Despite Candea’s argument that creating an arbitrary and purely heuristic bounded fieldsite can still be a useful method for the anthropologist (Candea, 2007), there is an increasing recognition that the boundaries of the field are permeable to the point of being almost meaningless. In an interconnected and globalised world, the villages and neigh-

bourhoods that formed the ethnographer's cohesive unit of study are now connected, via communications technology, migration, transport links, global finance, tourism and a host of other phenomena, to other points around the globe. If an ethnographer is, for example, working in a village where a large proportion of the population work abroad in order to return remittances, and where those "at home" are part of transnational systems through charities and NGOs, where does their field end? To which boundary must a fieldworker attend? The permanent residents of the village only, or their families, or their guests and visitors? From whom do they need to gain permissions and "informed consent" under such circumstances where the boundary of their field of enquiry is necessarily impossible to define?

Even those who one may assume to be sedentary can increasingly be seen as being situated across transnational and often global networks, and may, through migration, through their online presence, or through travel, be almost as mobile and hard to pin down – if not more so - as the Boaters with whom I worked. Certainly it is hard to pinpoint where the centre of the community may be in order to gain official permissions when persons are part of a number of amorphous and scattered transnational networks and are only partially located in the villages and towns from which they originate. It strikes me that "multi-sited" ethnography does not provide a panacea for these problems, partially because it does not address the issue of how to ensure informed consent across the diffuse networks into which the ethnographer is investigating; the ethnographer will always miss a corner of their "field." The approach of situating oneself at various sites in order to build up a mosaic of sites and experiences may well be more complete, rich and nuanced than a bounded approach, but it is clearly not unproblematic if one tries to move from these small test-sites to describe a wide social reality.

Thus, I raise my own experience as an example of the potential difficulties of being a travelling and hard-to-situate researcher, working with travelling and hard-to-situate peoples, and the ways in which one can attempt to solve them. These are, I have hoped to show, not problems limited to populations who are, in a literal sense, mobile, but rather have implications for any ethnographer working with any of the increasing number of groups without an official political centre which one can approach. The thesis now moves on to add a historical and legal dimension to the study of the Boaters. Here it is explored how

they came to be on the waterways and the laws which govern their lives aboard are introduced.

Chapter 3: The Waterways: A Historical and Legal Framework

The full history (if such a thing could be constructed) of people's engagement with and life upon the waterways of England would likely extend to several volumes. What is presented here is a history based, quite subjectively, upon the trends and discourses that have arisen in the course of my research with the Boaters (those currently living on the waterways). It is the history which is often invoked in everyday conversation, and towards which I have been directed by informants and the limited existing literature that documents life on the waterways. The intention of such a chapter is not to imply some essential or primordial link between my contemporary informants and the ancient sailors and river boatmen of England, or even the Victorian working-Boaters who popularised the narrowboat. Rather, I intend to provide a rough outline of the major events that have affected the inland waterways since the building of the canals and a general impression of the discourse on mobility and the water that has become part of a construction of English identity and history (although I recognise how problematic these terms are).

In essence, the discussion that unfolds in this chapter is a history that may be (and often is) constructed and reproduced by my informants in order to lay claim to some idea of primordial attachment to the waterways. Equally of course, some features of this history may be downplayed or entirely ignored, and certain individuals talk only of their own personal narratives that led them to the canals and rivers. However, without providing some degree of historical context to the world which enabled my fieldwork, such constructions and omissions would remain unanalyzed, and there would be a misleading implication that each of my informants sprang fully formed onto the cut, ignorant of the historical trends, discourses and events which had a hand in their emergence.

Thus, what is presented here is a historical sketch, built up from a limited literature, from anecdote, and from personal narratives. The first section here describes the construction, "golden era", and subsequent decline of Britain's canals, and asks these questions: who were the "working Boaters" who populated these waterways? How did people engage with them, and what became of them? The following section outlines the revitalisation of the canals as a location for "pleasure Boaters" and the repopulation of the waterways with new individuals who did not work the canals for a living: a varied population which is the subject of my doctoral study. The legal situation under which the Boaters live is then introduced.

The rise and fall of the working canals

They call me 'water Gypsy'
They call me 'bargee'
But they've got it wrong my friend,
'Coz I'm a boatie
Yes I'm a boatie.

John Saxon, a song produced for the Mikron Theatre, in Burton (1989:139)

Quoted above is a song, written by a "working Boater," for a theatre company set up to tell the story of the working Boaters, which, ironically and like so much of the literature on these denizens of the waterways, shows only mutual suspicion and misunderstanding between itinerant and sedentary populations. What it meant to be "a boatie" remains here, to a great extent, a matter of hypothesis and extrapolation. There is no consensus in the literature concerning what to call the "working Boaters" or "boaties" as they appear in the source. "Carrying Boaters" and "bargee" are also frequently-used terms. Within the thesis I tend to keep with "working Boater," taking care to differentiate this population from the modern "coal Boaters" or "working Boaters" who operate service boats on the waterways in the contemporary era. This first population to permanently live on the British inland waterways were primarily illiterate and notoriously private and thus their story must be told as best as it can through secondary sources and recorded anecdote. It is such a narrative that is attempted below.

Britain's first canals,⁴⁴ as opposed to canalised and modified rivers⁴⁵ were built to provide transport for coal and other mined commodities to factories where they could be used or refined (De Maré, 1950:59-65). Other canals, particularly the network around Birmingham, would take finished pottery and other fragile items to towns and cities for sale (*ibid.*). The advantage of the canals was their safety and load-carrying capacity, as compared to the existing transport network of Britain's poorly constructed roads. These canals, long before they served as the location for any workers' home, were built by an itinerant working-class population: the "Navigational Engineers" or "Navvies." These individuals travelled as their

⁴⁴ The first being the 'Duke of Bridgewater's Canal' in North West England, the construction of which began in 1760.

⁴⁵ River diversions and manipulations, like life on and around the rivers, can be traced back to pre-Roman times (Burton, 1989), though this is of little direct relevance to the modern canal system.

canals progressed and often travelled about the countryside in search of work.⁴⁶ Their reputation was as poor as that of British Gypsies⁴⁷ and the myths of their origin (it is unclear whether they were Irish, other foreigners, or the very poorest of the local working-class) has clear parallels with the Gypsies, whose historical origins have always been a matter of debate, rumour and supposition (Burton, 1989:41; see also Okely, 1983). Some Navvies, it is hypothesised, went on to work the canals they had built, while others began to build the railways that eventually became the canal's great competitors (Burton, 1989:140).

When canal history begins to concern this study, however, is when individual boat transport workers begin to live on their narrowboats and become a community with their own distinct traditions and understandings. Burton argues that "by the 1790s...[during the] great period of canal growth, there was a steady move among boatmen to take their families with them and a new type of narrow boat appeared with carefully organised living accommodation in a back cabin. The impetus for the movement of families on to the boats was the arrival of the railways" (*ibid.*:114). The railways could transport goods far quicker and with greater efficiency than the canals and, as such, families would travel with their cargo in order to offer a competitive service. Burton goes on to argue that, now present as reproducing family units, the working Boaters had no need to recruit from outside the community and, as a result, they became endogamous and slowly retreated from contact with outsiders (*ibid.*:142). Evidence of this endogamy (or at least a perception of endogamy) is provided by De Maré who, in a move which now appears unacceptably racist, captioned a picture of various Boaters with the words "a family resemblance can be noticed amongst [sic] very many of them for there is much intermarriage among the boating families" (De Maré, 1950:72).

A common assumption was that the working Boaters were Gypsies, or of some Gypsy heritage. Canal historian Harry Hanson, however, concluded from an analysis of boaties' (or bargees') surnames that they were not likely to have been of Gypsy origins. Rather, he argues, those who weren't Navvies recruited during the construction of the canals "came from the land much as the carters [commerical cart drivers] did" (Burton, 1989:140). De

⁴⁶ This was known as being a "tramp" or being "on tramp."

⁴⁷ The Gypsies have been the object of moral panics and widespread demonisation throughout UK and European history. See the discussions in Chapters 1 and 10.

Maré repeats this hypothesis, stating that “it is often but wrongly believed that canal boat- ing families have gypsy blood, a belief they strongly resent. Though they have been re- cruited from different sources at different times, many come from English country stock originating around such canal centres as Braunston” (De Maré, 1950:71). That they even- tually became vilified and associated with Gypsies is a testament to the danger and ambi- guity that these families represented for the sedentary population.

Developing in a degree of isolation from the wider community, working-Boaters became known for their own unique cultural traditions. These included styles of dress, “notably the bonnets and wide skirts of the women and the brightly woven belts of the men” (De Maré, 1950:15), a system of roles and titles including “leggers,”⁴⁸ “mole-catchers,” “ice-breakers” and “wharfingers”⁴⁹ (Burton, 1989:106), a number of superstitions regarding boat launch- ing and naming,⁵⁰ and a unique folk-art form, known as Rose and Castle decoration. These designs comprised of bright white castles with high turrets (referred to by many as Arthurian castles, as they resemble traditional paintings depicting Camelot in the legend of King Arthur) surrounded by flowers, usually roses. These designs were incredibly popular with the working Boaters and were synonymous with the narrowboats belonging to this population.



Figure 10. Roses and Castles decoration.

⁴⁸ Workers who would come aboard a boat at a tunnel mouth and would lie on their backs across the roof of the boat, in order to walk the boat through the tunnel with their legs. The horse would be brought over the tunnel to meet the boat as it emerged and the “leggers” would return to their station.

⁴⁹ Those employed at wharfs to measure the load in both loaded and unloaded boats for taxation purposes.

⁵⁰ Among other traditions, boats would be launched side-on (this many be a pragmatic decision due to the length of the boat and the width of the cut). Boat naming is dealt with elsewhere. Another tradition which I have heard mentioned prohibits individuals from bringing wild flowers aboard, as this causes “bad luck.”

Narrowboat decoration, comprising of sign writing and Roses and Castles painting, was long assumed to be related to the art on Gypsy caravans. However, as Hill (1983a:4) notes, “[this theory] has since been discounted by Messrs. Ward-Jackson and Harvey (‘The English Gipsy Caravan’ [1972]. They conclude that the resemblance between caravan and boat is superficial and attributable to each taking its character from the same period and plebian [sic] class”. This research, Hill continues, would “seem to suggest more humble origins amongst the commercial art - the papier-mâché work and enamel trade - of the Midlands than the fanciful associations with the Gypsies” (1983b:24). Whatever their origins, these Roses and Castles designs remain highly recognisable symbols of the working Boaters. In 1950, De Maré, perhaps somewhat pessimistically, wrote that “the roses and landscapes with their Carpathian castles... constitute the one remaining folk art alive in England today” (De Maré, 1950:15). This decorative tradition, like the skills of boating itself, were passed along in systems of family apprenticeship and training from childhood and are still to be found adorning many modern narrowboats.

Such cultural peculiarities, however, are not the primary way by which the working Boaters are remembered in the historical literature. Rather, this population principally appears either as the targets for mistrust and demonisation by house-dwellers and the popular press, or as the intended recipients for aid by moralising Victorian reformers. Each of these trends sought to “other” and to distance the “boaties,” placing them towards the lower end of a moral hierarchy. The former trend can be noticed from an early date, as is evidenced by this account of a group of boaties from 1782:

Their language, their dress, their manners, were all of them singularly vulgar and disagreeable; their expressions still more so; for they hardly spoke a word without an oath, and thus cursing, quarrelling, drinking, singing and fighting, they seemed to be pleased, and to enjoy the evening.”

Charles. P. Moritz. In Burton (1989:139)

The working Boaters appear to have been mistrusted and feared with increasing ferocity as they retreated from contact with sedentary populations. Many had contact only with the Wharfingers with whom they traded and with occasional tourists in the canalside pubs, and, as such, mutual misunderstanding flourished, making the working Boaters increasingly isolated from the sedentary world. Relations between the two populations reached a

nadir in 1839 when three working Boaters raped and murdered Christina Collins, a lone traveller on the system (Burton, 1989:142). A hysterical press and public reaction implied that these individuals were typical of a class, or underclass, in a manner which evoked memories of the “Navy riots” and its violent vigilante reprisals (*ibid.*:143). Existing literature suggests that the Victorian working Boater lived a physically hard life, where masculine demonstrations of violent strength were essential to maintaining high status within the community. Yet “as in many communities, there were always a few who were fighting men, proud of their prowess, and the great majority who simply stayed out of trouble” (*ibid.*:143).

Further, accusations of theft and the pillage of goods were levelled at the working Boaters, who admitted to taking small amounts of cargo to supplement their meagre earnings, and to limited poaching on the canalside, an act that they felt entitled to commit (*ibid.*). Such gaining of small advantages can be seen as part of a widespread pattern of using limited agency to gently resist class repression, and may be thought of as an example of Scott’s notion of weapons of the weak (1985). The hysterical and demonising reactions of the public to these individuals and their alleged criminality seem to be more an exercise in rhetoric than a reflection of reality. The working Boaters were positioned as moral inferiors and as itinerant working-class labourers, or as pseudo-Gypsies. This perspective devalues any claim that these individuals could hold to having a justified and worthy culture, or even a unique and valuable set of skills and understandings. Consequently, “[o]ne of the problems facing boaties in their relationship with the rest of the world lay with the lack of recognition of the skills involved in their work” (Burton, 1989:150): the workings of esoteric boat engines, the skillful operation of locks and swing-bridges, the art of loading and unloading, and of driving a paired motor-boat and butty – skills that were also jealously guarded by the closed network of working boaters themselves (*ibid.*:151).”

Some individuals, however, reacted to the boaties with a moralising pity, which, although devaluing their culture and skills, at least led to improvements in boat-children’s general education and literacy. This is not to imply that education is invariably a bringer of “social goods” (see Rival, 1996), but to point out that such measures were welcomed by working-Boaters themselves, as “[m]any boat people remained virtually illiterate and resented it. They felt, probably justifiably, that it made it easier for the educated to take advantage of them” (Burton, 1989:147). This is in clear contrast to the Gypsies studied by Okely, who tended to see literacy as a tool of the dominant gorgio (non-Gypsy) order (Okely, 1983).

The language in which such reforms were couched, however, was insulting and demeaning to the boatie population. George Smith, a philanthropist and the prime “reformer” of the “[s]qualor and immorality” of the boats (Burton, 1989:145) wrote:

Utterly ignorant as a large population of them undoubtedly are, of all religious knowledge, wholly without instruction, coarse and brutal in manner and entirely given up to the vilest debauchery and the grossest passions, can we expect, without extraneous assistance, that the children of such parents are ever likely to grow into anything better?
George Smith (1878) *Our Canal Population*. In Burton (1989:44)

Such good-intentioned philanthropic efforts ensured a level of basic literacy for boat children, yet the price paid was the public denigration of the highly decorated, beautiful, and notoriously clean cabin interiors kept by boatmen’s wives. The tacit acceptance of these spaces as locations for immorality, overcrowding, and squalor, equates to a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1977) perpetrated upon the boaties. Strong parallels exist between this violence and that used upon Okely’s Traveller-Gypsies, who are accused of dirtiness and squalor despite their meticulously spotless caravan interiors (Okely, 1983).

The working Boaters did not have to contend merely with troubled personal histories; for many years of their existence on the waterways, their group as a whole was also threatened by a slow decline into poverty and redundancy. For almost the entirety of the nineteenth century, the canals were in direct competition with a growing network of railways which could offer a faster, and often more cost-efficient, service. The decline began in earnest, however, when the newly wealthy railway owners began to buy canals and allow their slow decent into disrepair. Burton summarises that the railway owners’ mood at this time was “[t]hough shalt not kill; but needst not strive officiously to keep alive” (Burton, 1989:158). In the twentieth century, the canals were saved from their decline by increased traffic during the First World War, and by nationalisation and official mobilisation for the war effort during the Second World War. The twentieth century, however, also brought stark changes to the pattern of British industry, as heavy manufacture in the North turned in favour of light manufacture in the South and transport became increasingly dependent on the motor vehicle (*ibid.*:161). This decline of traffic on the canal would lead to an inevitable death of widespread goods-carrying on the inland waterways.

When it came, it appears that this demise was a painful one. The newly-nationalised boats (now painted in the plain British Waterways⁵¹ blue and yellow livery) became the targets for bureaucracy and inspection in the post-war years. Some working Boaters resisted these invasive changes through argument and insult (Burton, 1989:164), whilst others took this movement and the dearth of haulage work as a cue to leave the system. The last few remaining boat families were forced onto land after a particularly cold winter in 1962-1963⁵² led to the freezing of canal channels and the halting of all traffic. A few retained canal maintenance jobs or became lock-keepers but most, my informants report, left the cut forever.

The British Waterways Board (BWB) made the end of the working canals official in 1968 when they divided the canals into large commercial waterways (for shipping traffic), cruising waterways (a few canals maintained for pleasure Boaters), and a great number of “remainder” waterways, to be allowed to fall further into unusable disrepair (*ibid.*:166). Some of the boats were sold to pleasure Boaters; others were allowed to rot. A persistent rumour asserts that the BWB deliberately sank many of their fleet in order to escape the problem of what to do with these uninhabited vessels, and, as a participant told me, the battle between Boaters and the authorities began with this first act of aggression (see Chapters 8-11, which explore the tensions between the Boaters and outside forces).

It is not, however, this history of suspicion, poverty, and slow decline which is conjured up by the popular image of the painted narrowboat. That there is little popular or positive conception of the Boaters themselves and only of their craft is a testimony to the relative invisibility of this nomadic population. The narrowboat itself invokes a discourse of rural Englishness and the idyllic due to their aesthetic quality and their associations. The canals themselves, and the boats that worked them, are seen as wonders of British industrial engineering; evocative symbols of the power of coal production, imperial strength and Victorian optimism. Yet, simultaneously, the narrowboat is rural, quaint, and inseparable from the nostalgic English idyll. The working-Boaters, whilst vilified in popular and historical ac-

⁵¹ British Waterways have remained the canal inspectorate, and it is towards this organisation that many recent protests for Boaters’ rights have been directed (see Chapters 8-11). Such feuds between Boater and bureaucrat are demonstrably not new phenomena.

⁵² The cold of the mid-winter and the presence of ice on the canals have been perennial problems for live-aboard, both the old working-Boaters and contemporary population.

counts, are spoken of by my informants as strong, independent, honest, hard-working, and as men and women of the soil. As these stereotypes have elements of both truth and fiction, our interest must lie less in their factual basis than in their rhetorical use.

The revitalization and repopulation of the inland waterways

Contemporary Boaters, when speaking about the history of the waterways, have been known to explicitly connect their current dwelling practices with a tradition of radical living on the waterways, dating back to even before the working Boaters and the great days of canal building described in the previous section. I have had conversations with Boaters who have mentioned how even since the Bronze Age of prehistoric Britain the rivers have been central to the lives of the tribes and cultures inhabiting the British Isles and have been the centre of much activity and many practices. One Boater reminded me that the inhabitants of Britain have been reshaping the waterways and making them part of their social spaces since the Roman period and that many of Britain's towns and cities have sprung up around estuaries, rivers, and canalised rivers.

There can be a tendency when speaking of the working Boaters of the Victorian era and the early twentieth century to speak of them as being simply a part of the past, with a sharp discontinuity between them and the "pleasure" Boaters (as the distinction between the working Boaters and all other boat users was spoken of at the time) who came after them and who are the founders of my population of study. When books mention the winter of 1962-1963 as forcing the last of the working Boaters from the cut,⁵³ they are explicitly drawing a line between the working Boaters and later water dwellers. The fact that the new "pleasure" liveaboards kept themselves separate from the working Boaters who were, as has been described, relatively unpopular and separated from the wider sedentary UK,

⁵³ Also see for example the author Steve Haywood's explanation in a interview that "Many of the nationalised BW fleet", Steve told me, "were moored at Sutton Stop. After '63, BWB literally put them out of a job and took their homes away. They were at the mercy of the Bedford council; lots of them ended up in social housing. I ended up there for a while and, like many of my mooring sites, this was just decided by where the boat happened to break down, on this occasion at a charity dock in Bedford." Being in Bedford, surrounded by some of the last working Boaters, Steve caught a glimpse of the reality of working boating, beyond the romanticisation and misty-eyed nostalgia. "They were long distance lorry drivers effectively, they were living this unusual, extraordinary, life because they had to. The whole idea of this heritage boating [cavalcades of people dressed as working Boaters on authentically restored boats] makes me want to projectile vomit". He explained that "the old boatmen used to wander down because they couldn't stay away from the cut. Any working boats still running, when you were going through locks, you stayed out of their way and let them go through, it was just respect."

adds weight to this idea of a rupture, or a strong distinction between the Boaters of the past and those of the present.

Some Boaters, however, including the Boater and academic Holly-Gale Millette,⁵⁴ deliberately refute such an idea and speak of modern boat-dwelling as part of a radical tradition of life on the waterways that dates back to the working Boaters and beyond. Millette, in personal communication, referred back to the mediaeval period and the days when the “Thamesmen” were a legally and socially separate group working the River Thames and when poachers and fishermen resisted the emerging state by using the fluidity of the river to support their livelihoods. Boats can be seen, from this viewpoint, as central facilitators of radical livelihoods in a continuous fashion for many hundreds or even some thousands of years. Neither perspective is, of course, entirely correct or entirely incorrect.

The Boaters of the modern era are certainly culturally distinct from their working Boater forebears, despite certain continuities, for example the Roses and Castles art, the form of the boats, the continued existence and function of working craft, some continued vocabulary (e.g. “gongoozlers,” “chandlery,” “gunnel,” “bargee”), the continued similarity of the materiality and operation of locks, and the ongoing distrust of many sedentary residents. On the other hand, the working Boaters themselves, including their traditional forms of dress, have all but disappeared from the canals. Although some new boat-dwellers claim an ancestry to the working Boaters, and a few old-timers were children aboard the working boats, the majority have no direct familial connection.

It is important to note that there is no sharp divide, temporally speaking, between the population of the canals by the working Boaters and the rise of the new liveaboards. “Pleasure Boaters” and holidaymakers have been a fixture on the canals since the nineteenth century. There is evidence that in the post-war years, even whilst the last of the working Boaters plied their trade, the number of pleasure cruisers on the waterways was on the rise, leading to some abuse from young boaties who considered such visitors to be “confounded nuisances” (Burton, 1989:164). This rekindling of interest in the fading canals was caused by a chain of events leading from the publication of L.T.C. (“Tom”) Rolt’s autobiographical *Narrowboat* in 1944. This account of Tom and his wife Angela’s travels aboard their narrowboat, *Cressy*, highlighted both the fading industrial beauty of the canal network

⁵⁴ See the Acknowledgements section.

and the possibility of living on the system. *Narrowboat*'s publication led not only to an increased interest in the canals from its readership, but also to Rolt's direct involvement in the Inland Waterways Association (IWA), an organisation which was founded in 1946 and was dedicated to the revitalisation and protection of the canals.

The internal struggles and notable achievements of the IWA have been noted at length in other volumes (Bolton, 1991; Haywood, 2009; Pavitt, 2007). The outcome of their work was, however, the opening through volunteer effort of long-closed parts of the system.⁵⁵ This included the implementation of direct democratic methods whereby IWA members would attempt to cruise long-closed sections of the waterways by organising cruises into abandoned parts and demanding that the authorities raise impassable bridges and fill empty channels in the spirit of allowing the IWA their right of navigation as guaranteed to them in law (Bolton, 1991). Their stated intention was to save "every last mile" of the 2,000 miles of navigable waterways, a goal that they very nearly came to achieve. Haywood describes the great irony of Rolt's life being that he and Angela became "the Adam and Eve of every pleasure Boater on the canals today" (Haywood, 2009:282) and his *Narrowboat* their Book of Genesis, when his intention was to preserve the old, unspoiled system of Britain's industrial past. "For in struggling with such futile enthusiasm to retain the things of the past", Haywood continued, "he created the shape of the future" (*ibid.*:282). Rolt's continuing work in literature and the struggles of the young IWA meant that, by the time the last of the working Boaters left the cut, there was a burgeoning interest in and slow revitalisation of the ailing system, coupled with increased holiday traffic, and even the emergence of a few "liveaboards," inspired by *Narrowboat* and following Tom and Angela Rolt's example.

A brief legal framework

A great number of boats have come on to the waterways since Rolt. Many of these are holiday boats owned or rented by enthusiasts and holidaymakers, but a great and increasing number are used for the purposes of permanent liveaboard residence. Personal accounts tell of a gradual increase in liveaboard numbers since the mid-1990s, due in part,

⁵⁵ A notable achievement was the reopening of the "Avon Ring" in 1964, due to the efforts of a large team of volunteers and a particularly highly motivated individual named David Hutchings (Burton, 1989: 208). Extraordinary individual efforts have often made the renovation of the canals possible. Another example is John Gould's single-handed cruising of the Kennet and Avon canal with a boat-load of paving stones in 1949, in an attempt to prove that the canal was still in active use.

perhaps, to the global recession beginning in 2006. This included a massive increase in boat numbers around London over the years immediately preceding and then covered by this thesis. This is borne out in legal evidence as, in 1995, John Major's Conservative government saw fit to create a legal act of parliament (The British Waterways Act) that insisted on stricter licensing conditions for pleasure Boaters. This Act also included a stipulation that license holders must make a "bona fide navigation" around the system, effectively making the itinerant Boater's lifestyle hard to maintain. The exact wording of the relevant section of law is as follows:

"The applicant for the relevant consent [must] satisfy... the Board that the vessel to which the application relates will be used bona fide for navigation throughout the period for which the consent is valid without remaining continuously in any one place for more than 14 days or such longer period as is reasonable in the circumstances."
British Waterways Act (1995)

The law essentially states that a boat may be given a license and allowed to remain on the waterways (and therefore may be used as a dwelling) if the boat has a valid BSS (boat safety scheme certificate), if it has valid insurance, and if it complies to the somewhat confusing clause C, which states that the boat must either have a valid home mooring or fulfil the conditions outlined in (ii). It is this small section which forms the quotation above, which allows the Boaters to live aboard as continuous cruisers and which has led to twenty years of sporadic conflict between the Boaters and the authorities⁵⁶. This sub-clause does not provide a definition of the important phrases "bona fide... navigation", "place" or "reasonable", meaning that it is extremely unclear as to how far and how frequently Boaters without a home mooring must move in order to remain within the conditions of the law. There is enough space within this single law to allow a great variation in cruising patterns and behaviours, and there is no mention of whether the Boater should be allowed to return to a previous "place" after a move away. Does this return count as violating the good faith (*bona fide*) of continuous navigation or not? How far counts as a new place? What is a "reasonable" reason for remaining longer than fourteen days?

These points remain unclear to this day. British Waterways (the Boaters' old enemy) was given the power to enforce this law, leading to a series of measures being tried over the years to "enforce" the various interpretations of the authority's understanding of this piece

⁵⁶ See Chapters 8 and 11.

of legislation. Such measures included the setting of minimum distances, the publishing of official guidances, the establishment of official “place” boundaries, and the collection of mapping data designed to show the location of boats.

Since 1995, this law has been tested a few times in local courts, where judges have ruled, in a manner that does not set precedent, as to whether certain cruising patterns are legal or illegal.⁵⁷ One such case was brought by Davies in 2010, which found that Davies’ cruising pattern of fewer than ten kilometres across the year of the license was not satisfactory. Other major legal decisions have been rare, and there is an ongoing debate between Boaters as to whether or not a greater body of law, considering the tendency of judges to favour the powerful and rule against travellers, is likely to be a help or a hindrance. Other cases have, however, resulted in broadly favourable results for Boaters. For example, in 2013, Nigel Moore won a case against British Waterways in a “section 8 dispute.” “Section 8” refers to a law distinct from the 1995 Act, namely the 1983 British Waterways Act, Section 8 of which allows the authority to remove boats from their waterways under certain conditions - namely that the vessel is “sunk, stranded or abandoned... or left or moored therein without lawful authority” (British Waterways Act, 1983). This is the law that allows the authorities to remove a boat from their waterways which has been refused a boat license and, therefore, denied the legal authority to be on their waterways. Moore won his case and has cast doubt on the waterways authority’s right to remove boats under certain conditions, but the judgement does not seem to be widely applicable.

Two judicial hearings have been produced in higher courts (Brown vs. Canal & River Trust (2013) in the Court of Appeal, and Brown vs. Canal & River Trust (2014) in the Royal Courts of Justice) in order to challenge whether the waterways authorities’ *Guidance for Boaters without a Home Mooring* document is legal in respect to the relevant Acts. These judgements have not proved to be conclusive in clarifying what is, in effect, currently an abstract point of law. What is likely is that specific cases of overstaying (staying in one “place” for too long, or not moving far enough), leading to license refusal, or leading to Section 8 notices, will have to be fought through a number of local courts, before moving

⁵⁷ I cannot go into these legal disputes in great depth here, or even mention all of them, partly because my thesis is concerned with the daily lives of the Boaters, against which these laws and cases form a backdrop and an establishing frame, and partly because they are not of everyday importance. Moreover, as noted in the Methodology chapter, I do not wish to pass comment upon certain sensitive legal matters for fear of inadvertently affecting the outcome of continuing court cases or the inhabitants of my field. Further discussion of these laws and disputes is provided in Chapter 11.

to the courts of appeal, and potentially on to the UK Supreme Court and the European Court of Human Rights, before there will be enough legal precedent for the Boaters and the authority to be able to state with any clarity what the law means, what patterns of boat movement are acceptable, and where the limit of the authority's powers lie. Alternatively, a new piece of legislation may clarify the situation – although many Boaters would rather avoid this eventuality, considering that the government have tended to favour draconian and or sedentarising measures in their dealings with travelling communities in a quest to make these communities, in Scott's terminology, "legible" (Scott, 1998) from the point of view of a bureaucratic centre.⁵⁸ The Boaters are in an entirely unsettled legal situation, one which may change dramatically at any time and where a simple law has led to endless re-interpretation and negotiation. This clearly resonates with the concept of the "subjunctive mood", the unfixed and uncertain mood of a group which can lead to transformation. The Boaters are always liminal from the point of view of the law, and shall remain so until new legislation or judgements are produced which support either their own flexible interpretations or CaRT's preferred precision concerning arbitrary definitions of "place" and fixed rules on minimum distances.

Apart from these legal occurrences, some major changes have occurred on the canals and rivers since 1995. It is not necessary to outline the details of the various documents that have been produced by the waterways authorities since this most recent British Waterways Act, or details of the major guidance changed and consultations proposing the changes that have arisen over this time.⁵⁹ Suffice it to say, however, that the authorities have been behind several sporadic interventions into the lives of the cruising Boaters, some of which have had a national remit and some of which have been more regional in their focus. These have ranged from relatively benign "consultations" designed to collect data, to the attempted enforcement of draconian mooring rules designed to make large areas one "place" where limited mooring is allowed, and to thereby force cruising Boaters into further and more frequent moves, or to make their living around one large circuit, for example of a major city, impossible. The pattern holds that there is a relative period of quiet in between these changes and consultations, which is followed by their being intro-

⁵⁸ See Chapter 8 where I engage with the idea of legibility in depth.

⁵⁹ Details of the most important measures (for example the 2012 publishing of CaRT's *Guidance for Boaters Without a Home Mooring*, the 2011 Lee and Stort Mooring Consultation, the 2013 planned introduction of the Roving Mooring Permit, and the 2013 South East Visitor Mooring Consultation) are outlined in Chapter 11.

duced, the Boaters organising in resistance to these measures, their abandonment in favour of the *status quo*, and a new set of measures being drawn up.⁶⁰

Some measures have, however, been more disruptive and central to the Boaters' collective memory than others. 2012, the year that saw the beginning of my fieldwork period and my official presence as a researcher on the waterways, was witness to two momentous changes for the Boaters. It is with a brief description of these two events that I end this chapter and begin the ethnographic body of the thesis. In July of 2012, the same month in which my fieldwork began, the quasi non-governmental organisation or quango, British Waterways (BW), which had existed in one form or another since 1962, ceased to exist. This move was part of the new Coalition government's "bonfire of the quangos," in which the conservative-minded and overtly neoliberal administration sought to reduce the size, scope, and assets of the state.⁶¹

In its place, a charitable trust was set up to take responsibility for the management and upkeep of the waterways previously held by BW. As noted in Chapter 8, this new trust, Canal and River Trust or CaRT (often simply pronounced "cart") is frequently the "authority" to which the Boaters are referring when they speak of battles with "the authorities", although there are some "private" canal stretches in the UK, and certain rivers and navigations (including much of the River Thames and the Norfolk Broads) that are managed by the government's Environment Agency (EA). Most Boaters do not make the distinction between CaRT and BW; instead, they rhetorically outline the continuity between the two, highlighting that no change for the better has taken place, by referring to CaRT as "BW" or "whatever BW are calling themselves now." This has created an unusual situation in the UK whereby a charity, rather than a government agency, is directly responsible for the management of a group of people. Indeed it has led to the tragically absurd condition whereby, as a participant put it, "a charity is going around making people homeless!" The full implications of this shall be explored in the following chapters.

⁶⁰ See Chapter 5 for a discussion of the effect that this has on the Boaters' temporal experience.

⁶¹ Such a move was only a small part of the "austerity" measures and privatisation which sought to reduce the "size" of government. For a briefing on the nature of current UK economic policy at the time of writing see Van Reenen (2015).

The second of the major changes that occurred in 2012 was related to the dramatic change in London's mooring conditions, a direct result of the 2012 Olympic Games. Despite narrowboats appearing in planning and publicity graphics produced before the games, during the actual event, the Boaters were banished from the waterways throughout East and Central London for months surrounding, during, and then after the Olympic and Paralympic Games. It was widely stated that this exclusion was to accommodate the "super yachts" of the visiting international elites. The waters around the Olympic Stadium itself (known as Bow Back Waters) remain closed to Boaters at the time of writing in 2015.

The effect of these closures in the short term was that they caused some Boaters considerable stress in having to move out into more remote parts of the city. Some Boaters, whilst exiled from the centre, were prevented from moving their boats by the geography of the waterways and lock closures, and some could not access drinking water at service taps (I discuss these issues further in Chapters 8 and 11). In the long term, this event clearly showed the Boaters that the new CaRT was going to be an interventionist landlord, which had the logistical and legal power to enact major changes on the waterways. Only months after the change from BW to CaRT, the Boaters came to realise that they would still have battles to fight and that their new condition was unlikely to be significantly more harmonious than it had been for years previously.

Framing within neoliberal politics and economics

It is of course necessary to situate this research within the wider economic and political trends in Britain and Europe, not least because Boaters tend to be aware of and reflect upon these trends and the ways they have affected the phenomenon of liveaboard boating. I focus here on various facets of the dominant economic and political frame of the later twentieth century: the trend that has most changed statecraft, governance and home ownership. Namely, this is the trend of neoliberalism and the resulting policies of austerity, as well as the privatisation of what were previously considered to be public, communal, or state-owned resources.

Ganti, in her review of anthropology's engagement with neoliberalism and the shaping forces of modern capitalism, notes that "the near ubiquity of the terms 'neoliberal' and 'neoliberalism' within contemporary anthropological scholarship has also attracted a fair share

of criticism for being cursory or insufficiently theorized” (Ganti, 2014:89). She also states that it has taken over from “late capitalism” and even (to an extent) globalisation as the hegemonic frame through which anthropologists view changing global economic and political reality in the twenty-first century. She notes that “because neoliberal is primarily a label of critique, using it too broadly can foreclose certain avenues of inquiry and analysis, leading to an absence of contingency in our representations of social, political, and economic life” (*ibid*:103). Thus, she states, it is important to be specific as to what exactly is being evoked when social scientists refer to “neoliberalism” or “neoliberal trends.” She outlines four main referents:

“(a) a set of economic reform policies that some political scientists characterize as the “D-L-P formula,” which are concerned with the deregulation of the economy, the liberalization of trade and industry, and the privatization of state-owned enterprises (Steger & Roy 2010, p.14); (b) a prescriptive development model that defines very different political roles for labor, capital, and the state compared with prior models, with tremendous economic, social, and political implications (Boas & Gans-Morse 2009, p.144); (c) an ideology that values market exchange as “an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide to all human action and substituting for all previously held ethical beliefs” (Treanor 2005); and (d) a mode of governance that embraces the idea of the self-regulating free market, with its associated values of competition and self-interest, as the model for effective and efficient government (Steger & Roy 2010, p.12).”
Ganti (2014: 90)

Thus, when I write about “neoliberalism” as affecting the economic and political reality of individuals in Britain, including Boaters, I am referring to an admixture of these four referents. Neoliberalism has come to shape economic and political reality around the world to the point where it has become hegemonic; more than a set of policies, it is a dominant way of viewing economies and the function of governments (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberalism grew in influence, from being a set of abstract theories towards its current position of hegemony, over the course of the twentieth century. In Britain, these trends particularly accelerated and came to the fore in the 1980s, with the policies of Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative administration mirroring Reaganism in the USA (Klein, 2008), but they were not disputed or significantly challenged by successive “New” Labour Party administrations from 1997 onwards (*ibid.*). Privatisations of those state-owned resources and services which were previously considered important parts of the state (for example, in Britain: the Post Office, prison services, and public education provision) are now regularly and unquestioningly accepted as everyday, commonplace, and logical.

In times of economic downturn or recession, it has become accepted, at least within political and expert economic circles, that “austerity” measures revolving around extensive privatisations and decreased government spending (referred to as deficit reduction) are necessary (Narotsky, 2012). The neoliberal causes and results of the “global financial crisis” of 2007-2008 and the subsequent global economic recession have been studied by various anthropologists working on the interaction between these international policy trends and the “grassroots” level of individuals, families, organisations and villages (see, for example, Narotsky, 2012; Narotsky and Besnier, 2014; Knight, 2014). It is important for anthropologists to ground abstract economic trends in particular real-world reactions: to describe how individuals are affected by particular austerity motivated privatisations, cuts, closures, and transformations, and how they resist, transform or provide alternatives for these incidents using specific local forms. Narotsky makes the point that it is exactly these actions and reactions of people on a local level which large-scale economic analyses ignore to their detriment (Narotsky, 2012). She notes a widespread distrust and rejection of neoliberal logics and “expert” narratives of crisis and how it should be dealt with, stating that,

“If we look around us at the angry responses of citizens – often also imbued of a certain “nationalist” defense [sic] of their honor – what we observe is a breakdown of trust, lack of trust in state institutions, in the aims of political representatives (*los políticos*), in economic institutions (banks), in the trickle down effects of growth upon unemployment or labor rents. But also, increasingly, lack of trust in the model.”

Narotsky (2012:630)

This distrust and a search for alternatives are brought out in her own ethnography of Vega Baja in Spain (Narotsky and Smith, 2006). Other ethnographies that have observed neoliberalism from “the ground up” to great success include *Navigating Austerity* (Bear, 2015), Laura Bear’s exploration of the affect of neoliberalism and austerity measures on the river workers of the River Hooghly in India, and Daniel Knight’s work in Greece (Knight, 2013; Knight, 2014). Knight’s work is influential as it shows how neoliberal policies can be explored at different analytical levels and through different frames. In one article, he describes Greece’s economic crisis and the affects of austerity measures forced on the country by other Eurozone countries from the local perspectives of interlocutors in his field site of Trikala (Knight, 2014), outlining how these particular Greek citizens understand their

current situation through their histories and their changing material culture.⁶² In another article, he describes the crisis from the perspective of wider “mediascapes” (see Appadurai, 1990), exploring the ways in which the Greek crisis has become a trope in the wider media discourse. These authors ground neoliberalism in specific lived experience and, importantly, note how individuals act in ways that challenge and subvert “expert” understandings of neoliberal trends, including austerity and widespread privatization, as being necessary, popular, and socially beneficial.

In summary, it is not enough to simply state that Britain, and thereby the lives of Boaters, has been shaped in recent years (and particularly in the immediately post-recession years during which I conducted my fieldwork) by economic and political neoliberalism. It is important to demonstrate, following the lead of Knight, Bear, and Narotsky, how the phenomenon of boat-dwelling is partially created and shaped by neoliberalism, economic trends, and government policies: how Boaters are affected by and live in relation to a changing austerity-driven state. I encourage the reader to keep this section in mind as they read the thesis, particularly its second half, as it goes some way towards explaining the root of the antagonism between the Boaters and their political opponents. Below, I outline the four major ways in which neoliberalism, austerity, and macro-economic factors have come to affect the Boaters, and how the Boaters have risen in numbers as a reaction to and a critique of these trends, coming to resemble what Scott would describe as the neoliberal state’s “dark twin” (Scott, 1998).

Firstly, there is the simple and direct link between the British government’s austerity measures, including its reduction of welfare and support for those who are impoverished or un- and underemployed (see Hills, 2014), and individuals choosing to live aboard boats. A number of participants have spoken of how their move to live aboard a boat was caused directly by poverty resulting from the economic downturn, rising living costs, and the reduction of government benefits for those in work and underemployed, unemployed and seeking work, or unemployed due to disability. Some explicitly speak of boat-dwelling as the way in which they saved themselves from homelessness, often linking this to economic

⁶² Knight notes, in a parallel to my own writing in Chapter 5, how temporalities can become compressed and muddied by the co-presence of items representing the past and present, and how individuals reflect upon these materials in a fashion that is political and rhetorical. Coincidentally, although our analyses are different, Knight makes his argument through describing the co-presence of photovoltaic cells and wood-burners, both items of vital importance in my own field site.

conditions and welfare reductions. Those who do come to the waterways due to the state's ideological removal of welfare and support find, as described in Chapter 7, a supportive community where even those with drug and alcohol problems can find a degree of support and protection. The affordability of boating, as described in Chapter 6, means that many Boaters can "ride out" periods of underemployment or low-paid work and can, in times of plenty, begin to save for the future. Where state support has been reduced, part of the burden of welfare and support has been taken up by charities, families, religious support networks and, in this case, alternative "communities" that try to recreate the traditional supportive role of the neighbourhood.

Secondly, it is worth noting that the waterways became, in the first year of my fieldwork, the responsibility of a privately owned and operated charitable trust (see Chapter 3), rather than being a government-linked quango (quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation). This is the continuation of successive neoliberal governments' policies of privatising state resources and functions and transferring powers, including powers of state coercion, to the private sector. The privatisation of the waterways is by no means a special case, occurring as it did in conjunction with a widespread "shrinking" of the state sector as part of the operationally named "bonfire of the quangos" (see Walters, 2010) under Britain's Coalition government of 2010-2015.

Other sections of Britain's environment and natural resources have been removed from government control and supervision over recent years in order that they become part of the private sector. For example, at the time of writing there is a move by the government to privatise English Heritage, an organisation with responsibility for heritage sites around England (Pearson, 2014). In another comparable example, the government abandoned their plans to sell England's forests to private sector companies in 2012 (McCarthy, 2012). Strang (2004) notes the gradual privatisation of water, which was traditionally thought of as a "commons" or public resource, over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, noting that processes have taken water supply and the management of water courses away from local people and authorities and placed them into the hands of private companies or centralised government.

The canals and rivers operated by CaRT are therefore by no means unique in having been removed from local management and ownership, placed into the hands of government

and, from there, made the responsibility of private organisations. These organisations, be they charitable trusts or profit-making companies, need to make money and in the absence of government funds to support them, natural resources and heritage sights must be made profitable and must become driven by the logic of the market. CaRT are still relatively new custodians of the waterways and, as can be seen throughout the thesis but particularly in Chapters 8-11, it is not clear how they will differ from the government organisation BW or even if they will significantly do so at all. What is clear, however, is that without government money CaRT are more reliant on gaining financial supporters and, in order to gain this support, they have been advertising their work to walkers and gongoozlers on the towpaths every summer. If this tactic proves insufficient for gaining the funds they require to pay their staff and maintain the waterways, this could lead to outcomes such as an increase in license prices for Boaters, the levelling of large fines for “non-compliant continuous cruising” (see Chapter 8), or the sale of CaRT’s assets, including their extensive water-fronted land and properties, to investors. Any of these occurrences could prove disastrous for Boaters and the uncertain future is a frequent topic of conversation on the waterways. Paranoid theories abound, including one participant who explained that CaRT were being deliberately cast adrift by the government in order that they become so deeply in debt that foreign investors are encouraged to come in and purchase the waterways from them, leading to the complete privatisation of the waterways and the death of continuous cruising.⁶³

Thirdly, one of the cornerstones of neoliberalism is the subdivision of land and the privatisation of the “commons,” or common lands over which the public has access and right of way. Under neoliberalism, the commons must be given over to private ownerships and made profitable. I have noted throughout the thesis that it is not uncommon for Boaters to speak about the waterways as the only space that has resisted enclosure and remained relatively free for access and travel. In contrast to the roads and lay-bys, which have become restricted, first by the Caravan Sites Act of 1968 and then the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994, it is still possible to travel relatively freely and to stop where one wishes on the waterways. Authors writing about UK-based Traveller-Gypsies and New Age Travellers (Okely, 1983; Worthington, 2005) chronicle the increasing restriction of traditional stopping sites and by-ways and the increasing police force used to restrict and control the movements of travellers on land. CaRT’s gradual privatisation of their mooring

⁶³ See page 211 and the discussion concerning Boyfield (1990).

space and their restrictions on other moorings (e.g. the creation of restricted “Visitors’ Moorings” with a 24- or 48-hour maximum mooring period) shows a gradual movement towards a subtle enclosure of the waterways, making them “legible” from a bureaucratic centre (see Scott, 1998; see also Chapter 8).

Lastly, it is important to note that, particularly in London, the large increase in the number of boat-dwellers has been partially caused by the “housing crisis” of skyrocketing rent costs, a lack of affordable homes to purchase, high transport costs for commuters living outside the city, and a lack of council housing for those in need. Even those who can afford to live in the city on their wages often find that their rent takes up so significant a proportion of their income that they are still in relative poverty after covering their housing costs (see Croucher, 2015). It is possible to argue that this housing crisis has been caused, or at least exacerbated, by governmental neoliberal policies. Even through the financial crisis and subsequent recession, London continued to perform well in economic terms, led by institutions in the financial centre known as the “City of London” or the “City” and driven by deregulation and government support, encouragement and financial “bailouts.” Throughout the crisis, it was one of the only parts of the country showing “growth” and, as such, house prices continued to rise. London’s population also continues to grow as it attracts migration from other areas of the UK and abroad (see Hill, 2013). Successive neoliberal governments have not sought to rectify this situation through rent caps, through restricting non-domicile purchasing of properties in the city, or by supporting the building of new affordable homes. These measures would involve “interfering” with private markets and therefore are not compatible with the theories of economic neoliberalism. In addition, ideologically motivated “right to buy” schemes, pioneered by the Thatcher governments of the 1980s, have decreased the number of council houses available as council tenants have been encouraged to purchase their own homes.⁶⁴

The housing crisis in London has caused a great and growing need for affordable homes in the city. Boaters, as is described in Chapter 6, can avoid paying rents and can keep their monthly expenditures considerably lower than renting in the areas through which they cruise. Thus, boat-ownership is often driven by the wider financial trends; increasingly, individuals who are *in work* are faced with the choice of moving away from the city, possibly

⁶⁴ The negative socio-economic and health outcomes of the policies of “Thatcherism,” including increased homelessness, can be found in Scott-Samuel et al. (2014).

to live with family members, living in squats or “guardianships,” “sofa-surfing,” or making an “alternative” housing choice such as becoming a Boater or living in a car or van. When discussing these matters with a Boater, I was however warned that “people think that boating just represents this backlash against the housing crisis. It’s not just that! It’s about people who love the life. Who want something more. Something different [from the norm].” It is important to avoid simple mechanical functional explanations which see boating as a simple result (an equal and opposite reaction) to the London housing crisis, especially considering that boating is a growing phenomenon around the country and considering the spectrum of class and wealth represented by Boaters (see Chapter 4), but there is certainly a relationship between the neoliberal and austerity-driven rent and housing crisis in the city and the dramatic increase in the popularity of boat living.

Thus it can be seen from the discussion above how the changing neoliberal state has affected boating. There is no simple relationship whereby one can simply state that boat-dwelling is “caused” by changing political and economic trends; individuals come to boating for a number of reasons, through discovering the boating lifestyle and then finding that it reflects, to a greater or lesser extent, the way in which they wish to live. Often there is a political and economic dimension to this choice, and of course Boaters are intimately connected to the neoliberal and austerity driven policies of the government. This thesis represents an attempt to provide a balanced through-line between structure, including descriptions of the changing state, and agency, including Boaters’ individual narratives. One of the ways in which this can be best achieved is thinking of the Boaters as part of the neoliberal state’s “dark twin” (Scott, 1998), that which is created by the state as it tries to mould its citizenry. The neoliberal state restricts the movement of travellers, privatises parts the environment and its resources, reduces welfare for citizens, and creates housing crises; from these structural pressures, there come certain potential solutions, one of which is becoming part of the boating community. Thus, individuals, under certain structural constraints, use their agency to become part of a phenomenon that arises as a mirror to the changing state, a living critique of the weaknesses of the neoliberal order and of austerity governance.

Now that a brief demographic, methodological, historical, and legal framework has been provided, this thesis moves into detailed ethnography of my time living with the itinerant

Boaters, taking particular note of their construction of a waterways “community” and their position within the contemporary British state.

Chapter 4: Becoming a Boater: Developing skills within a community of practice.

Introduction

After fieldwork and when contemplating writing up one's experiences into an intelligible and rounded thesis, it is almost impossible to know where to begin the first substantive chapter. The mass of experiences, revelations, relationships and fleeting ideas that have accompanied one throughout the fieldwork process exist as an unmanageable whole, a totality that resists deconstruction and atomisation. Even that first essential question - what must the reader know first in order to understand everything that comes after? - is difficult to answer, as this implies that one's representation of one's culture or society of study can be spread out like a narrative in order to form some kind of total revelation by the end of the thesis.

In reality there are, of course, any number of ways in which one could begin, a fact that is obscured by the extremely formulaic layout of classic ethnographic texts (see Clifford and Marcus, 1992). The question of where to begin surely rests upon the purpose of the thesis as a whole, the essential research question to be answered. In my case, this question is "Who are the itinerant Boaters of the waterways of Britain?", a question which further implies the basic questions, "How does one become a Boater?", "What do Boaters do?" and "How does this make them different from those who aren't Boaters?" These questions, set together, ask the central anthropological questions of what kind of category, group, society or community is being created by people living on boats, travelling the waterways and calling themselves Boaters.⁶⁵

In attempting to satisfactorily answer these questions, I aim to first examine the process by which one becomes a Boater. Thus, I begin by examining the population on the waterways as an outsider might do (and as I myself did during my early days in the field). I note how there appear to be different factions and categories of Boaters - for example, "Shiny Boaters," "Dirty Boaters," "Newbies," "Old-timers" and "Pirates" - categories which, it is often assumed, map on to class differences originating in wider British society. I then aim to demonstrate how class is not, in fact, the most important differentiating factor between Boaters, and that indeed there are not hard and fast categories of Boater at all.

⁶⁵ See the discussion in Chapter 1.

Drawing on Tim Ingold's dwelling perspective (2000), I argue that the Boater is constructed as a person through active engagement with the world and materials around them and with other Boaters and outsiders. Using Ingold's own theories on apprenticeship and en-skilment, alongside the theory originating with Wenger (2000) and Lave and Wenger (1991) that humans learn and develop in communities of practice through processes of legitimate peripheral participation, I attempt to show that Boaters become Boaters through a bodily process of learning from others and becoming knowledgeable agents.

Existing anthropological works on apprenticeship, including, among others, Marchand (2001 and 2008) and Argenti (2002), discuss how, in other ethnographic contexts, persons move from a novice state towards a state of mastery through processes of social learning. They become skilled and knowledgeable by attending to and training their bodies over time within specific settings where learning is supported. I conclude that the different categories of Boaters listed above describe individuals in different positions within these communities of practice and do not, as is widely assumed, map neatly on to wider "class" categories at all (I address this issue in the following section). Being a Boater is, I conclude, a matter of engaging with a boat and learning how to be aboard it, and of taking this boat out to dwell with others on the waterways.⁶⁶ If this point sounds commonsensical and simplistic, it is worth noting that such an idea would be anathema to classic anthropological analyses, which see societal classifications as being passed down to descendants on a disembodied level of symbol and "culture" (see, for example, Durkeim, 2008 [1915]). This idea that humans make themselves, their identities and their cultures through direct bodily interaction with the world around them is comparatively modern.

The central arguments from this chapter are subsequently taken into Chapters 5 and 6,⁶⁷ wherein I argue that the act of dwelling on the waterways creates a specific temporal experience (or, as Gell (1992) notes, a set of "time-maps") of the "natural" world (a particular

⁶⁶ Ingold (2000:189) would remind us that dwelling is active and constitutive. In addition to Ingold (2000), this chapter owes a debt to the modern popularisations of such a theory embedded in practice by, among others, Pierre Bourdieu (1977), a fact acknowledged by Ingold himself.

⁶⁷ Fittingly, the three chapters in this section (this chapter and Chapters 5 and 6) map thematically onto the three sections of Ingold's *The Perception of the Environment* (2000): whereas Ingold's three sections dealt with livelihood, then dwelling, then skill, the three chapters in this section discuss skill, followed by dwelling, followed by livelihood; the reversal of Ingold's order is simply a quirk arising from the need to unfold my own narrative in an sequence that is easier for the reader to follow.

and constitutive experience of “dwelling” within a “taskscape”,⁶⁸ to use Ingold’s vocabulary). I also argue that this has further implications for the livelihoods and economic worlds of Boaters, many of whom take a position towards “consumption” and “consumer goods” which sets Boaters in opposition and contrast to most of the wider sedentary world. If this chapter was read in isolation, it could be interpreted that Boaters simply learn how to *do* what is required within the community of practice. However, these later chapters show that Boaters also learn the rhythms, attitudes and the habitus that are expected of them within the community of practice: essentially, how to *be*.

All three chapters share the central thesis that dwelling on the waterways, within a network of social relations which includes other Boaters, puts one within a process which introduces one to particular skills and understandings and which creates a particular category of person called “Boaters.” It would be misleading to imply an evolutionary or simply progressive paradigm, whereby all who move onto the waterways are slowly homogenised and made into archetypal Boaters; rather, the learning and enskilment processes described here can be subverted, changed, adapted, ignored or embellished.

When one learns from people rather than textbooks or formulae; learning is of course entirely subjective and coloured with the understandings and experiences of others. One Boater’s way to tie a knot may not, for example, be anything like another’s, and yet, if it successfully secures the boat and the Boater teaches it to a friend, then it becomes a part of the life of the community of practice. The Boater being taught the knot may themselves ignore the advice, tie their own version, combine it with a more successful knot they’ve seen, or just copy it move for move. The vital point here is that they have engaged with the act of dwelling in the taskscape of the waterways and are a more knowledgeable Boater, and therefore closer to the centre of the community of practice, than they were previously.

A Question of Class?

Before elaborating on these theories of dwelling and apprenticeship, it is important to examine the commonly held etic view of the world of the Boaters that has taken me so long to discount and unpack during my time in the field and beyond. This viewpoint begins in the perceived wisdom that “Boaters are all very different from each other.” I was told at the

⁶⁸ See page 43.

beginning of my ethnographic research that “there’s a lot of different types of people that live on the boats” and also, by more than one individual, that “the only thing that Boaters have in common is that they live on boats.” Although it is true that Boaters differ greatly in every demographic category (age, sexual orientation, occupation, income, etc.), I shall argue in this thesis that there is a particular experience (a set of activities or “taskscape”) of boat-living that creates a community of practice which holds within it the great diversity of boat-dwellers. This idea that Boaters differ from each other is further elaborated in the essentialising theory that Boaters exist in different “types” and that these types are related to categories of class. Below I describe some ethnographic encounters in which such an idea was either suggested to me, or which led me towards such an understanding myself.

An early push towards my splitting of Boaters down class lines was suggested by a Boater himself during an interview. My interviewee suggested that there were three types of Boaters: “snobby day Boaters,” who are recognisable by their fibreglass vessels and are unpopular with those who live on the waterways; “part-time Boaters, holiday Boaters and renters;” and lastly “us, continuous cruisers, liveaboards.” Another drew a distinction between “two sets of people: those who live on the river and those who are part of the leisure industry,” adding “there’s a *big* difference.” I later heard this difference articulated as being the difference between “shiny Boaters,” or “brass polishers,” and “dirty Boaters”. The former refers to those boat-owners (usually not liveaboards or, if they are, dwellers in luxury marinas) who are characterised as holidaying aboard neatly-maintained boats rather than living upon the waterways; the latter refers to Boaters who live aboard all year round and can usually be identified by their scruffier boats, with a number of rusting items on their roofs. These “dirty Boaters” are generally those who are disapproved of by residents of canal-side residential areas and are more likely to be subject to the label of “water Gypsies” (see Chapter 10).

Immediately when I began writing about these distinctions, academics and friends alike began to assume that these reflected a difference in class background. Many times I was asked if the “shiny Boaters” were from middle-class backgrounds and the “dirty Boaters” from working-class backgrounds, a question that I found hard to answer based upon how difficult it is to ascertain someone’s class background in certain social situations. I had assumed, being natively British and therefore having grown up in a class-obsessed nation, that testing this theory would be simple, until I realised that the obvious accent and lin-

guistic cues which normally are used to place one in a class-position are not as common as one would imagine; often class is hard to identify in practice. Those who were easy to identify as having a particular class background did not fit simply into the proposed pattern; some “dirty Boaters” were from (often quite impoverished) working-class backgrounds, but some were clearly not; most “shiny Boaters” were clearly wealthy (as one would have to be afford a boat simply for pleasure), but not all were obviously middle or upper class. Still, however, so many colleagues had been so emphatic that I must be looking at the manifestation of class distinctions that I continued to investigate the idea.

Steve Haywood, a popular author whom we met in Chapter 1, and who claimed to have inverted the dirty/shiny Boater distinction, was unequivocal: “The divide between these two types of Boaters, shiny Boaters and dirty Boaters or whatever you want to call them, can be characterised by one word: class,” he told me. Later he spoke of the shiny Boaters being part of what he called the “fifty club,” which he said meant that they were “fifty years old, have fifty foot boats, and earn fifty grand a year.”⁶⁹ I had met enough “shiny Boaters” who fit that stereotype that it was hard to ignore Steve’s take on the situation. And yet I had met such an array of Boaters that I thought it likely that Steve was describing only one type: the retired holiday-Boaters, numerous on the waterways in general but rare in my London field sites.

Supporting and reinforcing this narrow focus on what was essentially a class-based distinction, it was suggested to me early on in my research that my own class identity⁷⁰ would form a barrier to my entry into the field and stop me from being able to make friendships and form close relationships with other Boaters. Before I even entered the field, a Boater named Paul was warning me that “they” (liveaboard Boaters) “won’t take to you mate, you’re far too posh!” Later, he added “Maybe you should turn up carrying a couple of bags of coal, you know, just smear coal dust on your face. Actually, on second thoughts, they’ll know you’re not proper from the way you carry the [coal] bags.” Clearly the signs of being a Boater are thought of as not coming simply from aping the action of other Boaters;

⁶⁹ Fifty feet is a good length for a narrowboat, especially if it is newer or well maintained; such a boat in good condition would likely be worth £40,000 to £50,000. In the UK, earning fifty thousand pounds a year is a middle-class income, far higher than the average individual wage of £26,500 pa (see Lynch, 2012).

⁷⁰ I come from a working-class/middle-class mixed background, but grew up in a relatively affluent area before attending a university with a large number of public school educated students. As such, I have a strong RP [received pronunciation] accent; to use the colloquial English, I “sound posh”.

rather, being a Boater has to be deeply engrained, through practice, in the habitus. Even the way in which one carries a coal bag demonstrates the relative extent to which boat-dwelling has entered and affected one's body.

Fortunately, Paul's predictions proved to be not entirely true, and I was quickly accepted and befriended at my first Thames moorings. However I heard a very similar sentiment repeated to me early on in the field when a couple of my good boating friends were discussing how I could "fit in" better.⁷¹ Tim suggested that I "get some coal dust on [my] face" and Dave began to laugh at the idea, suggesting that I dip my fingers into a coal bag and "smear it on like warpaint." The idea that I may be "too posh" for boating also came up during an interview with the former New Age Traveller⁷² and Brentford-based Boater, Sim. Sim had ended our (until then quite pleasant) interview by stating that, to get more contacts in the boating world, "You have to get your fingers dirty, that's what I'm saying." As I stood up to shake his hand, he held me in a crushing grip, stared at me for longer than was comfortable and said, quietly, "Soft hands, you don't work much. No coal dust under your nails." My posh and privileged upbringing was clearly in evidence from my hands, my face, and indeed - as Bourdieu would describe - my entire habitus. I was afraid that my class was destined to form a barrier.⁷³

It quickly became evident, however, that in reality the fissures on the waterways were not simply to do with class. Voices that contradicted the narrative expressed above were commonplace. One Boater, Danny, was quick to note that the idea that there were class differences at play on the waterways was, to him, ridiculous. He stated that "that's the bril-

⁷¹ As discussed in Chapter 3, historically, the idea that Boaters all have working-class backgrounds does not stand up particularly well. The working Boaters of the early canals were working-class people drawn from the land, and yet with some becoming self-employed and owners of their own boats, many became able to enjoy working conditions superior to the urban poor. The current move to live aboard the waterways was begun and supported by the middle/upper class L.T.C Rolt and other wealthy and privileged members of the IWA [Inland Waterways Association], including members of the landed gentry.

⁷² See Chapter 1.

⁷³ Okely (1983:43) notes how she, when working with Gypsies, had to learn to modify and hide her RP accent; a move which led to her increased acceptance within the group. Although Boaters are also travellers in the sense of being mobile people, and sometimes self-identify with the proper noun ("Travellers") they do not all share the same origins from childhood and through the acquisition of language and accent with each other. As such, my RP accent was not a lone, unharmonious note, as Okely's must have been at first. I did, however, find myself speaking with a lower, "cockney" inflected tone after a time aboard, and dropping "t"s and "h"s in certain words. This was not a deliberate move, but rather a natural consequence of living on the 'East-end' canals with neighbours from a variety of class backgrounds.

liant thing innit? It doesn't matter who you are on a boat, you still have to empty your own shit [at the elsan point]. If David Cameron⁷⁴ were [sic] on a boat, he'd have to empty out his own shit. [*Laughing*] If ol' Davey was stuck struggling trying to go through a lock, I'd help him out, I really would, because we're all the same out here." This reminded me of another conversation which I'd had with a Boater who had insisted that social background was not a problem on the waterways because "it's a great leveller, you don't have much chance for airs and graces if you're up to your elbow in your bilge."⁷⁵

Another Boater, Justin, was an exception to the class categorisation and a living example of Danny's assertion that "it doesn't matter who you are on a boat." Justin was obviously "posh," wealthy and well-educated and yet found easy acceptance on the waterways, where his expertise with woodworking and boat-building led to him being in demand for a favour, and his friendliness led to him becoming well known around the moorings of the East End. Gopal, whose boat Justin had been helping to modify, drew attention to Justin's status as an exception when he stated that, "I love being on boats because there's all of these people from all these different backgrounds, and it doesn't matter. I mean, where else would I get to hang out with someone like Justin?" "Or someone like me?" I enquired. Gopal burst out laughing. "Yeah, or someone like you, you're quite posh really, aren't you?"

Sim, the Boater who gave me the threatening handshake had, earlier in that interview, suggested that the New Age Travellers, many of whom he stated had become Boaters after being moved from the roads, were not by any means all working-class and poor. "Most were *middle class*," he told me. "They'd grown up with choices. It's not the *money*; it's the *mindset*. Poor kids didn't have the choices, or the idea that they could do something different like that. Yeah, a lot were middle class hippies."⁷⁶ Justin and the former New

⁷⁴ The current British Prime Minister.

⁷⁵ The area under the living/engine space of the boat where waste water and detritus collects and which must be "pumped out" to keep the boat afloat.

⁷⁶ Such a distinction of class origins is central also to academic discussions of the New Age Traveller's origins. Hetherington (2000:106-110) describes New Age Travellers as having rejected their lower-middle class origins (a non-identity) and suburbia (non-places) in order to attempt to live a life they see as more authentic. Martin (2002) draws on Clark (1997) in order to argue that this is an over-voluntaristic account, which romanticises travelling as being purely a personal choice and ignores those who took to travelling on the roads as a reaction to unemployment, poverty, and the impact of 1980s Thatcherism.

Age Travellers described by Sim were not the only ones to break the easy categorical relationship that identified “dirty Boaters” or “liveaboards” with working-class backgrounds and “shiny Boaters” with middle-class affluence. The Boaters I met around the waterways living aboard had a variety of backgrounds, some quite affluent, and a variety of careers, some of them very well paid. Moreover, some marina Boaters and those with permanent moorings, even some affluent holidayers, seemed to fit well into the liveaboard community and to be instantly accepted at social gatherings, regardless of their class background.

As an added complication, it seemed that as I continued my research, the liveaboard community itself was undergoing another split, a split that was also potentially occurring along class lines. Increasingly it seemed that newer Boaters, who were moving onto the waterways in popular East End areas, were being accused of not being “the right sort” of Boater, of getting into boating “for economic reasons” or “because it’s cheap.” It was frequently suggested by experienced Boaters that these people aren’t becoming Boaters for the correct “lifestyle reasons,” and instead represent an “overspill from a housing crisis.” These Boaters are referred to and categorised variously as “Hipsters,”⁷⁷ “Yuppies”⁷⁸ or just “Newbies,” depending on their outward appearances and the appearance of their boats.

Again, it would be possible to categorise this phenomenon as a kind of class conflict, with newer Boaters representing a more affluent influx into a predominately working-class corpus of Boaters, and indeed this is partially true. It is notable, however, that these categories are fluid. Boaters, for example, are said to be able to move aboard for financial reasons and then “learn to love it” or “learn to love the waterways.” Such stories are often part of individual Boaters’ own constructed narratives of their lives aboard. As no one would self-identify as a Hipster or Yuppie, these categories are not hard and fast; there is, of course, no subset of self-identifying “Yuppie” Boaters on the waterways. Indeed, with so much fluidity between the apparent class “boundaries” on the waterways, it became evident that these accusatory terms are used as insults directed at newcomers by “old-timers” (see Lave & Wenger, 1991: 114-116), insults which do not necessarily mark these individuals off as a completely different type of Boater, but rather seek to critique their current (and not-

⁷⁷ “Hipster” is a term, originating in New York, for a subgroup of young, trend-following individuals who are interested in forms of “alternative” living, older “vintage” or “retro” styles and particular musical sub-fields. London’s East end has become a centre for British “Hipster” culture in recent years.

⁷⁸ A term meaning “young professional” and usually associated with the young, capitalist and entrepreneurial class and often with young supporters of the UK Conservative Party.

fixed) attitude to Boating life. It became clear, in other words, whatever one's background one can *become a proper* or acceptable Boater.

What, I asked myself from the beginning of my fieldwork, was going on at these fluid and flexible intra-community boundaries? The boating community⁷⁹ seemed, from the outside at least, to be split along class lines in several directions at once, with “shiny” and “dirty” Boaters representing different social classes enjoying different usages of the waterways, and with newer, affluent Boaters breaking up the body of liveaboards into two approximate groups: “proper” Boaters and “yuppies.” And yet there was a body of evidence, based upon the backgrounds of the people whom I was meeting and their own narratives of entry into the community, that flatly contradicted this understanding. If Boaters were not split by class, then what lay at the root of these intra-community differences, these accusations that newcomers were not “proper” or “responsible” Boaters and that “shiny” Boaters were something else entirely? Was there an easier way to understand these splits than by referring to class differences? The search for such an answer led me to an understanding of how a community can be formed through the mechanism of individual's engagement with their environments (or “taskscape”) and with others as part of a “community of practice.”

It became evident that, although Boaters from different social classes can enter the community of practice in different ways and that this can affect how they are categorised and viewed, the important factor that affects how they are categorised by others is their relationship to and position within the community of practice as a whole. This is why class differences do not reflect themselves as clear-cut structural boundaries or divisions within the boating community. The route towards such an understanding began, first, with a re-approximation of my first days aboard, and it is an examination of this to which I now turn.

Learning to be skilled

When I moved aboard my narrowboat, *Me*, in September 2012, I was immediately offered a great deal of advice and support from those living around me. My first week was made busy and social by constant comings and goings as my neighbouring Boaters came over to introduce themselves and examine my boat and make suggestions. Simon quickly ar-

⁷⁹ I leave the term “boating community” undefined here, as a discussion of the concept “community of practice” will take place below, and a chapter on the Boaters' emic use of the term “community” will occur in subsequent chapters.

rived to “check out” my alternator⁸⁰ and to change the belt to one better fitted and better able to charge the batteries. Jo turned up with water cleaning tablets for my water tank and Shaun arrived to “have a poke” around my engine and have a look at my dripping stern gland,⁸¹ Most notably, however, Tim moored alongside me on his small river cruiser and had offered to help me find and fit new (low power usage) LED lights. Sure enough, within my first week aboard, we had gone shopping and Tim had picked out for me a number of useful items that I would need in the near future, including lengths of rope, chains and fenders.⁸² I was expecting Tim to fit the LEDs for me but, rather, he demonstrated slowly how to remove a strip light, cut wires, attach them to “chocolate blocks,” test the current, fit a switch, and hang the LED strip. I was then unceremoniously told “do the next one yourself” and watched carefully whilst I repeated the process, successfully fitting my own lights. The sense of achievement I gained from having learnt how to wire a light and having improved my own boat (albeit in a small way) was immense.

A similar experience occurred when I paid Tim to paint my roof. This turned out to involve me sanding my own roof under Tim’s guidance, as he taught me how to smooth chipped paintwork away in fine concentric circles until the paintwork was ‘stripped back’ to the original steel, and then painting my own roof after Tim had completed a layer of undercoat to demonstrate the rolling technique. Originally, I had been upset that I had had paid for work that I then had to do for myself, but I quickly realised that Tim, who was not being paid a proper wage for the work anyway, was actually giving me the skills to help myself. I was already aware that all of the Boaters in the area were engaged in “projects,” trying to improve or maintain their boats - be it by fitting stoves or toilets, or completing insulation or panelling work inside, fitting new solar panels or having a new “paint job” done - and that Tim had supported my first “project.”

⁸⁰ The part of the engine that charges the batteries - vital when one is generating one’s own domestic electricity.

⁸¹ The point where the prop shaft leaves the back of the boat is, of course, a point of weakness where water could enter and is protected by a greased and packed gland (or seal) – which, on my boat, let out regular drips, causing much disagreement between Boaters and different engineers as I attempted to find out why.

⁸² Fenders are plastic or rope objects that hang from the sides of boats and protect the steelwork from the bank or from other boat’s hulls.

My interactions with Tim were not, however, all harmonious or straightforward. One day, when we were discussing my boat and the improvement work that would be necessary, Tim asked me, “do you have any tools?” I had a few screwdrivers and essentials, I told him. “No,” he answered, “proper tools, power tools.” I didn’t have any, I explained, but, to placate him as he now seemed quite angry, I told him that I would buy some and asked him to tell me what I should buy. “No, no, don’t buy tools if you can’t use them!” he replied. “OK,” I said, confused, “I won’t buy any tools.” “No, get tools; you need some proper tools!” Tim replied. Tim’s ambivalence was clear; as a Boater I clearly should have tools, but it would be a sham if I had them but didn’t have the skills to use them. He was unsure himself as to what to recommend for someone so seemingly unsuited to the skilled performance of boating as I. It was clear from this exchange that the possession of tools and a proficiency in their usage was expected of me, and yet I was stuck without either, not quite yet able to fit in to Tim’s model of a Boater.⁸³

As intimated above, the day-to-day running of a boat, and the daily practice of being a Boater on the waterways, involves competence in and mastery of a great number of small tasks. I have already written about changing lights, painting roofs, re-packing stern glands and changing alternator belts, but these are not everyday occurrences (occurring instead only once a year or when necessary). More everyday activities, such as emptying out one’s chemical toilet or pump-out, lighting a fire in the stove, tying a knot onto a mooring pin or bollard, hammering in a mooring pin, checking one’s battery level, checking the oil and water levels in the engine or positioning a gang plank, must all be learnt, mastered and inducted into the bodily habitus and daily practice of individuals. These are only a few of the activities of the Boaters (many of which are introduced in later chapters of this thesis) and are, of course, only those that occur when stationary and not in the complex act of navigation.

When navigating aboard a boat, one must learn to feel the flow of the current around the propeller and rudder through the vibration of the tiller,⁸⁴ educate oneself to the sound and smell of the engine in order to diagnose when there is a mechanical problem, work out

⁸³ Something similar occurs when Boaters request online for someone to help them complete minor electrical or plumbing work; often the curt reply comes back “do it yourself,” occasionally followed by the more polite suggestion that there are people on this forum or page who could offer advice or help.

⁸⁴ The pole with which one steers a boat.

how to stop the boat and tie up at the bankside, become proficient in operating the often archaic lock-gear and paddles with “windlasses,”⁸⁵ and learn to wait for the lock chamber to fill and know when and how to safely push the lock gates open again. These are the “tasks,” many of which defy codification and which must be felt through the active body, which make up the “taskscape” of the Boaters (Ingold, 2000:154). These activities are not merely “things that Boaters do;” rather, I shall argue, the doing of these things are the constitutive acts which transform a person into both a Boater and a member of the boating community.

These tasks are not mastered by individuals from instructional textbooks. Rather, their mastery is learnt from others in the social setting of the waterways. For example, when meeting a Boater at a lock, after having been aboard for a year, I was told that rather than tying my boat up when I entered a lock chamber, it is quicker and safer to “wrap the rope around the bollard four times. The boat won’t move too far and the boat will drop safely, rather than if you tie it, it could over-tighten and then you’d be in trouble.” Some tips are picked up by observation and repetition, some by being directly told. Others are gleaned by a process of trial and error within a safe environment, when making mistakes becomes less risky and possible by the presence of others. Whatever the method of transmission of knowledge, it is always supported by practice, repetition, and the slow gaining of competency over time.

Such an education in the skills of Boating takes place in what Ingold calls a “*system... of apprenticeship*” (2000:37; emphasis in the original), which is, he says “constituted by the relationships between more and less experienced practitioners in hands-on contexts of activity. And it is on the reproduction of these relationships, not on genetic replication - or the transmission of some analogous code of cultural instructions - that the continuity of a technical tradition depends” (*ibid.*:37). He continues to say that “the fine-tuning of perception and action that is going on here is better understood as a process of enskilment than as one of enculturation” (*ibid.*:37), and that, in this way, technical skills are “inculcated in each successive generation through a process of development, in the course of novices’ practical involvement with the constituents of their environment - under the guidance of more experienced mentors - in the conduct of their everyday tasks” (*ibid.*:37). Ultimately, a

⁸⁵ Metal L-shaped tools that allow a traveller to lift a paddle and therefore fill or empty a lock.

Boater is one who *learns* to *dwell* upon the waterways, as can be seen in their daily interactions.

Bilge talk: what we have in common

By daily interactions, I am referring to the Boater's propensity for what some of my informants in Reading referred to as "bilge talk." Bilge talk refers to those conversations that two Boaters have upon meeting, which consist of lengthy discussions concerning each other's boats: their mechanical problems, ongoing projects and solutions to particular technical difficulties. The term has a double meaning, in that the bilge is the dirty area at the bottom of the boat where waste water collects. "Bilge talk," in other words, refers to those conversations about dirty, technical or "nitty-gritty" subjects. But it is also a colloquial term that means "rubbish" or "nonsense." Indeed, I have heard "bilge talk" referred to as "talking bilge," which brings the second meaning out more forcefully. Those who do not refer to the activity as "bilge talk" still engage in it. For example, it is common to find Boaters in all areas of the waterways beginning conversations with both outsiders and friends with discussion of their engines, their sanitation systems, tips for keeping things cool in the summer or warm in the winter, information concerning useful items for sale, etc. Boat-bound sociality, therefore, seems to start from the level of the mechanical boat and one's skilled engagement with it, and indeed with some acquaintances, interactions never leave this purely practical level.

This is more than just a way of entering into a conversation (and potentially, a friendship) with a stranger; it is a vital way of passing information on to others, of testing out one's own theories on how to complete practical tasks, and of establishing oneself (and one's interlocutor) as a knowledgeable Boater. These discussions occur online also, via the Facebook pages, listservs and forums that make up the online life of the Boaters of the South East. Along with chastisements of bad practice and poor etiquette and discussions of the waterway authorities' latest proposals and measures, these groups provide immediate feedback and suggestions for Boaters with any kind of technical query or difficulty. Indeed, this seems to be the primary function of these online spaces, outside of the occasional "emergency" periods, initiated by new and threatening mooring regulation consultations (see Chapters 8 and 11).

I asked a participant named Aaron why Boaters talked about the minutiae of boats and boating in this way and he replied with an instructive example. “You know on oil rigs, they used to have a bastard?” he began. Taken aback I said no, and asked him what he meant. “Well, on the rigs, they used to employ a guy, an unemployed actor or something, to wind everyone up, to get on their nerves. The guys out there, stuck together for all that time, they’d’ve gone stir crazy if they hadn’t’ve had something in common to talk about. So they had the bastard, that they could all talk about and gang up on and feel like a unit. That’s what it is with boats, it’s what you’ve got in *common*; it’s what there is to talk about!” Such an explanation seemed to fit with the frequent comment from Boaters that “we’re all in the same boat” and that therefore we must stick together and give support to each other.

Learning to be a Boater, in other words, is a process of learning how to engage with the series of constitutive tasks that allow one to live aboard a boat. In Ingold’s formulation, “the particular kinds of tasks you do depend on who you are, and in a sense the performance of certain tasks *makes* you the person who you are” (2000:325; emphasis in the original). This point can be seen in perhaps its most literal formation with the Boaters of Britain’s navigable waterways who, despite the only qualification for membership of the group being boat inhabitation, feel that they constitute a particular and separate social unit. How this unit functions and is maintained is discussed in the following section.

Legitimate Peripheral Participation within a community of practice

The focus on and the careful development of skills and knowledge within the boating community described in the previous section shows a clear relationship to Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theory of Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP), outlined in their book, *Situated Learning*. This theory states that learners, in a variety of contexts, develop their skills in structured environments, whereby they enter a community of practice at its periphery and, through a gradual gaining of skills through close attention to other, more knowledgeable members, gradually move towards the centre of the community, a centre populated by skilled and experienced full practitioners. The theory was further elaborated upon in Wenger’s *Communities of Practice* (2000), in which the nature of these structured communities was discussed. Wenger argues that these communities are not homogenous or lacking in tension, nor do learners always move directly and smoothly from periphery to centre; rather, communities of practice are filled with a great number of individuals at vary-

ing stages of their careers who may hold radically different understandings of the tasks and technologies of the community when compared to others in their learning environment. Wenger notes that generational tensions are particularly common in communities of practice, as “new-comers” and “old-timers” clash in their understandings (Wenger, 1998, pp.99-101; Wenger, 1998, pp.156-158) Despite these tensions, the shared understandings and experiences engendered by membership to the community of practice create a sense of shared life and collective identity (Wenger, 1998, pp.145-163). My own early days on the river, when skills and advice were freely offered and Tim showed me “the ropes” delineated my position as a “newcomer” at the periphery of a community of practice. Moreover, the “bilge talk”, which has accompanied all of my later interactions is indicative of the efforts of other Boaters to ascertain my position within the community via my relative level of knowledge and to enter into a relationship whereby we support each other’s development as Boaters.

Such a relationship may not sound like a classic “apprenticeship,” but recent ethnographies of apprenticeship situations, such as Marchand’s study of minaret builders in Yemen (2001), emphasise the agency of the apprentice: one who does not have the skills transmitted to them through perfect replication by a master, but rather learns, through a fine tuning of attention, through trial and error, and through direct perceptual *engagement* with the qualities of the materials, how to produce “better” objects. Apprentices learn for themselves, through their bodies, in an environment structured for learning. In Ingold’s words, “the novice’s observation of accomplished practitioners is not detached from, but grounded in, his own active, perceptual engagement with his surroundings. And the key to imitation lies in the intimate coordination of the movement of the novice’s attention to others with his own bodily movement in the world” (2000: 353).

Argenti uses the notion of legitimate peripheral participation in his account of carvers in Oku, Cameroon (Argenti, 2002). He describes how officially sanctioned apprenticeship is not necessary in order to learn to carve in Oku, and how communities of tool-sharing young carvers can learn all of the requisite skills “by watching others around them as they carve their own objects, but not being instructed in any intentional way” (*ibid.*:509). Similarly, the social world of the Boaters on the waterways is, as I have suggested, a world where the gaining of requisite skills and the completion of vital tasks is aided and struc-

tured by the presence of others, but where a degree of skilled self-sufficiency is vital to one being able to call oneself a Boater.

Now that we have seen how it remains for me to elaborate upon exactly how the Boater experiences the “taskscape” of the waterways and the importance of the physical object of the boat in this process. What are the “better objects” that apprentice Boaters are expected to produce?

The Boat as Project and Person

The waterways and the community of Boaters are accessed, of course, through the medium of one’s own boat. A former Boater – one who is now without a boat, or who has moved “off” for whatever reason – can still be a Boater if they profess to a long history of boat dwelling and a desire to move back aboard (and most importantly if they possess the skills of a Boater). Unlike many other social categories (in this case, sometimes referred to as a “minority” or “ethnic” category), being a Boater is not a matter of familial inheritance; rather, it is a description of an action, or more accurately a series of actions. Being a Boater is something that one *does*, which then becomes something that one *is*, whereas being British, for example, involves something that one is legally, which in turn may have implications for what one *does*. This, as was described in Chapter 1, resonates with literature that describes identity as arising in the course of the performance of particular constitutive actions and practices (Astuti, 1995; Bently, 1987 and 1991; Butler, 1990).

In relation to this, Ingold (2000:132-151) notes that the idea that being a member of a particular social category is a matter of inheritance rather than of direct active interaction with an environment is a Western construct, one that would make little sense to many hunter and gatherer groups where what one *does* in an environment is exactly what constitutes them as a person. Even though it may sound strange to Western ears, I argue that the category “Boater” is created through an individual’s engagement with the waterways through the medium of their vessels – vessels which, due to their importance to a Boater’s identity, become a focus of great attention and symbolic significance.

Boats are, first of all, often conceived of or articulated as “projects” in the process of improvement. Much of a Boater’s practical work involves changing worn-out parts or of

cleaning the engine bay, touching up paint work, blacking the hull,⁸⁶ or otherwise maintaining the boat as it is, especially given that boats are notorious for having things go wrong regularly throughout their lives. In addition to ongoing upkeep, most Boaters have a boat improvement project in progress or in the planning stage at any given time. Boaters may be planning a new paint job, a re-fit of the bathroom or kitchen areas, an upgrade of their domestic power or battery set-up, a new set of ropes (lines), a new stove or heating system, or any number of other small improvements. In the most extreme examples, some Boaters have “project boats” - boats bought cheaply, either as an empty shell or in a state of disrepair, which must be built up from the most basic level, sometimes taking years of hard work.

Many Boaters state that having a boat that they have fitted out themselves is desirable, as it allows them to feel that they “know” their boat inside and out. Getting to “know” one’s boat and the skills needed in its upkeep and navigation is, I have argued, the process through which one becomes a Boater. Boats, it is often said, are truly individual, they have their own “personalities” and idiosyncrasies, and no boat is the same as another. One Boater told me that they didn’t mind mechanical breakdowns as it helped them to learn about their boat’s “personality” and “what she likes and doesn’t.” Because of this, learning one’s own boat is a particularly personal journey, a journey which can be guided by others, but which must ultimately take place only between the individual Boater and the individual boat. Just as the minaret builders studied by Marchand (2001) see minarets grow through the interaction between *particular* stones and their environments, so too Boaters learn their skills through a particular and specific engagement with a fickle and complex engine, a byzantine electrical system, and a maze of plumbing, all contained within a relatively fragile steel or fibreglass hull.

Pálsson (1994) discusses such an enskilment process through the attunement of attention to one’s vessel and the marine environment in the context of Icelandic fishermen. He describes the process of becoming a successful fishing boat skipper as a process of acquiring “one’s sea legs - becoming skilful” (*ibid.*:901) before explicitly citing Lave and Wenger’s (1991) concept of LPP. In an utterance which could have come from my own field diary, Pálsson describes how “enskilment in *fishing* is not a matter of formal schooling and the

⁸⁶ Steel boat hulls must be coated with a rust-protecting agent, a kind of black paint, every four or five years to stop corrosion and decay in the hull.

internalization of a stock of knowledge; rather it is achieved through active engagement with the environment, in the broadest sense of the term” (*ibid.*.916). Boat-dwelling, in other words, cannot be taught in the abstract, but must come, over time, through trial and error, through mechanical breakdown, through exploring every channel of the waterways and following pipes and to find where they lead, and myriad other exploratory and time-consuming practices.

Vale, a young Boater from Italy who had been living aboard for around a year said, when I interviewed her, that “I live in my boat, but it’s not just my home...I want it to be a project as well. It’s not just a home; I want it to be a creative home.” “How?” I asked. “The space where you live is like a mirror of your soul,” she answered. “So I don’t want to live in a space which is square like a room. I lie on the sofa [in my boat], like a tunnel, like in the belly of a whale, you know? Ever since I was a kid I wanted to live in a different kind of space, so it’s not *just* I live in a boat, no?” Thus, while a boat is a project, it is more than this; the boat is, to a greater or lesser extent, an avatar of the personality of the Boater’s self. The boat, just like any room in a house or a flat, represents the owner’s taste, it showcases the items that they find important or beautiful, it represents them to others.

Boats, however, more so than sedentary homes, become identified with and inseparable from their owners. Part of what makes one a “dirty Boater,” for example, involves having a number of items on one’s boat’s roof and, as such, represents an exporting of the Boater’s habitus onto their vessels, which can then be seen and recognised by others. The boat is the way in which the Boater accesses the community, and Boaters will often know others “by their boats” rather than by their names. I interviewed a Boater named Tony Sulman, who professed that he only knew “people by their boat names, I’m hopeless with names!” It is common for Boaters to sign off e-mails or introduce themselves in person as “[name] on [boat name]” (e.g, Ben on *Me*) or even as “[name] [boat name]” (e.g, Tom *Leif Eriksen*) or “[name] on [boat description]” (e.g, Tim on the little green boat).

As we have seen from the above, boats, through the process of dwelling aboard, become inseparably associated with their owners and their owners inseparable from their boats. Indeed, removing the animate/inanimate distinction, and borrowing from Latour (2007), the Boaters and their boats together could be said to be actants coming together in order to become a single unit that interacts with the rest of the network of the waterways. Such an

approach would make sense of the fact that boats can carry a part of their previous owner's personalities with them as they continue their journeys under new ownership. Tony Sulman mentioned how his own boat was so deeply associated with its previous owner that he was often asked "is that Chris' boat?" to which he would answer "yes, I'm looking after it for him." Boat and owner come together to form a unit and shape each other's interactions with the rest of the waterways.

As I noted above, a Boater without a boat will often cease to be a Boater and, if they want to get back aboard, others will be sympathetic to their plight. When one sees an abandoned boat, particularly if it is sinking or in a state of disrepair, Boaters will state that it's a shame to see a boat unloved and occasionally use anthropomorphic language in stating that the boat has "died" or is "sick" or "dying." Asha and I once passed a sinking boat, and she was so saddened that, with tears in her eyes, she daubed occult runes of protection onto the boat's roof using river mud. The boat, in short, is not a mechanical *thing* onto which one acts; it is the shell that surrounds the Boater, *through* and *within* which they act. It is an ongoing project that engages and is part of the entire acting person.

Re-formulating the question of class

How does such a view of the boating community help us make sense of the apparent class differences described in the first section of this chapter? Returning again to Sim's menacing send-off when he observed to me that I had "soft hands" and clearly didn't "work much," it is clear that his problem was not with my accent and appearance *per se*, but rather with the fact that I did not appear to be able to contribute to and participate in the community of practice on the waterways. I looked like I was not accustomed to using my body in the kind of skilled activity which Boaters must engage in, in order to be a proper participant, as would have been evidenced through my habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). Equally, the advice to put coal dust on my face was clearly an instruction to show that I am engaging in one of the constitutive acts of dwelling on the waterways and of being a Boater: carrying coal and lighting fires. And Paul's assertion that "they'll know you're not proper from the way you carry the [coal] bags" suggested that he thought that my body would not yet possess the habitus that demonstrated my familiarity and engagement with the act of dwelling on the waterways. By habitus, I am referring to Bourdieu's (1977) concept of engrained bodily state. As Ingold describes it, "the *habitus* is not expressed in practice, it

rather *subsists* in it. What Bourdieu has in mind is the kind of practical mastery that we associate with skill” (2000:162). This is not exactly the same as Mauss’ (1973) techniques of the body, which, Ingold points out (2000:352), can be put on, learnt, and abandoned, and does not necessarily subsist in and emerge from practice.

“Posh,” in these circumstances, clearly refers to a disengagement from the practicalities of day-to-day tasks and an unwillingness to get oneself dirty in their completion. When seeing a Boater at a lock, it is obvious who is new and or holidaying and who is experienced. The newer Boaters will tentatively step to and from the boat as if unsure where the bank is, rise the paddle slowly and haltingly, and nervously watch the filling lock, keeping their ropes tight in their hands. This contrasts with the fluid movements of the obviously experienced Boater, jumping off onto the bankside, cranking the paddles and then reclining, idly and with no obvious interest (sometimes, one suspects, this disinterest is put on), atop the lock gate’s beam as the lock chamber fills. The habitus is, indeed, impossible to fake, and now, after more than two years’ experience on *Me*, I never doubt that people will assume me to be a Boater when I’m engaged in the act(s) of navigating the waterways.

Such an understanding also helps make sense of Justin’s status. Justin, whom we met above, may be extremely posh, but he is highly skilled and more than willing to participate correctly in the life of the waterways. We can also interpret the words of Danny, who stated that “it doesn’t matter who you are on a boat, you still have to empty your own shit,” as a succinct summarising of the class situation on the waterways. Class background may, of course, affect one’s abilities, as learnt from childhood, to complete many of the tasks in the waterways “taskscape,” and may also affect one’s willingness to learn. But this does *not* mean that the waterways are split along class lines. Boaters from more affluent backgrounds, if they are willing to engage with the community of practice and to learn about their boats and their environments, will be able to become “proper” or old-timer Boaters who have moved from the periphery towards the centre of the community. The split between “shiny Boaters” and “dirty Boaters” is thus not necessarily a split along class lines: it is a split between those who do not engage in the community of practice (those who are not really Boaters at all) and those who do.

This is why it is often said of “shiny Boaters” that they care too much about the outward appearances of their boats, spend unnecessary money on “trad” (traditional) kit and trap-

ping, “throw money at problems” (by hiring expensive mechanics) and live in comfortable marinas where they do not have to generate their own electricity or empty their own toilets. It is telling that when I asked a Boater who the “shiny Boaters” were, he said first, “well, they aren’t lock sharers.” His main way of identifying this type of Boater was that they do not participate within the community; they want to go through locks on their own and even to moor on their own, far away from other Boaters. The sociality and the support of the community of practice is, to “dirty Boaters” or “liveaboards” at least, the thing that defines them and marks them out against others.

Similarly, the anxiety concerning newer, affluent Boaters coming onto the waterways, particularly in East London, is not necessarily a concern about class; it is a concern about an emerging skill gap. When Boaters mention their concern about the “new” or “newbie” Boaters, it is articulated that these Boaters don’t know the rules, the etiquette, and they do not have the requisite skills to live aboard. It is often articulated that these Boaters “won’t last their first winter” (a rite of passage that is said to mark a transition point between being thoroughly new and being partially competent), and that they need to be told “the rules” and offered support, often with the suggestion being that “old-timer” Boaters need to be better and more forceful neighbours and to guide them well, perhaps with the addition of a written “new Boater’s guide.” Others, even those who suggest that these new Boaters are the “wrong kind of people” who are moving onto the waterways for the “wrong reasons” (economic reasons), generally admit that people can *become* Boaters through proper and long-term engagement with their boats and with others on the waterways.

Wenger (1998:99-101) notes that *within* a community of practice, without causing an irreparable schism, generational differences can often exist, whereby “old-timers” and “new-comers” clash over the community’s production of knowledge and the correct ways in which things should be done. The tensions in London do not represent a class split within the social world of Boaters, rather such a generational split that can take on the language of class warfare as one of its discursive trappings. Older (by which I mean longer-term) Boaters - who one informant, Hamish, described to me as representing “a kind of genteel poverty” - feel outnumbered by a growing number of, admittedly, more affluent Boaters, who do not understand and may not care to properly learn the skills needed to keep a boat and the waterways running smoothly, and who may not care to stay long-term and become full participants within the community of practice. The problem is, it is suggested, that with

the rumoured eight hundred new boats arriving in London every year, there are now too many apprentices and not enough masters. As one Boater succinctly suggested, when I told him I often moored in east London, “London’s full of dickheads now, get out whilst you can”.

The journey from periphery to centre

The journey of the “apprentice” Boater from periphery to centre is marked by a series of subtle shifts in identity. When the Boater moves aboard and is a “newbie” or “green” Boater, they are given, as I have described through my own experiences, a degree of leeway to make mistakes, along with high levels of support and advice, both from their immediate neighbours and from the online community, in order to facilitate their entry into the community of practice. The first winter (a process known as “doing a winter”) marks a rite of passage (van Gennep 1961 [1909]; Turner, 2011 [1969]) which creates a subtle separation between an out-group of Boaters who are so new and naive as to almost not yet be Boaters, and an in-group of Boaters who are seen as more justified in their opinions, more authoritative and more knowledgeable about the lifestyle - in general, closer to the ideal of the ‘proper’ Boater. This rite of passage is articulated subtly and is not marked by any particular display of acceptance; rather the status attained upon its completion may be considered to be a kind of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1977) acquired through experience.

I noticed that such a system exists in the early days of my boating when interested Boaters upon first meeting me would ask me, early in the conversation, “when did you move aboard?” This may seem like an everyday and straightforward “getting to know you” question that seeks to fill in some details concerning the biographical history of the acquaintance. Unusually, however, I found that this question was often followed, after I replied, “the end of July,” with the words “oh, so you haven’t done a winter then?” This was not followed by any overt rejection of me as jejune Boater of little significance, but I found that the question itself and its recurring nature led me to feel that I was lacking something and was in a position of inferiority. The question “when did you move aboard?” was, of course, repeated when I met Boaters over the course of the following summer. This time, when I replied, “July last year,” they often replied with something like “oh, so you’ve done a winter then?” with a satisfied nod of the head. The questions, I noticed, then took a turn rather unlike my pre-winter conversations. Before the winter the Boater would often proceed to

give me advice or demonstrate their own knowledge; after the winter we would proceed to discuss in greater depth how the winter was, where we had travelled and whom we had met. This may have more to do with my increasing knowledge and confidence, but it is hard to ignore the feeling that my having wintered aboard was at least a small badge of honour which, due to the hardships of winter (see Chapter 5) eased the process of conversation and marked my passage into a different section of the community of practice.

Boaters who have done a winter or two, who have gained a degree of proficiency within the “taskscape” of the waterways, and who engage with the community in the correct ways (which I will outline in the next two chapters), have moved into a state of being a “proper,” experienced Boater, and are more likely to be asked for advice by newcomers. Those at the very centre of the community of practice, however, move to an even higher status level, particularly if they have been aboard their boats for longer than a decade. Due to the recent massive increase in the number of Boaters, old-timers, that is to say those who lived aboard in the 1990s or early 2000s, or even further back in the now near-mythical 1980s, are in short supply. The community, as existing in any great number, is so new that one does not have to have long decades of experience to be an old, wise and experienced Boater; the “elders” are often relatively young. When a Boater who was aboard in the quieter days on the waterways shares their stories, they are usually received with a degree of reverence that is not always present in the everyday discussions and disagreements within the boating community. For example, a nostalgic post written by experienced Boater Jerry Clinton appeared on the London Boaters Facebook page and was welcomed with comments such as “Wow! Would love to hear more of your tales of ‘yesteryear’,” and “such lovely words.”⁸⁷

Such Boaters can be called “proper” Boaters or “crusty” Boaters, or can even be referred to as Pirates or “Pyrates.” Steve explained to me that a Pirate, in the waterways context, is “an old crusty Boater, you know, a proper Boater.” The use of the term Pirate, with its associations of lawlessness and freedom,⁸⁸ is a quite deliberate sign of respect;⁸⁹ if freedom

⁸⁷ The post itself, an evocative portrait of the boating community in the 1980s, is included as Appendix II.

⁸⁸ For a discussion of the symbolism of Pirates in literature and popular discourse see (Konstam, 2008)

⁸⁹ The Pyrate Party of Pyrate Regatta, which I discuss in Chapter 7, is an annual party which contains elements of debauchery, excess, masquerade (dressing as Pirates) and a deliberate anti-structural (Turner, 2011 [1969]) breaking of normal etiquettes and rules.

is one of the things towards which Boaters aspire (see later chapters), the naming of more experienced Boaters as “Pirates” shows that they have earned and attained a kind of freedom which allows them to live properly and “well” upon the waterways. Being a Boater of this type, central to the community of practice, is not simply a matter of time spent aboard, or even of practical experience and skills, although both of these are extremely important. Boaters who are well-known “characters” with a large network of contacts (see Chapter 6), who possess large reserves of “symbolic capital” (Bourdieu, 1977:171-182) are particularly visible and vocal within the community. Those who come to the waterways with a skilled habitus that fits into the pattern can become central and respected after relatively small periods of time spent aboard. As one informant told me “some people simply move aboard and seem to *fit*; it just seems *right*, as if you couldn’t imagine them not aboard a boat.”

Conclusion

Thus it has been shown that the waterways, which may appear upon first glance or after shallow interaction, to be riven by class divisions, are in fact a site of more subtle and less strictly stratified differences in status based upon one’s relationship to and position within a community of practice. The community of practice is the site where Boaters, who perform a role which is to all intents and purposes an apprenticeship, gain the knowledge and bodily skills in order to make their homes upon, and fully dwell within, the waterways of the South East. One’s identity as a Boater is based upon what one does; it is forged in the constitutive act of performing tasks within the “taskscape” of the waterways. Isobel Ward, in her master’s degree thesis *The Fluidity of Home on London’s Waterways* (Ward, 2012), uses Ingold’s dwelling perspective and the work of phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty (2002) to show that Boaters in London hold a sense of being at home which is “alternative” to the hegemonic understanding of the home as inhabiting a fixed place. Boaters, she argues, make their home through “being-in-the-world,” a state that is achieved through having freedom of movement with which to explore the waterways. In this way, the moving self becomes “home” or “at home.” I would, as demonstrated above, extend this concept to state that it is not merely a sense of home that is created through dwelling; a sense of identity as a Boater and a group sense of communal and common practice also emerge from these formative processes.

This chapter has discussed the practical skills and the engagement with the physical object of the boat, both of which are required for the Boater to become enskilled. What has only been touched upon and remains so far underdeveloped are the other requirements that must be met in order for Boater to be accepted within and to move towards the centre of the community of practice. These requirements - which I hope to show also emerge from a process of engaging with one's environment through completing "tasks" within a "taskscape" - lie in the realms of how one adapts to the temporal rhythms of boating, in the way in which Boaters conceive of and respond to ideas of the "environment" and the "natural world," and in Boaters' relationship to livelihood, the economy and exchange. Just as there is a correct way to learn the practical skills of how to live aboard a boat and complete basic maintenance tasks, there is also a correct way to engage with others, with consumer goods, with the environment and with temporal rhythm. None of these are handed down as some sort of totalising and codified system of etiquette; rather, they emerge from direct experiential contact and within specific social relations. Boaters, due to their direct active engagement with their environment, their neighbours, and their floating homes, are not (or do not imagine themselves to be) as alienated or insulated from the world around them as a sedentary city dweller (who represents, for the Boater, a deliberate stereotype in an air-conditioned flat, behind noise-cancelling glass, interacting with the world through the prism of the mass media) may be.

The following two chapters are essentially expansions upon the basic themes outlined here. They describe how Boaters conceive of the world in which they dwell, how Boaters act and interact financially, and how Boaters respond to the capitalist system which lionises the conspicuous consumption of desirable goods. Taken as a totality, these three chapters together describe how one becomes a "proper" Boater in the environmental context of the southeastern waterways.

Chapter 5: Dwelling, Temporality and the Environment

As seen in the previous chapter, Boaters, or at least those who come down on the “dirty” side of the “shiny/dirty Boater” distinction, become part of a community of practice on the waterways by learning to dwell aboard boats: by collecting the requisite skills and by learning vital knowledge in a richly textured daily interaction with other Boaters and other aspects of their environments. This chapter expands this idea further to examine how Boaters come to see themselves, through their acts of dwelling within the world of the waterways, as closer to “nature,” or as being bastions of “environmentalism.” The essential question asked here is therefore: how do Boaters (at least those experienced Boaters who are deeply embedded within the “taskscape” of the waterways) perceive their relationship to the world around them?

The argument proceeds as follows: Boaters often speak about their choice of housing as allowing them to enjoy a closer relationship with and proximity to “nature” – this despite the fact that they have chosen to live aboard man-made vessels floating upon waterways made or modified by man. This begs the question of what leads Boaters to make such claims of proximity to a “natural” order? This chapter proposes that, through the constitutive acts which take place in the course of dwelling upon the waterways, Boaters learn to experience and interact with their surroundings, neighbours, animals, and other aspects of their environment in a manner which is more immediate and less alienated than would be familiar to sedentary house dwellers. Using Michel Serres’ formulation (2008:278), boats’ “fragile shell(s)” do little to distance the boat-dwellers from the dynamic watercourses which surround them, from the fickle British weather, from the passage of the seasons, from their own by-products and waste, or from the public space of the towpath.

Notably, boats are described as places where a specific type of elastic or fluid temporality can be experienced. My informants speak of this “boat time” as being contingent upon the emergent complexities of life aboard and therefore as being closer to “natural” ideal rhythms. Using anthropological work on temporality including Munn (1992), Ingold (2000), and Gell’s concept of time-maps (1992) as modified and expanded by Bear (2014), I argue that Boaters construct “time-maps” which privilege slowness of pace and a tempo of activity which emerges from what they see as being “natural” rhythms and flows. By this, I mean tempi of activity that, in opposition to many of the precise and clock-focussed fea-

tures of “modern time,” rather emerges from the interaction between humans, the weather, the seasons, animals, and the chaos of fate and chance.

In this way, part of the practice of becoming a Boater involves relaxing one’s sense of the unbending rigidity and structure of forms of time-management prevalent in the wider capitalist world of work, which can be seen in the actions of CaRT. Bear (2014) writes about the need to combine Gell’s understanding of personal time-maps with an understanding emerging from Marxist analysis, concerning how collective representations of time are spread and controlled by institutions. As such, the sense of “boat time” that is created in the context of Boaters’ time-maps is compared to other collective representations against which they can be seen as oppositional or resistant. In their temporal experience, as with all of their interactions with the world around them, Boaters think of themselves as being in a state of immediacy and proximity, which contrasts with what Boaters view as sedentary people’s alienation from the real “natural” world surrounding them.

As Ingold (2000) describes, the nature/culture dyadic dichotomy prevalent in the “West” loses its import when one takes as their focus the individual dwelling within a rich and stimulating environment. I contend that Boaters emically begin to utilise such a “dwelling perspective” when they describe themselves as living closer to “nature.” I hope to avoid here the controversy found in ethnographies of New Age Travellers, wherein some authors describe an over-voluntaristic account of the motivations that lead towards a travelling life. For example, the sociologist Greg Martin states that, in his experience working with the New Age Travellers, they are like Bauman’s vagabonds, “on the move because they have been pushed from behind – spiritually uprooted from the place that holds no promise” (Bauman, 1998:92). He argues this against Hetherington, who in his ethnography of a New Age Traveller group, outlines a situation where the travellers adopt their lifestyle voluntarily and have an unrealistic level of personal choice, making them, Martin suggests, resemble “the vagabond’s *alter ego*, the tourist, whose experience is one of postmodern freedom” (Martin, 2002:733). Hetherington is not the only author to make such a voluntaristic argument. Phillips, a New Age Traveller herself, notes in an online article that “the Travellers did not want to live under conventional arrangements and were well aware that they would not be able to live in a way that would be acceptable to them if they did conform to convention. Living in caravans and vehicles was the only way they could avoid the confines of urban life and was considered to be more economical and more

ecological” (2015). I suspect, from my conversations with Sim (see Chapter 4) and other Boaters who were previously New Age Travellers that, just like the Boaters, they took to the travelling life for a number of not necessarily mutually exclusive reasons.

Some Boaters are clearly pushed into boat-dwelling by structural problems, by poverty, unemployment and homelessness; some are clearly more voluntaristic and idealistic in their dwelling choice. However, the critical point for my analysis is that, whatever leads Boaters to the waterways - whether or not the idea of being ecologically sound or of creating a utopian way of being in the world is part of the logic of this move - dwelling on the waterways has a particular set of effects. Dwelling on the waterways, as I shall demonstrate in the ethnography below, comes to change the ways in which individuals think of and describe their relationship to the “environment,” to “nature” and even to the flow of time.

Tales of Boaters in “Nature”

I begin with two vignettes from my fieldwork with which I aim to introduce the complex relationship between Boaters and the concept of “nature.” The first of these events occurred quite early on in my fieldwork. I was moored in Reading and had been spending quite a bit of time with the younger traveling Boaters of the area. One day, as was a relatively common occurrence, I was taking two plastic shopping bags full of litter across the field near our current mooring in order to dispose of my refuse in public council bins. I was joined by Tom, a boating friend. Tom was occasionally inclined to launch into rants concerning the things that annoyed him about the boating community or the river authorities, usually with eloquence, humour, and vitriol. Out of nowhere, Tom launched into one of these rants. “This is what pisses me off,” he began, “all of these Boaters saying that they’re part of nature, that they’re living aboard to be ecological and to reduce their carbon footprints and all that bullshit, and then, look, they’re dumping their plastic food wrappers in council bins! And they’re burning diesel and calor gas. I mean, how do they think they can ignore that?” This rant continued in a similar vein for a while. In our position, across the field and away from the other moorers, Tom clearly thought that he could speak freely and unleash his controversial and unorthodox opinion.

The second event occurred several months later when I had moved onto the canals of London and was far more settled in the field. I was traveling through the beautiful stretch of the Regents canal that meanders through London Zoo and is, due to this, a popular spot for walkers, joggers, and tourists. I was “butted up” alongside my friend Asha’s boat (meaning that our boats were tied together side-by-side so that we could have company whilst driving). Asha’s boat was pulling us through the park; her engine is raw-water cooled, meaning that it takes in water from the canal, circulates it around the engine to cool it, and jettisons it from an exhaust. When the engine is hot, the water comes out as clouds of steam. A man in a khaftan began walking quickly alongside our boats with his hands clasped in a prayer position. He was bobbing his head and talking, clearly trying to attract our attention. We slowed down and neutralised the noisy engine, expecting the man to launch a cheery greeting, a “what a lovely day for it” or a “you’ve got a lovely life,” as we were used to receiving from most passersby. Instead, and unexpectedly, we found the man to be saying, “Peace, peace, please stop polluting my environment. Peace, peace.” Asha was clearly shocked and revved the engine in order to escape the complainant.

Later on when we came to talk about the event, Asha was noticeably upset. “How could he say that? How could he think that?” she was asking. “I bet he goes back to his air conditioned apartment and doesn’t think about where his gas or electricity comes from or how much he’s destroying the environment when he plugs in a socket or turns on a tap. We are so much more kind to nature than people like that, but they don’t seem to understand.” I understood Asha’s opinion. But what was interesting was not only her shock and how personally she took the verbal attack, but also how she failed to comment on the fact that, in reality, there were diesel exhaust fumes coming from her boat along with the smoke from the cooling. Most boats do burn diesel for fuel to travel, and often when stationary in order to charge their domestic batteries.

From these two stories it can be clearly seen that many Boaters react badly to the disconcerting suggestion that they are polluting or damaging to nature. Seen here through the reaction when the orthodox approach is questioned, it becomes clear that a number of Boaters consider themselves to be, to a greater or lesser degree, in harmony with nature and to be living lives that are ecologically sound. It is important to recognise that many

Boaters do take steps to ensure that they have a “low carbon footprint,”⁹⁰ using solar and wind power, although this choice is partially supported by the fact that these measures are the cheapest and easiest ways of producing domestic power for narrowboats.⁹¹ Boaters who pollute their environments by allowing oil spillages to exit their bilges, or who overfill canalside bins or who do not use “eco” (non-harmful) washing up liquid, are criticised and shamed on online mailing lists, forums and boating group pages. In this way, Boaters lay down some of the essential expectations for Boaters to become part of the “community.”

Why “Nature”?

In short, Boaters invest a great deal of time and energy attempting to prove that they are ecologically responsible agents, and they tend to react badly to suggestions to the contrary - that they are polluting or that they damage the waterways that form their environment. Adjectives such as “green,” “ecological,” and “kinder to the environment” abound in Boaters’ narratives of their trajectories towards a life aboard. A typical statement came from Vale, introduced in the previous chapter, who explained why she had wanted to live on a boat with the words, “I’d grown up on a farm anyway and I wanted to go back to that, to living a different life, to be with the nature.” Boats that have achieved carbon neutrality, through the use of solar and wind harvesting technology are held up as examples towards which all Boaters should strive. Jedrek, who had installed solar panels aboard his boat, revealed proudly that he had calculated his boat’s carbon footprint and found it to be “a fraction” of that of his house-dwelling neighbours. It would be a mistake, however, to give in to a naive dualism and place the Boaters on the side of nature along a false nature/culture divide. Boaters do generally go to great lengths to ensure that they are as “green” as possible, but the rhetoric goes even beyond the reality, as seen in both of the anecdotes with which I began this chapter.

⁹⁰ The discussion of the “carbon footprint” of individuals, of course, comes in a contemporary milieu where climate change is a growing concern and where individuals and companies are attempting to (or attempting to appear to) limit their environmental impacts, particularly in terms of burning fossil fuels and releasing carbon by-products (see Crate and Nuttal, 2009; Crate, 2011). The Boaters’ desire to appear ecologically friendly must be viewed through this discursive frame, including wider society’s focus on calculating pollution and relative degrees of ecological responsibility in terms of carbon units released.

⁹¹ It is important to note that there is no scientific data on the relative ecological impact of boat living as compared to house living. One Boater calculated his carbon footprint and found it to be “very low” when compared to the flat in which he was previously dwelling, but his calculations have not been scaled up to wider boating populations.

It also deserves to be mentioned that Boaters do not live in some sort of wild rural idyll; my participants mainly live in Central and East London, in the midst of the city. Rather than living in structures built from natural materials, they live on (noticeably man-made) steel or fibreglass boats. Even the waterways on which they live are frequently not “natural” objects (in the sense of being formed by forces other than humans); rather they are canals or canalised rivers. As intimated earlier in the thesis, the canal is referred to as the “cut” due to the fact that it is, quite unnaturally, cut from the earth. Why, then, considering the variety of environments through which the canals and rivers pass (from the urban to the most overgrown and rural), and the again greatly variable environmental impact or carbon footprint of live-aboard boats, do so many Boaters feel themselves to be in some form of harmony with a natural order?

In order to answer this central question, it is first necessary to ask exactly what is meant in my field site by the terms “nature” and the “environment.” It is important to first note that most of the Boaters whom I have met are the product of upbringings in the West (although I realise, as did Ingold (2000:6) that this is a problematic term) and that, as such, there exists for the Boaters and for their sedentary neighbours the hard-to-ignore, ingrained enlightenment conception which sees the “cultural” spaces of humanity as removed from and opposed to the “natural” spaces of the wild, of animals, and of untouched flora. Such a Cartesian dualistic model makes “nature” and “the environment” synonymous and, in some way, “out there,” beyond the reach of humankind. As Ingold summarises, “we tend to think that the only environments that still exist in a genuinely natural condition are those that remain beyond the bounds of human civilisation, as in the dictionary definition of a *wilderness*: ‘A tract of land or a region... uncultivated or uninhabited by human beings’” (2000:67). Ingold correctly identifies this tendency to be a product of a specific philosophical trend which has found its way into the general “Western” imagination, and makes clear the fact that other global populations do not necessarily share such conceptions (*ibid.*:42).

Thus, it is apparent that Boaters, in their conflation of “nature” and “the environment,” are not entirely removed from or immune to these dualistic models. Ingold - when insisting that hunter-gatherers dwell within environment, and not out “in nature” as the myth of the ecologically noble savage (see Hames, 2007) would have it - is particularly clear on this point, stating that the concept of “[the Environment] should on no account be confused with the

concept of nature. For the world can exist as nature only for a being that does not belong there” (Ingold, 2000:20). It is clear that Boaters do use language emanating from the dominant Western discourse, and yet they do so in order to place themselves on the “nature” side of the divide, outside of “culture” and in a conceptual space that we, as Westerners, do not usually assume is a place in which it is possible to live. It is a place to be visited and enjoyed; a place where some “indigenous” people may enjoy an unsullied, Eden-like existence; but it is not a place, it is typically imagined, for Westerners to live in. It is, therefore, interesting to examine the ways in which Boaters feel themselves to be partially disconnected from hegemonic sedentary “society,” which rests, for them, on the “culture” side of the dyad, and why they feel themselves to be closer to the “natural” side. It is this question to which I now turn.

To reiterate: Boaters, in using the terms “nature” or “the environment,” are not imagining themselves to live in an untouched Eden, where they make no negative impact upon their surroundings. Indeed, Boaters know that they burn diesel and petrol, that the wood smoke from their fires releases carbon into the atmosphere, and that the rubbish which they put into the large “Boaters’ bins” ends up in landfill. When Boaters state that they are living lives that are more “natural,” “green,” or “ecological” (near-synonyms in the discourse), they are, I contend, describing three different but linked experiences.

Firstly, there is the fact that they produce fewer carbon emissions and waste products, but, more importantly, this can be seen and demonstrated by the fact that such waste products are immediate and evident and must be dealt with practically by the Boater him- or herself. As Asha stated with regard to the complaining man in the zoo, he does not engage in reflexive thought when he switches a plug or opens a tap. Asha, as a Boater, has generated every amp of her electricity and extracted every pint of water from a slow, communal hose; equally, her engine smoke is inescapable and immediate, and her toilet waste will be around until she, personally, empties it. Secondly, Boaters are describing the fact that their waterways environments are generally more richly textured with that which is *not* man-made, when compared to most sedentary house-dwellers (particularly those in urban settings). Boaters, for example, live in close proximity to animals, to trees, to the weather that

can easily permeate their hulls,⁹² and to the changing seasons, and must negotiate and deal with these parts of their environments on a daily basis. Thirdly, Boaters feel that their lives are governed by natural rhythms, flows, and patterns which form a particular boat-bound form of temporality, often referred to as “boat time.”

The link between these three constituent parts of Boaters’ experience of a life closer to “nature” is that these three experiences put Boaters in direct contact with the parts of their environments from which sedentary people are characterised as being unnaturally alienated.⁹³ Most sedentary people, for example, at least from the perspective of the Boaters, have no idea of their energy usage, where their electricity comes from, or to where the contents of their toilets are removed. Equally, sedentary people are thought to be ignorant of how to dwell in the natural world replete with trees and animals. An example from my field notes will illustrate this point well:

“Steve had recently had a trainee start as an unofficial apprentice and the “lad” had accompanied him on his last couple of runs. The man had come “from the houses, never been aboard” and Steve had been shocked at how badly he understood the natural world around him. Apparently the trainee had shouted “what’s that!” as he saw mist curling up around the boat early one morning. “It’s mist, it’s, you know, what makes up a cloud”, Steve had replied incredulously. The naive apprentice had then replied, “I ain’t never seen that before, I thought it was a ghost!” “A ghost! Ha!” Steve shouted, to make his point. Steve continued with his story, “later on we were at Cheshunt, by that big pear tree and I picked a pear and, you know, *crunch* [I ate the pear], and he said, “you’re taking a chance aren’t you?” I said “what?” “You’re taking a chance having one from the wild and not from a shop!” I mean, good grief! But that’s the attitude these days, of these folk.”
Field notes (13th April 2013).

Many Boaters feel that they, in contrast to many sedentary residents within the city, dwell within an environment that is richly varied and many facets of which are not man-made or within the usual gamut of what in the West is seen as “urban” or “cultural.” Ingold (2000) suggests that it is dwelling in an environment which constitutes us as persons. As such, Boaters’ intimate dwelling with that which Western dualists would consider parts of the

⁹² A boat seller in the East End tried to convince a friend of mine to buy a cheap hull that he was selling with the words “it’s only a grand [thousand pounds] and she’s a nice cabin on top, no weather’ll get in her.” My friend and I laughed at this on the way home as the only thing common to all boats is that the weather will *always* get in.

⁹³ While I believe that the terms “alienated” and “alienation” are useful analytical shorthands for what is being referred to when sedentary people are criticised in this way, Boaters do not use such terms when referring to sedentary people; rather they would be more likely to say that such people were “removed” or “out of touch” or didn’t “know anything” or were lacking in “common sense”.

“natural” world constructs them as people who are closer to, and in greater harmony with, this world of trees, animals, winds, and water. Boaters empirically begin to utilise what Ingold called the “dwelling perspective” (*ibid.*) when they speak about their own proximity to the natural world and others’ alienation from it; this is as they are recognising that their lives are produced by engagement with an active environment that changes and acts and is not simply a backdrop upon which one can impose “culture” or “order.” This can be seen when many Boaters, for example, refuse to remove their spiders from their boats as these spiders “live there too” and fulfil a service by spinning webs over drafty windows. It can also be seen when Boaters throw their leftover food to passing ducks rather than throwing it away for landfill.

The later sections of this chapter will provide further examples of Boater’s engagement with an environment, including its “natural’ features, and sedentary people’s corresponding alienation from these environments. Before continuing on to these examples of Boaters’ and sedentary people’s contrasting levels of engagement, however, it is important to briefly detour into a discussion of how the actual act of navigating a narrowboat brings one into direct contact with a dynamic world, a world in which give and take and interaction with other forces in their environment is vital.

As I implied in the previous chapter and expand upon here, the act of navigating a boat through water, especially on a river which has flows and cross-currents, involves feeling the flow of the water around the rudder through small vibrations and pressures in the tiller, and adjusting the tiller in tiny movements accordingly in order to maintain direction or make a turn. At the same time, the Boater’s attention is directed towards sensing tiny changes of vibration coming through the deck boards that may suggest that the engine is straining or has a mechanical problem, minute changes in the tone and pitch of the engine noise, changes in the colour and consistency of the exhaust fumes and waste water from the cooling, and changes in the wave of the water breaking against the bow. Each of these may suggest mechanical problems, underwater obstacles, or potential hazards such as the presence of thick weeds wrapped around the propeller or caught in the cooling system. Even if everything is running smoothly, these signs will be the only way that the Boater knows how fast they are traveling and at what level of its potential the engine is running. Over time, as intimated in the previous chapter, Boaters become part of their boats as they

begin to read these signals without thinking and to respond to them on a subconscious level.

In this way, the Boaters' environment is constantly feeding back into the Boater and the act of navigation becomes a dialectic between the flow of the water, the propeller and the engine, and the Boater's body. The navigating Boater is a part of their boat and their boat's environment. Whereas the sedentary person in a car, suspended above the road, remains at the wheel and uses instruments, dials, and tools (which all serve to distance the user from the outside world), the Boater has only a few dials, if any at all, and is out in the open, using a barge pole to free their vessels from the bottom when they get stuck on a shallow section, and jumping to the bankside with ropes in order to stop the boat before a lock, swing bridge, or mooring site. In many ways, the Boater's body becomes a trained part of the machine which they operate. Foucault's theory of "man-as-machine" or "man-the-machine" (1977:176) describes exactly this process of bodies becoming disciplined into harmony with the tasks which they are required to complete. As Ingold similarly notes, the use of tools for the experienced performer is a process of deeply embodied engagement with a tool or machine which one has come to understand over time (Ingold, 2000:413). He describes how tools, when one is proficient in their usage, are not so much "used" as "played", in the way that an experienced musician may play their instruments, not thinking about the rules and patterns and mechanics, but rather fully engaging their total selves in the performance. This is only one limited example of the ways in which Boaters experience their environments immediately, intimately, and in such a fashion as to shape their movements through landscapes. Boat navigation is more negotiation than dominance or mastery of the "natural" world by man-made machine. The Boater senses their way through their environment in a complex fashion, attending to the interplay of numerous man-made and "natural forces."

All of this is not to say, however, that sedentary people do not, to use Ingold's terminology, "dwell" in their "environments"; dwelling is not just for hunter-gatherers and for other non-Western peoples. Indeed, this point is explicitly made by Ingold when he states that "for hunter-gatherers as for the rest of us, life is given in engagement, not in disengagement, and in that very engagement the real world at once ceases to be 'nature' and is revealed to us as an environment for people" (Ingold, 2000, p.44). Sedentary people - even if one were to stereotype them as living in centrally heated homes, driving to work insulated from

the weather, not engaging with any non-domestic animal, buying their food from supermarkets, and living by the clock — still live in environments. The difference is that their environments are more controlled or even artificial, and the vagaries of the wild, the weather — that which we are prone to consider to be “nature” — are less likely to make an impact upon them. The environments in which they dwell are removed from certain realities of the world which is beyond their doors.

As an example, after two years aboard a boat, I find it extremely uncomfortable to be in an air conditioned room; the dry feeling of processed or “unnatural” air makes me feel ill, and I have heard boating friends make similar claims. Of course, the creation of this archetype of sedentary life is the creation of a “straw man” and it is unlikely that any house dweller is as alienated from the external world, or as ignorant of the provenance and consequences of their food production and utilities, as the extremely stereotypical sedentary resident whom I have described in order to provide contrast to the Boater. This is not, I believe, an unsurmountable issue, as I am describing Boater’s perspectives and understanding which are, of course, presented from the inside of the boating community outwards, against a less than nuanced stereotyped “other.”

In summary, the gap between the dominant sedentary experience and that of the Boater is, as I have described, based upon a difference between the immediacy of the environment for the Boater and a presumed detachment in the case of the sedentary resident. Below, I describe two examples of this difference in engagement with the wider dwelt-in environment — namely, that of the difference in ideas of pollution and the differing temporal experience of Boaters as compared to their sedentary neighbours. In addition to the two case studies described here, it is important to note that the Boaters tend to experience the weather and the changes in the seasons in ways which those living in air-conditioned or centrally heated homes in the city do not. The Boaters become acutely aware of the limitations imposed by the short days and low temperatures of the winter. These might include lock closures, channel freezes which restrict movement, a lack of solar power, an increased difficulty in starting the engine, etc. Due to the proximity of the Boaters to these “natural” imponderables, they must be sensitive to them and to the needs of the boat in winter or in bad weather and must take care to ready their boats for such occurrences. Ethnography concerning the importance of the seasons and the unpredictable weather for

the Boaters is not included in a separate section here, but is, rather, to be found throughout the thesis, threaded through several chapters.

Pollution

The question of “pollution” is of clear rhetorical importance in the relationship between Boaters and their opponents or challengers (sedentary residents and agents of the state). On one side, and as explained previously, Boaters make claims to be ecological agents, working hard to protect the waterways, quite in opposition to sedentary life which is seen as polluting and alienating. By alienating I mean that Boaters are forced to confront everything which they throw away and to understand exactly where their electricity, fuel and water come from, whereas those living in houses do not have to confront these realities; as an informant stated, “they need only flick a switch or turn a tap.” Boaters, to summarise, think of themselves as living in greater and more immediate contact with the “environment.” Boaters often make the point that they care for the waterways to a far greater degree than CaRT, the authority tasked with their upkeep. This is as Boaters frequently speak of their daily upkeep of the waterways, including their dredging work, water management at locks and protection of local wildlife.

When the accusation that Boaters are, themselves, polluting the waterways is levelled at the community, this is, therefore, deeply troubling. For example, in Noel Road (Islington) a number of local residents have a longstanding campaign, dating back at least to my first arrival in the neighbourhood in early 2013, against the Boaters who moor at the stretch of Regent’s canal which emerges from the Islington tunnel and passes the end of their gardens. They have launched a systematic programme, both through verbal confrontation and official channels, including the local council and the London Assembly, against certain of the Boaters’ practices, which they frame in the language of pollution. For example, alongside the complaints concerning overstaying on the moorings (for they are aware of the “14 day” rule), the residents complain about smoke and noise pollution, arguing that the noise of engines and generators are audible from their houses and that smoke from stoves becomes trapped in the natural gorge in which the canal lies and makes its way into their homes. The residents organised and utilised the mechanisms and discourse of official council complaints and reports to the environmental health executive. This led, in the summer of 2013 to an official London Assembly investigation and a report published in

November 2013 (London Assembly. Environment Committee, 2013), a flurry of meetings and consultations, and a local councillor pledging his support for their cause.

The accusation of causing “pollution” or being “polluting” is, as seen here, a powerful tool of critique which can be used by either side of the battle. Mary Douglas (2002) noted that we find polluting that which does not fit in to our categorical frameworks; that which we find out of place. This helps us to understand the complaints against Boaters, which are not always complaints about literal pollutants such as smoke or engine fumes, but also tend to speak of “noise pollution” and “unsightly” boats. Certainly for those who live in the unclean and traffic fume-affected centre of London, it would be unlikely that the argument that boats are a major damage to air quality would be particularly effective - although the London Assembly report into the complaints admits that “along most stretches of waterway, air and noise pollution from boats is not an issue. However, in some locations where it is a problem, for permanent residents it is a legitimate and serious concern” (London Assembly. Environment Committee, 2013). Pollution carries with it these associations of being dirty, infectious and unsettling, making the accusation of being a source of pollution a powerful one to level against another group. It is of note that one Islington resident whom I met professed to not minding the boats *per se*, but rather revealed that they do not like “those kind of boats, the dirty boats.” The residents’ problem with the Boaters thus does not seem to concern pollution of the waterways, as such, but rather the dirtiness, unsightliness and noise with which residents claim they have to contend.

Boaters with whom I have spoken are offended by these accusations of pollution, but generally see them as further examples of sedentary residents’ alienation. For example, Boaters cite the stupidity of residents who do not realise that a small amount of kindling, wood and paper materials are needed to get a fire going and that residents’ request that Boaters “just burn smokeless coal” is not realistic. One Boater told me in desperation that “they don’t know anything about our lives” and recounted how, when it was explained that Boaters needed to run engines and generators for their domestic electricity needs, a resident asked if they could not be provided with free canalside power points. These statements are taken as being examples of resident’s privilege and alienation from their environment and, again, it is often remarked how residents do not know where their own heating and electricity comes from. The argument is that they are far more polluting than the Boaters, but are unnaturally removed from their environment.

In short, the Boater and the sedentary resident seem to have differing understandings concerning the terms “pollution” or “polluting” and its application to the other group. Sedentary residents see the smoke from Boaters fires and the exhaust from their generators and engines or the untidy roofs of nearby boats and see a “polluting” influence in their immediate environment; Boaters, by contrast, recognise that they are faced with the immediate effect of their life’s waste products and thus know how to minimise them and their impact. For Boaters, the sedentary residents are those who are truly polluting, as they are burning fossil fuels to produce the high levels of heat and electricity needed in most domestic houses; they are just simply some distance removed from such processes.

Boat time: Temporality and Rhythm

In line with this idea of removal or alienation, I now turn to the issue of “boat time”, as it is referred to; both how it is experienced and how it came to be the dominant temporal experience in my field site in contrast to the ways of structuring time which are dominant in the bustling city of London that surrounds and engulfs the canals. There is a long history in anthropology, from Durkheim (1998 [1915]) onwards, which attempts to describe particular uses of time and tempo as being important in the construction of identities and social relationships. Influential are, of course, Bourdieu’s concept of ‘tempo’ as a fundamental shaping dimension of practice (Bourdieu, 1977) and Fabian’s contention in *Time and the Other* that “time is a constituting dimension of social reality” (1983:24). Munn concludes her review of anthropology’s literature concerning temporality by outlining a notion of “temporalization” that views time as a symbolic process continually being produced in everyday practices” (Munn, 1992:116). It would be easy, based on these accounts, to view temporal understandings as entirely socially constructed. Indeed this is why Alfred Gell is concerned to show in his *The Anthropology of Time* that “there is no fairyland where people experience time in a way that is markedly unlike the way in which we do ourselves” (Gell, 1992:314). Time does not stall, or reverse, or skip, no matter the social context. Separate individuals do, however, construct mental maps and representations of time’s passage which are markedly different from those of others, and which would differ from an objective “B-series” presentation of temporality. Gell gives anthropologists their best useable model for the analysis of temporalities when he suggests that an anthropology of time should “pursue a dual strategy of ‘allocationalist’ investigations of the inherent choreographical

possibilities of social actions in their space-time frame... [and] investigations leading towards the reconstruction, in model form, of the schemes of temporal interpretations, or internalised time-maps, of the ethnographic subjects" (*ibid.*:325). Here Gell is encouraging anthropologists to observe both how their informants actually plan, allocate and enact their activities and how informants think about time's flow and draw interpretative mental representations of the past, the present and possible futures.

Thus, in the final section of this chapter, I attempt to describe boat time through showing how Boaters' time-maps are affected by the materiality of their environment, how this affects their temporal possibilities, and thus how the specific experience of boat dwelling leads to the creation of particular personal time-maps. As we shall see, Boaters' maps are, in turn, in conflict with other (wider and institutional) temporal understandings. Bear (2014) expands on Gell's insights and goes beyond the clichéd distinction between "natural" temporalities versus clock-dominated capitalist time to describe how various competing time-maps, some supported by institutional power and authority, come into conflict. As Bear notes, "we no longer have to ask questions only about temporality or relative senses of time or about abstract versus experienced time. Instead we can map a complex field of representations, technologies, and social disciplines of time. Once we have done this we can then relate both institutional mediations and phenomenological experiences of time to this field" (*ibid.*:13). Different frames of time and their interactions and patterns should be mapped with as much care and diligence as possible, and it is such a multi-layered analysis which is attempted below. First, the features of boat time, how it is understood and how it becomes central to the ways in which individuals construct their individual time-maps, shall be explored.

What is boat time?

"You have to understand this, time is like a soup here. Things are more elastic, things happen when they happen, you know?". This Steve informed me whilst making a cup of tea in the cabin of his working boat. I was nearing the end of my fieldwork year and I had gone to meet the somewhat legendary owner of the River Lee's only working pair of coal and diesel-carrying service boats. We were talking about my imminent boat survey just over the river at Stanstead Abbots Marina. Steve was explaining that boats had been waiting to come out of the water at the marina for months, kept in a seemingly endless

queue by crane breakdowns, heavy winds and a lack of hard standing⁹⁴ for narrowboats as the yard's existing jobs took longer than anyone expected to complete. This philosophical and somewhat fatalistic approach to time planning is a common trait among Boaters and is one which causes newcomers and outsiders much frustration if they are attempting to achieve the completion of even the most minor project or a cruise of the shortest distance. I argue in this section that the essential uncertainties of life afloat, coupled with the "slow" pace of life even when all is operating as intended, lead to the creation of personal time-maps where time, as is experienced, contains long slow continuities followed by sudden ruptures. Such time-maps make forward orientation and the implementation of plans a complicated matter; plans are made but are changed, stretched across time or entirely abandoned, exactly as Steve's notion of a fluid soup-like or elastic time suggests. This creates boat time, a term which is widely used and which, for many, is a desirable experience. Many speak of boating as useful for "slowing down time", something which many see as desirable in a "modern" world of instantaneous connection, rush and fluster. Here, we can see how boating creates a rhetorical nostalgia for an (obviously fictive) rural idyll, located somewhere in England's pre-industrial past.

In order to make this argument, it is first necessary to present some examples of the fluidity of boat time. Examples are so common and pervasive that it is hard to settle upon one or two case studies. For example, when one of the coal boat text messages their customers' phones to advertise that they will be coming through at a particular time, it is likely that they will actually arrive a day or two (or maybe a week or so) later than this. I remember waiting aboard for Steve and Liz⁹⁵ one Wednesday at Stonebridge (they said that they would be through around lunchtime) and then finally seeing them cruise through as the sun was setting on Friday. I had left them money for their services in an envelope on my front deck rather than taking another day out to wait for a boat which I had given up all hope of seeing. In another memorable example, at an early stage of my fieldwork my intended travel down the Thames to the canals of London was postponed by almost two months by delays in the fitting of a stove for my narrowboat. No boat mechanic has ever

⁹⁴ "Hard standing" refers to the stands on which boats are placed when they are out of water.

⁹⁵ Steve is the aforementioned working Boater who I have quoted in previous chapters. Liz was, for much of my time in the field, Steve's business partner. For a time she was the sole operator of the working pair. Steve appears in the thesis more frequently than Liz as I spent more time with him, interviewing him and, on one occasion, helping him with a coal delivery "run".

been on time for a consultation aboard my boat, and no gathering or party has ever started at any where approximate to the given start time.

What is interesting here is that these are not thought of as delays at all. In Boaters' emic understandings of time's flow, these occurrences are unremarkable and everyday. "Things happen when they happen", Steve told me, referring to when things fortuitously come together to allow events the space to occur uninterrupted; when the weather, the fickle health of the boat, the hard-to predict part-time job market, the presence of the correct supplies and the correct persons allow sufficient space for an interaction to occur. Life on the waterways has been referred to as "life at four miles an hour", which denotes both the speed limit on the canals and the general pace of activity. Boaters frequently talk about having a different "pace of life" on the canal. For example, Tony Sulman, an experienced Boater, told me that "when you get home of an evening, you can step onto the canals and into a different world, a different time zone". Steve Hayward (2009) subtitled his book concerning boat living "slowing down time on the waterways of England."

Gell (1992:54-68) notes that it would be absurd to think of a group as having time be slower or faster in their emic reality - an hour is an hour wherever it is spent. What is different from individual to individual, however, is the understanding of the rhythms and patterns of events in time and how these relate to time-measures. Boaters' time-maps, it has been shown, extend flexibly into the future in order to privilege the "correct" amount of time taken to complete particular tasks (at their "natural" rhythm) over the setting and maintenance of firm deadlines. Thus, things take *as long as they take* due to the essential uncertainties of life on the waterways.

Boating, in other words, has its own rhythm, its own social time which is dominated by what Ingold (2000) describes as the temporality of the "taskscape", where the time taken for a task to be completed is given space to unfold. The way in which time passes upon the waterways is not as rigidly timetabled or regulated as the type which has been associated with wider capitalist discourse and its obsessions with deadlines and inflexible boundaries. Rather, more important for the Boaters is the concept of *Kairos*, the sensing of the correct moment when a thing is to be done; not just finding the time to do something, but finding the *right* time. Uncertainties in the future, and waiting for the correct conditions, may both be examples of what makes the Boater's "soupy" time idiosyncratic. In addition

to this, however, there is an extent to which boat time relies on actual rhythms which are different from those from the time-maps of other sedentary Londoners.

This idiosyncratic temporal experience is not simply marked by its slowness, its cyclical nature, and its uncertainty. Another important part of the experience is its “stop-start” nature: long periods of relative continuity, followed by sharp discontinuities. What I have written so far should not be misconstrued as my stating that boat time is simply a description of things in “flux”. Hodges (2008) writes of how “flux” as a metaphor to describe time in anthropological papers is loose, insufficient and under-theorised. Indeed, I would agree; for my informants time is indeed fluid and in flux, it does ebb and flow, but there is something more complicated in operation. Time on boats is inevitably experienced as a series of continuities, when things are relatively stable and, somewhat predictably, followed by unpredictable discontinuities which can drastically block and divert plans in the future. This pattern can be seen in the movement of Boaters (staying in one spot for weeks before embarking on sometimes risky cruises into the unknown), in the economic pattern of boat life (which consists of a quite predictable and comparatively cheap existence which can be spoilt by infrequent but extremely expensive mechanical breakdowns),⁹⁶ and in the geography of the waterways themselves (long stretches broken by locks, which break up the waterways into discrete sections). In this way, for my informants, temporal understanding cannot be separated from uncertainties and future risks; forward planning is, more so than in normal sedentary life, more akin to divination than science. It is this specific temporal experience and way of forming time-maps - a preference for slowness, and an understanding of the future’s opacity and unpredictability - that Steve was referring to when he stated that “time [was] like a soup”.

If one takes seriously and properly examines Steve’s central metaphor of “time” as “soup” the distinction between the Boaters’ temporal experience and that of house-dwellers and institutions such as CaRT can be seen to clearly emerge. One would assume, especially considering how pervasive it is (Hodges, 2008:18)⁹⁷ that the metaphor would hold that time was like a body of water or a river - especially in view of the fact that water is where Boaters dwell. However, for Steve, soup was the more appropriate image. Steve continued

⁹⁶ See Chapter 6.

⁹⁷ This metaphor dates back to Heroclitus’ assertion that “no man steps in the same river twice”, and then reoccurs throughout ancient and modern thought (see Hodges, 2008:18)

to say that “things are more elastic, things happen when they happen, you know?” which is, as I understand it, the main difference between time as soup and time as water. Water flows relatively uniformly whereas soup is slow, viscous, thick and chunky; sometimes it flows and sometimes it clogs. Pouring soup is very different from pouring a glass of water. Soup is also, of course, opaque, and one does not always know what lies below the surface. There is an obvious similarity here to the situation on the waterways, where boating does not simply involve slowing down time; it involves allowing irregular and unforeseeable events to unfold over time. Many Boaters speak explicitly about how boat time represents a more harmonious or natural condition, or talk about how “boat time” allows them to experience life in harmony with the seasons, the weather, natural daylight, etc. This is not simply rhetoric; many Boaters whom I know wake up with the dawn, travel in seasonal patterns and, of course, travel in a way entirely constrained by the flow of currents, the height of the water and the strength of the wind. This affects their personal time-maps, which tend to manifest in the following pattern: boat time is evidently as flexible in the precise timing of events as it is usually slow of tempo; it is marked by a lengthy and meandering sense of the immediate present; and it is followed by an opaque and somewhat unknowable future, into which it would be foolhardy to plan too far or with too little flexibility.

Boat time, in other words, is an important way in which the identity of the Boater is constructed - an identity that is constructed as being somehow in harmony with nature (in this case natural rhythms and *tempi*). New and inexperienced Boaters who are not yet “proper Boaters”, holiday Boaters and part-timers (marina dwellers), are all identified partially due to their being in a hurry, and therefore breaking etiquette by trying to “rush” at locks, by overtaking other boats, by going fast past moored craft and by generally taking things too seriously. Many a time I was chided that I was “too serious” and that I should “slow down” and “take things easy”; “if you can’t”, one Boater observed, “then this life isn’t for you.”

In this way, Boaters are constructed as being “natural” agents through temporal experience. They are therefore seen as opposed or resistant to the deterministic, precise and inflexible clock time that has been described since E.P. Thompson’s classic text (1967) as being the prime shaping force of the modern capitalist world. Ingold (2000:290), through his comparative use of ethnographic studies of locomotive drivers, modifies Thompson’s central idea to show that - although Thompson is correct in his understanding that capitalist clock-time is a powerful force acting upon us - at home and in our workplaces, we actu-

ally experience time through the prism of the rhythms of the task we are completing whilst interacting with our environments, in a way that may be watched over by the clock, but which is not absolutely ruled by it. Ingold describes us as constantly renegotiating between the rigid capitalist clock time and the task-orientated time we experience whilst dwelling, which has its own “natural” (or at least self-governed) flow and pace. This is what lies behind his contention that “we are not Westerners” (*ibid.*:338) before adding that “in a sense, clock time is as alien to us as it is to the Nuer; the only difference is that we have to contend with it” (*ibid.*).

It is, however, not enough to imagine a simple dichotomy between, on the one hand, “dwelt in,” “natural” time and, on the other, “capitalist” clock time. Bear (2014) recognises that “modern time” is made up of a complex set of practices, representations and competing rhythms, often mediated by institutions which have the power to impose upon others’ time maps. Her approach focuses on creating “a *rapprochement* between Alfred Gell’s epistemology of time and the approaches of Marxist political philosophers” (*ibid.*:3). The second part of this approach involves examining the role of collective time maps, including those that wield institutional power, in order to bring “the collective, antagonistic, and normative nature of time maps into view.” Thus, “we are able to ask questions about the hierarchical ordering of time maps within society. We can explore how they interact with multiple social and non-human rhythms in time. We can trace diversity and clashes among these representations. We can also examine how representations of time within institutions produce divergent social rhythms” (Bear, 2014:17).

Following this lead, and in order to avoid simply presenting boat time against a “straw man” capitalist clock-time, it is necessary to describe some of the differing temporal understandings against which the Boaters act. Firstly, the Boaters form an obvious contrast to commuters on the roads beyond the towpath, and to other towpath users. London’s towpaths are increasingly being used as “rat-runs” by cyclists and joggers who combine exercise with their commute to work. The Boaters frequently complain about the danger presented by these individuals “rushing” past their boats, making noise, creating danger for slower pedestrians, and rudely pushing Boaters and others out of the way. These others, with their frantic pace and their need to meet an exact deadline (to arrive at their workplaces), provide a model of time-planning and rhythm which is in clear antagonistic contrast to those time maps shared by the Boaters.

Secondly, the Boaters encounter rigid and more precise time in the form of the “fourteen day rule,” whereby Boaters must move to a new “place” every two weeks (see Chapters 3 and 8), and its enforcement by CaRT. As seen in Chapters 8 and 11, the Boaters find themselves acting in opposition to a waterways authority that is attempting to enforce this fixed and arbitrary temporal pattern. For the Boaters, the demands of life afloat - including unpredictable lock faults, iced-over canal channels, mechanical boat faults, the arrival of sporadic part-time employment, or being “boxed-in” by the arrival of other boats at one’s bow, stern, and “butted up” on the outside - may make a two-week move impractical. The rhythms of boat life are far more suited to the movement to a new “place” sometimes more frequently than two weeks, for example when one’s water tank is empty or chemical toilet full, and sometimes far less frequently, for example when the engine is in a state of disrepair and one is waiting for replacement parts.

CaRT, as an institution with the power of the law, have the ability to impose their temporal logics on the Boaters’ time maps, creating tension and unresolvable conflicts of understanding. When one adds to this the fact that the Boaters may encounter more precise and less flexible time maps in their working lives in capitalist organisations or in organisations connected to the nationstate, such as the NHS or the police, it can be seen that the Boaters are frequently in contact with understandings of time that may conflict with their own and against which they may appear as a resistant or oppositional force.

Temporality conclusion

Thus it has been shown that boat time is not just slow time; it is also discontinuous time, full of disruptions and uncertainties, long waits and smooth flows, all of which shape Boaters’ personal time maps and strategies of future planning. There are, however, other layers which can be added to the description of Boaters’ time maps, including extending the range of analysis back into the past, into history and memory, and forward into an uncertain future.

First, a note on the past: the Boaters dwell on waterways that were built or modified during the great age of canal building, dating from the 1770s to the 1820s (Bolton, 1989; see also Chapter 3). Even those on the rivers are surrounded by locks, swing bridges, embank-

ments, and bollards dating from this period. Thus, artefacts from the “working boat” past surround the Boaters and are part of their present, everyday lives. Such objects date from a time when the working Boaters lived aboard (see Chapter 3). Indeed, these objects are not artefacts at all in the normal archeological sense of “historical artefacts,” as they retain their original use value in the present. In the centre of the modern city, Boaters are using lock beams and paddles with working parts which are over a hundred years old. Moreover, locks are still operated by a steel or iron windlass hand-wound around winding gear to raise or lower the paddle, the way that they were when they were first conceived and built.

Authors writing about the waterways, such as Haywood (2008) and Burton (1989), have discussed the experience of using bollards worn and marked by the ropes of Boaters from all eras, including the working Boaters of the Victorian era and early twentieth century. They note the intense and immediate sense of continuity - a compressing of temporalities, as it were - as the past is seen continuing unchanged into a present where electronic technologies are normally hegemonic. The presence of the distinctly manual and analogue canal in the midst of the technologically modern city means that to step onto the towpath is, to an extent, to step back in time. Gell recognises that such objects from the past do not actually compress temporality, or bring the past into the present in any other than a metaphorical, non-literal, sense (Gell, 1992:28). Such objects do, however, retain their histories, and the memories and associations linked to these histories are projected into the present, with all the import that this can have.

In *Rhythm, Tempo and Historical Time*, Hertzfeld (2009) describes how residents of Rome derive part of a sense of their communal belonging from a connection to the ancient path that is felt through their co-presence with ancient artefacts and structures. It is in this way that my informants cannot exist on the waterways without realising, through direct bodily experience mediated by the materiality of the waterways, that they are part of a tradition of radical itinerant life on canals and rivers, a life that exists in contrast to the wider sedentary world. Tony Sulman, a Boater from outside London, summarised the particular power of the towpath space thusly: “historically, the towpath was actually sealed off; it was a working area; it took a long time after the Second World War for people to start walking the towpath. The working Boaters were seen as tinkers, child stealers; they were mistrusted.” He continued, “and so it’s a closed off little world. And you get this sense of heritage or continuity whenever you go up those steps that the boatmen used to go up, or see the

markings of their ropes on the wall.” In this way, the historical past of the waterways and the modern boat-dwellers are curiously co-present, adding a historical and richly nostalgic dimension to the experience of boat time.

Projecting into the past may be simple, or even inevitable, for the Boaters, but projecting themselves into the future is considerably more complicated. The waterways are spoken of by my informants as the last bastion of space free for itinerant peoples and travellers in the “post-enclosure world.” When my informants speak of the “enclosure” (which many of them do, despite it being a relatively obscure historical and geographic term), they are referring to a set of policies and interventions that have enclosed common land from the Middle Ages onwards, but mainly occurring since the Tudor period. The enclosure policies included consolidating small farm holdings into larger farms, at which point access to this land would be limited to the owners. The land would no longer be accessible “commons” for the use of the village community (see Polanyi, 2001 [1944]; Rubenstein, 2011).

The term “enclosure” is used by my participants to refer to this first process of privatising land and of later privatisations, whereby common land becomes extremely rare, and the free movement of people, including ramblers and travellers, around the landscape becomes increasingly restricted. Chapters 8-11 deal in greater detail with the relationship between the Boaters and the state and the sense of constant threat and stunted future which emerges from it. For now, I simply note that this almost millenarian sense of “the end of days” is pervasive and has the effect of making it hard for the Boaters to do more than deal with the next potential crisis facing the community. In view of this, Boaters find themselves in an unusual temporal situation, utilising working relics of the past, and appearing as a somewhat anachronistic community, “surviving” in a time when being an itinerant traveller in the UK is next-to-impossible.

This is in spite of the fact that their community is relatively young. Liveaboard Boaters, as opposed to the “working Boaters” or “carrying Boaters,” only came into being in the aftermath of Tom Rolt’s (1999 [1944]) book, *Narrowboat*, the community’s genesis tale, and have only existed in any number above an isolated handful since the early 1990s. Using Turner’s (1990) terminology, we can see again how the Boaters exist in a social world which privileges the “subjunctive mood,” that which is not fixed. Boaters’ time-maps of the present emerge from essential uncertainties, and then project into an uncertain future that

always feels potentially truncated by imminent disaster, but which certainly cannot be accurately predicted or planned for.

Chapter conclusion

Thus it can be seen that, even outside of the daily experience of boat time, encapsulated in Steve's comment about "time like a soup," the Boaters' temporal experiences as projected into the historical past and the imagined future are oddly out of step with various institutions in the sedentary world around them. Manipulating one's personal time map to be in step with the various layers of boat time as described above is an important way in which Boaters come to see themselves as being "proper" Boaters, dwelling skilfully and correctly on the waterways.

As demonstrated, boat time emerges from the uncertainties of life afloat, from the Boaters' rhetoric of the "correct" rhythms of being, and from the materiality of the waterways themselves. The purpose of describing Boaters' temporal experiences in this chapter is to make an explicit link between Boaters' claims to be natural or ecologically sound agents and their understanding of life with temporal priorities that differ from those outside of the boat-dwelling community. Both are focussed fundamentally on the concept of dwelling within a landscape and of being attuned to its vagaries and emergent characteristics; both are seen as being different, and qualitatively superior to, an alienated sedentary manner of being. In this way, Boaters' temporal experience is created through "dwelling" and is not formalised or made alien to the immediacy of the environment.

This is similar to the way in which Boaters' understanding of pollution is focussed on what Boaters themselves believe is a direct and unalienated understanding of their own environmental impact, in opposition to sedentary people, who are alienated and ignorant of their own impact in the world. The subsequent chapter takes this idea of the Boaters' privileging that which emerges from interaction and is not structured or formalised into the spheres of Boaters' livelihoods, consumption practices, and economic lives as a whole.

Chapter 6: Economy and Livelihood

This chapter aims to describe the economic life of Boaters. Its focus is on their necessary living expenditures, their livelihoods, income generation strategies and economic relationships with other Boaters. Attention is also given to their consumption and purchasing habits, with a specific discussion devoted to the “material culture” which comes to be highly valued and appreciated by boat-dwellers. The opening section on expenses describes a situation wherein Boaters can live more cheaply than housed persons in the areas where they are moored. As my ethnography will show, Boaters can use these lower expenses to remain flexible and creative in their working arrangements and to “weather the storm” of unemployment or underemployment. Boaters, however, tend to deny that living in a boat is cheap, partly because they do not want to be seen as just boating for economic reasons, and partly because boat living does involve frequent and unpredictable expenses, many of which can be disruptive or calamitous for Boaters whose incomes are low or irregular.

While boating can be cheap compared to house dwelling, boat dwellers must of course derive an income from some sector of the economy, particularly given these occasional heavy expenses incurred in the course of boat maintenance. The life of the travelling Boater – both because of the freedom afforded by its reasonably low costs, and because of the pressures that emerge from the need to travel and from the aforementioned unpredictable expenses – encourages income generation strategies other than formalised, salaried employment, or what Boaters call “nine-to-five jobs.” Some Boaters do hold down such “regular” jobs and travel from their moorings to work via public transport or, more commonly, by bicycle, although the majority of the boating community engage in income generation strategies within what may be termed the “informal economy” (Hann and Hart, 2011; Hart, Laville and Cattani, 2010) – e.g., in the world of casual work, cash-in-hand employment, or casual self-employment. Even those with “regular” jobs engage in such methods to supplement their incomes and to maintain connections with the rest of the boating world around them, thus adopting a mixed-employment strategy rooted in both formal and informal sectors of the economy. In reality, few travelling Boaters are limited to one or the other sphere, and as such this section attempts to describe just a limited slice of the complexity of Boaters’ employment situation and some of the more unusual and notable ways of making a living on the “cut.”

The informal methods of income generation - including small-scale trading, craft-making, and other forms of self-employment - allow some Boaters to have economic relations that involve direct face-to-face trade and sales with other Boaters and with towpath visitors. Anthropologists Chris Hann and Keith Hart (2011) describe how most of their readers will live predominantly inside a regulated and formalised sphere of the economy and how “what makes this lifestyle “formal” is the regularity of its order, a predictable rhythm and sense of control that we often take for granted” (Hann and Hart, 2011:114). It has been demonstrated how the Boaters live “informally,” outside of these predictable rhythms and, often, outside of formal economic structures, instead carving out an economy with flexibility, entrepreneurship, and social relations or obligations at the centre. By “informal,” these authors mean those economic activities which are not governed by the rigidity of rules and institutions, but which depend more on one’s own social networks and contacts.

This line of thought can be traced through the writing of Geertz (1978) on the bazaar-type economy and into writings from within literature on development (see Hart, 1973; Bromley, 1978). The term “informal economy” often has the negative implications of precariousness, instability, a lack of workers’ rights and the constant threat of unemployment and poverty. I argue here that the use of the informal economy, for the Boaters, cannot be easily described or understood in a purely negative or, indeed, a purely positive fashion. The unreliability of the informal economy may not be desirable, and those working in informal sectors can struggle financially. On the other hand, some informal practices also have the potential to allow Boaters the freedom to be able to maintain their cruising pattern, to plan their working hours to suit their other needs and interests, and to do work that they enjoy and value.

In this and in the following section, I aim to describe how the Boaters prefer economic relationships that are embedded within social relations with other Boaters in the formal sphere and with those outside of the community. Such a discussion draws on the work of Hann and Hart (2011), who urge contemporary anthropologists engaging with economic matters to re-evaluate and return to the work of Mauss (1990 [1950]) and Polanyi (2001 [1944]), as these two foundational scholars “made sure that their more abstract understandings of political economy were grounded in the everyday lives of concrete persons, thereby lending to field research the power of general ideas” (Hann and Hart, 2011:167). Both Mauss

and Polanyi describe a situation whereby the modern Western economic situation, as dominated by the “market economy” and by the redistribution of money, is only one possible model for organising financial arrangements between persons. The market economy is thus not inevitable, and nor are alternative forms restricted solely to “non-Western” or “small-scale” settings. Polanyi (2001 [1944]) famously argued that the economy of the market disembedded a person’s financial dealings from their social life by making commodities of labour and land, or of human relationships and nature. For Polanyi, “embeddedness” is the degree to which economic activity is constrained or mediated by institutions which are not explicitly economic, for example by one’s kinship ties, social obligations or religious or moral concerns (see Plattner, 1989:11-15).

This idea of embeddedness, popular throughout Polanyi’s substantivist school of economic anthropology, has also gained popularity in economic sociology via the work of Mark Granovetter (1985), who sought to bring the term into the heart of his discipline. He did this by attempting to “shift the critique of economics from its usual emphasis on the unrealistic (psychological) nature of the concept of rationality... and instead focus on the failure of economists to incorporate *social structure* into their analysis” (Swedberg, 2004:162; emphasis in the original). For Granovetter, the majority of transactions, including many “business” transactions, have social relationships at their key, with individuals being both rational and calculating *and* constrained by existing structure; the exception to this rule being the extreme *laissez-faire* market economy (Granovetter, 1985).

The Boaters do, of course, act as part of the disembedded market and the wider world of capitalism. But they also, as shall be seen, try to conduct economic relationships which are less alienated from social relationships and which hold other logics than those of the market, for example, working on favours, exchanges, and reciprocal understandings. Where Boaters do form a “market,” it is often without alienating themselves from the results of their own labour power, for example, by selling their own wares or by working for themselves under arrangements that are flexibly curated to suit both worker and client. Such “markets” are also noticeably not “free” or driven purely by the logic of profit, but rather embedded in relationships of friendship and patronage.

Since Mauss and Polanyi, scholars have taken further the idea that there is a distinction between socially-embedded exchanges on one hand and depersonalised commodity ex-

changes on the other. Often this distinction is drawn along the line between the gift and the commodity and between the West and non-Western societies. Gregory (1980; 1982; 1997); for example, Gregory's distinction between gift and commodity exchange describes a system whereby "gifts belong to the sphere of the household and personal relationships, while commodities belong to the sphere of trade and impersonal relationships" (Rus, 2008: 82). For Weiner (1992), the difference is between alienable and non-alienable possessions: that which can be given away or sold to another and that which, due to association with its previous owner, cannot.

There has been a widespread counter-reaction concerning the drawing of this dichotomy, wherein Gregory has been criticised for ethnocentrism and for romanticising the nature of the gift (Appadurai, 1986:11; Carrier, 1990:20; Parry, 1986:465; Parry and Bloch, 1989:8). Humphrey and Hugh-Jones (1992) have criticised this approach by demonstrating how gift exchanges, in societies of any scale, also show a degree of economic calculation. Gell makes a similar point, writing that "gift-exchange is much more like commodity-exchange than [Gregory] is prepared to recognize" (1992:144). These criticisms generally attempt to show how gift exchanges are much like commodity exchanges in that they show self-interest and rational calculation. Rus (2008), however, approaches from the opposite direction, arguing through an analysis of modern consumer brand advertising and marketing that many contemporary commodity exchanges share some of the features of gift-exchanges, including the building of a personal relationship of trust and loyalty over time.

I do not intend to argue that the Boaters' informal (or embedded) economic relationships with each other do not share any of the features of commodity exchange or that the two types are incompatible. Indeed, one of the reasons why I write about gifts, trades, and odd-jobbing (for favours or for cash) together is that I do not wish to romanticize or portray the gift as a special ethnographic case. I recognise that most Boaters are relatively maximising in their economic dealings, trying to get the best deal they can for themselves. Further, I recognise that the Boaters move easily between informal arrangements based on trading favours and bartering with known acquaintances, to formalising such arrangements with money, to entering the world of commodities entirely by shopping or working within the wider market economy easily and frequently. The point I am attempting to make here is that on the waterways, more so than in most sedentary neighbourhoods, there are economic relations which differ from the market due to their embeddedness, by which I mean

that they are based on social relations, that they do not resort to rational calculation of supply and demand, and that they often avoid the exchange of money entirely (see Polanyi, 2001[1944] ; Plattner, 1989).

These arrangements may, of course, exist in sedentary neighbourhoods in a limited way, and certainly exist within families. Such embedded arrangements can even exist within business organisations. Indeed, Granovetter (1985) demonstrates how even those economic activities that may be thought of as “market-type” transactions are often affected by social networks and relationships in a fashion which economists frequently ignore. Granovetter (*ibid.*), however, like Polanyi, recognises the existence of a disembedded market which can disrupt and undermine these social exchange networks. I contend, here, that embedded practices on the waterways are widespread, everyday, and constitute either a component or the entirety of Boaters’ livelihoods. The fact that many Boaters manage to subvert or almost entirely avoid being taken into the market economy is, I believe, notable and worthy of analysis, even if they are not unique in doing so.

In summary, my argument is that an emergent economic edifice is created which separates the Boaters’ economic dealings from the wider sedentary economy and offers a partial alternative to the influence of the neoliberal “market” economic stream. This is further examined in the subsequent section, where the small trades, gifts and offers of support between Boaters are described. In this same section, I also discuss how Boaters support those in the community who are in a state of relative poverty or those who are suffering from ill health or addiction. I argue that it would be a misreading of Mauss’ *The Gift* to describe gift exchange as being different in quality to “commodity” exchange, or as somehow existing progressively prior to it. Hann and Hart (2011) point out that “Mauss’s aim was to dissolve the opposition between pure gift and selfish contracts in order to reveal universal principles of mutual obligation and social integration” (*ibid.*:14) - principles which *can* exist in economic dealings other than gift-giving, including in monetary payment, but which the disembedded extremes of the *laissez-faire* market seek to break.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Sahlins also seems to imply this reading of Mauss when he writes that “... every exchange, as it embodies some coefficient of sociability, cannot be understood by its material terms apart from its social terms” (Sahlins,1972:183).

As we shall see in the ethnography that follows, rather than bracketing out the gift as a unique case, gifts, trades and what is emically referred to in the Reading area as “flip-flopping” (casually exchanging items and skilled favours between friends; see the section *Odd jobbing and casual labour* below) can all be considered as fulfilling similar functions: namely, embedding the economy in a web of social obligations and relations, and linking Boaters together, whilst avoiding the market-led system of less personal or entirely impersonal monetary exchange.

The economic world of the Boaters, of course, goes beyond their work practices and livelihoods; how Boaters spend their money and acquire goods is also an important area for analysis. In the realm of consumption and material goods, the Boaters similarly build up a rhetoric and practice which does not conform to the normal sedentary capitalist arrangement. This can be characterised as involving the “conspicuous consumption” of luxury items. Here I argue that Boaters are not rejecting consumption and the world of “worldly” goods *per se*; indeed such a move would be impossible. Rather, they tend to reject what is seen as the expenses and extravagances of “conspicuous” consumption and to show a preference towards the purchasing of useful, practical items, particularly when the purchase of these items is achieved frugally and with knowledge of the object’s worth and use value.

Bourdieu (1984) adopted the perspective that all consumers share a code of meanings concerning objects and, thus, individuals’ consumption habits are directly linked to their social positions within a class system. Similarly, Douglas and Isherwood urged readers to “forget the...usefulness [of commodities] and try instead the idea that commodities are good for thinking” (1979:62). As shall be seen below, many Boaters do not accept the hegemonic grammar of signs which place expensive consumer durables and expensive electronic items at the pinnacle of class-based consumption; rather, they suggest their own meanings based precisely on that which Douglas and Isherwood asked us to forget: an object’s use value. Boaters, in this way, value the “consumption” of diesel generators, new axes, ingenious boat-friendly hand-operated washing machines, and head torches – items valued for their utility and their value for money rather than their expense. It is concluded that Boaters, in both their rhetoric and their actions, advocate economic relationships - with each other, in their working lives, in respect to their material wealth and goods - which are “embedded” and differentiated from the “market” and from the free-market capitalist model.

In keeping with the previous two chapters, these economic relationships – because they emerge in the course of necessity and through networks of friendship – can be considered to be more “natural,” or the “proper” way for Boaters to act. This economic pattern is enabled by the unusual combination of freedoms and constraints that are a feature of life afloat, and it is to these matters of economic expense that this chapter turns first.

Expenses

Boaters are quick to combat the suggestion that living aboard a boat is cheap. This is partly in order to create rhetorical distance from new Boaters, many of whom are seen as doing it for “economic reasons,” and who are therefore viewed as lacking “proper” motivations, including a deep respect for the lifestyle, the “community” of Boaters, and the waterways. Boaters also deny the cheapness of life afloat, citing the essential uncertainties of living aboard a boat, where money must frequently be spent on mechanical upkeep and where, even if the boat is well-maintained, expensive mechanical issues can arise at any time. Many boats date from the 1970s or earlier and, as such, include old systems which are liable to deteriorate. Boaters are quite resigned to the fact that the boat that they have chosen will cost them a considerable amount of money in upkeep. It is a recurring joke between Boaters that the word “boat” “stands for” “Bring Out Another Thousand [pounds],” due to the constant expenditure which is required for boat upkeep. As one Boater said to me, with a sigh of resignation, “you know what a boat is? A big metal colander you throw all your money into.”

However, even taking the inevitable expenditure into account, boating is a comparatively inexpensive way to live, particularly around cities. One of my informants summarised this reality perfectly by stating that the lifestyle was “a cheap way to live, and a very expensive hobby.” A Boater from a Northern canal once claimed that, with their bills for upkeep and an “end-of-the-garden⁹⁹” mooring, they weren’t living any more cheaply than the residents of a nearby housing estate. I am in no position to deny the truth of this statement, although

⁹⁹ This was the term used in Reading for the cheapest form of mooring, where the Boater would find a spot on the off-side (the non-towpath side) and rent a length from the **landowner**. These were usually moorings at the end of a farmer’s field in a semi-rural location. An end-of-the-garden mooring could be a few hundred pounds a year, as decided in negotiation with the owner of the mooring, in contrast to many thousands of pounds for a berth in a marina.

I do contend that it would be hard to live more cheaply in a city, especially an expensive city in the south of England.

The reason that boating can be a cheap way to live in the city is due to the low cost of boat life. Regular expenses include the Boater's annual license, which is calculated by the length of their boat. The price of this license, which constitutes the most costly annual expense for a Boater, varies depending on which waterways one requires access to, but it would be unusual for any boat license to cost more than £1000 for the year. As a guide, the standard license fee (assuming prompt payment) for my 37' narrowboat would be £639.70 (Canal and River Trust, 2014). A "gold license," which would allow access to non-CaRT waterways, including the River Thames, would cost £872 for my boat (Canal and River Trust, 2015a). This amount includes a compound council tax. In addition, the Boater requires insurance, which will be somewhere in the region of £150-£400 per year depending on the value of the boat. These, unless the Boater joins a breakdown assistance company, are the only regular non-maintenance-related annual expenses incurred by travelling Boaters.

Beyond these annual costs, less regular expenses include diesel for the engine,¹⁰⁰ which may account for around £50 per month, depending on the Boater's travelling regime; petrol for those with generators; gas bottles, which need replacing every two or three months and cost around £25; toilet pump-out for those with such systems, costing between £12 and £20 every two or three months; food, laundry money, and money for other domestic provisions to suit the Boater's needs. Even when totalling all of these expenses, it becomes clear that boating has the potential to be very cheap, providing that the Boater avoids extravagant expenditure. As a rough calculation, my annual expenses on my 37' narrowboat would equal £1,400,¹⁰¹ which could easily be a month's rent on a room in a flat

¹⁰⁰ Diesel is cheap. "Red" diesel, a form of diesel which is dyed red so that it cannot be used in normal road vehicles and which is not subject to road-vehicle taxation levels, is permitted to be sold for use on boats. A recent EU intervention (2009) dictated that Boaters may only avoid taxation on diesel used for domestic systems (i.e. diesel central heating) and must pay tax on diesel used for propulsion. Prior to this, Boaters would receive this cheaper diesel without added tax. Since this intervention, however, marinas are required to ensure that Boaters fill in a form when purchasing diesel, detailing how much they are "claiming" as a domestic:propulsion ratio. Many marinas keep a standardised form offering a ratio of 60:40. Other marinas will allow a Boater to claim up to 80:20 or even 90:10. No marina checks to see whether or not the Boater has domestic diesel needs. At a marina offering 80:20, this makes diesel approximately £1/litre.

¹⁰¹ The rough estimations used in this calculation are listed here: License: £640; Insurance: £150; Breakdown Cover: £200; Diesel: £100; Gas: £50; Coal: £200; Basic engine service: £60.

in many of the areas of London through which the canals and rivers flow. The Boater lacks the major outgoings of most sedentary house-dwellers, including rent or mortgage repayments and regular utility bills.

Bearing this in mind, it can therefore be seen how disruptive mechanical breakdowns can be. Repair work is a constant struggle for a Boater with anything other than a brand new vessel. This work can be extremely expensive (easily costing many thousands of pounds), and while most Boaters (with the exception of those who are unemployed or on the lowest incomes) can set aside savings for boat maintenance emergencies, such work can disrupt the rhythm and expectations of the Boater's economic planning. This is one reason why learning the skills of boat maintenance can be such an advantage. The Boater will both improve their position within the community of practice and will save themselves a great deal of money.

This is the "subjunctive mood" in operation in a fashion which is not necessarily of benefit to the Boaters. The uncertainty of the Boaters' financial situation and its inherent precariousness is hard to predict, and any month could see a major fault which the Boater simply could not afford. Maintenance skills can partially mitigate against this, but the liminal position of the Boaters and the essential uncertainties of life afloat cannot be escaped. This is seen in the fatalistic shrug which accompanies the phrase "that's boats" which is heard whenever a Boater reports a major and expensive breakdown.

As I state above, whether or not boat-dwelling is significantly or inevitably cheaper than living in a flat or rented house very much depends on the area of the country where the two lifestyles are being compared. Based on my observations, however, boating in the South East is significantly cheaper than house-dwelling in all but the most extreme of cases, for example where a boat sinks or an engine explodes. The Boater's household income needs are not regular or stable, but they are not as high as they are in other forms of dwelling. This makes it possible for Boaters to explore alternative strategies for money-making other than reliance upon full-time wage work, as shall now be explored.

Income generation strategies

“You can work or you can travel; you can’t do both,” Nick from Reading once told me. If one were to take this at face value, then one would wonder how traveling Boaters managed to make money and to make ends meet. What Nick was referring to by “work,” however, was not, as we may understand it, any kind of paid labour, but rather the specific kind of inflexible, formalised wage labour in a single location which is the norm in modern capitalist society. I have heard other Boaters call this type of work “the nine-to-five” or “working for a company.” Further, as I discovered when I interrogated Nick’s statement, he was also not saying that all travelling Boaters avoid this kind of work; rather he was suggesting that when a Boater has a restrictive job of this kind, they tend to travel less and to stay around locations from where they can commute between their moorings and their workplaces. Nick is correct in saying that working full-time in one location would be incompatible with CaRT’s intention that continuous cruisers should frequently move long distances around the inland waterways. Many Boaters whom I have met do have full-time sedentary jobs, but these Boaters tend to have been based around the centres of cities such as Reading, London and Bath where they can travel as much as the authorities demand and still commute to inner-city locations for work.

As detailed above, it is not impossible to hold down a nine-to-five job as a cruising Boater. However, when one takes into account the necessities of living aboard – including movement and maintenance, the uncertainties of life afloat, and an understandable reluctance to leave a boat unattended for too long – combining a time-consuming job with continuous cruising may appear hard to balance. Those who do hold down the nine-to-five and remain travelling Boaters often speak of the draining nature of the commutes to which they must subject themselves, and they are often inclined to take marina moorings if these are available.¹⁰² Because of this, many Boaters develop ways to work from their boats in ways which offer a degree of time flexibility. Some of the most common methods are described below. Appendix III is dedicated to other unusual or notable methods, including boat trading, working from home, working part-time or in casual shift patterns, claiming benefits, or by being legitimately without employment as a student, a retired person, or an individual taking “time out” from working life.

¹⁰² These Boaters with more conventional and permanent jobs away from their boats are increasingly common, as even relatively affluent individuals who could normally afford to rent houses or flats in London find boating to be a desirable alternative to constant sharply rising rental prices. I had less contact with these Boaters as, due to their work and commuting arrangements, I was less likely to meet them hanging around on moorings, at Boaters’ meetings or in my mid-week travels. My access was skewed towards those Boaters who worked from home or had less stable or more flexible work lives, and this analysis reflects this fact.

Trading boats

London is host to a thriving community of travelling trading boats, by which I mean boats that offer services or goods to other Boaters and to members of the public. These boats generally travel roughly together during the summer months (and occasionally during the winter) where they often moor together to form “floating markets.” This is occasionally an official exercise, whereby a council might encourage the trading Boaters to come together in a place for a weekend (for example, in Hackney Wick in 2013 for the Hackney Wicked festival).¹⁰³ Sometimes it is organised in advance by the trading Boaters themselves (for example the Winter Market at Camden moorings in the winter of 2012), and occasionally it is more spontaneous (for example, when most of the traders, who travelled roughly together over the summer, arrived at Victoria Park and set up the market one weekend in August 2013). Many of the traders on these boats are close friends with each other and the relationships between trading Boaters is marked by support rather than rivalry.

Some of the trading boats working the waterways of East London are floating food and drink outlets, including *The Sandwich Barge* (which also sells chemical toilet fluid or “blue” to Boaters), *The Ice Cream Barge*, and *Foxton’s Bar*. Others are floating shops, for example, the *Word on the Water* second-hand book barge and *Frocks Afloat*, a vintage clothing outlet. A few music or meeting venues also exist aboard boats, most notably the *Boston Belle* café, Mihail’s *Floating Stage*, and James’ space for rent, the butty¹⁰⁴ *Vanadium*. James sells mulled wine and soup from *Vanadium* in the winter and offers the barge as extra seating space to any other business that wants it during the summer. Other trading boats are harder to categorise. Examples include the *Herbal Medicine Barge*, which offers medicinal consultations and herbal remedies, and the *Jellybean*, from which “Captain Jack Tarot” offers his Tarot-reading services.

As seen here, there is an immense range and variety of trading boats in London, each representing an occasion when individual Boaters have managed to turn their homes into

¹⁰³ See the festival’s website (<http://www.hackneywicked.co.uk>) for a discussion of the festival, albeit one which does not explicitly mention the boat market initiated in 2013.

¹⁰⁴ A butty is an unpowered boat: a boat without an engine which would have been towed by a “motor boat” to make up the “working pair.”

their full- or part-time businesses. These Boaters are not patronised because they are offering the cheapest products or due to money they spend on commercial advertising; often their client base is focussed around curious towpath visitors enjoying the novelty of being on a floating business, and other Boaters, including friends and neighbours, who do their best to support the success of such enterprises. The *Floating Stage* offered discounts to Boaters and, in fact, acted as a local pub for the East London boating community which formed the majority of their customer base.

Boat businesses have a number of advantages over businesses based in conventional static shops on land. They are cheap to set up due to the low cost of boats and thus they avoid having to pay commercial rent. They can also be immensely popular with tourists. Occasionally these businesses can be entirely impromptu and short-lived; for example, during the Reading Festival in 2012, Dave and Nate, two young Boaters from Reading set themselves up as “festival taxis,” taking festival-goers from the campsite to the town centre for a few pounds each. Such flexibility, coupled with the almost guaranteed excitement surrounding a business set up on a boat, makes becoming a boat entrepreneur an attractive proposition for many. Through these methods, be they short lived and opportunistic or one’s permanent floating business, Boaters can work for themselves, in locations which suit their needs, and with some flexibility over the timing of one’s work. The form of work described here exists on a spectrum from more “formal” (legal and taxed) to entirely “informal” (outside of the reach of bureaucracy; including “cash-in-hand” approaches), but all have several “informal” qualities, including the flexibility of movement offered and the lack of formal rules and regulations in evidence. As described in the introduction to this chapter, a typically negative view of the “informal” sector based on a critique of its precariousness is not entirely appropriate here, as many Boaters value the freedoms afforded by a lack of rigidly formalised and timetabled work arrangements.

Boat businesses aimed at Boaters

In the introduction to this thesis, I also made reference to the “working boats” or “coal boats:” those boats that travel the waterways servicing the community with coal, gas, diesel, and (if they have the facilities) a “pump-out” service for sewage tanks. These important boat businesses are a vital resource and a rare linking thread for members of the boating community, who come to rely on the well-connected individuals who operate such busi-

ness for many of the essentials of boat life, including coal, gas, diesel and, less officially, gossip and fresh information. The waterways of London support four working boats, and I am aware of several other working boats on the other waterways of the South East.

This is not, however, the only way in which Boaters can make money from offering services to their peers; many offer mechanical or engineering support, either through marinas or as individuals. Those who are freelancing advertise through word of mouth and through signs placed on their boats. Some Boaters provide specific engineering services. For example, Dom offers to maintain or fit solar panels, and Chris advertises as a battery specialist. Boaters are often able to supplement other incomes by doing plumbing, electrical or general engine work for other Boaters, whether or not they have any formal qualifications in this area. In addition to several “official” and qualified mechanics on the waterways, there are others who are simply experienced Boaters trying to earn a little extra money from newcomers who currently lack the skills to fix or to improve their own vessels.

At the informal end of this phenomenon, this work is often “cash-in-hand” and is reckoned in such a way as to provide those who are most in need of work with some much-needed income; more affluent Boaters employ those who they know are skilled and in need. There is often space for quite dramatic negotiation on price. For example, if the Boater paying for the work has limited funds, then a worker can labour for a fraction of the going rate. A notable example occurred when Justin offered to completely rebuild and fit out Gopal’s boat over the course of several months for very little payment. Conversely, if the Boater requiring work is in serious need then the commissioner of the work may decide to pay over the odds.

These interactions do not run according to the maximising logic of the “market”, but rather are embedded in social relations, making use of known acquaintances, and of understandings of the needs of the other with whom one is entering into the economic relationship. One Boater I know from Reading would regularly do a day’s work for other Boaters in return for a crate of beer and would become uncomfortable if you discussed money with him. Polanyi notes how the birth of the unregulated free-market economy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries acted to “disjoint man’s relationships” (Polanyi, 2001 [1944]:44) and thus how workers came to be treated in a commodity-like fashion. The Boaters, when they

work for other Boaters in this way, act to embed social relationships in their work and labour arrangements.

Other Boaters who work within the boating community survive by practicing the “traditional” boating crafts of sign-painting, fender-making and boat-building. In this category, some Boaters, for example, paint the Roses and Castles art on boats in the same style as was popular with the “working” or “carrying” Boaters of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see discussion in Chapter 3). Fenders are ropes or chains knotted into attractive shapes and then hung from a boat in order to provide a buffer between the boat and the bank or the boat on the outside.¹⁰⁵ Certain small knotted fenders are more decorative or ornamental and are highly prized by those interested in “traditional” boating. Circular knots known as “turk’s heads” were used by the working-Boaters to adorn their tiller and such traditional knots can still be purchased from some fender-makers. Other Boaters are a potential source of regular income for Boaters with this kind of valuable skills, particularly those who have been aboard for many years and are therefore seen as being more knowledgeable.

The crossover between official skills-based businesses – for example mechanics, plumbers, suppliers of solar equipment and Boat Safety Scheme examiners – and more casual forms of the same, where skilled friends can help one out for a few pounds, a bottle of whiskey, or a favour owed, becomes quickly apparent. Boaters select help based on several factors, including the skills and reputation of the workers in question, the advice of others, but also other considerations, such as who is a friend with the requisite skills and who is in need of work? Who may already owe me a favour, and who may have done the same work on their own boat? Often Boaters ask for advice online before attempting work themselves, or allow skilled boating friends to offer advice, before employing either casual or official, skilled or unskilled, paid or unpaid, help.

The distinctions between these categories are extremely blurry. My insistence on using River Canal Rescue for some work - a company which employs mechanics who are not necessarily themselves Boaters, and who do not have personal relationships, friendships and connections with their clients - was conspicuously frowned upon by some Boaters, as it was thought that I should be able to source sufficient support from my network of skilled

¹⁰⁵ See <http://fendermaker.co.uk/> for examples.

contacts. Tommy, an engineer who helped me with my electrical system when I was moored in Broxbourne, Hertfordshire, was introduced by a mutual acquaintance and our interactions had many of the hallmarks of a more typical Boaters' working relationship. Tommy and I became friends, which (in context of the Boating community) meant that rather than completing all of the work himself, he would show me what he was doing and encourage me to complete some of the work. It also meant that he only worked for cash and that we haggled around the price, typically with him "rounding down" almost to "cost" (the price of the supplies) as I was "a Boater too." And finally it meant that our entire working arrangement fell foul of boat time (see Chapter 5) and took a total of four months, as he was detained for some time by family and financial business in East Anglia.

Odd-jobbing and casual labour

I encountered several younger Boaters in Reading who relied upon short-term casual work to generate an income. These Boaters often lacked the long-term experience, reputation or resources to set themselves up as official boat mechanics or electricians. They often employed a mixed strategy of working extremely short-term in bars, on building sites, for roofing firms and for local tradesmen in order to make ends meet. This work often has a seasonal dimension, with Boaters getting "summer jobs" or "winter jobs" with particular firms and then spending the rest of the year traveling more extensively. Two of these Boaters were freelance "handymen," who had signs on their boat advertising their availability for any job lasting any length of time. Dave, for example, cruises extensively, often between London and Oxford, for work; he is a genuine handyman, for whom no job is "too big or too small." These Boaters would work on construction sites, in boat yards, or wherever there was work for a time, before moving on when the work "dried up."

When work, as it is described above, is casual and for the benefit of other local Boaters, there is the possibility of what Tim and other Reading locals call "flip-flopping." While I have not heard the term used on the canals of London, "flip-flopping" describes the small exchanges and re-negotiations completed around any economic exchange. For example, one of the reasons that Tim cited for not painting Asha's roof in her absence, after she had asked him to do so, was that this would mean that she wasn't there for the flip-flopping. I experienced flip-flopping myself when Tim offered to charge me "a few quid" less for my roof painting if I let him use some leftover paint and allowed him to use my generator to

briefly charge his batteries. Flip-flopping also refers to the small trades and sales which regularly occur on a mooring, whether or not there is a work contract involved. A “flip-flop” could be, for example, when Marcus allowed Kermit to pitch his tent in the area behind his boat in exchange for some help clearing the branches from the overgrown trees, or when Shaun allowed us to borrow his generator for an hour in return for a four-pack of beers, or even when I sold “American Joe” a spare vocal microphone for his nascent floating recording studio for a fraction of its label price (I sold it for £20, and it was worth at least £50) to get him started.

Money may or may not be involved in flip-flopping; all that matters is that the Boater is entering into an exchange relationship, no matter for how short a time, with the other, and that this relationship is not governed by the cold logic of the market and of maximisation. These transactions are “embedded” in social relationships with known acquaintances, as Polanyi (2001 [1944]) or Granovetter (1985) would argue. It being so, the actors described seem to have priorities other than economic maximisation, such as the maintenance of mutually beneficial economic relationships and the offering of mutual support over time.

For a time I lived next to a Boater in London who works as a “rag and bone man” and who, in between collecting and selling scrap, makes extra money from buying, selling and exchanging useful items between members of the boating community. Also coming under the heading of “odd-jobbing” and “casual labour,” one could include the phenomenon of working on other Boaters’ “project” boats. Many Boaters employ others to casually work aboard their “project” boats, sharing any skills that they have. This may be paid work, or work completed for gifts or favours, or may be in return for lodging, as the worker lives aboard in return for their labour.

In short, there are a range of strategies whereby Boaters’ livelihoods and their working economic lives are often embedded in social relationships and often in the “informal” sphere of the economy (see Hart, 1973; Hann and Hart, 2011). This is not to imply that all Boaters work within the community in this way, or that Boaters never work away from the waterways in formal and permanent jobs. Further, this is not to imply that these work arrangements are entirely harmonious and represent some utopian form of operation. Indeed, these working relationships can be exploitative and can cause arguments, particularly as neither side usually holds a contract nor, therefore, legal recourse. Equally, many

of the negative associations of the informal economy, including a precariousness, a lack of guaranteed worker's rights and the possibility of being without work (Hart, 1973), do cause some concern for Boaters who work in informal sectors.

If, however, one follows Polanyi (2001 [1944]) and his division between, on the one hand, economies that take the relationships between human actors into account and, on the other, market economies that “[require] that human beings....be turned into pure commodities” (Block, 2001:25), then the Boaters are clearly organising themselves around the former. Again, as with the choice to move aboard in the first instance, some Boaters opt happily for this, and some are pushed into it by circumstance. Indeed, some find that casual work is the only possible work when moving extensively every fourteen days; for others, the freedom and flexibility afforded by these arrangements, along with the possibility of working for oneself, are thought to be an attractive prospect. Taking economic world history as a whole, these relations are not uncommon, and indeed it is only the contemporary hegemony of the market which makes it appear to be anything other than the norm.

Gifts, trades and the informal Sphere

The Informal Sphere: Gifting and trading

Boaters' economic lives do not begin and end with their livelihood strategies. As already partially explored in the description of “flip-flopping,” boat dwelling presents many opportunities for gift giving, small-trades and barter – the distinctions between which are never clear. These can include the sharing of food, as described in the section below entitled *Relative poverty and support* and later on in Chapter 7. These can equally be seen in the sharing of knowledge and of group tasks, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, and in Boaters' group clean-up operations on the towpath and in their online activities on forums and group pages. Sharing is frequently spoken about in the context of sharing fuel for burning, i.e, wood and coal. As shall be described in more detail in Chapter 7, moreover, gifts of coal, logs, and smaller pieces of wood for use as kindling are spoken of as being acts of “doing” community and as being indicative of the support which is provided by the Boaters and which differs from what is stereotyped as the atomised and alienated life outside.

A great deal of ethnographic literature has been devoted to the analysis of sharing and redistribution in what might be classified as an “informal economy,” where gifts serve to create an egalitarian level field.¹⁰⁶ This is not the case on the waterways, where these practices are not all-encompassing or even seen as particularly important. Nor are formal institutions of gift exchange created as would be the case, to turn again to the classic literature, in societies which practice *Kula* exchange (Malinowski, 1920) or the potlatch (Boas, 1966).

Sharing and giving within the Boater community is more haphazard than this, and may occur when Boaters are in need, or when a neighbour happens to feel the need for a party or has scavenged an excess amount of wood. These acts, like any gift (Mauss, 1990 [1950]), carry with them an obligation of reciprocity and can create and maintain friendships and long-term working relationships. They make the Boater feel part of a supportive community to which they owe a debt to be repaid. Many Boaters speak of their desire to help those Boaters suffering difficulties and those who are new and inexperienced due, in part, to the support that they themselves have received in the past (see the following section of this chapter). To reiterate the argument from the introduction, the idea, via Gregory (1980; 1982; 1997) that gifts and commodities are necessarily different in quality and in their productive sphere does not resonate in my fieldsite; rather these blend in with the trades, barter and loans, the important quality of which is that they are personal and social in the sense that they constitute a bond, albeit a possibly short-lived one, between two or more Boaters. They are the economic life of the community, where goods are not “priced” for strangers, based on the logic of supply and demand, but become a token between known interlocutors.

It would be a mistake to think of gifts as a completely different type of exchange relationship to the other relationships described above, including employment and monetary relationships. As intimated above, Hann and Hart argue that we should not make the mistake of misreading Mauss’ *The Gift* as presenting “one side of a contrast between ‘gifts and commodities’ that is often taken to be exemplary of the great divide between the West and the rest” (Hann and Hart, 2011:14). Rather, the gift is but one of a number of possible forms of exchange and redistribution. The outlier, as it is not based in known social rela-

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Woodburn’s (1982) work on small hunter-gatherer bands and tribes. See also Layton (2005) and Marshall (1998).

tions, is free-market capitalism and not the gift, even though it was the latter that was long treated as an ethnographic curio. Related to this, the *Human Economy* project (Hart, Leville and Cattani, 2010) seeks to detail with wide-ranging ethnographic examples, societies and cultures that are re-embedding economic relations within social relations and the gaps in the discourse of the capitalist macroeconomists. As an example of this, it has been shown how the Boaters' economic relationships tend to occur in the realm of the "human economy," how they are often "informal" in the sense of having fewer rules and structures, and how gift-giving, sharing, odd-job work and even small "market"-type deals overlap and fulfil similar functions, namely providing support in the uncertain economic world of boat-dwelling and of creating a sense of communal belonging.

Relative poverty, relative wealth and support

Occasionally, the giving of gifts is made necessary by the relative poverty of some individuals on the waterways. Some Boaters are among the poorest in UK society and, if they were not living aboard, would likely be homeless. It is common to hear liveaboard boating disparagingly spoken of as "social housing" by outsiders and by affluent marina Boaters. One Boater, keen to critique the newer Boaters "flooding" the system, told me that the increase in the number of boats in London simply represented "an overflow from a housing crisis." Such statements show an awareness that many Boaters share a precarious economic position, that they cannot afford rent or any other form of "bricks-and-mortar" housing. The Boaters whom I have met, however, exist on a more complex spectrum of wealth: at one end are a minority, like Justin, who I suspect has relatively large stores of private wealth. The majority, in the centre, seem to have enough money to afford food, the occasional drink at a pub, and essentials for the boat, but worry about the possibility of incurring expensive repair work, and certainly do not seem to have enough money for income not to be a concern. Indeed, the majority of Boaters with any kind of formal work seem to struggle towards the end of the month as the last pay day stretches into the past, in a manner that must be familiar to anyone on a low income.

At the far end of the spectrum, there is a minority who are undeniably impoverished. Other Boaters worry about these individuals and often cook for them or share their resources. In one example, a Boater from Bath, Ann, who had serious health issues, was physically unable to cook for herself for a time and was not receiving enough money to cover essential

costs. Another Boater, previously only a casual acquaintance, would cook for Ann every day and would help her to tidy and clean her boat. However, sharing and helping those in need is usually spoken about with the specific example of giving fuel (coal and wood) in the winter. When people invoke the concept of “community” and state that other Boaters have been helpful or supportive, they often mention that they were given scrap wood or small amounts of coal when in need. Quite frequently individuals will point out scrap or waste wood to another Boater if they know that they have enough and that he or she may be running low. For example, I was walking home with Gopal once and he pointed out several wooden objects that he suggested I scavenge and burn.

The most frequently given “gift,” however, is technical assistance and knowledge, with Boaters being keen to help others with practical problems, especially if the other is ill or is struggling financially. When I talked to Boaters in Reading about the Boaters with alcohol or drug addiction problems (who are generally those in the most precarious position in terms of health and financial stability), one Boater talked about how these individuals are supported “way more than they would be in houses. I mean,” he continued, “we don’t condone what they’re doing or anything, but we always make sure they got [sic.] something to eat and some wood for their stove and that they haven’t done themselves any damage.” This did not apply, however, to the more antisocial alcoholic or “junky” (heroin-using) Boaters who were being aggressive or threatening on moorings; these individuals were shunned and ignored and generally chose to moor away from my group of acquaintances.

When I write about the Boaters occasionally being extremely poor or close to homelessness, I realise that in order to afford a boat in the first place, one must have some savings and some degree of private wealth. My own boat, at a cost of £20,000, is quite basic and is not luxurious in comparison to the boats of some of my London neighbours. My boat probably lies somewhere in the middle of a hierarchy of comfort and, as such, I recognise that many are not privileged enough to have £20,000 to spend on their dwelling, and those that do are not the destitute poor. Many Boaters do come to boating with private wealth – wealth derived from saving whilst renting or living at “home,” from selling a property or a car, from using other forms of savings, or from arranging a private loan. Be this as it may, many are indeed poor and close to homeless. Usually these Boaters will come into the community from the cheapest level of boat-renting, or from buying the shell of a fibreglass

boat (or, these days, a lifeboat; see Appendix I) or from living in shared boats or working on others' "project boats."

A friend of mine who has lived in the "squatting scene" for many years scornfully explained to me that boating reflected the "bourgeois end" of an alternative housing spectrum and was "close to being like houses, just on water." For her, squatting and living in tents and caves was more "pure," at least partially, as these do not involve financial outlay, property ownership, or a reliance on private wealth. I would still maintain, however, that there is not anything inherently bourgeois about boat-dwelling; the demographic of the Boaters covers a relatively broad range of wealth and income and includes some of the very poorest and the most marginalised individuals who may not have access to any housing, including local council housing. These individuals typically find themselves supported by the boating community in a way that, Boaters suggest, would not be found in the sedentary world.

Consumption: Frugality and the value of things

One of the reasons why it is so difficult to assess how much money a Boater has, and why my comments concerning wealth are surrounded by caveats, is the fact that Boaters tend to put little value on objects that are purely ornamental and are not useful (objects that may be glossed as "conspicuous consumption").¹⁰⁷ Boaters, even from the earliest days of my fieldwork, told me that moving aboard is a way of "freeing" themselves from "having too much stuff," or from "having things that aren't useful," or from "that competitive, keeping up with the Joneses, hoarding bullshit." The only material items which are likely to make Boaters enthusiastic are gadgets that allow their lives on boats to be easier. For example, Boaters are often saving up for solar panels or new domestic batteries which will make their electricity situation easier to manage. A friend from Reading who had been a Boater for a long while talked about power tools as the "luxury" items which were his weakness; all of his surplus money would be spent on new tools or parts. Other Boaters speak about their bicycles as their most valuable items and state that much of their "spare" money goes on bicycle upkeep and improvements. I have met other Boaters who speak about their ra-

¹⁰⁷ The concept of "conspicuous consumption," or the idea that some items are purchased and displayed for the purpose of showing wealth and gaining status, was originated by Thorstein Veblen (1994 [1899]). Sociological and anthropological contributions to the study of conspicuous consumption have been provided by, among others, Baudillard (1998 [1970]), Campbell (1995), Colloredo-Mansfield (1994), and Thomas (1998).

dios (particularly digital radios, and solar-powered or wind-up radios) as the single item that they could not “do without.”

No relatively experienced Boater has ever, in my experience, mentioned fashionable or designer clothing, electronic gadgets, or other typical “consumer” goods as being important to them in any way. “White goods” such as kitchen appliances are obviously impractical on boats. New “smart” technologies (e.g., tablets, smartphones, etc.) are inconvenient due to their high power usage and short battery lives, and are also a threat to the community in that they are said to encourage break-ins and muggings around moorings. One Boater whom I interviewed stated that, for him, having a television was the sign which divided “shiny” Boaters (affluent Boaters who moor in marinas) from “dirty” Boaters (travelers, those who are “proper” Boaters), and that if he saw a television aerial on a boat, he “wouldn’t trust [the owners].”

It is also hard to access Boaters’ relative wealth by interrogating their consumption habits in terms of daily shopping and food purchases. Due to the fact that food does not last long (fridges being impractical), it is rare to see Boaters purchasing more than they need for a few meals at a time. In a memorable and eye-opening episode, I was once “caught” carrying four bags of shopping home from a Tesco store by some boating neighbours in Reading, who stared at me in disbelief before one of them shouted, “Bloody hell, how long is that all going to last you? A month?” Buying too much at any one time is a sign of the type of conspicuous and unnecessary consumption practices that Boaters try to avoid, and is impractical as some of the food may not last and may have to be thrown away. Wasting food (indeed, wasting anything) is a great breach of boating etiquette.

When a Boater buys a luxury consumable item, like expensive biscuits or chocolates, and if they are on a particularly social mooring, then this is talked about and the food shared. My fieldnotes reveal an example where Jo had bought ice lollies and Boaters came from a distance along the mooring to share these. Particularly in the summer, when there is a communal barbecue occurring, it is very rude not to share what you have, be it a few vegetables, some spare meat, or a block of cheese, which will be put towards the communal

meal.¹⁰⁸ In this way, having expensive or luxury food items is shown to be an event and not commonplace, and (unless the Boaters secretly hoard expensive items; I cannot, of course, know if this happens or not) there is often an attempt made to spread luxury items out between friends moored nearby. Whether Boaters are rich or poor, they are not regularly seen to hoard or to over-consume food more than any other type of “consumer” item.

The driving logic behind these measures seems to be the importance of being frugal and not wasteful, and of not advertising wealth. There is an egalitarian aspect to this, whereby whatever the private wealth of the individual, the ways in which they appear to the community are roughly similar. Wealth is certainly never flaunted and, if one must admit to having money, it is with a little embarrassment. Indeed, there seems to be a tendency towards carefully reckoning every purchase and not taking any item for granted. I heard this described by a Boater once as “knowing the value of things,” requisite for which is “knowing what you need to live, and knowing what you don’t.” A Boater in an interview (a woman named Vale) described boating and the requisite avoidance of consumption as “a prototype of an existence minimum,” which I found to be an evocative single-sentence summary of the Boaters’ position.

Bourdieu (1984), and before him Baudrillard (1975), drew up a theory of consumption in which one’s consumption was reflective of one’s position in a social order, where one’s accumulated material goods could be used as a diagnostic of one’s class and status. Bourdieu made consumption and the material realm part of the habitus, an individual’s mode of being in the world as shaped by their class-bound biographies. Mary Douglas (1996) followed Bourdieu in this endeavour, ultimately arguing that “contemporary identities are not constructed through a direct relationship with the material world but rather through the consumer’s relationship with the symbolic sphere of consumption” (Rus, 2008:94).

More recent scholars, such as Miller (1998) and Chevalier (2010), have conducted ethnographic studies into how consumption practices shape and are shaped by individuals. These contemporary scholars allow more room for the agency of consuming individuals than is suggested in Bourdieu’s work, as individuals can use consumption to their own

¹⁰⁸ The barbecues and festivals of sharing are, as shall be seen in the subsequent chapter, more common in certain areas than in others, and are quite rare in some areas of central London. However, most Boaters will have experienced these events and they tend to recall them fondly, particularly when discussing the “community” as it exists on the waterways.

ends. Hann and Hart also write that, for Miller and Chevalier, “this process of internalisation is more of a matter of reconstruction and reinterpretation than a simple mirror... people create and reproduce the public sphere through consumption practices” (Hann and Hart, 2011:155). Thus, consumption behaviours are a useful heuristic for understanding how a person understands their social position and attempts to curate and construct this edifice.

It would be incorrect, of course, to suggest that Boaters avoid or reject consumption; this is quite obviously untrue. Boaters shop, consume, are affected by advertising and covet items as one would expect. It is noticeable, however, that those items which are valued by the Boaters are generally valued for their use value, and that conspicuous consumption of more than one can utilise - showing wealth for wealth’s sake - is strongly discouraged by the power of Boaters’ communal scorn. Hann and Hart offer a critique of early approaches to the subject of consumption when they write that “while Bourdieu grants consumers individual choice as actors, he links consumption to their social position by assuming that every individual shares the same code of meaning for these object-signs” (Hann and Hart, 2011:154).

Boaters subvert the hegemonic grammar of what is signified as a high-status item in a way which clearly and pointedly marks their rejection of excessive capitalist consumption. The refocussing of Boaters’ consumption behaviours onto items of practical value which are purchased frugally and cannily means that wealth is not necessarily any advantage to gaining status within the boating community. This works to the disadvantage of affluent newcomers and to the advantage of not particularly affluent, but experienced and knowledgeable Boaters who hold a position close to the centre of the community of practice. Those who are practical and frugal, who are good at making deals and who have good contacts and suppliers have an advantage in the Boaters’ world of consumption. Adjusting to a social world where an old mobile phone with a long battery life is more desirable than a new iPhone has proved to be a stumbling block for many a boating neophyte.

Conclusion

Andrew Bailles, a politically active advocate on behalf of the London Boaters and a live-a-board Boater himself, surprised me in an interview. He stated that “A coal boat isn’t a cap-

italist enterprise; it is an expression of the community's need for coal!" before going on to ask "how many minor miracles happen every day on the cut? There's one every time the coal boat goes! How many communities organise themselves to provide for themselves?"

Of course, the coal boats are, in the strictest sense, capitalist enterprises: they turn a (small) profit, they sell their wares for the medium of money to any who wish to purchase them, and they even exist in a "market" where there is a choice of supplier. Why, then, did Andrew make this extraordinary claim? The answer, it strikes me, is that the coal boats are so necessary to the community, and so embedded in the social lives and daily practices of individuals, that they appear so unlike the faceless and impersonal "capitalist" business model as most people understand it as to look like something else entirely. Indeed, to Andrew, they are the community expressing its own need for coal through an act of miraculous invocation. Andrew would have been more correct if he had said that the coal boats are *more than* simply a capitalist enterprise: more than simply selling coal and diesel to Boaters, "coal Boaters" or "working Boaters" are friends and local heroic figures held in common – figures who help Boaters to relate to one another. They are knowledgeable experts with links to all in the community and with good advice to spare. Their "runs" up and down river help one to orientate one's week and to understand how close one is to running out of essential items.

Before 2014 and the positing of the coal boat details on Facebook, one had to find the coal Boaters' contact details from friends and place a personal phone call. They are, in short, inseparably "embedded," as Polanyi (2001 [1944]) would describe, in the lives of Boaters in a way which is the antithesis of the disembodied capitalism of the global free market. Polanyi wrote that "the outstanding discovery of recent historical and anthropological research is that man's economy, as a rule, is submerged in his social relationships" (Polanyi, 2001 [1944]:48) and that it is only the capitalism that has emerged since the Industrial Revolution which breaks this strong pattern. The Boaters, where possible, seek to re-embed their economic lives, to ground them in interrelation.

This statement by Andrew is, for me, a way of understanding how Boaters understand their economic relationships. A greater or lesser part of Boaters' lives (including their working lives) may lie in the wider capitalist economic world, which will be affected, to some degree, by the disembedded logic of the "market," but the parts of their lives which are fo-

cussed on their boats and on other Boaters tend towards certain economic features and patterns. These patterns feel natural and personal, due to their location in social relationships, in circles of friendship, in interdependency and support of the neediness, and in the ties of reciprocity.

The economic life of Boaters is, as has been seen in this chapter, a mixed and complicated affair, existing in formal and informal spheres, relying on both gift and financial exchange, sometimes personal and sometimes impersonal, maintained by livelihoods which for some are sometimes stable and legible and for others are often mixed, flexible and unpredictable. This is due in part, as demonstrated at the beginning of the chapter, to the unpredictabilities, in terms of location and expense, of the life of the travelling Boater. When dwellings move and boat systems tend to catastrophically fail, Boaters must bind together, as will be seen in Chapter 7, and economic flexibility and embeddedness become key. The Boaters' patterns of consumption and world of material goods support this economic reality by not encouraging conspicuous consumption and the hoarding of material wealth, with a new grammar of "object-signs" favouring instead frugal, ingenious or necessary expenditure.

Learning to act economically in this fashion and to consume in these ways is, of course, a vital part of learning to dwell within a community of practice and of becoming an experienced and knowledgeable Boater. One must learn the skills of boating, with the gifts, advice and participation of experienced others, before passing them on to others, in a way which may often have an economic dimension and involve exchanges and redistributions. Thus, this chapter, in combination with the previous two, has given some indication as to how the "community" of Boaters is thought about and functions.

Community, however, is such a central concept in Boaters' conversations that it deserves the attention of a chapter of its own. In the following, I outline my search for the "community" of liveaboards that I was repeatedly told I would find, and my eventual realisation concerning the emic nature of "community" as the Boaters have come to understand it.

Chapter 7: Community

Introduction

Until now in this thesis I have used the term “community” frequently and in various contexts without offering a full analysis of mine and my participants’ usage of the term. I have, of course, introduced the concept of “community of practice” and the use of “community pressures” to encourage a particular approach toward time, the environment, consumption, and the economy. “Community” is, however, such a central term in the Boaters’ discourse - in their description of what makes them Boaters and what separates them from others - that it deserves attention on its own. In this chapter I attempt to define the emic use of the term, as the Boaters use it and as it is understood and enacted. I seek to show what it means for a location to be said to “have” community, and what Boaters mean when they say that they have been “doing” community in a particular location; the term community in the social world of the waterways can both be an attribute of a location and a set of actions and understandings.

When Boaters speak of “community,” one may, armed with a general lay definition or even with a classic anthropological understanding, believe that one understands what this means. To do so would, however, be to miss the Boaters’ emic and specific understanding of community; this is fundamentally dual, both a feature of a place which may contain more frequent instances of Boater interactions and performances of community and solidarity, and a rhetorical promise of support and protection which must be drawn over the waterways in order to protect their vulnerable and often geographically scattered inhabitants. It is toward an understanding of this perspective that this chapter is aimed.

I begin this chapter by describing my early searches for “community” on the waters in the days of my pre-PhD fieldwork. This search was misinformed due to a misunderstanding of the term community as the Boaters have come to use it and, as such, I describe this common or lay definition in order to provide contrast with Boaters’ usage. Subsequently, I move on to describing the first sense in which the Boaters use the term, namely in creating a rhetoric of support and togetherness against obstacles. Here, I briefly return to the themes of the previous chapters in describing how the community comes together to aid those who need support, particularly unskilled newcomers. However, I also introduce a

theme which will come to prominence in the second half of the thesis, namely that the community must bind together for support against threats from outside. This supportive community is, of course, found in actions of exchange and education as detailed in previous chapters, but it also exists beyond practice in the frequent rhetoric of community used by Boaters.

In many ways, Boaters “talk” community into being, brushing over disharmony in the community and the isolated experiences of some in order to create a rhetorical blanket of support over the waterways which can theoretically be called upon, regardless of whether or not the Boater has friends in the immediate vicinity, when the Boater is in need. In theorising this particular usage of community I am in debt to the work of Delanty (2010), who uses the work of Bauman (2001), Nancy (1991), and Agamben (1993) to describe variously the “postmodern” or “communicative” community, and attempts to create a synthesis of these conceptions. These are communities which are not created in the traditional sense, via the *communitas* of shared action (although some shared action supports the rhetorical content), but rather in discourse and in self-ascription. These are not communities of (inter)action, but rather “communities of the mind” (Delanty, 2010:115; see also Spencer and Pahl, 2004). Delanty describes this as a “community beyond unity” (Delanty, 2010:103), following Webber’s (1963) coining of the term “community beyond propinquity.”

Boaters do, however, use the term in another sense when they describe community as being something which certain places “have.” By this they are implying a particular cultural model of Boaters having barbecues and drinks together on their back decks and on towpaths and sharing food, especially in the summer months. This is a specific ritual-like¹⁰⁹ expression of communal action which demonstrates within it some of the major features of Boater sociality: the “laid-back” nature of time, the importance of sharing, the importance of banter and the lack of clear authority and hierarchy.

¹⁰⁹ Throughout this chapter I use the term “ritual-like” rather than ritual. I use this term in a fashion which, I am aware, is not compatible with its technical anthropological usage or understanding, including its solemn nature, its religious components, its set-apart or “sacred” character. By ritual-like I mean that the events in question have a set content, create a sense of *communitas* for those together, are removed from quotidian existence and may consist of an element of anti-structure. This is the loosest possible definition of ritual, whereby ritual means a set of actions performed by a group with no purpose other than to create some groups sense of belonging or understanding. The term is used more to cause the reader to reconsider apparently mundane or banal actions than to create an analytical distinction.

These particular performances of community are easier to analyse using classic anthropological theory. Cohen (1985), for example - building on the concept of *communitas* (shared communal feeling created in ritual) originating in the work of Turner (2011 [1969]) who, in turn, drew on Durkheim's *collective effervescence* (2008 [1915]) - outlines how communities are created by shared (often ritualised) action against boundaries between the in-group and the out-group. This work equally owes a debt to Barth's (1998 [1969]) *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, in which groups come into being in opposition to cultural boundaries and come to be defined against an antagonistic "other." I describe the general format of these performances of community, including a special case, that of the "Pyrate Regatta," which allowed Boaters to break some of the normal community "rules" and thus represented an example of what Turner (2011 [1969]) called "anti-structure." I end with a description of how the "boundary" between Boaters and the out-group has been described and can be experienced. This shall provide an introduction to the second half of the thesis, which turns its focus to the effects of these differences and boundaries.

"Community chasing"

The period of my earlier undergraduate fieldwork was dominated by discussion of the boating "community." My memories of this period, as well as my notes dating back to that time, are full of Boaters with glasses of wine in hand enthusing unprompted as to the closeness of the "community" of liveaboards. Boaters talked about "the old 'over the garden wall' attitude," commenting that "everyone helps each other out," that "everyone knows everyone else's business," that "it's so close knit" and that "it's like living in a village." These comments were usually tinged with nostalgia; an idea that this "community" closeness and coherence was something missing from the modern world.

Indeed, Delanty (2010) notes that community has long been (incorrectly) associated with a lost golden era predating the modern era of individualistic "contract" society. More than once I heard Boaters exclaim, when I mentioned that I wanted to work with Boaters, "oh, you must be looking at "community" then?" Usually these comments would be made at large social barbecues or pub visits, when many Boaters would come together, drink, share food, and demonstrate their community spirit. I was obviously rather pleased to find this kind of cohesive and seemingly easy-to-analyse structure, and so I accepted the statements of my informants quite uncritically. My undergraduate dissertation is, therefore,

a rather stodgy and old-fashioned sort of document, reflecting how various processes act to keep the community coherent and egalitarian despite the freedom and mobility of the individual. As with all essentially functionalist explanations, a great deal of complexity and nuance was lost in this explanation - perhaps unsurprisingly given the perfunctory nature of this early fieldwork. I was told what I wanted to hear, and I am afraid to say that I did not explore very much further.

Reading back over my first PhD fieldwork diaries, the concept of community appears to have dominated and shaped my first several months in the field. In the earliest part of my fieldwork, when I was based around Reading, mentions of community began to occur whenever I spoke about travelling to the canals of London. One Boater was unsure as to whether or not there was a “community up there” and urged me to stay around Reading (the tacit understanding being that Reading was full of community). This lack of knowledge concerning London, complete with such queries as “do people live there?” and statements such as “I hear it’s not safe to moor your boat there at all” were common in Reading, showing that there is actually a relative lack of contact and mutual experience between regional hubs of the waterways network. A few Boaters, however, had experience of London; one in particular, an electrician named Simon, explained where good places to stop in the capital would be, these being places which had a “great boating scene. A London boating community.” Clearly, to the Boaters, community is something that some places have and others lack and this is important to consider when deciding where to stop whilst travelling.

On my way into London, these conversations would continue, with Boaters assuming that my PhD fieldwork would mean that I was looking for “community” or “the community” and suggesting that certain areas would be suited to my purpose. Early suggestions included Kensel Green/Ladbroke Grove and, most commonly, “Vicky” (Victoria) Park in East London. One Boater suggested that the strength of the Vicky Park community could be seen in that even in the winter it is a “place for bonfires and barbecues,” the suggestion being that these social events occur even when the weather is not conducive. Therefore, community was clearly both geographically specific and enacted in a specific fashion.

Throughout these conversations I felt unsure as to what I was expected to find at these mythologised locations. Beyond this, however, I was unsure what I was searching for, assuming that I would know it when I found it. I assumed that the barbecues and bonfires

would be a component, with Boaters constantly in and out of each other's boats and each other's business, sharing food and gossiping about each other as I had been led to believe in my early interviews. Reading had felt somewhat like this, helped by the fact that I was present there in the height of summer and on what was known as the most "social" mooring. Even given these seemingly ideal conditions, getting together communally was haphazard, spontaneous and limited to myself and a few younger Boaters I had befriended.

It was with unrealistically high expectations, then, that I arrived at Ladbroke Grove, only to find the Boaters far from instantly communicative and sociable. I had met a Boater, Jedrek, whilst travelling towards the area and he was friendly enough and gave me an interview. I remarked that I had found it hard to talk to people in the area despite hanging around for a couple of weeks and he sympathised, saying that he did not know many people on the mooring either. I noticed that a few Boaters who seemed to know each other would spend time talking to each other from the bankside or sharing drinks on the towpath, but that these were the representatives of two or three boats on a well-populated but quiet mooring. Jedrek convinced me, however, that some areas of London were "nice" and full of community. He told me again that "[a]round Vicky Park and down by 'The Palm Tree' [a canal side public house], there's a really strong community because BW stopped checking there. I was there for twelve weeks over the summer because of the Olympic restrictions¹¹⁰... It was great over the Olympics here; there was a barbecue and someone put a TV out on the towpath."

A further complexity arose when I continued my series of interviews with Boaters whom I had met or been in contact with through the *London Boaters* mailing list. I met and interviewed a young woman named Azzurra who was relatively new to boating in London, having been aboard less than a year. Azzurra was living at the aforementioned area around Springfield but, when I asked her explicitly what interactions she'd had with her boating neighbours, she answered, "I asked for a [cigarette] lighter last night. Practical stuff really,

¹¹⁰ Areas of London were turned into an "Exclusion Zone" for the Boaters over the 2012 Olympic Games period; see Chapter 3.

when you've run out of something, normal neighbourhood stuff.¹¹¹ To be honest I haven't had a satisfactory or deep interaction with the community. If there is 'community' out there, it's yet to be discovered by me." Some other newer Boaters with whom I talked during those early months also agreed that the frequent references to community were strange and that they had found most Boaters would keep themselves to themselves and not engage in collective action or displays of communal unity. Thus it is necessary to take a detour in order to examine the lay view of community and to interrogate exactly what it is that Azzurra and I were expecting to find and felt we were missing.

Community, in the non-specialist discourse present in wider British society, is usually referred to either in a way roughly synonymous with locality or neighbourhood, or in reference to a particular ethnic minority group. In the former sense, community is referred to via a language of "community projects," "community centres" or "local pillars of the community." These ideas form a discourse that makes community intrinsically linked with an idea of people who live in direct local contact with each other, organising officially and politically in order to achieve certain aims, often aims concerning civic regeneration. Community is, in this sense, also often talked about as something being eroded and lost; something that existed in a golden age (where parents could leave the doors to their houses unlocked, children could play in the street, etc.) and which must be fought for.

Intrinsic in this discourse is the idea of unity and action towards specific needs of the group and an idea of shared local space. Also implicit in this discourse is the idea that community is the preserve of working-class neighbourhoods, whether they be inner-city or rural poor: those that are poor and yet have the support of the extended family and others in the local area. Middle-class families are popularly thought of as being more shut off and insular, and middle class neighbourhoods are associated more with competitive consumption and gossip ("keeping up with the Joneses") than collective action.

In the latter sense of "ethnic community," the common usage is rather similar, the focus being given to collective action, orthodoxy, tangible organisations and projects, as well as to face-to-face interaction in a small delineated neighbourhood. Sometimes minority com-

¹¹¹ As I shall demonstrate, the "community" does not go far beyond what Azzurra sees as "normal neighbourhood stuff," but its importance to the Boaters raises these small acts (as they are to her) to a high level of rhetorical import.

munities are spoken of in wider terms, for example “the Muslim community in Britain” or “the gay community,” but this seems to be understood as a political abstraction with no literal referent (unless by the political far Right, who do see minorities as monolithic, threatening, and with a collective agenda). There can be a degree of exoticisation and romanticisation in middle-class, white British people’s conception of “ethnic community.” In most cases: communities are things to which others belong and to which we do not. Delanty (2010) describes this pervasive use of community in the following fashion: “first, there is an approach typical of community studies, but also reflected in communitarian political philosophy, which associates community with disadvantaged urban localities and requires government-supported responses and civic voluntarism... Here, ‘community’ is highly spatialized and a contrast to mainstream ‘society’” (Delanty, 2010:12).

With these assumptions garnered from public discourse and from an everyday, non-specialist understanding of community, Azzurra and I were expecting community in the context of the waterways to bear several or all of these hallmarks: Boaters having a great deal to do with the day-to-day activities of each other’s lives, some form of co-ordination of projects for the benefit of the whole across distances, a degree of political conformity and, most importantly, regular interaction with other known community members. This view is encouraged by the enthusiastic comments, described in the introduction to this chapter, with their focus on the “close-knit” or village-like nature of the boating world. Indeed, the waterways are often known as “the linear village,” reflecting how, even though moorers are spread out in a long thin line, they are still a small and close community.

Also of relevance here is the concept of the “towpath telegraph,” the gossip network which is meant to ensure that Boaters know about occurrences from distant parts of the system and is said to be a hallmark of the strength of the community. A Boater once explained to me that, “it’s amazing, I can set off from a mooring and people know that I’m coming before I arrive at the next one!” This is not, however, exactly how the towpath telegraph works; rather it is a mechanism through which people who meet whilst travelling discuss particularly important news events (enforcement crack-downs, sunken boats, lock closures, attacks and break-ins, etc.) and a few famous local “characters” which they may both know and have in common. In this way gossip *is* passed around the system, but it is gossip about a few specific and important events and people; the majority of quotidian information is not important enough to be transferred. Some Boaters maintain that “everybody

knows everything about everybody else” on the waterways, and in particular small and very closely knit moorings this may be true. However, it would obviously be entirely impossible to know everybody around the waterways system and to spread information about them all evenly, in a way which may be possible in a small village, where direct face-to-face interaction with all participants in the community is more practicable.

As I understand it, the towpath telegraph performs the functions which are described by Payne as “information management” (1967), the passing on of important information and the regulation of it so that it is kept within a certain circle (in this case other liveaboard Boaters), but also has a rhetorical importance, whereby the characters who are discussed are symbols that the Boaters connect with and are linked to by known acquaintances. This limits the distance between interlocutors and situates both in a web of relations, in a fashion which recalls Candea’s description of the purpose of introductions in Corsica, where those places and persons which the interlocutors hold in common, are of particular importance (Candea, 2010).

The “linear village” is, of course, a rhetorical construct and indeed Boaters from geographically separate regions, even regions within the same large city such as London, do not know very much about other distant regions at all. In this era of instant internet connections across vast distances, Boaters can link quickly and directly to all other Boaters nationwide and indeed they have used this ability to set up national groups such as the National Bargee Traveller Association and the Association of Continuous Cruisers and to share the results of important law court judgments and consultation reports, creating some sense of nationwide liveaboard identity and a more effective mechanism for the towpath telegraph.

It is noticeable, however, how the most popular Facebook groups, websites and mailing lists (South East Boaters, Lee & Stort Boaters, London Boaters, Kennet and Avon [Kanda]) have a local rather than pan-Boater character.¹¹² The sense that there is a national Boater identity exists primarily in internet forums and in the work of those national institutions advocating for Boaters’ rights. This is mainly due to how Boaters - excepting a limited number of individuals, couples and families who have so few connections so as to be able to cruise the entire 2,000 miles of waterways in a grand journey - travel around a region,

¹¹² See the discussion concerning Boater advocacy groups in Chapter 12.

usually a particular waterway, a set of towns or a large city, and it is on these levels that local knowledge is important and that most information is spread.

It is noticeable also that many of the features I described above which one would be expected to find within a “community” are either rare or absent. For example, Boaters often and regularly keep to themselves on moorings - frustrating for me as an ethnographer as I found it hard to strike up conversations, unless I was in my engine compartment completing a technical job, in which case I would be interrupted and offered advice, tips and tricks. In my experience, getting to know direct neighbours involves several shy waves, the odd hello, and finally the initiation of “bilge talk” to “break the ice.” Luckily this does work on occasion, as neighbours from moorings have, given time, become some of my closest friends and informants.

It is far easier to meet Boaters whilst travelling and to begin to converse at locks, but these conversations tend to be fleeting before the other Boater leaves to moor in a different location and one may not meet them again for several months or even years. These short-term friendships (one interviewee called them “boat friendships”), when a Boater may become a travelling companion for the space of a few locks, or a friend for a week at a mooring, before disappearing on their own journey before one meets them again somewhere many miles away, feel unusual due to the deep connections which are often made but which have such a short lifespan. This leads to strange occurrences, an example being when Tony “leant a bloke a book about Aylesbury, and he’s had it for six years or so now; [they’ve] crossed paths about twice in twelve years.” It would be hard to describe these friendships as deep or likely to form the basis of community in the sense of individuals feeling enmeshed in a set of immediate and powerful social relations.

Even more rare of course is political orthodoxy and conformity. Dave in Reading told me that “when you have five Boaters in a room, you’ll have six different opinions” and I use it here as a shorthand for describing how heterodox, independent and willing to air their opinion Boaters are, particularly in online spaces, where disagreement with and mockery of others can stop any particular opinion from becoming hegemonic and can mitigate against individuals becoming powerful through the force of their opinions. Boating mailing lists and forums are constantly full of argument, debate and accusation, creating a constantly fluctuating and contested discourse and not allowing an orthodox Boater’s charter

or accord to develop. This did not bother my interviewee Stuart, who described boating community as being defined by disagreement. “They always argue, that’s what community is. You should feel intimidated, that’s the other thing, that’s what community is. Like, when you walk on to a traveller site, well, you don’t walk on to the site! You feel naked, they strip you to the soul. That’s when you’re landlocked though, and surrounded by roads. On the water it’s different; there’s a different element to it, but you should still feel intimidated, like an outsider.”

Community, for Stuart, should not feature the relative orthodoxy implied by the term in everyday discourse, but should have conflict at its very centre and should simultaneously provide a boundary against which outsiders will come into a tension-laden contact. This is not community in the sense imagined by Azzurra or by myself, or, I would argue, as it appears in the general discourse and imagination. There is, for a start, no need for much time spent actually together and in interaction in this model of Stuart’s, and the lack of (or deliberate rejection of) conformity also seems at odds with the community as a self-ascribed, politically organised minority.

In short, Boaters of London do not live within the sort of community I had been led to expect by my early interviews or by my understanding of the term as used in common parlance. However, I hope to show that, counter to this, there is indeed a “community” of Boaters in London *as the Boaters understand it and as they require it to be*, although the small and relative static population of Boaters in Reading does make the kinds of community rhetoric and action which I shall describe far easier to implement.

Firstly, I will describe how talking about community and emphasising the collective action that does occur has a rhetorical importance for Boaters; there is a need to build up community in the abstract and to talk community into being. Secondly, there is clearly an actual experience of boating community which does not necessarily relate to contemporary clichés of orthodoxy, communal action and widespread face-to-face acquaintance, but does invoke a classic anthropological theme and involve acting together in specific ways and creating and maintaining a shared symbolic repertoire.

The rhetorical importance of community: “Doing” community to each other

It should not be assumed, on reading the previous section, that the Boaters are unfriendly or unwilling to help. In reality, the very opposite is true, and something far more complicated is in operation. I aimed merely to make the point that widespread communal and organised action, agreement and homogeneity - those markers which are thought to denote community in modern Britain - are not present. As described previously, Boaters often mention barbecues and sharing as markers of community, but it is worth noting that they also mention community as meaning the ability to ask other Boaters for help, advice and for mechanical assistance, even if they are strangers. This specific model of community is frequently evoked.

From my fieldnotes, I have examples of Boaters giving evidence for the existence of the boating community by describing how they were given help by more experienced strangers, especially in their early days of being on the cut. Several Boaters repeated stories of being given coal in the winter or being leant chainsaws to cut wood. Help and support over the winter period is particularly important due to the challenges of lock closures, channel freezes, high likelihood of battery failures and sometimes intense cold over the winter months.

Boaters are almost always happy to help out another in need: to lend tools, advice or expertise. Within my first few weeks on the cut I had been given windlasses, fenders, log makers, spare tools, water purifying tablets, mooring pins and spare engine oil, not to mention advice on driving, rope-tying, boat-painting, basic engine maintenance, stern tube-greasing and food storage. Often the semi-pun, "we've got to look out for each other, we're all in the same boat," is used.

A particularly instructive encounter occurred when I smelled gas when boiling my kettle and I noticed that there was no flame alight on the hob. I knocked on the door of the boat next door (being careful not to break boating etiquette by stepping aboard without permission) and the door was answered by a scowling man, who growled a clearly ill tempered, "What?" through his hatch. When I told him what had happened, he quickly brightened up, he was only too happy help and enthusiastically came to take a look at my gas system despite being in the middle of cooking his own dinner. He quickly identified that I had simply run out of gas and pointed out a local moored coal boat to me. The change in his demeanour, from suspicion to helpful enthusiasm, had been immediate and a little shock-

ing. Clearly it took for him to realise that I wasn't just a Boater, but a Boater in need, in order to produce the change.

Many Boaters have stories of being helped out when they themselves were new to the cut and profess to now be trying to repay the favour. As I have written previously, Tom, an early friend from my mooring around Reading, had a justification for helping that was the opposite of the norm. He told me how, when he was a new Boater, "nobody gave me any help or showed me anything, and that's why I'm helping: so that doesn't happen to you, so you're not on your own." Either justification has the same effect, however, and that is to make it clear that offering support is what Boaters are expected to do as they become more experienced on the cut.

Helen, in our interview, stated that the boating community was "people of like mind. So even though you don't know anybody there's a support system there if you need it. I mean, there was a time when I towed a gin palace out in Windsor when they got stuck when the river dropped. I did it because you're a community. It's about being on your own and not on your own." Community, in this sense, is very much an action, something which must be done to or in the company of others. When I asked a Boater early in my fieldwork what community was he replied "Community? I've been doing it today and I'll be doing it tomorrow! A guy had some wood needed cutting, so I did it for him when I was doing mine." For this Boater, community was to be found in actions of support - it is *done* by one Boater and to another when the other is in need. Tony and Gill were noticeably positive concerning this type of enacted supportive community:

"I've just walked down a line of boats and people said hello to me. Nobody says hello to me in the street! Boaters are friendly as a rule and great to strangers. I think that there's only a real commune, a real static community at somewhere like Bathampton [at the western end of the Kennet and Avon Canal]. There's an attitude that "you're a Boater so you're one of *us*." We'll leave you alone if you want to be left alone. But if you're in need, we'll give you things, we've given coal, we've given books... But we're not particularly rushing up to people to do that!"

Community in this understanding refers to a community of mutual support. Most importantly, it is a community of support that does not rely on previous acquaintance. The relationship is one of implicit trust that as the other is a member of the community of live-a-board Boaters, they can be approached for support in times of hardship. Thus it is import-

ant to build up such a rhetoric of community; the more that it is enthused about and enacted, the more it can be relied upon and invested in. Occurring at a level more abstract than that of direct face-to-face interaction, liveboards are creating an imagined community (Anderson, 1991), although more than just imagining similarities with unknown others, Boaters must be able to imagine that these unknown others are benevolent and able to help. In private I have heard some Boaters be skeptical about how much trust can be put in unknown others, occasionally highlighting that Boaters can steal or be otherwise antisocial too, but this is very much a reactive discourse against a mainstream for whom the concept of the waterways-wide network of support is paramount.

Certain conceptions of community (Baumann, 2001; Habermas, 1984 and 1987) have begun to focus on community as a communicative construct, i.e., created in dialogue by individuals to whose self-ascription of identity and community affiliation is flexible and personal and allows for membership to multiple “communities” simultaneously. Delanty (2010:104) describes these theories as “post-modern” theories of community and, in a way that reflects my ethnography, as “community beyond unity” (*ibid.*).

As seen in greater detail in the literature review for this chapter, the idea of the “postmodern community,” or the “communication community” that is “sustained by mass culture and aesthetic sensibilities and practices rather than in symbolic battles between self and other” (Delanty, 2010:104) has been described in abstract philosophical discussions by, among others, Nancy (1991), Blanchot (1988), Corlett (1989) Agamben (1993) and Maffesoli (1996), and in ethnography by Hetherington (1999) and Heelas (1996) in relation to the “New Age Traveller” movement. Nancy (1991) and Blachot (1988) explore, as reflected in my ethnography, how community is experienced as a loss of a fictive ideal state and set up in opposition to this understanding of misplaced harmony. For these writers, community is emotional and communicative, but does not take concrete forms, instead remaining abstract and idealised.

Corlett (1989) focusses instead on the lack of consensus and the importance of difference in modern community, in a fashion that directly supports my informant Stuart’s contention that community lies within arguments and disagreement. Maffesoli (1996) calls his post-modern conception of community the “emotional community:” it is marked by “fluidity occasional gatherings and dispersal” (Maffesoli, 1996:76). This seems to fit closely with the

Boaters' occasional coming together whilst remaining strongly individuated. For Maffesoli, these communities are established in an attempt to "re-enchant the world" (Delanty, 2010:111), in a way that echoes Nancy and Blanchot's conceptions of community being most powerful when it refers to that which has been lost.

These understandings of community are a clear and close fit for the sense of community described above in my ethnography; community, in these theorists' work, exists "in temporary groupings, in the flux of life" (Delanty, 2010:112) and against "expressivist kinds of individualism" (*ibid.*:112) and conspicuous consumption. A concrete example of this kind of community is offered by the New Age Travellers, many of whom become Boaters after travelling on the roads. These travellers have an elective community based on an emphasis on self-identity (Heelas, 1996), which is therefore postmodern in its formation. These travellers are reflective, according to Heelas (1996), of the "detraditionalization" of the self, in that their community exists in the absence of tradition and genealogical links.

From Maffesoli's use of the term "fluidity" and Delanty's use of "flux", it is clear that this communicative or postmodern community is not fixed and is flexible, able to become vital, important and immediate or to diminish as necessary. In this way it exists clearly in the "subjunctive mood" as described by Turner (1990), where structure is broken down and a condition exists whereby new formations can emerge. In my fieldsite, a community of mutual support, a number of expectations and responsibilities, and a shared lifeworld, are communicated and thus talked into being in a way which reflects this tranche of theories. This does not and cannot create a utopia, but the rhetorical content is powerful and pervasive. Boaters use acts of self-ascription as part of the community and the expectations this entails to powerful rhetorical effect, as can be clearly seen in the normalisation of the high levels of support and gift-giving to boating newcomers, even when the very idea of "newcomers," as seen in Chapter 4, is frowned upon and these new individuals become the targets of distrust and accusation. Community, created in the abstract and, so to speak, "beyond unity" (meaning beyond the need to be together; to agree on a homogenous set of understanding, to ensure what Delanty (2010:109) calls "the elimination of difference," and to share a unified ritual life) becomes directly useful and important for those Boaters who come to depend on its force.

The community of practice; the community of support and protection

It is important to be part of this kind of supportive community for several reasons. The first few refer back to Chapter 4-6, where it was shown how the new Boaters must be led through the process of enskilment in order to become part of a “community of practice” on the waterways. I shall recapitulate briefly the nature of the challenges that frequently arise and cause Boaters to have to be aided by neighbours. Firstly, there are challenges arising due to the difficulties of the colder seasons. Secondly, boats are famously mechanically unreliable and complicated to understand. Electrical systems, plumbing systems, gas systems and engines are all different to those found in houses and present unique challenges for the Boater, whether or not they have well-developed practical skills from their time living in houses. Boat navigation, locking, knot-tying and cruising etiquette are also otherwise closed worlds which must be discovered through gathering experience, and then only with the support of experienced others. Thirdly, and as shall be seen in the subsequent chapters of this thesis, Boaters are in a position of relative marginality and insecurity when moored in residential areas. Boats are often locked with simple padlocks over lightweight wooden doors and do not have alarm systems. They can easily be untied, jumped on, rocked, or attacked with missiles, experiences with which all Boaters will be familiar. As will be seen in Chapter 11, being part of a community of support is vital for Boaters’ security and safety.

Lastly, communities of support are important due to a Boater’s complex and marginal position with regards to the UK state and its agencies. Boaters are a travelling people who may be considered to be acting within a legal loophole¹¹³ and, therefore, to be a nuisance along similar lines to other itinerant and hard-to-categorise groups, for example Gypsies, New Age Travellers and the homeless. As a people with (debatably) no shared ethnic origin or deep historical background, they can find it difficult to claim that they have an ethnic right to their itinerant way of life (although their legal claim is, as has been seen, quite strong). With an idea of a single supportive community, not just is the idea of effective political action made possible, but also Boaters open themselves up to the possibility of being recognised as a cohesive (and potentially ethnically distinct) group in law. Received knowledge states that communities acting together and supporting each other are harder to disrupt and manipulate than individuals. This can be seen in Stuart’s comments quoted earlier in

¹¹³ See Chapter 3.

this chapter, suggesting that community is akin to security through intimidation: that the group is not to be interfered with by outsiders.

An example of the rhetorical importance of the boating community as an act of representation can be seen below. Steve, the working Boater, was keen to talk to me about my writing about community, thinking that it would be useful to present this evidence in the live-board Boaters' negotiations with and conflicts against the waterways authority (CaRT). He told me that someone was needed to act on behalf of the community, adding "I want to talk to you about the oncoming political situation with CaRT... I was thinking, with the current mumblings [about limiting mooring, creating permits and upping enforcement], and with CaRT becoming a limited company, that we need political representation *fast* and, whoever takes up that clarion call will have to be stressing *community*, just as we talked about." I told Steve that, although I believed he was correct that as an anthropologist, there was a chance that I could campaign for the rights of Boaters and add to the debate, but that I was ethically bound to a degree of neutrality, at least at this stage of my research, which would make it hard for me to be the sort of outspoken activist that he needed. For these reasons, maintaining a rhetoric of community and knowing that there is a community of support is self-evidently important, particularly when one feels the necessity of aligning the community against an "enemy" the size of CaRT and bearing their powers and resources.

To summarise, Boaters create a rhetoric of community in order to ensure that they can rely on unknown others to provide support in times of hardship (be it mechanical fault, the harshness of winter, outsiders or state agencies) and in order to ensure that new Boaters are led from their peripheral role towards a position where they have the skills and knowledge to become considered somewhere near the centre of a community of practice. Community is an invisible safety blanket which coats the waterways and, due to the danger of relying on strangers, it is a blanket that requires frequent darning and embellishment in order to function when it is most needed. All (or at least a vast majority) must trust in the imagined community or it is worthless.

I am a little reticent about using the term "rhetoric," as it may be seen to imply that the community is a fiction or a convenient exaggeration. This is not the case and rather I contend, via Anderson (1991), that all communities are based upon the imagination of similar

and unknown others, many of whom one is incapable of knowing directly. Carrithers (2012) argues via the Rhetoric Culture Project that students of anthropology should study the rhetorical content of any and all texts, not simply those produced for an overt political purpose, as all texts hold the rhetorical impact of schemas, norms and understandings emerging from their cultural setting. In this way, when one looks at community as it appears to Boaters, there is an obvious rhetoric centred towards describing and embellishing the cohesion, support and unity to be found on the waterways.

This is not a fiction, although it does, like all rhetorics, paper over the uncomfortable cracks in the system produced when Boaters fall short of the ideal: for example, when Boaters prove to be untrustworthy, unwilling to learn how to help themselves or to help others, vain, materialistic or polluting. Such a theory fits well within Habermas' (1984 and 1987) conception of community as produced via a communicative project and via the creation of a shared discourse, language or lifeworld. It also bears the hallmarks of Delanty's (2010) "postmodern" conception of community, where community as it is spoken about by individuals does not have a necessary analogue in collective action.

Despite the fact that Boaters' acts of support are not everyday occurrences, and despite the even greater rarity of large communal support events such as Boaters' clean-ups and dredging of their local waterways, the rhetoric remains central and is seldom disputed. For the Boaters, the communication of community creates a security and allows a sense of belonging to emerge, even across the great chasms that can all too easily atomise Boaters on isolated moorings and between regions. Within this community of support, I can knock on the door of a fellow Boater in the middle of the night in a panic about an unidentified and concerning leak, or call upon the same stranger to emerge from his or her boat to protect me in the event of a potentially violent break-in; without it, and what makes this topic so fundamental, the group is simply a collection of individuals who happen to live on boats.

Performing Boater community: 'having' community in a particular place

It has thus far been demonstrated that boating community exists in a rhetorical or abstract form that allows access to skills and advice and enables increased participation in a community of practice. The Boater's situation is not, however, a perfect fit for postmodern theories of communicative community. Nancy is clear that "communication is not a

bond” (Nancy, 1991:29) and that postmodern community does not consist of close bonds and ties created by combined action. Equally, Maffesoli, drawing on concepts such as lifestyles and taste cultures, speaks about communities as being based not on “strong symbolic bonds, but on very temporary associations” (Delanty, 2010:113).

I believe, however, that these bonds and the traditional sense of community that they imply are created by Boaters’ (often ritual-like) actions together and their shared symbolic repertoire, although these ritual-like events are relatively rare occurrences and it may be possible for Boaters in the wrong locations and who have not yet met the correct well-connected individuals to miss them entirely and to view the “community” as a purely abstract concept. Due to its emergence from the “mundane” materiality of boating, the shared symbolic repertoire of terms and understandings seems natural and unremarkable and as such is seldom reflected upon, with Boaters not necessarily recognising that the bonds which bind them as co-present dwellers on the waterways are so powerful and affecting until they try to move back onto “dry land” and realise that they have become part of a symbolic community.

Community is, despite my early skepticism and confusion concerning the term, also performed and enacted through concrete expressions, although maybe not as often and to so great a degree as the rhetoric implies. These are, of course, the acts of support described above, but can also take a more specific and ascribed form. Here, I am referring to the model described in the first section of this paper, that of barbecues and bonfires during the summer where food and drink is shared. These events do occur; it is merely that their importance is greater after the event itself, and they represent an example of how powerful and immediate the community is in a particular area and at particular times.

I believe that this concrete expression can be best analysed using older concepts of symbolism, boundaries and ritual, rather than ideas of the postmodernism and rhetoric. These festivals of giving and sharing tend to be relatively spontaneous and haphazard and thus one must either just happen to be in the right place at the right time, or to have heard about a planned event from an acquaintance on one’s travels. Somewhat luckily for me, Chris and Andy, two very experienced and well-regarded Boaters living aboard a large barge, have semi-formalised the barbecue arrangement and run a Boater barbecue most weekends throughout the summer at a particular location in east London, where they keep

a firepit. They encourage all nearby moored Boaters to place food on the firepit where it can be shared out to all-comers. If one wishes to partake, then one must put food on the pit or give an alcoholic drink to the cook (whoever happens to be turning the meat over at the time) and the hosts. It is notable that the sharing and exchange being formalised at these events are similar to the sharing, the small exchanges and the barter which are a feature of the community of support. Boaters enter into exchange relationships with others through both methods, relationships which, due to the spirit of the gift and the compulsion to reciprocate, bind Boaters together as actors in the waterway's economy and practices.¹¹⁴

These are not, it must be emphasised, daily occurrences, and nor do they necessarily succeed in creating the sense of deeply shared interrelation expected by Azzurra or myself at the more naive early stages of my fieldwork. One example is the story of a later interviewee of mine, who had been aboard for seven years and yet only had one recollection of being invited to a barbecue. Reflecting a story that was somewhat familiar to me by now, she said, "I was asked to a barbecue that some neighbours were having. I bought some chocolate and put it on the spread next to their barbecue, but that sort of thing doesn't happen very often." Tony, who I quote in the previous section as being positive about the community, explained to me that even though he and his wife Gill had lived in the same area for around five years and there were forty boats regularly in the area, they only knew "three or four" Boaters well.

It is possible to see the sharing barbecues of the Boaters as ritual events which mark the boundary between Boaters (who know the location of such events, who are legitimately present, who understand the etiquette of sharing, with whom one has a trade or giving relationship) and others (who are rhetorically imagined as being in their houses, isolated and not acting communally, or else staring uncomprehendingly¹¹⁵ at the Boaters as they go about their business of sharing). These events, with their emphasis on equal sharing, taking place around a communal fire, with their impromptu musical and circus skills performances, and their sharing of alcohol and soft drugs, certainly have components which allow one to imagine such events as important, ritually-charged and set apart. They are certainly

¹¹⁴ See Chapter 6.

¹¹⁵ See Chapter 9 and the discussion concerning "gongoozlers" and "gongoozling."

spaces to show friendship, conviviality and helpfulness - all of the markers of community that so often remain amorphous and only present in the abstract.

Following Turner's (2011 [1969]) work on ritual, in which he built on Durkheim in describing how ritual events, set apart from the "normal", can be said to create *communitas*, the feeling of belonging created through mutual ritually-charged experience. This sense of being together and acting together in these ways is what makes these occurrences so rhetorically important. In a Boater's barbecue there will be a sense of freedom of expression, which is why such events so often end with communal singing and musical improvisations ("jams"), if a Boater has a musical instrument (typically a guitar, but potentially a ukelele, a banjo, or an accordion) aboard. Fitting with the laid-back, informal atmosphere encouraged by Boaters in social settings,¹¹⁶ these occasions are liberal and permissive. Recreational drug use and the overconsumption of alcohol are not questioned or remarked upon, and Boaters will congregate around the fire to talk, and drink, and dance. These events are not to be taken seriously, and are often not planned or formalised (Chris and Andy's semi-regular events being an exception), with the list of attendees emerging organically from the population of nearby moored vessels, other visiting Boaters, and passersby.

The sharing events are given their most formalised and large-scale expression at the occasional (theoretically annual) Pyrate Regatta, the only formal party for liveboards; however, due to the fact that it is not a widely advertised event and news of the event is only spread to friends and those moored near the organisers, it is attended mainly by older and more experienced Boaters, and those with a more clearly anti-authoritarian outlook - the kind who would be described as "pirates" during the rest of the year. This party contains elements of the normal Boater barbecue: musical performances, a central bonfire, sharing of drinks, friends moored closely together. But there are also noticeable differences which set the party apart. The event is planned; Boaters travel to a distant location far out of central London and their normal localities; fliers are even printed; games and activities are organised for the entire weekend; no communal meal is cooked; guests dress up as pirates and deliberately break mooring etiquette norms (one declaring "Arrgh, we're pirates, we'll moor where we like!"). The event itself is opened by James, a local Boater, stripping naked and demonstrating tricks with fire.

¹¹⁶ See Chapter 5 of a discussion concerning the habitus of the Boater.

These extra touches set the Pyrate Regatta apart as being a special demonstration of one's Boater identity. Normal rules are subverted, not just mooring rules (e.g., mooring in lock landings) but further as all-comers are forced to "walk the plank" in to the river; normally Boaters of course try to avoid falling in and are proud of having lived aboard for x number of years and having "never been in." The dressing up, the strange opening ceremony and these breaks from tradition give the event the impression of theatrical or ritualised demonstration.

Victor Turner (2011 [1969]) describes such inversions and rejections of the normal structure, in ritualistic settings, as forms of "anti-structure:" "a transformative self-immolation of order as presently constituted, even sometimes a voluntary *sparagmos* or self-dismemberment of order whence the normative order can emerge revitalized" (Turner, 1982:83). Via these ritual-like experiences, subverting structure as they do and centred around shared symbols, Boaters experience themselves as being part of a community of Boaters; the abstract community of support is made real and palpable in these events and, as such, they are discussed as important despite their relative rarity.¹¹⁷

The symbols that form components of these events - the sharing of food and drink, the communal fire, the space given over to free expression and performance - are related to by Boaters in ways which allow them to imagine themselves as part of a community of liveboards against a boundary of others: others who, due to their dwelling in centrally-heated houses, would not understand the importance of a communal fire, who would be too hierarchical or selfish to share what they have, who would not be creative or free enough to jam on folk instruments with strangers. These things need not necessarily be true; they must only be imagined or understood at some level by the Boaters present.

Other features of Boater sociality which will, by now, be familiar to the reader - the flexible nature of time (boat time), the lack of a clear hierarchy, the importance of the informal and the lighthearted - are all clearly evidenced in these expressions. Even if they do not ex-

¹¹⁷ I attended the Pyrate Regatta in the summer of 2013 but could not in 2014; apparently this second year it "went too far," with Boaters causing litter, damage and a large amount of noise pollution that led to the police "breaking up" the gathering. A number of Boaters resisting this intervention by moving *en masse* to a further, more rural location and attempting to stay throughout the remainder of the summer, despite increased pressure to move them on. I can only report this secondhand, and the 2013 Pyrate Regatta, to my knowledge, was good-natured and positive for the majority, despite the encouragement of rule breaking and "anti-structure."

press it in exactly these words, there is a clear understanding when around a campfire sharing a drink: that “we are Boaters, we act in this communal fashion and we are the kind of people who privilege these experiences.” Such symbols are, however, only the most explicit of those shared by Boaters; an entire grammar of more banal shared symbols and understandings can make Boaters feel like they have had experiences which makes them closer to other Boaters than to outsiders from the houses. These can be small or large, seemingly unimportant or vital.¹¹⁸ Each component, like a sediment or coral growing into a large structure from tiny parts, adds up to a shared symbolic vocabulary which, if we follow Cohen (1985), we can see as constitutive of community, particularly when they imply a boundary, a difference between the self and others.

Conclusion

It has thus been shown that, for the Boaters, community is best understood as the following:

1. An obligation supported, created and maintained through rhetoric; community is what you *do*, or, more accurately, what you promise to do for those facing the same challenges (“in the same boat” as the convenient cliché holds)

2. A feature of particular areas and particular times, where Boaters on particular mooring know their neighbours well and have close relationships with them, and where barbecues and “party-like” gatherings - which could be considered to be ritual-like events focussed on sharing - are more likely; the sense in which community is what a place *has*.

One could spend months “chasing” this second sense of community, but without luck, or a knack for meeting sociable Boaters, one could easily end up feeling disappointed and as if the rhetoric had oversold the reality. These two components enable what Cohen refers to as the symbolic construction of community (Cohen, 1985), although, as Delanty (2010) realises, community, especially in an individualised modern world, is as much about com-

¹¹⁸ An exhaustive list of these banal symbols would be uninformative and unnecessary. Such a list would include shared local terms for particular locations, a shared knowledge of the use of particular esoteric items which would be of use only to the Boater, and other “markers” of one’s identity as a Boater, such as the “cork float,” or “foam float:” a small circle of material which Boaters keep on their key chain so that their keys may float if and when they fall in to the cut.

municating a personal sense of belonging as it is about taking action in order to delineate boundaries.

This chapter has attempted to establish how my thinking on the subject of “community” has developed, from naively chasing after a non-existent corpus of communal action and face-to-face relationships, to recognising that boating’s relation to the term community is, in fact, more complex than stating that Boaters either are a community or they are not, that they have community or that they do not. Boaters have a strong rhetoric of community which allows them to create and maintain a network of support that holds an imagined community of Boaters together despite distance, immense diversion of opinion and a lack of face-to-face knowledge of those with whom one may be forced to interact. This rhetoric of community is not a fiction or a lie, but is rather an embellishment and an idealised vision of the social world of the Boater.

The rhetorically-enhanced community of support allows Boaters to enter into a community of practice and move from a relatively isolated peripheral position towards a greater state of integration and an accumulation of skills, knowledge and contacts over time. Boaters further enact their identity as part of a community via certain ritual-like expressions. Their sense of being part of a community is finally enhanced by having a number of shared symbols, experiences and understandings, many of which are related to boundaries between Boaters and antagonistic others.

Throughout this chapter, I have taken Delanty’s approach of taking the “notion of a community as a fragile communicative bond;” (Delanty, 2010:xiii) a feeling of belonging which emerges, breakable and thin, from dialogue and from shared experiences. Further, I would argue that there is no way to avoid exploring community in the manner I have attempted here, from several directions simultaneously: the lay definition, the emic meaning implied by the users of the term themselves, and the etic viewpoint of major theorists. Only in this way can a coherent argument be reached, hopefully towards the end of explaining how and why an experience of membership of a community is created and maintained by individuals at a particular place and at a particular time. From here, after a summary bridging su-chapter, the thesis continues in its widening of scope in order to examine how the Boaters are viewed by and interact with those organisations who wield legal and state power over them.

Sub-chapter Summarising Part 1 of the thesis and bridging to Part 2.

I have described how the Boaters become part of the community of practice on the waterways as a process of apprenticeship, of coming to learn skills and to gain vital knowledge through the material body of the boat and through journeys within the landscape of the waterways. It is important, however, to consider the political and ethical dimensions of the Boaters' immersion in the community of practice, their apprenticeship, and their lived realities. The ways in which Boaters learn how to exist and thrive on the water is shaped by the material quality of the waterways and emerges from their environment, but also shows particular biases and the encouragement of certain ways of thinking and being that are by no means inevitable. There are many theoretically possible ways of becoming and acting as a Boater,¹¹⁹ and yet Boaters tend to show certain patterns of thought and understanding resulting from their "apprenticeship" and their movement from Gongoozler to liveaboard. This section aims to provide a cosmology of the Boaters: to describe the model of person and society, the utopian vision, which Boaters are encouraging. This model is encouraged through the mechanisms described in Chapter 4, including but not limited to the ways in which Boaters spread and restrict information, react to newcomers, the ways that they socialise and act together, and even the ways in which they create and act within representative organisations.

Practical skills

Throughout Chapters 4-6, it was seen that new Boaters are encouraged, by processes of censure and encouragement from other Boaters, to work hard at getting to "know" and understand their own boats, to be able to fix or at least diagnose the majority of mechanical issues and breakdowns which may occur, and to be constantly and industriously improving their boats through projects and maintenance. There is a clear bias towards being practical, capable, and independent, a bias that is articulated through a description of the "kind of person" who is suited to Boating. Usually these individuals are spoken of as being "down-to-earth," "practical," "handy," "useful," and possessing of "common sense." The material

¹¹⁹ As Argenti (2008) shows, even in places where "communities of practice" types of apprenticeship are evident, these are often not the only form of apprenticeship taking place in that particular setting. He describes how some of the Cameroonian carvers with whom he works operated within strictly hierarchical systems of apprenticeship with strict systems for transmitting knowledge. The kind of apprenticeship relationship that I describe as occurring on the waterways is by no means inevitable; it has come about through a series of deliberate choices by the Boaters as to how they wish to organise.

nature of boating, including dealing daily with complicated electrical, plumbing and diesel systems, makes “practical” knowledge and being good with materials very important for Boaters. However, the community seem to go beyond this in holding up industriousness and hard manual work as a moral and ethical strength and reliance on paying another to work on one’s boat as a corresponding moral and ethical weakness. It is possible to imagine Boaters as being more forgiving, in the manner of most sedentary neighbourhoods, of the act of paying experts to complete odd jobs and maintenance tasks aboard boats, particularly as this financially supports members of the community. Yet often, as I have described in Chapters 4-6, less capable Boaters can be chastised for their ignorance, their laziness, and their mistakes (with newcomers being given slightly more leeway), and Boaters, when they do help out others, often do so in such a fashion as to allow the receiver of the support to gain sufficient knowledge to help themselves in future.

Thus, it is possible to describe the process through which individuals become Boaters as being a particular kind of apprenticeship, one which privileges a certain moral code. The Boaters’ apprenticeship has a focus on the friendship and support of the wider community as individuals are given advice and assistance but, importantly the individuals being supported *must* work hard for themselves; they must show industriousness and a desire to gain skills and to make their boats better places in which to live. This can be seen in the ways in which boats themselves are spoken about by Boaters. Poorly maintained boats which have fallen into extreme disrepair or begun to sink cause Boaters distress and sadness. The sight of such boats will lead to criticism of the owners and the neglect they have shown. On the other hand, Boaters are quick to show approval of well-maintained boats, particularly boats which have been “done up” in a particularly skilful fashion, especially if the owner has found particularly impressive or ingenious solutions to problems. This shows the importance of the boats themselves, which are treated at times as living participants; often they are patted or kissed by their owners, given pet names, anthropomorphised in conversation, and “mourned” when they sink or are removed from the waterways. A participant once admitted to me, “I kiss my boat goodbye when I go to work. Is that weird? I hope I’m not the only person to do that!” From the evidence of a number of interactions, I could reassure them that they were not alone in doing so.

This privileging of work ethic and industriousness, as opposed to an abstracted intellectual labour, could be seen as being related to a traditional “working class” ethical and moral

code (see Strathern, 1982; Weber, 2010 [1905]), and indeed, as shown in Chapter 4, people from working class backgrounds and who have worked in “trades” do tend to already have many of the skills and much of the knowledge required to take to boating without issue. There is, however, an additional focus on independence, on ingenuity and creativity, and an anti-authoritarian spirit within Boaters’ understanding of their apprenticeship that goes beyond the sort of “protestant” work ethic described by Weber.

Capitalism and consumption

As described in Chapter 6, the ethic of industriousness, skill, and independence goes beyond the process of Boaters’ enskilment and practical work aboard and into their engagement with the wider capitalist realm. Boaters implicitly and explicitly value skill, practical knowledge and ingenuity above the market cost or expense of things, particularly above services that can be purchased from companies and from the wider market. Boaters tend to be those who value things they feel are more important than material wealth; this is seen in the importance of skills and abilities, communities, and particular individual freedoms and expressions of independence. Implicit in this is a critique of the capitalist system which privileges ownership of goods, conspicuous consumption, and the overt demonstration of wealth. Boaters privilege action: what one does over what one owns. This realisation was bought home to me one day during my fieldwork when I visited a cinema with some boating friends. We had all lived without televisions and, therefore, without television advertisements, for some time. Before the film, a car advertisement came on screen. The advert was extremely overwrought, showing sleek images of the car under moody lights, interspersed with images of people in revealing clothing and images of panthers, the image complete with bombastic classical music on the soundtrack: in many ways it was a piece typical of modern advertising. We all, as one, began laughing at the advertisement. When we spoke about it afterwards, we realised that, as we had all lived on boats for a time, where images like this are uncommon and where competitive ownership of status resources such as expensive new cars is simply not part of our social realities, we had found the advertisement to be surreal and jarring.

As Boaters, our understanding of value had changed and we had ceased to see these advertisements as normal and relatable and the items they were trying to sell as desirable. We had begun to value individuals’ abilities above their appearance and wealth. Boaters

often use a schema of relative “depth” when they discuss these matters. For example, they will talk about the capitalist world as being obsessed with the “surface,” with “gloss” and “sheen,” in the same fashion as they describe the “surface” concerns of “shiny” Boaters and their obsession with polishing their brass work and keeping the external surfaces of their boats tidy and their roofs empty. Equally, they speak about their own concerns as being “deeper,” of going “below the surface” and, thus, of being more important and meaningful. This schema of relative depth is pervasive in general discourse within the UK, from the critique of “glossy” magazines and “shallow” celebrities to the quest for “spiritual depth,” a “deeper meaning” or that which goes “beneath the surface” by those who feel poorly served by consumer culture. Boaters tend to consider their lives as being lived beneath surface and appearances and towards a more meaningful centre, where that which is valued is of actual importance.

Nature

Thus, for the Boaters, what is important is knowledge, skill and engagement; the consumption of expensive consumer items and the capitalist system of the reckoning of value are resisted. This particular moral and ethical cosmology continues into Boaters’ dealings with what they consider to be “nature” or the “natural world.” As Strang described (2004), and as I outline in Chapter 5, in the contemporary milieu of the UK, there is not a strong Cartesian dualism between “nature” and “culture,” but rather there is a continuum whereby certain areas are thought of as being more “natural” than others. Usually it is rural areas, particularly those that are overgrown or apparently wild, which are thought of as being in particular proximity to nature. However, all areas (even those in the city) that have trees, grasses, wild animals and, particularly, bodies of water, are thought of as being in closer proximity to nature. As well as having an ethic of working hard to engage with the boat and to understand the mechanics of boat dwelling, Boaters are encouraged, through the censure and encouragement of others, to enter into close engagement with the “natural” world. As described in Chapter 5, non-Boaters are thought of as alienated and closeted, cocooned from the realities of the world around them. Boaters, by contrast, tend to think of themselves as engaged in intimate proximate interaction with the natural world; they have to negotiate daily with the changing weather, with the wind, with the height of the water, and with the changing seasons. They feel the summer intimately as their boats heat up

and their milk begins to spoil every day, and, as the winter comes, they find themselves having to keep a fire lit and stoked constantly so as to not freeze in bed at night.

There is a clear ethical and moral dimension to the Boaters' understanding of nature demonstrated here. By rhetorically positioning themselves as closer to nature, and by choosing to live on these "natural" watercourses, they are implicitly rejecting the "alienated" city around them and setting themselves up as an example of positive alterity and difference. Rhetorically, as shown in the opening sections of Chapter 5, they are custodians and protectors of nature, living in greater harmony with the world than their alienated sedentary neighbours. Again, like the surface/depth continuum described in the previous subsection, here there can be seen to be a moral continuum in operation, a continuum between, on one end, alienation from the natural world - viewed as a negative way of living - and, on the other, direct (and skilled) engagement with natural process - viewed as a positive way of living. Environmentalists, proponents of "green" politics, and climate change activists in the contemporary Western world tend to invoke this kind of schema and, as such, Boaters are not unique in making these moral and ethical understandings a key facet of their way of being in the world.

Community

How does this cosmology, which privileges engagement with the world, hard work, skillfulness, industriousness, independence from others and a rejection or critique of the capitalist order, fit with the importance to the Boater of community? Community is about interaction with and reliance on others, in seeming contradiction to the Boaters' cosmology as described so far in this summary chapter. The answer is, as demonstrated in Chapter 7, that the kind of community which is espoused as ideal by Boaters is a complex construct, one which both encourages the presence of a supportive community in the abstract, providing a blanket of support for Boaters, and encourages and rhetorically exaggerates face-to-face co-presence and interaction. The community which Boaters are encouraging as an ideal type is an old-fashioned and nostalgic kind of community;¹²⁰ one which privileges being able to depend upon one's neighbours when in need.

¹²⁰ Due to the nature of nostalgia and whimsical notions of the past, it is, of course, perfectly possible that this kind of community never really existed in the forms in which it is now described or, if it did, was never as widespread as it is popularly imagined. This does not diminish from its rhetorical importance.

Community is important within the Boaters' cosmology as it is felt to be something lost and lacking in consumer society, a mechanism that works against the alienation and disconnection already described. In order to have this relationship, it is important to know one's neighbours personally and well. Further, in order to do this, it is important to have trust in neighbours, to believe that they have the same moral codes and ideas of good conduct, and to be trustworthy oneself. Boaters do not have the small and constrained geographic area of the village in which to encourage neighbourliness and, as such, rhetoric, gossip, and the spreading of codes and ideas of etiquette through overt means (including the internet, leaflets and discussions at meetings) are necessary.

Community, as the Boaters understand it, does not stand in the way of those other aspects of the Boaters' cosmology as previously described, as the support of neighbours is saved for those who are "proper" Boaters, those who work hard on their own boats, show the correct attitudes and comply with boating etiquette. In this way, more sympathy and support is given for newcomers who are not expected to be expert Boaters from their very first days aboard. Those who are more experienced Boaters and yet are deemed to still be ignorant, overly reliant on expert others, or to be inconsiderate users of the waterways, are shamed online or ignored. The community is saved for those Boaters who, to a greater or lesser extent, fit the model as described up until now in this summary chapter.

This helps to explain the critique of "shiny Boaters:" those who do not meet the model of the ideal Boater that is being encouraged, or their way of understanding society and the world. As described in Chapter 7, it is notable that when Boaters talk about "shiny Boaters," they talk about how unsociable and inconsiderate they are, how they break etiquette and never share locks. In summary, community is necessary as the Boaters - be they as they are independent and hard-working, stubborn and anti-authoritarian - must bind together for support in times of hardship. They must do so in the way that communities are imagined, nostalgically, to have always done: the group act as neighbours should, as protectors and supporters of the other members of the community, the community in which their own well-being is invested.

The Boaters' Constitution

I have not written so far, but I do so far more in the coming chapters of the thesis, about Boaters' relationship with outsiders, including the state. In brief summary, and limited only to the discussion that is pertinent here, it is notable that the Boaters' cosmology is one of anti-authoritarianism, stubbornness in the face of authority and attempted surveillance or intervention from the state. This dovetails well with the aforementioned focus on independence and self-management and in the subtly anti-capitalist and resistant nature of Boaters' lives aboard.

One prominent Boater created, to general approval, a two-rule constitution for the Boaters on an online blog. The two rules were "be a pirate" and "don't take the piss."¹²¹ The former referred to having a free, anarchistic, and anti-authoritarian stance towards authority and was balanced by the latter, which encourages Boaters not to make the situation more difficult for other Boaters, including trying to stay out of trouble and away from the gaze of the authorities. He stated that these two rules could neatly describe how a Boater should act in a variety of circumstances, e.g. on a mooring around other Boaters (have wild parties if

¹²¹ Here is the Boater's original post, almost in its entirety:

"There are two keys to being a CCer

1) *Don't take the piss*

2) *Be a pirate*

That's about it, now they can overlap, let's look at examples of both:

Don't take the piss.

- * Move every 14 days, not hard, and if you can't regularly keep to this then you probably aren't cut out for life of a CCer, time to think about getting a flat or a mooring if you can afford it.
- * Clean up after yourself, your mum isn't in your boat, thank god, not taking the piss comes down to you, so clean it up.
- * Noise, you're up for a rave good on you pirate, but don't take the piss by doing it in the middle of built up suburbia near lots of moored up boats who aren't invited.
- * Help your mates, the pirate code is mates rates.
- * Don't be a boss with a machete, a can of special brew, it's not friendly it's not wise.
- * Am not sure were this goes "Don't tell me how to live my life."

Be a pirate.

- * Fuck the system, fuck the bureaucracy, fuck the police, though sometimes smiles and giles are the pirate way, good to keep balancing this.
 - * We all love pirate moorings, make good use of them and spread the word of mouth.
 - * Invite all your neighbours to parties, we all love parties.
 - * Build you boat under a bridge, it's what they are for
 - * Pirates are horizontal, the captain gets voted in, remember this.
- There are more but that's enough to get on with."

(Campbell, 2015)

they wished, but try to move to a safe distance from any Boaters who may reasonably object), or when fighting CaRT (stand up for your rights, stubbornly, but try not to do so in a way which will bring attention down on your neighbours or the community as a whole). Even though this two-rule system wasn't explicitly taken up by many Boaters (that would involve conforming to someone else's plan after all!) the Boaters seem to be trying to balance these two principles in their actions. In a way, these two principles correspond to balancing independence and community, keeping these two important facets of the Boaters' cosmology in some form of dialectic relationship.

The utopian vision: Manual vs. Intellectual labour?

So what, in summary, is the utopia which the Boaters are trying to produce on the waterways? The vision seems to be the creation of a society or series of communities where money and wealth cannot buy you entry, where individuals share in and support each other's projects and their progression as strongly independent, industrious, and practical Boaters. Anathema to this is the idea of political dominion being sought over others, leading to Boaters disagreeing over and pulling apart most kinds of formal representation or political structure (see Chapter 11). The most important thing, even more important than the community of support, is individual freedoms: freedoms that are supported by the nature of water (see Chapter 12), but also by the Boaters' implicit cosmology as I have come to understand it. It is a cosmology of the everyday, the practical, of common sense and direct engagement. Because of this, it is evidently against abstractions and that which is not seen as "proper" or grounded. If a Boater's tap isn't supplying water, he is encouraged to get in there with a screwdriver and fix it. In doing so he will get to know more about his boat and about the nature of marine plumbing in a way which it would be hard to understand from a book. If you must, then ask "the community" for help, by posting on Facebook or knocking on the door of a neighbour, and then ignorance can be no excuse.

It is important to note that this is certainly not an anti-intellectual cosmology. Intellectual and intelligent political arguments against CaRT are welcome and, in fact, encouraged, seeing as they are for the good of the community. It is accepted that many people who take to boat-living are creative people, such as artists and writers and, therefore, are used to dealing in intellectual concerns and in abstract representations. There is a difference, however, between being accepting of creativity and the arts, and being scornful of that

which is deemed to be pretentious and not grounded in reality or experience. An example would be the hostile reaction from many Boaters towards CaRT's appointing of a "waterways poet laureate," who then proceeded to carve poetry on to lock beams in some parts of the system. This move was ridiculed on the grounds that whilst many locks are poorly maintained and leaking, it makes little sense to spend money on needlessly prettifying others.

Many journalists and prospective social science researchers have found that the boating community has been skeptical of their work and has reacted badly to their approaches. Often the Boaters explain that this is not simply their being private or protective; rather, they think of boating as something that must be experienced and not overly abstracted or intellectualised. Quite often the Boaters will ask the journalists to come and help them move their boats and empty their elsan for them, so as to see what boating is really like. I know of one journalist who gamely did just this and spent a weekend emptying toilets. Personally I am skeptical as to whether I would have been able to complete any useful research without myself being a Boater and struggling through these moral and cosmological codes from the inside. Intellectual labour is accepted, but manual labour, or at least understanding things through manual exploration, is certainly more important.

So if this is the utopia - getting one's hands dirty, coming to experience the world in an unalienated fashion, being an independent and resistant figure, all as part of a supportive and old-fashioned community - what is the dystopia? The dystopia that corresponds to this cosmological approach is the alienated modern world, a world where one's atomisation and lack of belonging to a neighbourhood or community is not a strength, as in the Boaters' strong individualism, but a weakness. This dystopia is thought to be a world where individuals do not make an effort to fix their own items, which crumble quickly anyway due to in-built obsolescence. In the dystopian capitalist world, individuals spend money on consumer items they do not need and do not think about the impact that any of their actions have on the environment due to their alienation from the measurable affects of their actions. The dystopia that the Boaters resist is inhabited by helpless and isolated individuals, working capitalist jobs to buy capitalist items, but understanding little about materials, about the environment, and about the world beyond their homes, cars, and workplaces.

If this description, or the description of the Boaters' utopia, seems unrealistic, it is because they are archetypes, caricatured representations of the worst or best that can be imagined of the self or of the other. In reality, of course, there is a wide continuum of behaviour on the waterways and in the sedentary "outside" world. Equally, this description of the Boaters' cosmology would chime resolutely with the thinking of many, but I am sure that some Boaters would not recognise themselves within this schematic description at all. What I have endeavoured to do in this summary chapter is to tie together the themes of Chapters 4-7 and to provide a summary of Boaters' thinking and understanding, insofar as it is possible to simplify and reduce a wide spectrum of understandings and attitudes.

Chapter 8: “A very English kind of Anarchism:”¹²² Boaters as citizens within the state

Introduction

In this chapter, my focus moves beyond the boundary of the boating community in order to describe the points of contact between Boaters and outsiders, beginning here with an overview of Boaters as citizens within the British nation state. Subsequent chapters continue to flesh out details of this relationship.

This chapter asks if Boaters feel that they are or seek to be “marginal” to the state and, if so, in what way this marginality should best be understood. Chapter 9 considers Boaters and their complicated relationship with the idea of personal freedom and how this relates to the increased levels of surveillance to which they are subjected by “gongoozlers” (boat-watchers) and CaRT enforcement officers. Chapter 10 examines negative aspects of Boaters’ relationships with the sedentary world by looking at threats to Boaters’ security and safety in burglaries and attacks, and includes a discussion of the contested term “water Gypsy.” Chapter 11 picks up on themes from throughout this section in order to examine how Boaters organise themselves officially and politically in response to pressures from the outside world. It is contended, here, through the theories of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and others, that Boaters’ political organisational form is “rhizomatic” in a way that contrasts with and undermines the dominant “state” they encounter in the course of their interactions.

Before the argument can progress into such areas, however, it is important to discuss in this chapter how the Boaters legally and officially fit into the modern British nation state and what kind of citizens they are. I argue, via the theories of Mitchell (1999) and Rose (1996), and building on Foucault’s notions of *governmentality* (1991), that in a world increasingly governed by neoliberal political doctrines, it is hard to theorise “the state” as a cohesive set of governing pressures exerted from a centre through the power of various repressive and

¹²² Andrew Bailles, one of the London boating community’s most active political organisers, gave me the title of this chapter in an interview in the autumn of 2013. He explained that, “Boating; it’s a very English kind of anarchism, not like the eco-squats, more a case of bloody-mindedness: do as thou wilt, you know?” For Andrew, the political unity of the anarchist left (see Graeber, 2009; Scott, 2012) was not the same as the Boaters’ heterogenous contrariness.

educational institutions. Rather than having an easily-defined role as citizens being governed by a central state bureaucracy, Boaters are in an ambiguous position, with various competing authorities choosing at various times to interpellate them as citizens, with these interactions occurring infrequently and unpredictably.

Quite who is “responsible for” the welfare of the Boaters in law - who can tax them, who can govern their movements (and how they do so) - is a grey area of some complexity, and I hope to give an impression of the muddiness of this situation. Recent theories from Wendy Brown (2014) and Comaroff (2012) make evident the fact that states are not the only units of sovereign power in the modern world, nor do their powers stretch uniformly across the faces of their nations; indeed, states and competing sovereignties overlap, leaving gaps and contested borderlands. Thus it becomes clear that “the state” is never experienced as a single or simple force, or even as one cohesive entity. As was described in Chapter 1 (pages 48-52) “the state” is not an entity with a single unified view and in using the term I therefore mean those bureaucrats at several stages within the organisations tasked with the government or management of Boaters. Here, it is important to follow the lead of Akhil Gupta (2012; see also Sharma and Gupta 2006) in interrogating the actual interactions between citizens and agents representing the state, or state-like agencies, in order to see how state power is wielded, experienced, negotiated with, resisted, or ignored.

By focussing on such actual interactions, it is possible to see the state from the point of view of the Boaters, and the Boaters from the point of view of the state. It is precisely this two-way imagining that I attempt in this chapter. This chapter asks who it is who attempts to wield “state-like” power over the Boaters and to what ends, and how Boaters react to this situation. I will show that Boaters usually have contact with the state through the medium of CaRT’s “enforcement procedures” and through attempts to access welfare services. Based upon this examination of actual interactions, it will be argued that the Boater, and the travelling person more generally - especially one who lacks a postcode and is, therefore, of “No Fixed Abode” (NFA) - are “matter out of place” (Douglas, 2002). They are not quite citizens as Western governments understand and normally relate to them. They therefore form an ambiguous or threatening element for the state, which wishes for its citizenry to be legible and easy to govern with statistics, censuses and such quantitative and static tools of statecraft (Scott, 1998).

It will also be shown that Boaters are put under twin pressures by state or state-like forces, pressures which could be seen as contradictory: namely pressures to sedentarise and become settled, legible citizens, and to move on into another authority's zone of management. The effect of these twin pressures is that Boaters, much like the Traveller-Gypsies in Okely (1983) and Fonseca (1996), are caught in a contradictory bind in which they are, to borrow a quotation from the folk singer Bob Dylan, "condemned to drift or else be kept from drifting." It is argued that this characteristic experience is a consequence of travelling people's breaking of the legal and social obligations of citizenry and their refusal to fit in to pre-existing categories or structures of governance. It is, finally, argued that such a relationship is diagnostic of the fact that the state is not a single unitary force, but rather a collection of oft-opposed practices, agents and institutions.

Boaters' position within the state

Boaters who are moored in official residential marinas and upon official residential moorings are in an unambiguous legal position. They pay council tax, have an address, and are, as Scott would describe it, fully "legible citizens" (1998). The majority of liveaboard Boaters (including all continuous cruisers; see Chapter 3), however, have either no official mooring or a mooring in a non-residential marina (the number of official residential moorings is in fact quite small). Consequently, they are not official residents of any single location, and therefore find it hard to gain access to the state via the normal medium of having a "fixed abode" or postal address.

Many Boaters manage to hold a postal address, either at the home of a parent, spouse or friend, or by holding a box at a private mailbox outlet in a town which they frequent. These are not options for all, however, and many Boaters are forced (or prefer) to be people of No Fixed Abode (NFA) in the law, e.g., not under the care or control of any particular local council. Consequently, cruising Boaters find themselves in a position whereby their governance is the responsibility of various organisations at various times.

Boaters on certain waterways, including the Thames, live under the control of the government's Environment Agency (EA). On these non-CaRT (Canal and River Trust) waters, the local councils control the towpaths and must therefore regulate the presence of Boaters

and provide for their needs. Boaters on the majority of the waterways are living on waterways under the control of CaRT, the authority which, in its previous incarnation as British Waterways (BW), was a quango or quasi non-governmental organisation, and which is now a not-for-profit organisation not associated with any government department. Despite its lack of government funding or connection to any government department, CaRT have retained the power of BW, including all of the powers of the 1995 British Waterways Act (see Chapter 3). After such a long period of time under the power of these non-governmental groups, Boaters are used to the seemingly radical idea, taken from Comaroff (2012), Brown (2014) and other anthropologists, of the “neoliberal” condition that official elected governments are increasingly not the organisations who are going about the tasks of governing; this has been in operation on the waterways for many years.

Where the towpaths end (only a few metres from the water), a series of local councils officially take control, and, as such, local councils interact with Boaters when they have noise and smoke pollution complaints to manage, or when, at election times, they find that they have a number of Boaters living in their constituency. Boaters’ dealings with the police forces in my fieldwork usually occur through a dedicated marine section of the Metropolitan Police Force known as “Project Kraken,” although local police officers and CPSOs (Community Police Support Officers) are known to patrol the towpath, even though it is CaRT territory and not local authority “land.”

To further confuse matters, it is commonly the case that the towpath side (the “on-side”) of the canal is owned by CaRT, whereas on the “off-side,” most of the land is private property. That said, it is often not entirely clear to whom the land belongs. A number of organisations and property groups in London, including the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority (LVRPA), are major landowners on both “on” and “off” sides.¹²³ Simon from the National Association of Boat Owners [NABO] tried to explain this complex legal system to me with these words: “DCLG, the [government] department for communities and local government, get roped into this stuff from time to time, because among other things, they deal with housing. They also deal with planning, roads and Gypsy Travellers, but the issue of who actually owns and can legislate on the waterways; that’s a minefield. I suppose, technically, that’s a BW concern!”

¹²³ A Boater is currently attempting to map the patchwork of land claims along the London waterways, and is finding the research of this task to be dauntingly time-consuming.

In short, quite who is allowed to fine Boaters and tax them, who must provide services to them and who receives their complaints, and whether or not they are allowed to stay in particular spots are matters of great confusion. For example, several times I heard Boaters ask “can they do that?” when local councils threatened to take measures against “their” resident Boaters. Boaters weave their way through a complex knot of competing claims of sovereignty upon them, often finding that they are in an overlapping zone of authority between two organisations. One example of this is when local councils accept Boaters’ claim to rights as an “ethnic minority” of Bargee Travellers, against the recognition of CaRT. Equally, they often find themselves falling into a gap between such claims and being essentially exempt from the direct governance of any particular authority. For example, in certain areas of the Thames, a forgotten enclave of council land allows Boaters to stay for longer periods of time without fear of surveillance and recrimination.

As Kapferer and Bertelson (2012), Comaroff (2012) and Brown (2014) argue, the “state” or “government” does not cover the map uniformly; state powers and influences are not experienced as a constant presence or pressure; rather they are a set of diffuse pressures which are spread into different areas, by a number of different groups and organisations, allowing forms of resistance and refusal, including the recognition of other competing states and sovereignties. Like Scott (2011), I see state presence and power as spreading out in circles, sometimes overlapping, and leaving gaps into which individuals can flee or be pushed. Boaters experience a confusion of actors claiming some form of authority to manage and rule depending upon where they travel on the waterways system. They are proof, if proof is needed, that the state, even the neoliberal western state, is not one rational monolithic construct which makes all citizens its subjects in an identical fashion.

Such confusion concerning their position within the state, whereby Boaters fall between certain competing powers, makes their lives as citizens different to that of the sedentary majority.¹²⁴ For example, Boaters, particularly those of No Fixed Abode, find it harder than

¹²⁴ I am by no means claiming, here or elsewhere, that this “sedentary majority” is a monolithic, uniform entity, but for the sake of analysis I am using this term to highlight how Boaters are distinguished and treated. Indeed I recognise that many groups, including but not limited to students, low-waged workers, other Travelers, homeless people and protestors are mobile in a way that can effect their relationship with the state and their position as citizens. Implicit in this is the heuristic of using the viewpoint of the Boaters: looking, as it were, from the inside facing out at a world. This is a world that appears, to the Boaters, to lack the sort of freedoms and mobility which they enjoy, and also many of the complications and difficulties.

other citizens to access those parts of the state's provision they require. These include healthcare through registering at a General Practitioner's (GP's) surgery. Those Boaters using a relative's address may have to travel inconvenient distances to access healthcare, whilst leaving their boats unattended. Others may use the surgery's own address to gain access, but will have to find one of the "few" (as I was informed by a Boater) surgeries which "are used to and accept Boaters and homeless people," and which are "usually overstretched and in deprived areas."

Boaters may also find it hard to obtain a passport or to open a bank account, have their mail delivered, or get a job without a fixed address on their CV. All of these difficulties have been reported to me, with one Boater adding that "when they [the bank in this case] won't accept a PO Box [post office box] address, what can you do?" One of the Salvation Army's Waterways Chaplaincy team¹²⁵ made a point of approaching Boaters in order to persuade them that they could access housing benefit without a fixed address. "It's difficult," she stated, "and you have to fight for it, but that's what I do." Most Boaters are not lucky enough to have such an advocate and find it difficult to access government benefits such as Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA) and housing benefit.

Boaters also find it difficult to register to vote, having first to fill in an official declaration of homelessness (which many are unwilling to do as it is said to typically "ruin" one's credit rating) and then to demonstrate that they spend a significant amount of time within a particular constituency (which is hard to prove). For Tony Sulman, it was not these major concerns regarding lack of services that affected him most; it was the small indignities which meant that, as he put it, "you're not a person without a postcode." He quoted an example: "Years ago, when we started cruising, it was even worse than it is now! We were in Stone in Staffordshire and we went to the library and could only take out four books compared to eight for non-Boaters. Now we officially have a house, which is a help when dealing with authorities. We used to live in a converted ambulance by the Bridgewater canal. The library there wouldn't even let us borrow books! They said that people of no fixed abode may, I quote, 'throw the books in the canal!'" Boaters lacking an address may find it hard to in-

¹²⁵ The Salvation Army are a Christian organisation who, as part of their work, provide Chaplains who can minister to those groups who may be vulnerable, isolated, or who may find it hard to access religious advice and support. Their role varies on the needs of the population with which they work and can include practical support as well as religious guidance. The Waterways Chaplain whom I met most often, Jenny Dibsall, spent most of her time supporting and advocating for the Boaters rather than evangelising or spreading explicitly religious messages.

teract with agencies of the state by approaching them for the fulfillment of their needs, meaning that the interactions between agents of the state and Boaters are more often of the antagonistic kind, when the Boaters are approached for the purpose of being surveilled and interrogated (see Chapter 9).

As seen above, Boaters find it difficult to access the state. But the other side of this equation is that the state also finds it hard to access the Boaters in the same ways as they would more legibly housed citizens. Scott describes the historical condition of being within a state as involving “virtually by definition, taxes, conscription, corvée labor, and, for most, a condition of servitude” (2011:7), and notes that it was precisely these conditions that caused potential citizens to flee in great numbers and to turn to nomadic existences at the fringes of the state. This is not exactly the condition within the modern Western state, which is more subtle in its demanding of labour from its populace, requiring an acceptance of capitalist wage-work rather than direct labour for the sovereign. Taxes, and a submission to the rule of UK law are, however, a requirement for all citizens.

Tilly (2009) argues that the state is not just experienced and constituted by threats and acts of violence, but that taxation is also one of the major ways in which the “state” is experienced and brought into existence in the imagination of the citizenry. Boaters pay an annual license fee to CaRT, a portion of which goes towards the upkeep of the waterways on which Boaters live and the maintenance of navigation on the system. Part of this annual license (which some Boaters find a way of avoiding, by hiding in out-of-the-way parts of the system) is used as what is referred to as a “compound council tax” in order to provide remuneration to the local councils through which the canals and rivers pass. Thus, most Boaters do pay a form of tax for the upkeep of the towpath and the facilities in the areas in which they live.

Despite this, right-wing critics of the boating lifestyle usually open their critique by asking, “Do you pay council tax?” and speak about the council tax avoidance of Gypsies, Travelers and Boaters as part of their complaint against these peripatetic peoples. Apart from the license fee, which is generally far lower than council tax charges,¹²⁶ Boaters can avoid

¹²⁶ My license charge is, for example, approximately £650 a year for my small boat, whereas council tax in Hackney, the ward through which much of the East London waterways past, is £2,586.90 per year in tax band H (for properties worth over £320,000) at the time of writing (Hackney Council, 2015).

paying many other forms of tax. For example, the Boaters may use their comparatively low outgoings in order to work a small number of official hours or for “cash in hand,” thereby avoiding the payment of income tax. Their lack of an address may also work to prevent Boaters from taking official employment, and therefore causing them to remain untaxed. Boaters also avoid having to pay the television license due to their lack of address and avoid “stamp duty” when selling their properties. Be it through taxation, official voter registration, census data, or GP records, then, Boaters without an address are harder to “make legible” in routine, governmental fashion.

Gurney notes that there is, in modern Britain, a “deeply ingrained desire for home-ownership” (1999:176) whereby it is assumed that owning a “bricks-and-mortar” home is the goal of all sensible adults and that not to desire this is, to some degree, deviant or defective. This can be seen every time a relative asks a Boater when they will “grow up” and “get a proper house” (most Boaters have such stories), or assumes that they will be living on a boat in order to save up for a deposit on a bricks-and-mortar dwelling. Boaters’ experiences show that even some of those who are legally homeless, whose homes are not found in one constant point on the landscape, and who have entirely non-traditional forms of dwelling, do not have an unintegrated or diffuse sense of self, or a sense in which they are not “at home.” As Ward (2012) described in her Masters fieldwork with the Boaters of London, Boaters gain their sense of home and stability precisely through their ability to be free and to move upon the waterways, and not in the stability of a bounded and static dwelling.

I contend that it is not useful to think of Boaters without a fixed address as being in some way lacking an integrated self or being Bachelard’s “dispersed beings” (1994 [1958]:7), as this is simply not the case; such an argument itself originates from a bias towards home-ownership as a precondition for participation within society. It is, I believe, far more useful to think of such Boaters as being in a liminal position from the point of view of the state. They are a betwixt and between¹²⁷ form of citizen, who cannot be accessed or managed in the normal ways (via their postal addresses) and yet are present as citizens within the na-

¹²⁷ I here use the idea of liminality, being between two conditions, which was prevalent throughout the structuralist tradition of Lévi-Strauss (see Lévi-Strauss, 1995 [1979]) and later British anthropologists including Mary Douglas (2002) and Victor Turner (2011 [1969]).

tion state and may occasionally be required to make claims upon state services, such as the police or the National Health Service.

In summary, Boaters are hard to account for with any accuracy, especially given the possibility of counting twice when volunteers set out to monitor continually moving Boaters living in moorings across a vast area. They are hard to tax, although most Boaters do pay their license fees to their central managing authority. They are hard to police, given that they can move from authority to authority and one does not immediately know where to find a Boater who is wanted by the law (the inverse side of this situation is that Boaters find it harder to access the police when they need protection). Boaters are essentially ambiguous citizens, not fully part of the manageable citizenry of the state, nor fully outside of the state's access or protection.

Mary Douglas' (2002) theory that the ambiguous or liminal- that which constitutes "matter out of place" - is dangerous or threatening goes some way towards explaining why states find travelling elements within their borders to be undesirable. Scott (2011) describes a long history of deliberate state avoidance by citizenry across a wide geographic and temporal range, including what he refers to as "watery regions of refuge" (*ibid.*:14). He describes the various tactics used by people who wish to avoid the state in its various forms, including but not limited to personal mobility, flexible social structure, certain subsistence techniques, a lack of hierarchical organisation and a deep-seated egalitarianism and a flexible approach to ethnic identification. Scott goes on to describe the relationship between the state and travelling persons as extremely tense and fractious in a way which recalls Douglas' understanding of how we distrust the ambiguous and the liminal. Scott takes a historical and cross-cultural perspective on this interrelationship and notes that "when whole peoples, such as pastoralists, gypsies, swidden cultivators follow, by choice, an itinerant or semi-itinerant livelihood, they are seen as a collective threat and are collectively stigmatised" (Scott, 2011:101).

Here, Scott demonstrates that states always have margins wherein their influence is weakly felt and into which citizens who wish to avoid the unpleasant aspects of being part of the state citizenry can flee. For the Boaters, as shall be seen in the following chapter, such a marginal relationship is agreeable as it allows life to be lived relatively cheaply, to create a home which is "personal" to the self, and to have the freedom to move around the

landscape in the course of what is often called a “better” or an “alternative” way to live one’s life. The Boaters are not fleeing “the state,” as such, but they are fleeing the financial burdens, restriction and limitations of living in sedentary housing, all of which are encouraged by the state as they seek to make populations legible, mappable, and taxable (see Scott 1998). Scott recognises this distinction, arguing that “it is critical to understand that what is being evaded is not a relationship per se with the state but an evasion of subject status” (2011:330).

There is, therefore, a situation upon the waterways wherein the Boaters in their mobility find that they are harder to access from the point of view of the state, that they in turn cannot easily access parts of the state apparatus which they may wish to, and that agents of the state are predisposed to find them at least inconvenient and at most extremely threatening. They are part of the state, but are shadowy, hard to map or manage, living upon one of the last pieces of land which has not been subject to the enclosure processes which all but eliminated the commons and communal and public-owned free space (Polanyi, 2001 [1944]).¹²⁸

At this stage, I turn to an examination of the consequences of this tense situation, as agents of the state attempt to manage the travelling Boaters. I do this through what I call the travelling peoples’ double bind, as expressed previously in the words of Bob Dylan.

The Boaters’ actual experience of “the state:” “Condemned to drift or else be kept from drifting”

It is important here to reiterate that it is dangerous to see the state as one cohesive unit with a unified method and approach. It is of note that most of the agents of the state who are being discussed in this chapter are actually working for a charitable trust (and not a government organization) that has a number of legal rights and responsibility to manage the lives of the Boaters, although none of these are uncontroversial or clear-cut. It has further been shown that competing claims are made over the right to manage the Boaters in particular areas, including areas of overlapping control and areas where there is no evident control in place at all. The surveillance by state agents (CaRT enforcement officers and date gatherers) is, as shall be seen in the following chapter, extremely haphazard and

¹²⁸ See also Chapter 5 (page 130).

variable, meaning that agents representing the authorities may be a close and controlling presence, or may not be seen for months on end, depending on where and when the Boater finds themselves moored.

Further, few Boaters would speak of “the state” as such; they would not even refer to “the government” unless talking about members of parliament in Whitehall. Instead, they would refer to CaRT, the EA, the police, and other organisations involved in their control and restriction by name whenever they happen to be experienced. In the previous section, I used the term “the state” as shorthand when discussing how Boaters are viewed by outside authorities when they have to engage with them. In discussing “the state” in this way, I am not assuming that it is possible to see state force as one homogenous pressure. I am rather suggesting that, regardless of the agency to which they belong, the point of view of the bureaucrat at management level is, as Scott suggested, focussed on the mapping and making legible of the citizenry before the implementation of their policies of intervention.

Such processes are based, as Weber (1968) showed, in the world of letters, numbers, addresses and other official and recordable data. These processes are hard to describe in the abstract and, like Akhil Gupta, I contend that “without theorizing the role played by everyday practices, representations, and narratives in the cultural construction of the state,” one cannot accurately view how such a relationship between state and citizen becomes established (Gupta, 2012:33). To this end, the actual interactions between state agents and the Boaters are described below.

Pressure 1: Being sedentarised

One pressure that is felt by the Boaters and has its origins with agents of the state is the sustained pressure put upon Boaters to move from the waterways and become housed residents. This can be seen in the creation of more private moorings around London and in the subsequent removal of temporary moorings and official “visitors moorings,” which has been a sustained process despite the dramatic increase in the numbers of liveaboard Boaters in the capital. CaRT have further developed ways to remove boats from those without licenses (using Section 8 of the 1983 British Waterways Act), meaning that they can force some Boaters back onto the land, into a house or into homelessness. Such measures are reserved for boats which do not have a valid license and form the end of a

long legal process, but incidents of boats being taken out the waterways and away from their owners to be crushed or sold have occurred throughout my time in the field.

It has further been suggested, though not yet tested, that Boaters may be refused a license and therefore risk removal from the water if they do not abide by the terms and conditions of their license, including paying fines and charges which are incurred over the licensed year. The debate over whether or not CaRT can refuse licenses, whether they are legally allowed to levy fines, and whether their actions in the removal of boats contravene the human rights of Boaters are common conversation topics on moorings and in online discussions. Here, a general sense that CaRT or “the authorities” are trying to force Boaters from the water is felt. Stuart exhibited a typical view when he told me that, “BW is squeezing people out of the place; soon it’ll be like Europe!”¹²⁹

CaRT also seems to attempt to dissuade potential new boat owners from taking to the waterways in its official guidance. Consider the following statement under the section heading *But what’s it really like?*:

“Hard work. Could you honestly say you'd enjoy trudging along the towpath with firewood when the rain is horizontal and the wind chill is -5C. Of course, it’s not like that every day, but you should expect as many depressingly cold, wet and grey days as gloriously sunny ones – perhaps more given the last couple of years’ weather. There are other factors - monitoring battery and water levels, emptying sanitary tanks, the list goes on – that make it a more challenging lifestyle than you might first think.”
Canal and River Trust (2014b)

Later in the same section, prospective Boaters are told that they could lose their boats for persistent breaking of the rules. The authority¹³⁰ has stated, through various channels and at various times, a desire to increase residential moorings (regulated, expensive, taxable) and to reduce the number of “on-line” [towpath side] moorings for “visitors.” Members of the Cowley and Uxbridge Boaters [CUB] group became incensed when it was suggested that in their area there would be a 10:1 reduction in their local moorings, meaning that ten

¹²⁹ See the discussion below concerning Amsterdam.

¹³⁰ In this chapter and elsewhere I use the vague-sounding terms “authority” and “authorities” as these are the terms that the Boaters use for describing those groups that seek to wield power over them. Usually the term refers to CaRT. The use of these particular terms implies continuity between BW and CaRT, and across the waterways between CaRT and EA. I describe in Chapter 2 (page 53, fn. 34), what these terms actually mean in practice. It is a gloss term, but a gloss term which makes sense from the point of view of the Boaters.

online mooring spaces would be removed for every one “affordable” residential mooring added.

Boaters are often scathingly critical of the authority’s apparent desire to make itinerant boat living impossible in certain areas.¹³¹ One participant told me that “they want to make it like Amsterdam,” where the centre of the city consists almost entirely of expensive residential mooring. This point was almost admitted by a CaRT employee when he told me that Amsterdam was “a vision of what we are becoming. The waterways are much more integrated. There’s a lot more local digression in the UK.” He was presumably referring to local mooring rules, mixed mooring patterns and irregular enforcement of the authority’s take on the law. As Tim in Reading once said, with deliberate sarcasm after a friend had given him grim news of increased “enforcement” at the western end of the Kennet and Avon canal at Bath, “it’s almost like they don’t want people living on the canals.”

The idea that the authority (BW at the time) wished to make liveaboard boating difficult or impossible in the lead-up to the creation of the 1995 Inland Waterways Act is supported by Simon, from NABO, who has researched the negotiation process that proceeded the creation of the Act. He informed me that the 1995 legislation was “riddled with compromises and inconsistencies. BW wanted extremely draconian legislation, and their proposal broke the record for petitions against a private bill.” After five or six years of argument, the patchwork Act was signed. Simon explained, “the Act itself was born out of massive conflict between parties. No-one got what they wanted.”

A student who I met in Bristol had lived on a boat for several years and had a number of stories of how “the authorities” (which she summarised as including “BW and the police”) had tried to force Boaters from certain areas out into different areas of the system or into sedentary living. One particularly violent example she described involved the closing of the single boatyard supporting the Oxford canal. She explained that BW were tasked with protecting the canals and life on them; in reality, they fell under the influence of property developers who simultaneously failed to maintain their charge and began to sell off valuable parts of the system. This came to a head when BW sold the Castle Mill boatyard, the only

¹³¹ A desire to profit from the canals whilst not considering or making allowance for the Boaters can be seen in the authority’s correspondence, from the prophetic pamphlet *Pleasure and Profit from Canals* (Boyfield, 1990) onwards.

such service on the Oxford canal. The student told me that, “the heart was ripped out of the community.” A lengthy occupation protest resulted in a police invasion of the premises and damage being caused to boats that were lowered into the canal with their steel only partially coated.¹³²

Such violent confrontations are thankfully rare but do seem to show at the very least a lack of understanding of the needs of Boaters, and at most an active attempt to remove them from the area. When one adds to this picture the ways in which the apparatuses of the state are set up to accommodate and support legible citizens with postcodes and paperwork, one can see that there is a general pressure placed upon the Boaters to move from their boats back into the sedentary fold or take a permanent residential mooring. Such pressure does not involve the Boaters being forcibly settled, but rather can be identified through more subtle signs; it is seen in the lack of support which they receive, the ways in which the authorities do not seem to figure this population into their plans, the gradual and piecemeal enclosure of parts of the waterways, and the rising tide of anti-Boater media pieces.

Pressure 2: Being forced to move on

When continuous cruising Boaters speak of their interactions with CaRT, as they do frequently, it is almost always in the context of discussing when and how far they have to move in order to avoid the authority’s enforcement procedures, or a discussion of fines levied or enforcement notices received. It would be impossible to discuss in the few thousand words available here the entire width and variety of different approaches to, understandings of and reactions to BW and CaRT’s enforcement procedures or the long and complex history of the “fourteen day” rule’s enforcement and interpretation. Instead, I offer a brief history and a few of the varied examples from my fieldwork of Boaters becoming part of the “enforcement” process.

Since the initiation of the “fourteen day” rule in the 1995 British Waterways Act (which, as the name implies, means that a boat may stay fourteen days in one place before having to move on; see Chapter 3), there have been a number of interpretations of how far a boat

¹³² This would be extremely dangerous to the integrity of the boats as unexposed steelwork rusts and corrodes very quickly in water.

must move every two weeks in order to be in a new “place,” when a navigation is “continuous” or “*bona fide*,” and when it is “reasonable” to be required to move - these terms having been left undefined in the law. These questions and interpretations are argued over at length by Boaters who may feel that their understanding of “place” is reasonable and that the authority, in whatever form their latest interpretation takes, has exceeded the reach of the law.

Long-term Boaters have informed me that early BW enforcement of the guidance was based upon the understanding that each Anglican parish was a new “place.” This interpretation had its roots in an earlier law that required the “working Boaters to move from the parish after a given time to avoid them being able to get married there,” as an older Boater named Joe explained. However, the only other reference to this law I have found was when a Boater named Steve described BW’s early efforts to enforce the 1995 legislation as “using eighteenth century legislation on parishes to hone in on particular people that want to move on.” Since the abandonment of the “parishes” guidance, several other interpretations have been given of how far a move is acceptable. Tony explained that BW had moved from parishes to “lock miles, requiring a move of ten lock miles, which would be whatever number of miles you moved times whatever number of locks you went through; that number would have to be more than ten.” At one point, according to a Boater at Greenford, the guidance seems to have suggested that “one nautical mile” would be a minimum distance of movement.

As described in CaRT’s guidance for Boaters without a home mooring (Appendix IV), CaRT have moved away from firm values of distance towards an emphasis on what they see as common sense and the judgement of the Boater. This does not mean, however, that the Boater will not be part of the enforcement procedure if they fail to satisfy CaRT that they are moving far enough or completing a “bone fide navigation.” A hard numerical judgement of distance has been replaced by a more confusing situation, wherein one has to justify one’s cruising pattern without there being any clear metric by which to measure whether it is legal or illegal.

This latest guidance has raised again the issue of “no-returns policy,” which dictates how many moves must be made before the Boater may return to their neighbourhood of origin. CaRT, and before them BW, have been reticent to publish official rules and guidances on

the no-return issue, meaning that Boaters tend to report whatever they have heard from particular enforcement officers, which become rumours of official “policy” that then spread through the waterways system. It has previously been understood that point A, to B, to C, to D, back to A would be acceptable, and, in one persistent rumour, that a Boater would have to move 30km in one direction in a license year before turning around to return.

In the latest guidance, the emphasis is placed on being part of a continuous navigation and that “subject to stops of permitted duration, those using a boat licensed for continuous cruising must genuinely be moving, in passage or in transit throughout the period of the license” (CaRT,2012b), and no minimum distance or minimum number of stops is provided. Despite this, there have been enforcement “crackdowns,” in particular areas, variously on those who have moved less than 5km, 10km and 30km in a year.¹³³ In reality, BW and now CaRT’s enforcement has been haphazard and based on varied understanding of policy as subjectively understood by particular enforcement officers. Those who end up in the official enforcement procedure or warning letters, followed eventually, by legal action, are by no means the worst “offenders;” they have found themselves in the wrong places and at the wrong times.

It is not simply the details of “place” and “navigation” that have been the subject of confusion and various policy changes over the years; the ways in which enforcement is managed has also changed dramatically. In the years after 1995, in many areas (although the system has always been intensely variable from region to region), Boat Wardens, many of whom lived aboard and were given a free mooring, would be tasked with enforcement on their stretch. This was a continuation of the tradition of “lengthsmen” who would each control a length of towpath. As Tony explained, the system was often successful as “they were our Boaters, we knew them. Some would be officious, some would be more laid back.” Tony and Gill’s area had been managed by wardens under the charge of “Janet,” who had been “very practical. [Allowing a reasonable amount of overstaying] was her policy with her wardens. It wasn’t official. She was good at her job and she kept the boats moving!”

Tony and Gill both believed that a common-sense approach like this that did not stick rigidly to the rules was better for both Boaters and the authorities. Clearly the ability to talk

¹³³ See Canal and River Trust (2012c:4) for a description of how rumour, policy and data can become confused.

in person to a warden meant that translation and negotiation could occur and most situations could be dealt with without recourse to legal action.

At various places and at various times since 2010, this system has changed to a system where there would be a limited number of far more dispersed Enforcement Officers working with a team of data collectors covering far larger distances. Jedrek described how, when he first arrived in London, “There were wardens moving people on, people coming round, giving tickets, and saying move on. There was one guy, Baz, he was very diligent about his work, always saying, “come on, move on”. We liked him; others said, ‘asshole.’ He got thrown in the canal and quit after a year, and he wasn’t replaced.” According to Jedrek, Baz was eventually replaced with a single female enforcement worker who was required to cycle “all over London” enforcing BW’s mooring guidelines.

These different enforcement workers, specific to their area and either committed to “enforcement” of the law and the moving on of Boaters or more lenient, would be tasked with enforcing the “fourteen day rule” in a fashion which has, again, changed dramatically over time and varies from area to area. Many Boaters report pleasant dealings with CaRT and describe how, when they have had a mechanical breakdown, they have been allowed to stay for prolonged periods; Helen, in particular, was generally positive, stating that, when she had a family medical emergency, a BW officer wrote her a month’s “permission to stay” notice for below Cowley Lock. She added that, “Generally, I’ve found them to be really polite and helpful.” Others have a series of horror stories, including Sam in Bristol, who had another account of a BW worker being thrown in the canal, in this case due to exacting enforcement of the law and his (alleged) attempts to peek through the curtains of young female Boaters as they were changing clothes.

The enforcement procedure would, traditionally, begin with a notice known as a pre-CC1, which would suggest that the Boater was breaking the rules and should begin to cruise within the conditions of their license. Subsequently, CC1, CC2 and CC3 notices would be provided, usually cable-tied onto the “swan’s neck” of the Boater’s tiller, with a copy to their registered postal address (if applicable), which would state the authority’s disapproval in increasingly strong language. Finally, the Boater would be taken to court and instructed to

pay a large fine, or be refused a renewal of their license, or both. Boaters without a license would then be “section eight-ed”¹³⁴ and would lose their homes.

Under this system, the Boater at least knew that they were “in” the enforcement procedure and could change their behaviour. It was always recognised that the enforcement procedure was haphazard and based upon the luck of the Boater to be in one region or another or to somehow not attract the attention of the enforcement officers and data checkers. Many posit the existence of a “list” of those who are to be targeted by the authorities and another “list” of those who may be powerful advocates for the boating community and thus are dangerous and should be left alone.

It was recognised that in some places one would very rarely be checked, with one Boater telling me to go to location X as “they never check there, you can stay there for four months, no problems!” and it was accepted that certain areas were likely to be “carpet bombed” with pre-CC1 letters whether or not the boat had been there for two weeks or several months at the time. Enforcement could vary from a knock at the door on arrival and a harsh demand to know “when you’re going to move on,” to a pre-CC1 notice after half a year of silence. For example, Tony stated that he had, in his area, a community of about forty boats, “of whom only three have had [pre-CC1 enforcement] letters.” Boaters pass on the knowledge of which areas are full of officious enforcement officers and which are more relaxed in their daily meetings on moorings or at locks. It is common for a Boater to moor up and to hail his or her neighbours with, “What’s enforcement like around here?” particularly if the area is new to them.

However, even this *modus vivendi* was to end when CaRT took over from BW and began to reduce their explicit monitoring and enforcement in favour of data collection and the application of “overstaying charges” to the licenses of overstaying Boaters, with a view to refusing the license renewal if these fines are not paid. Simon Robbins explained that, “they [BW/CaRT] have been trying to do it through the license for a while, adding overstay charges when you try to renew and trying to refuse licenses to those that don’t pay, but there’s case law which proves you can’t do that. All enforcement up until now, it’s been done in such a bloody cackhanded way, such an uneven way, such an unfair way! We’ve

¹³⁴ Section 8 of the 1983 British Waterways Act (British Waterways Act, 1983) allows the authority (BW then, now CaRT) to take possession and to remove boats without a license from their waterways. See Chapter 3.

got data to show there's 300 cases nationwide of non-continuous cruisers, what they'd call 'non-compliant continuous cruisers' that they're worried about. That's about 1% of licensed boats! That's a lot of fuss when 99% of Boaters of all persuasion aren't doing anything wrong!" A discussion of the destabilising effect of this constantly transforming enforcement is included in Chapter 9.

Thus it has been seen, from the perspective of the Boaters, that although their interpretation of the law, their personnel, and their methods of enforcement change frequently, the waterways authority is constantly trying to move Boaters on. Boaters exist in a state of some confusion as to their legal rights and requirements and feel a general uncertainty towards the future. Many fear the day when the *status quo* becomes untenable and there is a change in the law, or when the authorities have collected enough favourable legal judgments in order to force all those but the Boaters who can afford to move long distances every two weeks from the waterways. The system has slowly moved from being one of almost complete non-engagement before 1995, when boat numbers were small enough for the waterways to be significantly unregulated, to a system of direct engagement with waterways officials, to a depersonalised situation where data is collected mysteriously and without the consent of Boaters for purposes which remain opaque until some time in the future.

The pervading uncertainty of the situation leads to wild speculation and gossip, with any new mooring consultation document or press release from the authority being seen as a potential threat and analysed by several experienced Boaters and self-proclaimed legal experts within the community, including those who have had previous legal dealings with CaRT. The rise in membership of the National Bargee Traveller Association (NBTA)¹³⁵ further reflects this uncertainty, and this group has recently given a series of sold-out talks and meetings in London concerning Boaters' legal rights and the limits of the authority's power.

¹³⁵ The NBTA were, until late in my fieldwork, mainly active on the Kennet and Avon canal (K&A), particularly at the Western end, near Bath. Since the completion of my fieldwork, they have become more active in London, calling meetings, setting up a new London branch and increasing their membership from within London's boating community. As shall be seen in Chapter 11, the decrease in political activity within London Boaters has led to an increase of activity by the NBTA, but this move has occurred since the end of my fieldwork period and, as such, London Boaters (LB) receive greater attention within the thesis.

It is important to note that the pressure behind making the Boaters move on does not necessarily come from the upper echelons of CaRT, although there are individuals in that organisation who are known to be “anti-Boater” in their approach. Rather, it is far more common for residents living by the canal side and members of “shiny Boater” organisations such as the Inland Waterways Association to put pressure upon BW/CaRT to move Boaters fortnightly. I asked Tony Sulman where the pressure against “overstaying” on a mooring originated; he told me that, “it’s come from other Boaters. Who are these Boaters? Well, it happened about five or six years ago when there came another type of Boater on to the system. We’re talking about retired Boaters, people with immaculate boats....the tactic is not coming from the authorities and the press; it’s not divide and rule. We’re already divided; it’s coming from the Boaters themselves and, to be honest, they’re sort of right in what they say; they look at our life and say “how the hell’s he getting away with it?”

Internet forums and magazines for the “shiny” or holiday Boater contain many editorials and comments directed against continuous cruisers, who are frequently termed “continuous moorers” and assumed to never move. Others call continuous cruisers “bridge hoppers”, meaning that they only move from one side to the other of a bridge or landmark; they are accused of “swapping places once every two weeks with their friends then swapping back again,” a practice I have never observed. Occasionally it is said that they engage in “midnight flits” to a new mooring nearby in order to escape enforcement. An IWA document explicitly stated that there should be measures taken by CaRT to combat the “problem” of “increasing number of craft appearing on the waterways system around London and resultant congestion” (The Inland Waterways Association, 2012:1). It stated that “we need a means by which boats without home moorings or those who need to spend considerable time moored in the London area may continue with their chosen lifestyle without blocking visitor’s moorings or the need to move every fourteen days” (*ibid.*)

Organisations such as the IWA and other Boaters focussed upon holidaying aboard or cruising extensively around the entire system tend to see continuous cruisers as “blocking” popular visitor moorings where they may moor when passing through the city. Their critique of cruising Boaters seems to be based upon this desire for visitor’s space and a dislike of the “dirtiness” of cruising boats, their loud music, their non-traditional fittings, and their assumed rudeness.

Housed residents, however, seem to object to “overstaying” for other reasons. I asked a CaRT representative, who had already explained to me that many of his actions to deal with Boater overstaying were down to “pressure” from outside the authority, why residents would mind if a boat stayed for more than two weeks. He replied that, “There’s a concern, when there’s a long-term relationship [between Boaters and residents]. They [certain residents] are engaged with monitoring the use of the canal. They equate overstaying with those who do not observe the rules, who are anti-social generally; they don’t care about causing unpleasantness for residents.” When I asked if this was a class-based issue, he replied, “You can’t necessarily draw that class distinction. I may agree that people would rather have neat shiny boats at the end of their garden. It’s perception, the idea that these people may be criminal, may have criminal friends.”

In other words, it is not overstaying *per se* to which the sedentary people object, it is the lawlessness it appears to represent. Perception of overstaying and overcrowding is important to CaRT, as is their image in the media and relationship with local councils, to the point that they have used data describing a general “perception” of these problems (rather than numerical data) as evidence when putting together a mooring consultation, the SEVMC (CaRT, 2013), which suggested increased enforcement measures, including a more stringent annual move and no-return policy. Thus, certain boating advocacy groups, groups of sedentary residents, and conservative elements within the trust itself, put pressure upon CaRT to enforce what was originally an arbitrary fourteen-day stay and which has become a major weapon in the fight for control of space on the waterways.

The two pressures combined

Thus there appears to be a situation where the nation state is geared towards sedentarising the Boaters and placing bureaucratic obstacles in their paths. As Scott (1998) describes with his concept of legibility and the creation of the legible citizen, the state - admittedly through diffuse methods and not acting as a single monolithic entity - seeks to create a citizenry readily and easily mappable in the grids, spreadsheets and databanks in bureaucratic centres of governance. This process is also recognised in the writings of Deleuze and Guattari and can be seen in their statement that “one of the fundamental tasks of the State is to striate the space over which it reigns” (1987:385).

Applying these observations to my own ethnographic data, we can see how at the same time as Boaters are being discouraged from their mobile lives and encouraged to take residential moorings, even as they are recognised by councils as part of their legal responsibility and are encouraged to vote in local elections, they are forced to move further and more frequently by agents of the state. Somehow Boaters are simultaneously encouraged to become legible citizens whilst becoming increasingly mobile and prove they are true travelling Boaters, never stopping their continuous journey around the waterways. They are, as Bob Dylan sang in *Chimes of Freedom*, “condemned to drift or else be kept from drifting.” The Boaters are caught in an ambiguous position when they are accessed by members of the state and institutions of governance. From the point of view of the state administrator, it is not quite clear what to do with a troubling travelling element within one’s jurisdiction. This bureaucratic ambivalence is reflected in the way in which some councils accept Boaters as an “ethnic” minority group with attendant rights (National Bargee Traveler Association, 2011),¹³⁶ whereas others hound them out as a nuisance (see Johnson, 2013; McLennan, 2014).

This situation may seem, at first glance, to present a contradiction, as “the state” simultaneously pushes and pulls the Boaters. I shall argue, however, that this is in fact an understandable state of affairs, particularly if one bears in mind that the state is not a single logical entity but is, rather, a loose ideologically-allied set of diffuse pressures. Such a double bind, a twin pressure upon the travelling group, comes from the realisation that it is in the interests of the state and bureaucracies to have a legible, accessible, and ultimately governable citizenry, followed by the realisation at the level of the local administrators that this will mean having the travelling people in question under their aegis. The view is that these travelling individuals should be settled somewhere, but the urge to move them on and to make them someone else’s responsibility means that they are encouraged to continue drifting through different landscapes into another operative’s zone of authority or into one of the gaps and cracks in between “state” controlled or surveilled space. At the same time, sedentarising or forcing the settlement of Boaters, as occurred with the historical “working Boaters” and as happened with a large number of itinerant indigenous groups (Chatty and Colchester, 2002) and famously in the UK with Gypsy groups,¹³⁷ would require

¹³⁶ See Chapter 1 (page 35).

¹³⁷ See, for example, the resettlement of Gypsies from the Dale Farm in 2011 (Okely and Houtman, 2011).

a change in the law, a large level of concerted force and financial outlay, a protracted legal battle including the rising spectre of human-rights challenges, and likely widespread public condemnation due to the Boaters' general popularity.

There is, however, a feeling among many Boaters that the recent unfavourable media coverage¹³⁸ and the increase of localised mooring disputes may be the precursor to such drastic action on the part of CaRT. As it remains currently, agents of the state are usually willing to simply move Boaters on to the next area, when there is external pressure to do so, or before Boaters become troublesome and put down roots in the form of permanent structures on the towpath (as one sees on squatted moorings where Boaters have managed to remain in place for many years). The navigable waterways are long and meandering, and CaRT is low on funding and staff, meaning that the waterways can be a zone of refuge from aspects of the state in exactly the way that Scott (2011) describes. The Boaters are clearly a liminal type of citizen, which does not fit easily into the categories of the state and which is subject to a confusing and not logically consistent set of pressures. Again it is possible to describe the Boaters' experience as occurring within the "subjunctive mood" (Turner, 1990) where one's position is unset; where there is little certainty and no easy way to predict what measures will be put in place by the authorities in months to come.

The Boaters' double bind, as they are simultaneously sedentarised and moved on in order to show that they are proper legal travellers, is not a unique feature of this particular community. Okely (1983) described a similar situation with the Traveller-Gypsies with whom she worked in England, whereby legal changes (particularly the 1968 Caravan Act) attempted to force them to stay in official residential parks where they could be monitored and their movements controlled. Simultaneously, however, Traveller-Gypsies would be moved from council to council as it became clear that no authority wished to house them long-term. In reality, even though (essentially sedentary) provision was to be made for Gypsies by each local council, a *status quo* prevailed whereby Gypsies would become the recipients of complaints from sedentary local residents and would be forced from the council's jurisdiction and on to the responsibility of another, constantly being hounded between local authorities (*ibid.*:105-124).

¹³⁸ See Johnson (2013); McLennan (2014).

In parallel to the Boaters' experience, the Traveller-Gypsies find their dealings with the state to be a series of "unpredictable events" which "confirmed their views of gorgios as untrustworthy and capricious" (*ibid.*:109), and like the Boaters, they too found that, in face-to-face interaction with agents of the state, "a *modus vivendi* is found beneath the letter of Gorgio law." In this way, the Traveller-Gypsies were also caught in an ambiguous permission between a sedentarising pressure and a pressure to move. Okely, in her concluding remarks, summarises that "the state has attempted to control, disperse, deport, convert or destroy them" (*ibid.*:231), although she does not reflect explicitly on how some of these pressures may be contradictory and may serve to push and pull travelling people in several directions simultaneously.

Fonseca (1996) describes this process from a pan-European and historical perspective, in her examination of several attempts to settle and control the Gypsies of Europe. She acknowledges how Gypsies were often simultaneously restricted from owning land and becoming full citizens and that "everywhere the solution to 'the Gypsy problem' has at some stage included expulsion" (*ibid.*:217). It is perhaps too much of a leap of reason to see this experience of twin pressures, namely those towards movement and towards becoming sedentary and legible, as being a common experience of all mobile populations. Certain ethnographies of mobile indigenous populations within nation states (see, for example, Rabben, 2003), however, do show that "the state" makes a concerted effort to settle such people, before denying them access to their traditional zones of travel as they no longer demonstrate their travelling behaviours. Such groups also become "condemned to drift or else be kept from drifting" by state agencies that will make the travelling life as difficult as possible, before forcibly settling a population who fail in their attempt to maintain mobility in the face of sedentarising pressures. Due to the ambiguous position of mobile people within states – due, in other words, to their status of being between a proper citizenry and a non-citizen other – contradictory, diffuse and unpredictable pressures will always come down upon them as parts of the state alternate between trying to make them legible and settled, and trying to rid themselves of what they understand to be a burdensome, troublesome and "criminal" element.

Certainly this is how the Boaters understand the pressures of the state and represents their experience and perspective. It is important to note, however, that, as has been seen, those agencies representing the state do not necessarily have a consistent approach or

even a consistent structuring ideology. Under pressure from sedentary residents and “shiny Boater”-dominated groups such as the IWA, CaRT try to manage a population, a management that they, as a group with little money and a small staff, are by no means equipped to achieve. The perspective(s) taken by CaRT are of course given less space when compared with the perspective of the Boaters that I am trying, as an ethnographer, to present for. As a liveaboard Boater myself over the course of my fieldwork, my interactions with CaRT were not neutral and my access to that organisation was limited to one interview, a few e-mail exchanges, and sporadic interactions with Enforcement Officers patrolling the “stretch” on which I happened to be moored.

Summary and implications

Thus it has been shown that the state is not cohesively experienced, logical, present, or effective in the quotidian lives of Boaters. CaRT, who are the agents of the state who most frequently and most overtly interpellate the Boaters as citizens are (fittingly, in the neo-liberal age) not elected government agencies. Rather, they are a charitable trust whose powers were transferred from BW, a quango with some connection to government departments. Boaters experience the state firstly as a series of sedentarising pressures as they find it hard to access the agencies and institutions of the wider British state, and secondly through the letters, fines, surveillance experiences and antagonistic conversations with CaRT, which encourages them to move into new areas of the waterways. Boaters form, like other mobile peoples, an ambiguous and hard-to-manage presence within the state for those authorities required to administer them. Their very mobility is threatening to the bureaucratic order and ordinary management that are based upon the presence of a legible and quantifiable citizenry.

The purpose of this chapter was to examine the interactions between state agents and citizens from the perspective of the Boaters rather than taking the state for granted as a monolithic entity of unlimited sovereign power within a given nation territory. As seen in the above, the state is often somewhat peripheral to the lives of Boaters, who find themselves accessed by or accessing agents of the state in ways that are more complicated and haphazard than they are for most citizens, including more overt surveillance and antagonistic or confrontational occasions of direct conflict. Even though the state is an ideological project embedded in certain limited institutions, this does not mean that it does not have

measurable and sometimes drastic effects. Those sedentary people who are easily accessed and interpellated by state agencies will likely not realise how dispersed, disconnected, decentralised and illogical the state's approach to its citizenry can be. Indeed, it may be that only those on the edge of the state can view how it is imagined and operated with any kind of detached clarity.

Quite how the relationship between the Boaters and CaRT will develop is unclear, but many Boaters fear the worst as organisations like the IWA, sedentary residents, and media organisations increase pressure upon CaRT to disperse the Boaters further and more frequently into more isolated parts of the system. Ultimately, the legal framework upon which liveaboard boating takes place will be tested in higher courts and the limits of CaRT or their successors strongly delineated. But until then, the Boaters remain in a space which has almost resisted the enclosure, and where the state is seen head on as an overt set of forces and agents rather than being experienced from within as a pervading sense of being a citizen positioned within the state's institutional machinery. The following three chapters continue to interrogate this relationship between Boaters and non-Boaters, moving first on to the subject of "surveillance," when Boaters come to be observed and monitored by both agents of the state and by boat-watchers known as "gongoozlers."

Chapter 9: Surveillance

Introduction

Many Boaters take to the waterways for the privacy afforded by a life “off-grid” and yet find themselves “gongoozled,” that is to say observed, invasively photographed and generally made an object of fascination and exoticisation. Further, as seen previously in Chapter 8, Boaters find themselves subject to the monitoring and “enforcement” efforts of agents of the state via the authority, CaRT. Boaters often speak about living their lives in “a goldfish bowl:” a sort of public panopticon. There is an apparent paradox in operation here, wherein Boaters talk about the privacy, seclusion and the “off-grid” nature of the waterways and yet find themselves frequently publicly scrutinised. This chapter examines the Boaters’ problematic relationship with surveillance, secrecy and state intervention, asking if this seeming paradox of privacy vs. visibility is truly as intractable as it seems.

I first outline how, for many Boaters, one of the major motivations for moving aboard is the freedom from certain constraints. One important facet of this is that life aboard allows the possibility of “privacy”, in the sense of seclusion, the ability to be alone and to live a life that is more self-determined than the alternative. I then describe the phenomenon of “gongoozling,” wherein Boaters are the subject of sometimes invasive surveillance by interested outsiders. I argue that this is due to a disjuncture between Boaters’ and gongoozlers’ delineations of public and private space. Boaters recognise that the towpath and the waterways are public, but view their boat interiors as private or domestic spaces, and also see navigating a boat as an everyday and relatively domestic activity, rather than as a public performance. The more invasive gongoozlers, by contrast, see the waterways as a public landscape, the boats as exotic, nostalgic objects of fascination and their navigation as a fascinating performance almost akin to public art. This disconnect can create tensions, but many Boaters are content to answer questions posed to them by outsiders and to be photographed whilst navigating, depending on certain contextual aspects.

Following this, I briefly tackle the quite different issue of surveillance from “the state” in the form of CaRT enforcement officers. I argue that this overt surveillance, which many would think would be insufferable for Boaters, who are so interested in privacy and personal freedoms, is actually accepted as a “necessary evil” in the context of the freedoms af-

forded by boat-dwelling: the freedom to move into new locations, the freedom from crippling rent payments, mortgages and, often the freedom from the “wage slavery” of unfulfilling employment. Indeed, the sense of “necessary evil” can be used to summarise both of these forms of surveillance, where Boaters submit to being overtly observed in order to cultivate the kind of economic and social relationships they desire (as outlined in Chapters 4-7). I conclude by noting that surveillance - in the sense of having Boaters “watching out” for each other at a mooring and creating an observant community for protection - is used by the Boaters themselves due to the dangers and threats they face on the towpath, threats which will be explored in Chapter 10.

“On the river, you can almost hide”: Being, and desiring to be, “off-grid”

The above quotation comes from a song written by Anna, a Boater and talented songwriter who I met at Reading. Her song described how the river was a place where one could be themselves and be fiercely private and independent. This idea, that the waterways are a place of freedom, individuality and, ultimately, privacy, somehow hidden from or partially removed from the wider sedentary world, reoccurred throughout my fieldwork. An informant in West London enthused that “you get all sorts out here; people are able to be themselves, beyond prying eyes. You can have as much or as little to do with other people as you want to and, if you want to, you can just disappear.” A reoccurring theme was the idea of wanting to be “off-grid” which is a hard concept to define. It appears to mean the desire to live a life that is, to a greater or lesser extent, self-governed and beyond the reaches of taxation, economic expense which may tie one down, and bureaucracy in general.

The Boater may wish to be off-grid in the literal sense, generating their power and their domestic heat without recourse to the national grid. In a more figurative sense, being off-grid seems to be the phrase used when describing the desire to live without a postal address, often without a passport; without the bills, taxes, charges and responsibilities which are an inherent facet of life for most citizens in the global west. Foucault (1975 and 1991) describes the processes of surveillance, recording and analysis through which the citizen is constructed in the modern world. This is done, at least in part, through grid-like systems of control, making citizens fit into legible rows and columns in census reports, city grid patterns and the like. He states that the medium for state interaction has been transferred from laws to “a series of multiform tactics” (Foucault, 1991:137), a phrase he leaves un-

defined here but which, in later work on discipline and bio-politics (see Gordon, 1991), is described as the creation of docile and disciplined bodies through diffuse and localised channels of power; channels that could be present anywhere, for example, in the prison, the clinic, the school, the hospital, the church, the court-room, or in the home.

Scott (1998) goes further when describing how the processes of mapping, post-code creation, census-data collection, official registration and statistics have a total effect on the modern citizen, making them “legible” from the perspective of the centralised state. As he summarises, “[a]s long as the state’s interest is largely confined to grabbing a few tons of grain and rounding up a few conscripts, the state’s ignorance may not be fatal. When, however, the state’s objective requires changing the daily habits... or work performance ... of its citizens, such ignorance can well be disabling” (*ibid.*:78).

Boaters’ desire to be “off-grid” can be articulated as a desire to minimise the effects of these processes or to mitigate them entirely; to attain a deliberate social marginality. Stories abound of how individuals and couples have retreated to the waterways in order to escape or hide from former faults and misdemeanours or to “start again.” These stories range from the quotidian - divorced men buying narrowboats to have a freedom to escape mortgage repayments and to explore the country without their former spouses - to the exotic - former IRA members are said to have hidden from the authorities on the canals of London during the 1980s.

A first and most subtle indication of the Boater’s desire for a somewhat occluded and marginal existence was the habit of Boaters wishing to avoid talking to me about political matters and a desire not to be quoted in my work. One informant commented that most Boaters just “want to keep their heads down, just keep doing what they’re doing,” and another that “the fact that I’m even talking to you about [the political situation of the waterways] is very unusual; most people wouldn’t be willing to.” Added to this was the constant impression that, for every talkative Boater whom I met on the waterways, willing to converse and share their opinions, there was another in an isolated rural location, living a far more disconnected life right on broader society’s very margins (although obviously my access to these individuals was rare). I spoke to one Boater who confirmed that “yes, there’s a load of Boaters live up the River Stort; they haven’t got phones or internet or anything, they just fish and forage wood and live a life in the wild.” An informant in Caversham was more ex-

PLICIT when he began explaining how the government had been increasing the explicit surveillance of the population (through CCTV, official documentation, etc.) since the 1980s, adding, “they want to know more and more and control your movements until you’ve just got to say ‘bugger off.’ On the canals and rivers... you’ll always have people there for you, unless you want to be alone.... you’re off the grid, you’re invisible.” This invisibility was, for this rural dweller outside Reading, entirely desirable.

Even my inner-city informants, however, tended to express at least a version of this desire for solitude and occlusion. Many of the older Boaters spoke about the earlier days of the canal, when living aboard was rare and boats were spread out over long empty stretches. Steve, who moved aboard in the 1970s, recalled that, “at the time it was, many will say, a richer experience. It felt like a secret, totally undiscovered at the time.” At the completely opposite end of the spectrum of experience was Vale, who had only lived aboard for three months when she stated that “on my boat I can go home, switch off the Internet and be in another place, a place that’s more than a flat. There’s a lot of privacy.” Azzurra’s argument was similar and yet more pithy. When I asked her why people wanted to live on Boats she answered “to get lost,” and that it was for “people who want to escape from sedentary city living whilst being connected to the city also.”

There is also an idea which I often heard repeated that boating is for those who are too singular and strange for wider society; clearly this is the image that many Boaters wish to propagate about themselves. I had Boaters describe the numbers of “eccentrics,” “misfits” and “characters” I was to meet on my travels from my first days aboard. Steve described many Boaters as “people who somehow can’t connect with 21st-century life.” The ideas of escape, of freedom and of tranquility in isolation permeate the discourse around boating and are connected to the rural idyll, the concept of recreating the condition of a “golden age” which is implicit in the Boaters’ project and as can be seen in much of the published literature discussing boat travel (e.g. Pavitt, 2007; Gogarty, 2013; Haywood, 2008; Darlington, 2012).

The rhetoric seems to imply that Boating is for somewhat disconnected people who wish to become marginal to wider society; to retreat towards the margins away from daily constraints of conspicuous consumption, economic ties, and geographic ties to a particular location, in order to live lives of eccentricity and freedom. I have met a number of individu-

als who fit this mold, as well as many who have relatively everyday work and family lives and do not make any obvious attempts to become occluded or marginal, but this rhetoric is the brush with which all Boaters are often tarred. Boaters seem, to a greater or lesser extent, to court the identity of the “mad traveller” (Hacking, 1998), or the “medieval fool” (Foucault, 1965), too strange and individual for society and destined to exist wandering on its margins.

Hacking, in *Mad Travellers*, describes how the social constraints of life in continental Europe in the 1800s, combined with the theoretical ability to move long distances over the continental mass, led to the specific incidence of the *fugue* state, where individuals would break their social constraints and travel hundreds of miles in order to begin living entirely new lives. He hypothesises that this could not occur in the British Isles due to the limited size of the landmass, those individuals who felt the *wanderlust* finding themselves instead taking to the sea and to the colonies. The high prevalence of Boaters who have “escaped” from broken marriages or from “poverty wages” and high rent payments suggests that many see boating as a modern way of taking to sea, or of “travelling” like many teenagers and pre- and post-university students, but without the need for large stores of personal wealth.

I believe it is in this way that we can understand the statements of Boaters’ such as Vale and Steve concerning privacy. Boats do feel like private spaces, as they are owned by the individual and are not usually linked by loan or mortgage to a bank. Rather, they are the dwelt-in avatars of one’s freedom from constraints. This can be seen in the propensity of boat names denoting freedom and escape that are prevalent throughout the system. Boats may be in the middle of the city, but their disconnect from economic constraints and from the bureaucratic grid (including the postal address system) make them spaces where one can, as Azzurra put it, to some extent “get lost,” and, as Vale described, feel like “another place.” This space can be extremely disconnected, from transport links, from other Boaters, from modern amenities, as in the rural extremes of the system, or can be in the bustling city centre, but (as I described in Chapter 5 in my discussion of temporality) still feel somewhat disconnected from the world beyond the towpath. Most Boaters will move from more isolated to more connected locations as their needs and whims change, but all recognise the freedoms afforded by boating, and many do so through the language of privacy.

“Gongoozled”: Invasive surveillance on the waterways

Reading the previous section, it would be logical to assume that Boaters, as interested as they are in privacies and freedoms, move on to moorings and find them quiet, tranquil and isolated and manage to remain unmolested, carving out a life of “utopian” freedom in an unwatched corner of the UK. This is often very far from the case. This can be best seen, perhaps, in the following linguistic example. Boaters do not have a great deal of unique vocabulary other than technical jargon and terms referring parts of the boat and for specialist equipment. One example of Boater-specific, non-technical vocabulary is the word “gongoozler” (also “gongoozlers”, “gongoozled” and “gonzoozling”), which refers to people who stand around watching the work of Boaters, usually at locks.

The word, according to Rolt (1999 [1944]), comes from two Lincolnshire words, both meaning to stare or to gape. The meaning of “gongoozler” goes beyond the simple meaning of being watched, however, and refers more to being invasively observed by others who do not help whilst one is undertaking strenuous activity; the dictionary holds the meaning to be “originally, an idler who stares at length at activity on a canal; hence more widely, a person who stares protractedly at anything” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2015). I believe that it is telling that the only piece of non-technical specialist vocabulary that Boaters share concerns being under surveillance, which is an everyday reality for all Boaters except those in the most isolated and rural parts of the system. Boaters do find themselves at times under extraordinary levels of invasive surveillance and interference.

Everyday invasive surveillance from the bankside is particularly common, especially in the warmer months and in the centres of large urban areas, although hotspots do exist in more rural areas. Boveney Lock near Maidenhead, for example, has an audience all year round with whom Boaters must contend. Gonzoozlers gather around locks with cameras and video equipment in order to watch the boats operate the lock gear. Some locks have benches set aside for viewers and ice-cream vans in order to furnish them with refreshment. These observers are quick to break the boating etiquette (of which they are presumably unaware) against looking in a Boater’s window. They are often unafraid to take pictures of the Boater, their personal possessions, their pets and their dwelling. I have known

more than one Boater begin taking pictures of particularly invasive gongoozlers to give them “a taste of their own medicine.”

These onlookers generally ask the Boaters questions such as “is it cold in winter?”, “how do you get electricity?”, “how much does it cost to moor?” and questions concerning other practical considerations. These are asked with genuine interest and concern but can become frustrating after months and years. Boaters have been known to use these questions as an “in-joke,” as they refer to an experience that all Boaters understand and have in common. Many Boaters will state that they are happy to answer the questions of others, but that this can become wearing, especially if, at the time, the Boater is trying to operate heavy and dangerous lock machinery or to navigate a tricky passage. A Boater, Tom, once explained that, “I’ll answer them, but not when I’m in the middle of hammering in a mooring pin, with a rope between my teeth! And as long as their questions aren’t too rude and personal, which they are half the time.”¹³⁹

Many Boaters profess to enjoy the levels of outside fascination. Helen stated in an interview that, “in some towns you are under observation. Some people are curious; they look in because it’s there. I’ve quite often invited children to look around the boat because they’re so fascinated.” Others, however, admit to being annoyed by these regular interruptions and the invasion of their privacy; a whole subsection of boating stories and gossip is reserved for “horror stories” of how invasive and insensitive passersby have been. One Boater offered up the story of how they had heard one family member remarking to another that “that lady has a kettle in there! Look!” Boaters become used to cries of “that lady lives in there” or “look, they live on a boat” at any time of the day or night.

Tony and Gill Sulman provided me with my most extreme example of this behaviour, recalling, “I heard of this couple on a boat, having dinner, when suddenly a pair of arms holding a baby came through their window and waved the kid around, someone was saying ‘Cor! Look! They live on a boat!’ Arms right through the window, and then they pulled the kid

¹³⁹ I spoke to a Boater who had become the unwilling star of his own YouTube channel. He found out, after a few weeks at his mooring, that he had been being filmed daily over the duration of his stay from an upstairs window of a private canal-side house. The camerawoman had created her own “Tim the Boatman” (I am using an alias here) film clips for YouTube channel, with such titles as “Tim the Boatman brushes his teeth” and “Tim the Boatman goes outside, looks cross, and then goes back in.” He was incredulous when he found out about this strange invasion of his privacy. As seen, the interference of gongoozlers can easily go beyond photographs and questions.

back out, quick as you like.” This story, whether or not it is true, shows the fear that Boaters have of their domestic space being invaded by those from outside without warning. Most Boaters will have had experience of leaving a curtain slightly open, only to find whole families peering in, or, more extremely, will be surprised to find gongoozlers on their decks, testing their doors or posing for photographs. More than once this has led to confrontations and violence.

Boaters regularly speak about boat-dwelling as occurring “in a goldfish bowl,” a kind of public or inverted panopticon. In my field notes I wrote that it “also struck me how the normal notions of privacy are changed on a boat. How people talk to you, question you intently on your daily life and actions, wave at you, etc. A surreal life on a sort of display, like an oddity or a marvel.” The feeling of being an exoticised part of the life of the city, in some way being a performing cultural artefact, can be occasionally overwhelming. Two more examples from my fieldwork chart this lack of privacy. Firstly, I was awoken once in the early morning by revellers returning home from a club who had decided to conduct a portion of the journey walking atop boat roofs. When I opened my door to warn them off, they apologised profusely and professed that they “didn’t think that it was someone’s house,” but then one leading member of the group preceded to pronounce that he wished to “shake me by the hand” and “hear all about living on the boats.” In a second example, I wrote in my field diary that, “these women this morning [were] shouting through my window ‘wakey, wakey, out of bed!’ And asking me questions,” quite ruining a Sunday morning lie-in at a favoured north London mooring site.

These interferences from the sedentary world are met with an ambivalent reaction from Boaters, many of whom enjoy indulging the interest of others and finding the levels of interference perfectly manageable, and many of whom profess to acting with anger and frustration against these “rude” invasions of privacy. Boaters often point out that a house-dweller would find it unthinkable to photograph and ask personal questions of another house-dweller as they went about their daily business. One Boater stated that he had “half a mind to go ‘round their [the resident who had been questioning them] house and shout at them ‘oi, mate, is it cold in winter?’ and ‘how do you go to the toilet?’” This is further seen in the general scepticism of the boating community towards the attentions of artists, social researchers and journalists who are attempting to work on the Boaters as a group.

A variant of the same argument breaks out each time an artist or journalist declares that they wish to complete a project on the Boaters; certain Boaters (not always the newer ones, but certainly those with fewer issues around their personal privacy) are more than willing to be photographed and interviewed. Others declare that the project must be dull or uninteresting for the academic markers or editors considering the plethora of other art projects and “investigative” journalistic pieces concerning boat living (see Calvieri and Knight, 2013; *The Gongoozler*, 2014; Meikle and Maynard, 2014). Others even more blatantly declare that they are tired of being treated as exotic artefacts and curios: being the subject of unsolicited photographs and blog posts by those wishing to capture the boating “scene.” This has only increased as the “Hipster” movement and the gentrification process in London’s now fashionable East End has increased apace, with Boaters being an integral part of the “cool” and colourful make-up of London’s “hipper” districts. I have met several undergraduate anthropologists who have found gaining “access” to the Boaters difficult for this very reason, and who often receive so much obfuscation and (mild) mockery in the early stages of their project that they give up, although some Boaters usually seem willing to help, providing that the project seems like it shall offer a degree of informed comment, rather than an exoticised image.

I believe that this uncomfortable situation with the gongoozlers comes from a disconnect between the Boaters’ and gongoozlers’ understandings of the line between the private or domestic sphere and the public sphere. Weintraub (1997) notes that the public/private distinction has been described by a number of different theorists and is used to refer to several different distinctions, and thus when using the terms one must proceed with care. He states that “the public/private distinction, in short, is not unitary, but protean. It comprises, not a single paired opposition, but a complex family of them, neither mutually reducible nor wholly unrelated” (*ibid.*:2). By public vs. private, I am referring here to a distinction between what is seen as “public property” in the sense of being part of the landscape which one can explore and in which one can conduct leisure activities, as opposed to “private property” as defined as that into which outsiders should not intrude.

This distinction has aspects of both components of what Weintraub states as being the shared public/private distinctions: namely differences in “visibility” and “collectivity.” As seen from the events and confrontations described above, Boaters see the interiors of their homes as private, domestic, spaces and fear invasions of this privacy. Weintraub ex-

plains how Phillip Ariés noted that, historically, as the social space of the city retracted, the domestic sphere and the role of the family expanded; he goes on to cite the family and the café as exceptions to “the modern system of surveillance and order which came to include all social behaviour” (*ibid.*:25). The Boaters believe that they are in the private/familial space, but are dragged by gongoozlers into this “modern system of surveillance” and scrutiny with regularity. The outside of the boat is for display, and interactions when one is navigating on the waterways are, to a degree, “fair game,” unless the questions become invasive or personal (as when they involve one’s private sanitation arrangements, or one’s personal wealth and other topics which are seen to “cross the line”). The act of navigating the boat is completed on a public watercourse, but is a quotidian event for the Boater, akin to doing the laundry, collecting water, or shopping. Boaters may intellectually understand the fascination of outsiders, but their own fascination in daily navigation has usually faded.

In addition, boat navigation can be time- and concentration-consuming and gongoozlers can be unaware of when Boaters’ concentration needs to be on their navigation and not on interested outsiders. For the gongoozlers, the waterways and the boats are objects of fascination. They are also public, like the towpath and the locks themselves. The addition of benches, ice cream vans and even cafés at locks make the waterways seem like the very definition of public space. Press releases and publicity from CaRT and BW support this understanding by encouraging the “public” to see their local canals as leisure spaces for angling, dog walking, or enjoying the sights. As demonstrated in Chapter 5 (page 129), this was certainly not the traditional understanding of the towpath space. In much of CaRT’s publicity, the brightly coloured boats are seen as part of the attraction of the waterways, without there being any critical reflection on the fact that these are privately owned domestic spaces (see Figure 10). Indeed, I have spoken to gongoozlers who state that they “never realised” that the boats could be houses, and who approached them more as brightly coloured parts of an enjoyable leisure landscape, which also includes ducks, swans, trees and the functional “furniture” of the locks.¹⁴⁰

One can examine this disjuncture using the frame of Goffman’s distinction between on-stage and off-stage behaviours (1990 [1959]). The Boater is “on stage” when outside of their boats, and some play up to this - swinging their windlasses, lounging on lock gates

¹⁴⁰ The functionality of which is also frequently not understood, as when gongoozlers lie on lock beams and prevent their operation until a Boater has to explain why they have to move.

and jumping from lock ladders on to their roofs. Some Boaters do love to “show off” their lifestyle, making a display of their pirate regalia, or conspicuously displaying their eccentricities by playing musical instruments and congregating on their roofs and decks or, in the case of James, unicycling around East London wearing a top hat and circus trousers, proudly displaying his difference from the sedentary world. The inside of the boat is, however, “off stage,” where the Boater expects not to have to perform or confront the outside sedentary world. When this is invaded and made front of stage, Boaters can be confused and disgruntled. When navigating a boat, the distinction between on and off stage can be confused as this is a relatively involved and technical activity, which, for the Boaters, is “domestic” (in the sense in which the word means “of the home”) and quotidian. “Off-stage” behaviour can quickly become an on-stage performance without much warning. Indeed, a Boater may only notice after a flash of a camera that they have become part of a tourist’s holiday or a family’s day out.



Figure 11. A CaRT online advertisement.

It is not unheard of for these gongoozlers to follow a Boater along a stretch of locks for some hours, inviting themselves to become part of the Boaters’ navigating day, causing some discomfort for the Boater who may feel an odd compulsion to entertain, and who may be unsure as to how to deal with a family pointing at their home and discussing it, whilst often ignoring the Boater themselves. Questions arise, such as, does one speak to the gongoozlers in order to explain the operation of the lock? At what point of interference does one step in to comment or offer approbation? The confusion between the Boater and the gongoozlers’ understanding of public and private leads, as has been demonstrated, to what Boaters feel to be intrusive levels of surveillance and invasions of their privacy, to the

extent that they describe boating as like living “in a goldfish bowl.” From the gongoozlers’ point of view, their interest in the Boaters is innocent and comes from a fascination and a desire to understand, coupled with the understanding of the waterways as private leisure space. Relations are usually entirely cordial between the Boaters and those who observe them, but, as my ethnography has shown, tensions can flare where Boaters’ privacy is invaded.

Surveillance by “the state”

I have written at length in the previous chapter on the relationship between the Boaters and the nation state. However, in order to support my argument concerning the surveillance to which the Boaters are regularly subjected, it is important to reintroduce into the discussion the role of the CaRT Enforcement Officer. I recognise that being under the scrutiny of gongoozlers and having one’s boat monitored by the CaRT enforcement team are different types of experience (one well-meaning, the other potentially threatening), but both have a similar result, in that they can make Boaters feel as if they are the objects of invasive scrutiny. Of note here is the random and haphazard nature of the “enforcement” process (see Chapter 8). The fact that one’s boat number is not taken down everyday does not, however, lead to the Boaters relaxing and feeling secure or left alone. Rather, quite the opposite: it lends an air of unpredictability, randomness and ultimately disquiet to proceedings.

For example, when I was moored at Ladbroke Grove, west London, in the spring of 2013, Boaters were becoming uneasy with the daily checking of their boat numbers, which seemed to have had no prompt and to have no purpose. Were they “cracking down” on the area, Boaters wondered out loud? Were they going to add overstaying fines to Boaters’ licenses when they came to renew? Who was gathering this data and where was it going? My first formal interview in which I spoke to Jedrek (introduced in Chapter 7) dated from this time. Jedrek explained that, “for the past few months, people have been moving up and down, taking boat numbers. Nothing seems to be happening; it’s unnerving,” which echoed the sense of unease and paranoia which I’d found throughout the West London moorings. “It’s a worrying time,” Jedrek continued. “BW was famous for being completely useless and not being able to do anything, but no-one ever *ever* enforced... properly.”

This lack of predictability is further enhanced by the fact that those checking boat numbers cannot always be easily identified as members of CaRT. In late 2012/early 2013, waterways forums and “the towpath telegraph” were buzzing with reports that cyclists had been stopping, taking photographs of boats, and then speeding away down the towpath. Were they plain-clothed data checkers (data checkers often do not wear an official or easily identifiable uniform anyway, and may only be identified by a small logo on a jumper or shirt)? Were they “boat spotters” who, like trainspotters, enjoy making sightings of rare or unusual boat models? It emerged that these were members of the Inland Waterways Association (IWA), a deeply conservative leisure boating organisation closely allied to CaRT, who had been instructed to inform the authorities on overstaying and nuisance boats. The boundaries between gongoozlers and enforcers, normal outsiders and the state, were here blurred, creating a sense of confusion and instability. Like Foucault’s description of Bentham’s panopticon (1975), the disciplining nature of the edifice is effective not because the observation is constant, but because one is unsure *whether or not* one is under observation.

On the waterways, Boaters have little way of telling what data the authorities have concerning their movements, including how many “sightings” in a year have been recorded, and no way of telling what the authorities are planning to do with the information they have collected at particular locations. Some Boaters put in Freedom of Information (FOI) requests in order to ascertain what “they know,” but this still cannot predict their future plans or movements. Skidmore’s work on “incipient fascist” Burma (2004) details how the random and haphazard nature of the state’s repressive threat makes the Burmese so unsure of the shifting political ground that they self-censor more than they may if the state’s measures were more brutal but predictable (*ibid.*). In comparison with my own observations, this is, of course, a far more extreme example, where the state is capable of disappearing and torturing dissidents, and so comparing this to the “state intervention” of serving fines and revoking licenses may seem glib. However, Skidmore’s description of the unease and fear created by the *inept* regime as opposed to the *expert* regime, precisely due to its unpredictability and lack of logic, closely mirrors the confusion felt in my field site when debating what the authority may be “up to next,” second-guessing the work of the unpredictable and ever-changing authority and its inconsistent monitoring and enforcement measures.

Skidmore herself uses Turner's concept of the "subjunctive mood" to describe the uncertain position of the Burmese citizen in the face of what she calls the "deterritorializing" efforts of the state, which do not present a logical or consistent position against which the citizens of Burma can act (Skidmore, 2004:182). She describes the state's intervention as "transformative moments" (*ibid.*:182) and states that the concept of the "subjunctive mood" is useful in describing the effect of these "rupture[s] in their [the citizen's] sense of normalcy" (*ibid.*:182). For the Boaters also, the step up of enforcement measures over months or years of a *modus vivendi* in a particular area represents an unsettling rupture of this kind and reminds the Boater that their relationship with the state is far from simple, settled, or predictable.

In summary, one may always be in the process of being watched, and that surveillance may be from "the state" or from a group closely allied to CaRT, and for a purpose that may currently be occluded. If the tension with gongoozlers is pronounced, the tension with data checkers is even more so, especially if they break the taboo of stepping across a Boater's deck without permission to take down the number of a boat butted to their outside. This invasion of the Boater's private space by a member of the authorities is often greeted with anger or dismay.

Freedom and surveillance: a paradox?

I have so far described a condition wherein Boaters both explicitly declare their desire for freedom, mobility and to be "off-grid" and yet fall under a great deal of everyday invasive surveillance and interference from interested parties from the world around them, including agents of the state. I argue that this appears to be a paradox as, while moving deliberately towards or by being forced into a marginal position in society, often in order to gain a greater degree of personal freedom, Boaters find themselves watched and monitored in explicit ways as never before. Few house-dwellers will have had the experience of being photographed when at home, of having members of the public trying to look through their windows, of being asked personal questions by passersby, or of having their home's details explicitly checked and recorded by members of a state agency.

Firstly, I shall deal briefly with the matter of state intervention as this has been covered in depth in the previous chapter. I argue that the Boaters submit to the overt monitoring of the

state as it is inevitable given their situation; it is a “necessary evil” considering the other, more important freedoms that boat dwelling affords. These freedoms have been described in previous chapters but have not been linked together explicitly in one place. They are, firstly, economic freedoms, including being free from regular debt, such as mortgage repayments and many monthly bills or rent payments. Many Boaters talk about how these economic obligations lock people into unpleasant and unfulfilling wage work (which some describe as “wage slavery”) and setting them in a system of month-on-month struggles to meet payments. These economic freedoms can allow Boaters to follow the possibility of “dream” careers, or, at least, to adopt more flexible part-time arrangements and to spend time on hobbies and other wider interests, including time spent learning to dwell about the boat. Secondly, there are geographic freedoms, whereby Boaters can move into areas which they find more attractive or interesting relatively at will, and can meet up with friends or snub unfriendly neighbours just by moving a small stretch. In this way, Boaters can choose sociability or solitude, “nature” or the built-up city, affluent areas or “scruffy” suburbs depending on their current whims and needs. Third are the freedoms from being “on grid,” dependent on expensive fossil fuel utility providers. And finally, the more amorphous and hard-to-categorise set of freedoms where the Boater is free to be - indeed is encouraged to be - “alternative” and to reject conspicuous consumption practices and their high-tech signifiers, including television and other high-status consumer items.

These freedoms encourage the Boater to feel free (or as though they have the potential to be free) from the quotidian and pervasive everyday dominance of consumer capitalism and of society’s hegemonic “mainstream.” Boaters engage with these processes, but can also choose to be marginal to them and can face them, so to speak, on their own terms, rather than being tied into “the system” through bricks-and-mortar housing. It seems that this is what Boaters are referring to when they speak of freedom, of invisibility, and of being able to, as Anna’s song stated “almost hide” - whether or not the state is interpellating them overtly. Gramsci (2005 [1971]) wrote of how “the state” had, in the modern world, changed from a “war of manoeuvre,” meaning face-to-face confrontation with the citizenry, challenging them and demanding tribute and service, to a “war of position,” whereby the state subtly tries to ingratiate itself in the lives of the citizenry. The data checker’s work is more like a war of manoeuvre tactic of direct and blatant interpellation than a war of position tactic, showing that the Boaters are not integrated within a system where they are easily mapped and legible and where overt surveillance measures would be unnecessary.

In some ways, this increased monitoring is inevitable for the traveller in the modern world. As seen in Chapters 3-5, the Boater often wishes to portray him- or herself as alternative and resistant to wider sedentary/capitalist lifestyles, part of which is the orthodoxy of being a settled, grounded, legible citizen easily located by the state. The very fact that Boaters are explicitly sought out and monitored by the state shows that they are marginal and partially separate. Sedentary people do not come in contact with daily state monitoring as there is no need; they are already within a legible mainstream. The state knows where they are, or at least could find out if it were ever required.

As I outline at the outset of this chapter, Foucault (1975 and 1991) describes how the modern state has moved from using overt interventionist techniques of government to using “technologies of power” (Ong, 1987:142). Central among these are techniques of disciplining and punishing deviants (Foucault, 1975) and techniques of “bio-power,” through which governments intrude into the lives of individuals in order to manage their health, education, family life, etc., aiming to create conformity through establishing models of acceptability and deviance (*ibid.*). It is not, however, large-scale government policy and national systems which Foucault sees as ultimately acting on the individual; rather, he aims to describe “the “microphysics of power,” which are pervasive, “come from below” and use “local, low-level, ‘capillary’ circuits of power relationships” (Gordon, 1991:24) in order to induce conformity and discipline. A data checker climbing on the roof of one’s boat in order to check on one’s movement is, clearly, very different from this Foucaultian power through the moulding of conformity. It is the normalisation of daily wage work, the hegemonic nature of the postal address, and the acceptance of a system where indebtedness is built in to daily economic experience, that work together to create a normalisation of market capitalism and the authority of power of the state on a banal level for most citizens. It is these things against which the Boaters push and opposed to which they offer an alternative model. Surveillance by data checkers is, in contrast to the freedoms offered by boating, a necessary and - as the authorities cannot, for reasons outlined in the previous chapter, allow the Boaters to navigate the waterways unchecked - inevitable evil.

A spectrum of attitudes

For Boaters, gongoozling and being under the scrutiny of interested outsiders can also be described as a necessary evil. Boating provides them with a freedom, with mobility *in potentia*, with the ability to (almost) hide from the undesirable facets of a modern capitalistic existence and to escape from constraints, be they economic, geographical or societal. This is the understanding of privacy that I believe is implied in the first section, where Azzurra and Vale spoke of their boats as private and intensely personal spaces - the boat is the lived-in object that allows one to attain a strongly-desired and sought-after set of freedoms. Thus, the boat interior is a particularly important, personal, and private space. The gongoozlers, when they invade this domestic environment, despite not knowing that they do, are invading both a dwelt-in home and a symbol of the Boater's (oppositional and "alternative") identity.¹⁴¹ This is, however, less important than the act of dwelling in the boat, of coming to hold this identity in the first place. Thus I believe that there is no paradox here either, and that Boaters can both desire a privacy, linked to freedoms and self-determination, and accept that they are under more direct and overt surveillance and scrutiny than their sedentary neighbours. Of course, there is also a divergence of attitudes among the Boaters themselves, many of which are considered below.

As described in the previous section, many Boaters deliberately create for themselves a space at what could be considered to be the edge of the reach of the state, where they submit to explicit monitoring in order to enjoy the implicit freedoms of boating. There is, of course, a spectrum of attitudes within the boating community, including a slight "generational" change that makes this glossed description somewhat more nuanced. At one end of the spectrum, and equally resting in the geographical extremities and margins of the system, are a number of Boaters, usually those who are more experienced (occasionally called "crusty Boaters," "proper Boaters" or "Pirates"), who avoid gongoozlers and Enforcement Officers alike by taking to rural extremes, occasionally even eschewing telephone contact, the Internet, or many of the other connections which typically tie persons together in the modern world. To some with whom I have talked, boating is merely the more bourgeois end of a spectrum of alternative living that includes those living in vans, tree houses and tents.

¹⁴¹ For a discussion of how homes and their decoration can become avatars of identity, see Ceiraad (2006) and Miller (2001). For a discussion of Boaters' understandings of "home" and "place," I refer the reader to Isabel Ward's excellent MA Dissertation *The Fluidity of Home on London's Waterways* (Ward, 2012).

On the other end of the spectrum, many (usually newer) Boaters tend to live in the very centre of the city and to proudly show off their “lifestyle,” always willing to talk about their boats and to evangelise to others. One of the reasons that the boat population has grown so rapidly in London is that new Boaters are encouraging their friends, families and colleagues to buy or rent boats as a solution to the crisis of high rents and low availability of housing. I have spoken to Boaters who wish to fill London with boats, one in particular telling me that he would like to be able to “walk on water from Mile End to Islington, just on the roofs of boats.” As described in previous chapters (see Chapters 3-5), other Boaters worry about the lack of facilities in Central London, the growing de-skilled boating population and the inevitable backlash from the state, who already see central London as a “hot-spot” or problem area of overcrowding and overstaying. Thus, many and especially newer Boaters can be seen to be more accepting of surveillance from outside, and may proudly display or show off their boats, although this can quickly lead to mockery and censure from “old-timers” and those who have a conservative approach towards the expansion of the community.

The nature of “surveillance” from the outside of the community looking *in* has been explored and shown to be a necessary evil undergone by Boaters in their quest to have the freedoms which they desire. However, surveillance from the inside *out*, i.e., Boaters watching their own moorings and their neighbours’ boats for protection, has not been discussed. This action, as shall be seen in the subsequent chapter, can be used to build up a sense of being in a community of support against outside threats. This other form of surveillance can also show up intra- and extra-community tensions in exactly the same way as the surveillance described above. The relatively benign interest of gongoozling outsiders has been described. From here, I move on to describing more potentially harmful security threats facing the boating community.

Chapter 10: Security

Introduction

Moorings in certain areas are attacked and burgled frequently, and most Boaters have stories of unwarranted violent attacks or, at least, heated confrontations with local residents. All of this occurs despite the fact that boating is often seen as quaint and acceptable, or even as idyllic and desirable. In much the same way as with other UK travelling groups there is a mixture of romanticisation and demonisation in the public's dealings with Boaters. Thankfully for the Boaters, and with direct contrast to Gypsies, romanticisation seems to currently be tipping the balance. In this chapter, I ask why this may be: whether it is due to a more positive historical discourse, a lesser visibility in the media, the lack of a component of "ethnic threat," or a combination of all of the above. The use of the term "Water Gypsies" is examined here in depth. Subsequently, this chapter discusses how Boaters bind together and create a vigilant community as a reaction to these threats and challenges. It is discussed how the vigilant community, when reified in material culture via "Operation Whistle Blower," actually led to the emergence of a critique of newer Boaters by more experienced "old-timers" who felt that the newcomers were not able or willing to defend the community to the degree that is sometimes required.

Security is traditionally dealt with in anthropological literature as being related to the measures taken by nation states to keep their citizenry "safe" from the threats of other nations and from global terrorism (Goldstein, 2010). Such an understanding has its roots in the Hobbesian notion of the state as arising from the mass for the benefit and protection of the citizenry (Hobbes, 2003 [1651]). Moreover, the term is usually now associated with the "security moment," meaning the proliferation of the discourse of security as an aid to the Western neoliberal agenda in a post-9/11 world (Goldstein, 2010:487).

Certain scholars (see Waever *et al.*, 2003) are, however, attempting to widen the descriptions of security within anthropology in order to focus upon how any society, with or without the State, attempts to deal with threats, even if these threats are themselves enabled or initiated by the State itself. Goldstein writes of such a project (which he terms an "anthropology of security") that a "critical, comparative ethnography of security can explore the multiple ways in which security is configured and deployed—not only by states and author-

ized speakers but by communities, groups, and individuals—in their engagements with other local actors and with arms of the state itself” (Goldstein, 2010:492). This chapter gives a detailed ethnographic introduction to the security threats faced by Boaters, the potential causes of these and then, finally, the implication of these threats for the Boaters’ creation of community feeling and sentiment. In this way, this chapter follows Goldstein’s blueprint for rehabilitating the term “security” with localised practice and discourse below the level of the nation state.

Threats to Boaters’ security: Burglaries and attacks

I was given a piece of advice before moving on to the London canals, whilst I was still moving downstream on the Thames: “always moor where there’s other boats, for safety, and try to never be the first boat at either end of a mooring.” Boaters from the Reading area had been warning me about the security threats of London since I declared my intentions to move down river. I was told that I should chain my boat up where possible and keep all valuables hidden, the threat of burglary being ever-present. It is not, however, just burglary that Boaters fear. In this section, I concentrate on this and other forms of threat; specifically attacks on Boaters at moorings, break-ins at boats, instances of graffiti and criminal damage, and missiles being thrown at Boaters as they travel, before moving on to discuss the specific threat of boat untetherings.

London did not turn out to be the consistently threatening danger-zone some had suggested that I might find. I did, however, begin to hear rumours of areas where break-ins were occurring in spates. My first and most obvious exposure to this threat came when I traveled into the East End in January 2013 and found the normally busy Victoria Park moorings to be almost deserted due to a series of violent attacks and burglaries over a single weekend period between Christmas and New Year. The “towpath telegraph” was awash with gossip concerning these events, although the numbers of boats that had been targeted changed depending on who was telling the story. The highest estimate stated that eighteen boats were broken into over the course of two days. Most disconcertingly, it was not just empty boats that were targeted. Stories began to circulate of Boaters being confronted inside their boats by assailants with knives; it was even reported that one Boater was marched at knife point to an ATM and instructed to make maximum withdrawals from their bank accounts.

Such attacks are not an everyday occurrence, but do seem to occur in spates in different areas and at different times. Autumn and winter, due to the longer hours of darkness and the relative isolation of the towpaths, are particularly dangerous times for Boaters in London. After a London Boaters meeting at which security issues were discussed, one Boater was moved to create an interactive online map in order represent danger areas. Such was the frequency of these break-ins over the winter of 2012-13 that a specialist police team known as “Project Kraken” was set up to deal with crimes committed on the waterways and towpaths. After a spate of break-ins, police patrols would begin to circulate in the area, attempting to deter further incidents. Most of these burglaries turned out to be the actions of an individual or a small group of perpetrators who realised that some boats can be easily broken into, due to their being protected by padlocks and wooden doors rather than complex systems of alarms and locks.

The London Boaters mailing list became a source of important information, with Boaters quickly reporting burglaries and encouraging others to be vigilant. Such burglaries did not merely occur in the city centre; when up the River Lee in Hertfordshire I met a Boater who had found their cratch cover¹⁴² slashed and their front deck ransacked. The centre of London does, of course, have higher crime figures than other parts of the country - the average number of burglaries per 1,000 homes in England and Wales is 37; in London, the average is 79 (Lloyds Banking Group, 2014) - but the Boaters I met were more aware of their security being under threat than nearby house-dwellers; as already stated, this is because they are aware that their boats are more vulnerable than a house or flat to an opportunist thief.

The areas where these break-ins were occurring seemed to also become the focus for other crimes, for example a number of towpath muggings and even towpath sexual assaults, leading to whole areas (like Victoria Park over that winter) being seen as dangerous to be around. Boaters in the area blamed the council’s move to remove street lighting from the mooring and to close the entrances to the park, making the towpath both darker and quieter at night. When Boaters discuss these burglaries, they are often explained away as being opportunistic and for financial gain – not, therefore, as reflecting a particular disrespect or hatred for the boating community. Many of these break-ins do occur in de-

¹⁴² A fabric covering over an exposed area of deck (usually the front deck).

prived areas of London, such as parts of Hackney and Tower Hamlets, where Boaters may represent an easy target and where newer and more affluent Boaters may even leave expensive electronic items on show through their windows. Other incidents, however, do seem to show a more explicit disdain for Boaters. For example, several Boaters in Hackney woke up in March 2014 to find that their boats had been graffitied overnight with crudely-drawn dog turds and swastikas. It is hard to explain this occurrence without accepting that it was a deliberate attack on the Boaters.¹⁴³

On other occasions, Boaters have been attacked around their homes for no obvious financial motivation. One of the most dramatic incidences occurred when two Boaters, Raj and Nicky, were badly beaten in Hackney when mooring up their boats in a seemingly random attack. Both Boaters and their dog were assaulted at length but thankfully escaped serious injury. Many Boaters, not just those who travel around London, have stories of having their boats attacked with missiles or of coming into violent confrontation with land-dwellers. For example, Helen, who cruised all over the system, revealed that she had “once had a problem, between Lower Heyford and Leamington when... [she] first had a boat. Someone put a boulder through the window. They didn’t break in, they were just hooligans who had crashed a garden centre.” Helen then told me that she had also had a brick “chucked” at her on the BCN [Birmingham Canal Navigations]. Many Boaters having stories of local “gangs” and “kids” attacking their boats with hurled missiles in other parts of the country (usually “up North,” as Boaters are more common and therefore more accepted in the South).

Steve the working boatman was convinced that the spate of break-ins around Victoria park was going to result in violent conflict. He stated that the situation was “terrible; something’s going to go down down there. It’s not on, the police have actually gone down there and told us to protect ourselves, because they can’t do it.” Such a sense of crisis and foreboding was common across the London waterways at the time, with people fearing a final violent confrontation occurring imminently. Steve was sure that something was soon to “kick off” around Hackney. His tone turned serious as he warned that “for all that with boating you get these bohemian and arty types, it’s probably one-for-one them and people who’ve

¹⁴³ I have also heard of boats being assaulted and defaced in various parts of the country, the most usual complaint being of windows being smashed in for purposes other than entry.

been inside [been to prison]. Not that you'd know it or that they'd tell you!" and that these individuals would likely defend themselves more violently.

Glossing all of these threats together as a single set of phenomena would be clearly nonsensical. For example, they presumably have different motivations (financial gain in the case of the burglaries, whereas boredom, disenfranchisement or a vendetta against Boaters may help to explain other attacks) and have wildly differing consequences. Where they are important is, I argue, where they allow us to see how Boaters respond to insecurity and to threat, and further how certain elements of the sedentary community view the Boaters. None of the threats detailed above are unique to the Boaters' experience; burglaries and attacks with rocks and graffiti may be experienced more often by the vulnerable Boaters, but they can also befall housed residents. Based on this evidence, it is hard to conceive of the Boaters as being particularly targeted or victimised any more than the other residents of the sometimes deprived neighbourhoods through which the canals pass. One type of attack is, however, specific to the Boater's experience: namely, the untethering and setting loose of boats.

Boat untetherings - where assailants, usually under the cover of night, pull a boat free of its mooring by pulling out their mooring pins or untying their knots and then set the boat loose in the stream - like burglaries, seem to occur in spates and at different times and places. It is often hard to tell whether the pins have come out due to boats passing fast and causing a wake, excessive wind or sodden ground (the floods and storms of the winter of 2013-14 led to many boats coming loose and many Boaters spending a great deal of time trying to peg them back in), or due to the deliberate malice of others. Certain areas are, however, known to be areas where boats are untied and where one must be vigilant. My own first experience of being set loose was an ambiguous occurrence that may have been caused by adverse weather conditions (heavy snow), a number of drunken locals, or even a Boater with whom I had previously had a disagreement. The second occurrence was, however, unambiguous and is written up in thick narrative form from my field notes and included here as Appendix V.

On the canals, these occurrences are irritating and confusing. I remember the third time I was untied, waking up, looking out of my window and being thoroughly disorientated in a way that must have been amusing to outsiders. They are not usually particularly danger-

ous, unless the boat is near a weir or boats are coming through fast and not paying attention; they are more a time-consuming annoyance than a threat. On the river, especially at a wide portion of heavy-flowing river as one experiences at Kingston, there is danger in being set loose; there are heavy passenger and haulage boats coming down throughout the night, there are wide weirs that can easily destroy boats, the flow can carry boats against brick embankments or can carry a boat miles before they come to a rest.

Most of the time, Boaters put these events down to “local kids” “having a laugh” and being opportunistic; my field notes detail an occasion when I found a boat drifting out into the centre of the channel. I stopped and Imran, the Boater in front, helped me to push the pin back in. It was frustrating, he said, as they’d had some kids lift up their pin when they were sitting on the front deck the day before. Apparently they had stated that it was “just a bit of fun”. The occasion when I was untied at Kingston (see Appendix V) seemed, in contrast, to be the deliberate actions of one person who wished to orchestrate planned and dangerous disruption.

Having described the threats to a Boater’s security, I now intend to examine in greater depth why these threats may occur and the effect they have upon the corpus of liveboard Boaters.

Are Boaters targeted and, if so, why? The ambivalence of the term “Water Gypsies”

Boaters, as one would expect, discuss these events with each other and in doing so attempt to create a discourse to explain why they may be being attacked, if they are being especially targeted by outsiders and, if so, why this may be. The most common explanations state that the Boaters, due to their relative isolation from residential areas, their frequent position in the “bad areas” of town and their vulnerable boats, are easy targets for opportunist thieves and vandals. Most attacks which are not for an obvious financial gain are said to be the results of “gangs of youths” or “gangs of kids” who are said to be “bored,” “drunk” or “on something,” meaning illegal drugs.

More rarely, it is suggested that certain locals may be jealous of the Boaters’ colourful homes and freedoms or that the Boaters may have specifically upset a particular contingent of local residents. In a particularly harrowing local example, a Boater had their craft

set on fire after confronting a group who were drunkenly dancing on their roof. Such suggestions tacitly deny that Boaters just because they are there and they are vulnerable. Boaters sympathise with the attacked, recognise that there are unpleasant elements at work in their area and do not usually express any deeper fear that they are being especially victimised. Still, the feeling of vulnerability and the need to stay vigilant is ever-present in some areas and any Boater who is familiar with any of the Facebook pages or mailservs that support the community cannot escape tales of new attacks, confrontations and damages.

Some Boaters do, however, suggest that the attacks, especially the specific untetherings and un-pinnings, are the result of some “ethnic” tension against Boaters who reflect, like other travelling groups, the presence of the “threatening other” (see Said, 2003 [1978]) and can appear as “folk devils” in public discourse (Cohen, 1973; see also Morris (2000) for a discussion of how the Gypsies and New Age Travellers have been portrayed as “folk devils”). It is important to note how the Gypsies, as seen throughout literature concerning this population (Okely 1983 and 2014; Fonseca, 1996; Clark and Greenfields, 2006), have been distrusted, widely accused of criminal activity, and the subject of rumour and moralising panics. Okely (1983), Clark and Greenfields (2006) and Fonseca (1996) among others have noted that Gypsies are, apart from Jews, perhaps the most perennial and powerful construction of a “threatening other” in European history; the following section entitled *A conflicted image? Romanticisation vs. Demonisation* deals with the question of why Travellers in general (and Boaters and Gypsies in particular) can be seen as a threatening and destabilising influence by the public, the state and the media.

As I have written in previous chapters, Boaters struggle to define exactly what manner of identity being a liveaboard Boater constitutes. For many, it is simply a housing choice; for many others, something deeper and more significant concerning their idea of personhood, and, for some (including the growing “Bargee Traveller” movement), it is a description of ethnic identity. What is certain, however, is that outsiders can conflate Boaters with being “Water Gypsies,” “Gypsies” or “a type of Gypsy” and then make use of these terms, suggesting that some attacks may be motivated by a deep-seated distrust based upon the Boater’s identity as a type of “Traveller.”

Boaters have been known to report verbal attacks and being called each of these terms in a threatening manner. It has been reported that in certain areas (one Boater informed me

that it was particularly bad “up North”), local residents “don’t like Boaters” and “see them as a threat, just like Gypsies.” Local residents have a complex and ambivalent relationship with Boaters, which varies in different areas and contexts. In the next section, I describe this relationship in greater detail, including comparing the admixture of demonisation and romanticisation experienced by Boaters to that experienced by UK Gypsies and Travellers. As context, however, in this section I discuss the reaction of Boaters to the tag of “Water Gypsies” and how it is used instrumentally and contextually. Some, for example, appear to be quite free with the term, but usually in a qualified way; Helen, for example told me that “I consider myself a traveller. I call myself ‘a bit of a ‘Water Gypsy’ to some people. Although I don’t align myself to the travelling community in a way to which I feel I can abide by different rules, flout rules that should be abided by members of the community. I don’t like upsetting anybody, [so] it really upsets me.” From this exchange, it is clear that Helen associated being a traveller with a positive idea of freedom, but also with a strongly negative concept of questionable legality and the breaking of societal rules. Vale similarly did not mind using the term, stating that “[As a Boater] you’re a contemporary Gypsy. I’m not away from the urban life of a young person, yet I live in an extreme way. I have a fire, not much water, not much electricity.” For Vale, being a Gypsy carried positive associations of being free and of living an exciting and alternative existence.

Others in the boating community do not use the term “Water Gypsy” openly, yet do acknowledge the similarities between Boater and Gypsy lifestyles and even see the Traveller site as a model for how Boaters could and should self-organise. Stuart, for example, explained how many of the Boaters had come from the New Age Traveller communities and even some of them from old (Gypsy) Traveller communities. Boaters, for Stuart, held an element of this intimidation, a concept that would be familiar to Barth (1998 [1969]) and Cohen (1985) when they describe how boundaries between groups are created and reinforced through enacting them, in this case geographically and through observation and monitoring. For Stuart, Boaters are a lot like Gypsies and should feel like an intimidating and foreign presence.

Several Boaters, however, have spoken to me about how they do not like being tagged as “Water Gypsies” (I have also heard the terms “Ditch Gypsies” and “River Pikeys”¹⁴⁴ used in different areas of the system, but Water Gypsies seems to be the most common). John stated in an interview that “Boaters can be called ‘Water Gypsies;’ we *have* to break that, we’re not. There’s a smirky bit there [in that statement], in the background, about hoarding scrap metal. I mean, there’s nothing wrong with Gypsies; they’re alright.” Gypsies, as Okely (1983) describes, are often derided in the UK or being dirty and a source of litter and rubbish: associations that the modern Boaters, like the working Boaters of history (see Chapter 3) would likely wish to avoid.

The relationship between Boaters and this loaded term is clearly not simple or universally recognised. Modern Boaters recognise that being called a “Water Gypsy” can be dangerous as it can lead to the same forms of othering, threats and attacks which the land-based Gypsies and Travellers must endure. At the same time, many wish to describe themselves as bearing a relationship to the Gypsies and other travelling communities. The NBTA [National Bargee Traveller Association], for example, wish to have Boaters (their term being “Bargee Travellers”) recognised as an itinerant minority for the purpose of pursuing legal rights for their members and, thus, are implicitly accepting their similarity to other itinerant populations. The website of the charity Friends, Families and Travellers, which usually deals with the needs of the land-based travelling population, has a section on “Boat dwellers, also known as ‘continuous cruisers’” (Friends Families and Travellers, 2015), although Boaters remain absent or a footnote in most internet sites dedicated to travellers and their rights. Clearly, in some cases, being related to Gypsies and Travellers is politically desirable. Others, as I have previously described, use the term as it is evocative of freedom and has a certain romance in certain contexts.

It is thus possible to conclude that the term “Water Gypsy” is used instrumentally by Boaters; that is to say, it is used only when it suits them and denied when it appears as a threat. This is best seen when Boaters use such terms jokingly with each other (I have heard Boaters call each other and themselves “aqua pikeys” and “water rats” for example) and yet are scornful of others attempting to impose the term upon them. This is a piece of

¹⁴⁴ Pikey is an extremely offensive term for a Gypsy or Traveller and, as such, I was surprised to hear it used in connection with the Boaters, even though the individual who used the phrase was using it, he felt, in a tongue-in-cheek fashion and without aggressive intent.

reappropriation that defines the boundary of the group (as in the work of Cohen, 1985), creating a difference between those who are allowed to use such terms and those who are not. The lines of what is acceptable and unacceptable are thus drawn around a boundary which describes an in-group and an out-group (see Barth, 1998 [1969]).

The use of the term “Water Gypsy” is, however, merely one limited facet of the ambiguous relationship between Boaters and outsiders; it can be used as a shorthand for those outside the community to describe their problem with and distrust of liveaboard boating populations, and it can be used as a reappropriated term by those within the community to jokingly describe their identity. But it is merely one term, moving within a thoroughly complex discursive field which goes far beyond a single descriptive label.

A conflicted image? Romanticisation vs. Demonisation

Wider society seems to react ambivalently towards the arrival of Boaters. On the one hand, many seem to see boat living as quaint and harmless, or even as desirable and romantic and, as such, welcome the appearance of Boaters in their neighbourhoods. Many conversations with fascinated passersby will detail how they themselves wish to live on a boat or, at the very least, to know more about the lives of the Boaters (see the discussions on it being “cold in winter” in Chapter 9 (page 213). Stuart hypothesised that CaRT may not be putting all of their efforts into making liveaboard boating illegal or breaking up the community, as “they’re scared of kicking up a hornet’s nest, as people actually like Boaters.” He quoted an example whereby a caravan-travelling friend of his was visiting the canals in the north and his parents saw a boat and commented “how lovely and quaint that would be [to live aboard].” He replied “right, I’m doing that,” incredulous and amused considering that they’d never accepted his traveller lifestyle before. He pointed out that, “they [on the boats] are travellers too,” a sentiment which was not understood by his parents.

As described in Chapter 3, the waterways and their iconic narrowboats are oft-romanticised facets of the British rural idyll and hold associations of a golden age of beauty and industry. The nature of my research has meant that, like Okely (1983:38-48), I have been able to use the responses of friends, family and other sedentary people I have met to judge outsiders’ views of my community of study. Whereas Okely found herself exposed to sedentary peoples’ scorn and mistrust of her Gypsy hosts, I have found myself experien-

cing the general goodwill and high levels of fascination that are felt towards boat-dwellers on the waterways.

There is, however, a counter-trend in certain areas towards a demonisation of the Boaters and a mistrust of their motives. A fellow anthropologist informed me that when she was in Manchester completing her fieldwork, she had heard Boaters described as “Water Gypsies,” “just like Gypos” and had heard that they “steal babies.” The trope of kidnap is one of the common features of anti-Gypsy sentiment and an old fear used to be that babies would be “taken by the raggle-taggle Gypsies” (see Okely, 2014:72). Its use in this context was telling of how, in this area at least, Boaters are seen as similar to or part of the Gypsy community.

This variation around the country and the presence of areas where discrimination is more common is recognised by many Boaters. Tony Sulman succinctly summarised the confusing situation when he stated that “in certain locations, such as Stratford-on-Avon, people don’t seem to want boats there...There’s an analogy with travellers. There’s a perception that they come here and leave all this rubbish. There’s definitely a parallel when you get a commune of Boaters. Having said that, there’s this idea that we’re the last community of travellers who can come and go relatively as we please. Lots of people don’t know that we’re even here! When a caravan stops, there’s panic, and you don’t see that with boats.” Tony Sulman saw this distrust, and also Boaters’ somewhat hidden position within the wider discourse, as having historical roots dating back to the time of the working Boaters.

Such a mixed perception from wider society does not allow Boaters to assume that they will be safe or well-received in any particular location. Simon Robbins of NABO [National Association of Boat Owners] summarised that “the perception of Boaters and those who live aboard is varied, from those who are sympathetic and reasonable to ‘they should be hanged,’” and this, of course, makes life difficult for the Boaters who have to travel into potentially hostile territories.

The perception of continuous cruisers is different in “trendy” East London than it is in the context of the wider waterways. I have met a great number of people around Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Islington who declare their desire to live on a boat and ask me to put them in contact with a potential source of a boat to rent. The result of such enquiries can

be seen in the rapidly increasing number of boats and new Boaters mooring in these areas. Outside of East London, I have heard many holiday Boaters and sedentary house residents be routinely scathing of liveaboard Boaters. Sam from Bath said that she had, as a liveaboard, encountered “so much prejudice it’s unreal.” Dan from Reading stated that “I don’t understand it [the abuse]; they think we’re all grotty tramps.” The signs that liveaboard Boaters are thought of as undesirable are often quotidian and subtle; for example, when I told marina or holiday Boaters that I was going to be living with continuous cruisers, more than once I was snobbishly wished “good luck.” Equally, I was once told that I did not “look like a Boater” as I did not “look like a drug-addled hippy.” Kate, in an interview, mentioned a similar confrontation when an acquaintance asked, “You live on a boat? You don’t look like a junky.”

Thus, it is possible to conclude that Boaters, much like other peripatetic groups, receive something of an admixture of romanticisation and demonisation from the public at large. Both of these responses are, of course, forms of exoticisation and othering, of making the subject appear foreign and removed, even if one appears to be superficially positive and the other entirely negative. Okely (1983) notes such a combination of these two seemingly contradictory but actually mutually constitutive trends in the historical discourse surrounding Gypsies and Travellers in the UK. She notes that those groups have been victims of these twin processes throughout their history, stating that “since a travelling people are seen to defy the state’s demand for a ‘fixed abode,’ they are seen as both lawless and fascinating” (*ibid.*:2). Fonseca (1996) charts this trend as occurring historically with Gypsy communities in the context of a number of different European nations. She notes that “the Gypsy is the quintessential stranger - and strangers are never benevolent. It starts early, with fear” (*ibid.*:227). She does also, however, note the counter-trend of romanticisation, writing, “Prejudice is complicated by romantic yearnings, which find a sad echo among the Gypsies themselves, always anxious to tell you that they - not the sorners [fake Gypsies] down the road - are the *real* Gypsies” (*ibid.*).

Clark and Greenfield’s (2006) sociological overview of the situation of UK Gypsies and Travellers similarly notes the discrimination and simultaneous fascination undergone by those populations and the effect this has on their wellbeing. They chart a long period of uneasy truce and co-habitation between Gypsies and gorgios during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries emanating from these two processes; thus “the need for seasonal

land labour and other particular skills of Gypsies and Travellers, when coupled with the (middle- and upper-class) interest in the developing 'science' of anthropology, and the romantic notion of the 'Gypsy wanderer,' ensured that members of the nomadic community were tolerated as a necessary (or perhaps picturesque) presence at the margins of society" (*ibid.*:62). This *modus vivendi* was subsequently broken apart by the Caravan Acts of the 1960s and 1970s and the breakdown of these traditional seasonal work practices, and the acceptance of Gypsies by sedentary members of society deteriorated as a result.

From this evidence it is clear that these othering processes, even though they seem mutually exclusive, are often experienced simultaneously by Travellers. The figure of the Traveller has a clear and powerful resonance and set of associations with sedentary people; they can stand for freedom, the exotic, the wild, the unrestrained, the sexual and the danger of the stranger in society. These powerful associations are not, of course, easy to summarise as purely positive or negative, but they are certainly potentially disrupting of the taken-for-granted regularity of sedentary life.

It is clear, however, that Gypsies and other land-based travellers suffer from demonisation more often than they "benefit" from romanticisation. Boaters, as can be seen from the ethnographic examples provided above, have a generally more positive experience during their travels. There are certainly not the same moral panics or orchestrated media "witch-hunts" when Boaters move into a new area. As described in previous chapters, Boaters do receive complaints concerning their presence and behaviours from local residents and have even been known to generate unfavourable news coverage; these are, however, small in scale compared to the nationwide panics and outrage directed towards Travellers (see, for example, Okely and Houtmans (2011) and their discussion of the Dale Farm Traveller eviction and the resulting media coverage).

This is due, I would hypothesise, to the fact that narrowboats carry associations of the British rural idyll and are seen as peculiarly British, rather than as a foreign threat. Secondly, Boaters tend to form a constant and rather small population on any particular mooring; residents will be used to the presence of a few boats in their vicinity and boats never arrive unexpectedly and *en masse* as large communities of caravan-dwellers have been known to. Boaters also are not taken to have an "ethnic" identity that is foreign and thereby undesirable. Gypsies have always had such ethnic labels placed upon them, which can then

be seen through their relative endogamy and inability to interact with gorgio society apart from at its very margins (Okely, 1983). It is thus extremely easy to make these people, whether they are assumed to be Egyptians, Eastern European Rom, Indians or Irish, seem to be a threatening other. Boaters are not obviously ethnically different to other UK residents and are, to a greater or lesser extent, embedded within economic and social networks beyond the boundary of the boating community. Boaters also, for whatever reason, seem to be spoken about less frequently in the media and to be relatively invisible from the point of view of general public discourse; many times I have heard people, including those who live near canals and rivers, claim that until they heard of my PhD, they had not realised that narrowboats were also often individuals' homes. As such, there is no received public opinion on Boaters, no cliché that is presented whenever Boaters are discussed.

Boaters, thus, experience exoticisation, be it abuse or romanticisation of their lifestyle, to an extent which is usually far less extreme than that experienced by land-based Travellers. The Boaters' dangerous identity as a "Traveller" does, however, and as I have shown above, lead to accusations of being "Water Gypsies," and at times to attacks, both physical and verbal, and to the untethering and damaging of boats. When one adds to this the Boater's otherwise vulnerable position to burglaries and muggings, security becomes a great concern for the vast majority of Boaters. Such a concern with security has profound implications for Boaters' conceptions and management of the "community" and can also be used to draw attention to fissures and factions which exist within the boating community as a whole. The Boaters' concern for their own security has also affected their material culture and their idea of what is required in order to be a member of the community of live-a-boards, and it is this impact which shall be discussed in the following section.

Security, community and internal divisions

It was only after my first few interviews and my first months on the canals of London that I began to hear Boaters specifically articulate that security was a concern of theirs. In two interviews (those with Vale and Azzurra), these security concerns came to the forefront and it became clear that the material safety of the boat was an important part of these Boaters' realities. It is perhaps more important to note that both of these Boaters were living on their own and were just discovering the reality of life aboard; it is possible that they both felt more vulnerable than Boaters who have adjusted over time to life aboard and who

find such security threats to be less at the front of their minds.¹⁴⁵ Vale was particularly quick to mention security. When I asked her what she was looking for in a mooring, she answered “a strong, safe mooring...It’s mechanical safety more than personal safety, when I feel the *boat’s* safe.” Vale wished to make her boat mechanically sound before moving on, and was quick to point out that this form of security is more to do with the boat (its mechanical “health” and physical safety on the mooring) than with her own personal safety. As has been seen in previous chapters (see Chapters 4 and 5), the boat is the avatar of the Boater on the waterways and it is an equal (or maybe more important) participant in the social life of the waterways to the Boaters themselves.

Security is very often talked about in combination with community. As discussed in Chapter 7, Boaters consider that having community and enacting community are part of what makes their social organisation special or notable. Showing a concern for community is central to the practice of being a liveaboard Boater and thereby of gaining a status of legitimacy within the group. Boaters often argue that community (as in enacted or performed community) is essential, due to the threats to Boaters’ security arising from their marginal position. Azzurra summarised that “one of the main ways that the community binds together is security, looking at other’s boats... this is one of the communities who should, and who are organising themselves.”

The importance of having someone to “look out” for the boats is seen when Boaters talk of the need to moor near other boats “for safety.” This is equally to be seen when Stuart spoke of the intimidation one should feel when walking into the midst of a community of travellers. One Boater, who wished to explain how community was less to do with gift-giving and sharing in London and more about security concerns, endeavoured to put me right by explaining that community is “when you’re moored with a group of Boaters [and] you feel like someone’s watching out, that someone’s going to notice if you’re being broken in to and maybe do something.”

Steve Haywood also found the idea of security to be central to the Boaters’ creation of community and it was, he argued, important to emphasise such aspects of boating life if

¹⁴⁵ It is also possible that these two female Boaters felt more vulnerable due to their gender and the fact that women living alone would be more vulnerable to sexual harassment or sexual assault and would likely be seen as more of a target by male assailants than male Boaters. Neither of these Boaters mentioned their gender and, as such, I do not wish to engage in supposition or to speculate here beyond their words.

they wished to challenge the actions of the waterways authorities. “To take the fight to CaRT,” he explained, “folk have to organise their own community. You need to take care of your area, keep your boats neat and tidy, make sure there’s enough space for visitors to moor, and make sure that there’s always someone on the boat watching, for security reasons; that’s important.” Gossip networks, alongside protection through surveillance, are said to be able to help to protect Boaters by furnishing them with important information concerning localised security threats. Helen, for example, described how “there’s a bit of towpath telegraph [gossip and information exchange networks]; like there was a guy on the Oxford [canal] breaking into boats and you hear about it, watch out and don’t moor there, that kind of thing.” I was struck early on after arriving in London how the online London Boaters Facebook page and mailserv functioned effectively to advise of “suspicious” looking groups, hotspots for attacks and generally to provide a network of support and vigilance.

It has thus been seen that community can be shown to be in existence when Boaters remain vigilant on behalf of others and generally monitor activity around moorings, particularly in vulnerable areas where there are known to be immediate threats. This vigilant support network can, as I described in Chapter 7, create a sense that Boaters are together against a common threat. This commonality against a specific threat, in turn, creates a boundary (see Barth, 1998 [1969]; Cohen, 1985) against which the group can experience themselves as cohesive and different from others.

Some Boaters have, however, used London Boaters’ formalisation and reification (see Wenger, 1998:57-62) of this community vigilance to provide a generational critique of newer Boaters and of the changes and new divisions within the boating community. This began when London Boaters, as a response to the break-ins and attacks of the winter of 2012-13, initiated “Operation Whistle Blower,” a system whereby Boaters would be given a whistle and encouraged to blow it if they found themselves in danger or saw anything suspicious.

Previous suggestions of what to do when encountering attackers or burglars were to take pictures of them in order to show them that they were being watched and to telephone the police’s dedicated marine force, “Project Kraken.” It was suggested that this was not being effective and that a louder and more startling deterrent would be required. As such, the

vigilant aspect of the boating community became reified (*ibid.*) in their material culture. Now, along with their cork floats and key bundles, many Boaters carry whistles on their key chains. These whistles were handed out by volunteers along the Regents Canal and River Lee over the summer of 2013. They were often left on the back decks when Boaters were not home to receive the gift. Along with the whistles themselves, a striking A5 sized cardboard sign was provided in a plastic bag (see Figure 12). These signs can be seen in the windows of many London boats and are present to inform nearby Boaters that the owners are supporters of the scheme and can be relied upon to whistle in an emergency situation.

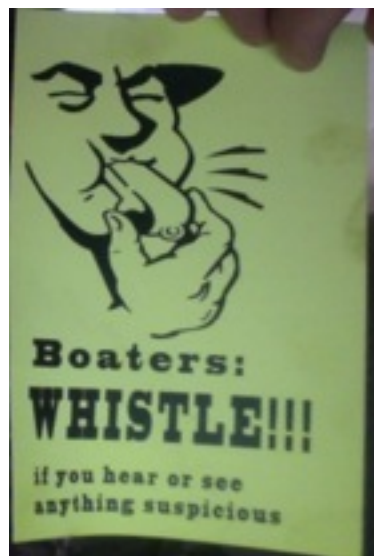


Figure 12. The “Operation Whistleblower” handout.

Operation Whistle Blower was not, however, met with the enthusiasm of all within the boating community. “What use would a bloody whistle be if no-one’s going to answer it?” ran one angry online comment. Another said, “Why would I run out to answer a whistle if the hippies next door won’t bother? It’ll just be me against a bunch of knives and I’ll get killed.” In another, a Boater who remembered the “bad old days” when Boaters had been forced to defend themselves on dangerous moorings with the use of axes and machetes questioned whether newer Boaters knew how lucky they were and what a struggle had gone in to making the waterways as safe as they currently are. The same comment questioned whether “Guardian readers”¹⁴⁶ in the Boater community, who “are not like other travellers at all,” would react to a violent attack. Implicit here is a critique of new Boaters who are

¹⁴⁶ In the UK, the Guardian is a left-wing newspaper traditionally thought to be read by middle-class and privileged individuals. It is also thought to be generally centre-left-liberal and gentle with its political commentary. Calling new Boaters “Guardian readers” is akin, in this context, to calling them privileged and weak.

seen as too privileged, “soft” and impractical to respond to the violence which was once the daily experience of the Boater.

This is not necessarily a class-based critique, although it does imply that these Boaters may not be as capable of dealing with dangerous threats due to their backgrounds. This critique is more to do with how newer Boaters are not familiar with the history and background of the areas into which they are travelling and do not have the skills and practicalities needed to stand up for themselves. For example, I once heard a Boater exclaim exasperatedly, “They think they can moor in Hackney and swan about wearing hippy jumpers with their iPads and not get their boats broken into.” This reflects a generational difference of “old-timers” criticising the efforts of “newcomers,” as is common to many communities of practice (Wenger, 1998:99-101). The critique is not merely just about time spent aboard boats, however, as it also reflects deeply held anxieties concerning the arrival of a population of new and increasingly affluent Boaters onto the waterways.

In this way, even the measures of the community to formalise their arrangements of mutual support became a contested space that highlighted the conflicts within the boating community. As seen in Chapter 6, each community contains contested spaces and internal divisions and this does not limit its strength to act or to be powerfully felt. Indeed, Boaters disagree with each other frequently, but, due to the importance of acting together as a community and at least partially due to the importance of remaining secure and having sympathetic vigilant neighbours, the concept of the boating community flourishes and continues to reproduce itself.

Summary: A Question of Security?

Even though Boaters use the term “security” regularly and are concerned about being “secure” aboard, this clearly means something very different from the national “security moment,” as characterised by coercive and often militarised state power that is described in traditional security literature (e.g Chipman, 1992). Goldstein, in his study of village scale security in Bolivia, describes a field site where security is not provided by the state but by the people. The discourse of security is, rather, understood as providing a critique of the limitations of a distant and corrupt state government. He concludes that:

Rather than contributing to the seamless reproduction of neoliberal governmentality, security, like so many other components of transnational political economy and its accompanying discourses, has been adopted and reconfigured in unexpected and challenging ways, serving not necessarily to deepen a neoliberal hegemony but to contest the very parameters of governmental responsibility and citizens' rights. Ethnographic research reveals these contradictions, expanding our conceptions of what security entails and of the ways in which local ideas about security are informed by and yet also serve to challenge national and global understandings, discourses, and practices.” (Goldstein, 2010:499).

In my own fieldsite, the security concerns do not lead to lynchings and vigilante violence (although a waved machete has been known to have been employed to protect a boat in danger). However, there is a certain parallel between Goldstein's observations and approach, viewing “security” as a concern with implications for a community's actions, and the way in which a community comes to understand itself and its relationship with the state. Like Goldstein's Bolivian informants, Boaters feel isolated, vulnerable and poorly served by the state's response to their position and, as such, attempt to organise their own community response to threats. Ultimately, both the Bolivian villages and the Boaters become aware of Hobbes' understanding that “if there be no power erected, or not great enough for our security, every man will and may lawfully rely on his own strength and art for caution against all other men” (Hobbes, 2003 [1651]), just as Steve the coal boatman feared would occur in Hackney. Luckily for the Boaters, serious injury on both sides of the Boater/sedentary security divide has been avoided in recent times.

This chapter has argued that Boaters' security concerns can be used as a diagnostic for their vulnerable position and in order to examine how they are viewed by wider sedentary society. It has been seen that Boaters hold an element of exotic fascination for many but can simultaneously be demonised, like Gypsies or Travellers, as a threat (ironically) to the security of house-dwelling communities. In different areas and at different times, Boaters become the victims of attacks that may have a component of hatred and distrust of their peripatetic lifestyles. It has been discussed how these threats cause the community to endeavour to act together for mutual support but also how, even in the midst of this collective action against a perceived threat, the issue of security is used to highlight splits in the community, as generations question each other's legitimacy and ability to respond to malevolent outsiders. In this way, the concept of security can be used in order to probe deeper into community relations and to answer the question of how Boaters see them-

selves (and are seen) in relation to sedentary outsiders. Such concerns are pivotal in the following chapter, where the official representative Boaters' group set up to deal with external threats is examined.

Chapter 11: Political (Dis)Organisation

Introduction

As I noted in earlier chapters, no hierarchy has existed whereby powerful Boaters would attempt to exercise political control over others; the community has been kept together through the cultivation of interpersonal relationships of trust, giving, care and the exchange of skills and favours, rather than by concerted hegemonic action. As Scott (2014) describes, mobile populations can always resist hegemony to some degree by moving away from political situations which they find unpalatable. Anthropologists working with many geographically dispersed peoples, including nomadic bands and slash-and-burn horticulturalists, have provided ethnographic examples of this egalitarianism ensured through open boundaries (see Solway, 2006; Lee, 1979; Woodburn, 1982) and Okely describes how the Traveller-Gypsies with whom she worked moved in order to escape interfamilial conflict and any emerging tensions within the social order (Okely, 1983:143).

It is not satisfactory, however, to simply state that the Boaters are egalitarian and resist political domination by particular groups who may wish to exercise political control upon them or claim to represent them as a body, although, as I shall describe below, this is part of the story. Boaters do have advocacy groups which arise and represent them to state agencies, the media, and residency groups in waterside sedentary neighbourhoods. In this chapter I present data gathered from my interactions with these groups and attempt to show how they differ from other organised advocacy groups that may be found in contemporary Britain. This chapter describes the developmental cycle of Boaters' political organisations: their rise, their working processes, and their fall. Throughout this chapter it shall be shown that the Boaters' political formations are flexible, fluid and unset, in a state of being able to change with necessity. In Turner's (1990) terms, the "subjunctive mood" of culture, the mood of becoming, of the unfixed and the might-be, can be seen in the Boaters' political dealings when new groups spring up to deal with particular threats, in the way they act in creative and flexible ways, and then when they disappear when the threat diminishes.

In drawing out this life history, I shall be referring predominantly to the organisation London Boaters (LB), a group who use consensus decision-making methods¹⁴⁷ and with whom I have been most directly involved over the course of my fieldwork. I shall, however, also use examples from organisations such as the Association of Continuous Cruisers (ACC), the National Association of Boat Owners (NABO), Cowley and Uxbridge Boaters (CUB) and the National Bargee Traveller Association (NBTA). I recognise that the “life history” of London Boaters may not be typical and that presenting this life history may not be a perfect way of describing how all Boaters wish to engage politically with outside organisations, but I hope to show that LB’s history can demonstrate how many within the boating community wish to model their political interactions.

“Jellyfish” organisation: the amorphous and the leaderless

“Divide that ye be not ruled.”

Ernest Gellner (Scott, 2011:209).

As seen in Chapter 7 in discussions concerning surveillance, it is common for Boaters to wish to remain to some degree hidden and “left alone” on the waterways. Escaping into the margins of the state - onto the waterways where regulation and bureaucracy is experienced as a forceful imposition rather than a pervasive milieu - is, for many Boaters, a political choice of a different life as compared with that experienced by their sedentary friends and relatives. I opened my chapter concerning the Boaters and the state with the words of a politically active Boater to whom I will refer often, Andrew Bailles, who stated that boating was “a very English kind of anarchism, not like the eco-squats, more a case of bloody-mindedness: do as thou wilt...” I feel this quote summarises the desired relationship between the Boaters and the state as being primarily one of non-engagement.

Boaters are, as was described in the first section of this thesis, proud of their ability to learn the skills and techniques requisite in boating, to learn about their vessels and to become self-sufficient in as many ways as possible. In these ways, Boaters are inclined towards distrusting others who may attempt to make demands of them, particularly those from outside of the community, although, as shall be seen, none are entirely exempt from this general distrust and satirising of aspiring authority.

¹⁴⁷ See the later section of this chapter entitled “Business of the society: How boating groups act.”

Concerning mobility and romanticisation

It is further important to note that there is an apparent paradox in operation whereby on one hand, Boaters' disputes with CaRT tend to focus on their relative *lack* of mobility (overstaying in a place, not moving far enough, etc.), and on the other, their mobility is troubling to the state. Further, I write about this mobility as having an effect on Boaters' political organisation. To clarify, there is a general consensus amongst Boaters that the purpose of living on a boat is to move and to explore the waterways; this does not mean that some would not like to stay in a particular place for long periods of time, particularly when their boat needs mechanical work or over the winter when moving is dangerous, unpleasant and time-consuming. Disputes between Boaters and the authorities tend to occur over the Boaters staying around a city or on one particular waterway and not in relation to their not moving at all. Even by having the ability to move and then staying in one place for some weeks or months, Boaters can still avoid confrontation with others, band together with those they like, and then choose independence and solitude. However, mobility *in potentia* still has important consequences for boat-dwellers.

Here, it is important to note that it is not my intention to romanticize Boaters' non-engagement and non-conformity without acknowledging that many sedentary people, including sedentary residents in London, also wish to avoid state-forms, official representative groups and bureaucratic processes. I recognise that the Boaters' approach to politics is, as Scott (2011) recognises in his description of widespread and longstanding state resistance and evasion, not uncommon or unique to mobile groups. Indeed, many housed (sedentary) residents in London and the South East have a complicated relationship with the state and do not engage with councils, representative neighbourhood groups, local politics etc., preferring other, often non-hierarchical, networks and social formations. I do not deny this or claim some kind of special status for the Boaters; my intention here is merely to highlight the consequences of Boaters' mobility and to describe the pattern of how Boaters' groups form and act.

A note on “official” representation

Such is the background to the Boaters' political representational choices, and the reader is encouraged to keep in mind this base level of self-sufficiency, the tendency towards free-thinking non-conformism and the centrality of mobility to the Boaters as the chapter moves into its ethnographic examples. When authorities, including CaRT and local residents associations, wish to interpellate the Boaters as a larger entity or as a collective, they find it difficult to grasp who is in charge, who to contact, and who is able to "speak for" the Boaters. When consultations occur and liveaboard Boaters are to be included, it is often a representative of the National Association of Boat Owners [NABO] who is the sole presence representing the needs of boat owners. It is important to note, however, that NABO is mainly comprised of residentially-moored Boaters and Boaters who do not live aboard; it has been shown elsewhere (particularly in Chapters 1 and 4) that these Boaters are of a generally different sensibility to the continuous cruisers with whom I lived and mainly worked. Occasionally, the representative body chosen is the Inland Waterways Association [IWA], which, despite its early radical history (Bolton, 1991), is now a conservative group that generally takes an anti-continuous cruiser stance in its press releases and policy documents.¹⁴⁸

When Andrew Bailles "represented" London Boaters at a London Assembly meeting in late 2013, he was asked if he was an official representative of the organisation known as London Boaters. He replied that London Boaters was a consensus-based, acephalous organisation that rejects representational democracy and, as such, he spoke only for himself as a London Boater, or more properly as a Boater of London. According to Andrew, the assembled meeting found it difficult to grasp this concept, embedded as they were in the hierarchical representational structures of their own institutions. The officials could not translate into their models of official representational democratic organisation the acephalous and amorphous quality of a "group" such as LB.

In view of this, representatives of CaRT or other official bodies usually find themselves having to interpellate individual Boaters in a time consuming way, as highly mobile and geographically dispersed individuals. When non-Boater organisations deal with representatives of Boaters' organisations, they are usually dealing either with groups who do not and do not claim to speak for cruising liveaboard Boaters, or with isolated individuals who do not draw their authority from the mandate of the liveaboard Boaters as a corpus. This is

¹⁴⁸ See The Inland Waterways Association (2012).

a situation on which CaRT representatives do not reflect, rather choosing to bypass the fact that the majority of cruising Boaters wish to keep these political processes at arm's length.

Theoretical background: differing political organisational structures

There are obvious advantages to being a dispersed and amorphous group without obvious political hierarchical structures. Firstly, Boaters are not coerced or controlled by powerful individuals within the group, and it is hard for those from outside to force structural changes upon them as a body. James Scott (2011) points out how, throughout human history, tribes and small groups have used such a dispersed and acephalous approach in order to avoid the interventions of the state. Thus it is obvious that such a state-avoidance strategy is by no means a contemporary innovation. Scott (*ibid.*:210) uses Malcolm Yapp's (1983) term "Jellyfish Tribes" to describe such deliberately unstructured and amorphous populations.

Scott summarises his argument with the words, "Egalitarian, acephalous peoples on the fringes of states are hard to control. They are ungraspable. To the command "Take me to your leader" there is no straightforward answer" (Scott, 2011:277). His analysis draws upon the work of Deleuze and Guattari, whose *A Thousand Plateaus* (2004) describes the tension between state-like formations (hierarchical, treelike, rigid, structured) and rhizomatic formations (amorphous, egalitarian, flexible, spontaneous and emergent). Kapferer and Bertelson (2009) have also begun the project of applying Deleuze and Guattari's theories to ethnographies where states come into contact with "nomadic" elements. Here, it is important to stress that the authors do not necessarily mean that those resistant to the state are literally nomadic or travelling peoples; while mobility can be an element, the term is used to refer to those groups or elements which organise themselves in a non-hierarchical fashion.

Reading the following summary from the work of Kapferer and Bertelson (2009), it is possible to see how Boaters are both somewhat nomadic in terms of their itinerant lifestyles and are an example of the "nomadic war machine" in the sense used by Deleuze and Guattari:

The *war machine* is “rhizomatic”... [an] indistinct, complex shape complemented by a fluidity and mobility, and its form is exterior to the state apparatus. *The state*, on the other hand, is characterised by territory and control, sedentation and lack of mobility, where hierarchy is an important feature”.

Bertelsen (in Kapferer and Bertelsen, 2009, p.223).

If we follow Kapferer and Bertelsen, it is possible to see Boaters as representing a form of political organisation opposed in type and structure to that which is found in wider sedentary society. The two forms, as seen in the example involving Andrew Bailles at the London Assembly Meeting, do not readily and easily translate or interact; whilst political meetings are being held in which the Boaters as “stakeholders” should be represented, many continue to opt to remain marginal to the process, not to discuss the Boaters’ political situation and to otherwise continue on with their lives in disengagement.

It is also important to note that Deleuze and Guattari, in presenting their dichotomy of smooth space and striated space, are creating deliberately extreme ideal types. Indeed, the distinction is made more subtle when Deleuze and Guattari “reject this dichotomy: all societies are segmented in one way or another” (Holland, 2013, Chapter 2). They recognise that even mobile societies, tribes and bands have hierarchy and are not entirely “flat.” Instead, they distinguish between “supple” and “rigid” forms of segmentation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:209), where one is flexible and tends towards flattening, and the other is rigidly structured and tends towards the hierarchical and state-form. In this chapter, when I write about the Boaters’ form of organisation in comparison to CaRT’s, I do not intend to describe the Boaters as being completely without structure or hierarchy, or CaRT as being some form of bureaucratic monolith; rather I am describing such a tendency towards one form or the other: the difference between Deleuze and Guattari’s supple and rigid hierarchies.

Occasionally, of course, the Boaters have to speak the official language of the state and to organise themselves officially and politically. Andrew Bailles described the structural difficulties up against which Boaters find themselves with the words, “It’s a passive-aggressive way of life, pushing against something, but you can’t hope to win really.” In order to fight these structural constraints, Boaters have bound together. Most Boaters find themselves to be at least occasionally on the map, with the “authorities” attempting to effect change upon them and their ways of life in a way that it is not possible to simply evade or flee. Engage-

ment must be made, but it must be engagement on the Boaters' terms. The subsequent sections of this chapter describe how this engagement unfolds, with focus on the ways in which official representational groups arise, act, and disaggregate.

The rise of new Boaters' groups: from the people, in response to threat.

The first time I heard of London Boaters (LB) was in November of 2012, after I had moved my boat as far as the moorings in central London at Kings' Cross. The Boater who "but-tied" (tied) alongside my boat, Nick, when hearing about my fieldwork, suggested that I look up an organisation known as London Boaters. A small amount of online research showed that London Boaters functioned primarily as a listserv or mailserv (see Chapter 2) and as a busy Facebook page. It was some time later, when I attended a London Boaters' meeting that was organized in response to IWA and CaRT support for draconian mooring restrictions and enforcement, that I was able to see that the group functioned on a level other than an online presence.

When I did meet those active within LB, I found that they had an origin myth of which they were all notably proud. After we retired to the pub after that first meeting in February 2013, one LB member proudly stated, "This all just started as a few of us getting together in the pub. Maybe we ought to get back to that?" I heard this theme repeated many times, with Boaters stating that they were proud of their informal and unplanned origins and wishing to get the "fun, social" element back into the group. Indeed, all London Boaters meetings which I have attended have either occurred in pubs or have ended with a suggestion that we all retire to the nearest available public hostelry.

Later, when meeting Andrew Bailles, I asked him about the origin of the group and he confirmed that LB had actually arisen in response to a specific threat from the authority which was, at the time, BW. The Lee and Stort Mooring Consultation in 2011 had led to proposed changes being declared by BW which would have made living on the Rivers Lee and Stort in east and north London practically impossible. The document produced by BW (see London Boaters, 2011) defined the entire length of the rivers as six "places" and declared their intention to introduce no-return rules whereby it would become impossible to do as many Boaters do and spend several months or all of their licensed year cruising the rivers up into Hertfordshire and back down into East London. Andrew told me that BW had held two

public consultations in order to debate the measures and had expected little response. He stated that “Sally Ash [CaRT’s then Head of Boating] created London Boaters! She had a cackhanded way of dealing with things. They tried to bring in this document and she had two meetings on the Lee and Stort, two little consultations, and there were over a hundred people at both.” London Boaters had arisen from these meetings and had campaigned vigorously, both directly in correspondences to BW and in the media, for the changes to be scrapped.

Ultimately, the Boaters, who made use of a general sympathetic public and BW’s lack of evidence to support their proposals, won their battle and the changes were not introduced. This victory, along with LB’s successful campaign to be provided with drinking water in the absence of workable taps¹⁴⁹ during the Olympics of 2012, were central to LB’s understanding of their origins and purpose. Although the majority of the group’s business primarily involved quotidian matters, those involved knew that the group could act together in order to bring about major change for the benefit of the community. The satirical magazine *The Floater*, produced in March 2014, described the origins of the group thusly: “Once there was a dis-organisation, we called it London Boaters. It had lifted like a Phoenix from the flames, called into being, a humble email list became a fierce force to face, in meetings, on the towpaths we fought for our cause and won. The Lee and Stort Moorings Policy was defeated, lost cats were found, and lost bicycles returned” (*The Floater*, 2014).

In summary, LB was forged in the heat of an immediate battle; it arose from the unallied mass of Boaters with specific goals and in order to combat a specific and immediate threat from the BW. I was not a witness to the birth of LB and so I cannot confirm how much of this origin story is true and how much is hagiographic. I was, however, present at the birth of another Boaters’ organisation and, as such, I could immediately notice the similarities between this group and LB. Cowley and Uxbridge Boaters (CUB) were formed in late 2012 in order to represent the Boaters of Cowley, Uxbridge and the West of London in the face of the threats from the waterways authorities regarding the introduction of “Roving Mooring

¹⁴⁹ As Andrew explained, “the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] were very interested that a charitable trust were denying us the universal right of clean drinking water, and CaRT quickly changed their tune.” Despite narrowboats appearing in the London Olympics’ architectural designs and promotional material, in reality the Olympic Games had caused widespread chaos on the waterways, with an “exclusion zone” being set into which boats could not pass (see Chapters 3 and 7). This has continued long past the 2012 Games, with the area known as Bow Back Waters remaining closed now at the time of writing. The issue of water provision was, for many displaced Boaters with whom I spoke, a terrible further inconvenience and indignity, and a powerful act of aggression from the new authority, CaRT.

Permits” (RMP).¹⁵⁰ The nature of these permits is outlined in the following section of this chapter. CUB was formed by a number of concerned West London Boaters when CaRT revealed that the Grand Union canal at Uxbridge, Cowley and Denham would be an early trial area for the RMP scheme. Although the group was set up with the explicit intention to enter into a dialogue with CaRT and to allow compromise (as opposed to LB’s more militant stance), once again it can be seen that a group arose with a specific aim (in this case to represent the Boaters in the negotiations around the bringing in of RMPs) and in response to specific threats from the waterways authorities.

The form of political organisations in response to specific threats as described here is not unique to the modern waterways or to the liveaboard Boaters of the twenty-first century. Indeed, the IWA, despite now being a conservative organisation mainly representing the interests of hobbyist non-liveaboard Boaters (“shiny boat people,” as a CUB member summarised), began life as a resistant group in 1946. It used direct action to combat the actions of the British Transport Commission (BTC) who had taken legal control of the waterways after their nationalisation in 1948. The BTC attempted, throughout the 1950s, to save a small number of canals which they deemed to be of “commercial” value and to allow the remainder to fall into disuse (Bolton, 1991). Indeed it was IWA’s guerrilla cruising-tactics, and their insistence that unused canals be filled and low bridges raised for their members to make their journeys, that led to the preservation of almost all of the pre-existing inland waterways network and the birth of canal-based “pleasure cruising.”

Thus it is possible to see a reoccurring pattern of resistant reactive organisation and mobilisation throughout the short history of liveaboard boating, although this is not always a popular view from the perspective of the authorities. As Andrew Bailles gleefully informed me when discussing his meeting with the complainants of a particular residents’ association and members of CaRT in Islington, “When I said that London Boaters was a reactive

¹⁵⁰ The IWA had produced a document entitled *A Proposal for Reducing Overstaying Boats in the London Area*. This document provided no evidence of overcrowding or overstaying in London but declared both to be “problem[s] to be solved” by “greater enforcement and self regulation” (The Inland Waterways Association, 2012:1) and suggested that those who could not be a “genuine” continuous cruiser would have to purchase a “community mooring permit[s]” (*ibid*:4) in order to remain in London. The document also suggested that a “new culture” was needed on the waterways; one which freed up space on the visitors moorings and was marked by increased enforcement of frequent moves over longer distances. CaRT had released a press release supporting the IWA document and were drawing up their own South East Visitor Moorings (SEVM) Proposal which, time would reveal, took the IWA’s suggestions and replicated them as their own, including the adoption of Roving Mooring Permits (RMP).

group to the actions of BW and CaRT, Sally Ash started clawing the table.” The actions of members of the authorities, in other words, are regularly met with equal and opposite reactions by the Boaters upon whom they seek to act.

Business of the Society: How boating groups act

Boating groups of all kinds, including London Boaters, do most of their business online, often acting as resources for Boaters by providing a mailing list (listserv or mailserv) service whereby Boaters can share information with each other; having a presence on a social networking site such as Facebook, where Boaters can discuss emergent issues; and/or having an archive of online resources such as consultation documents, press releases etc. When boating groups go beyond this online presence and do meet to act corporately, there tends to be a feeling that this concerted official action is unusual and does not fit in with the normal patterns of flexible and independent activity on the waterways.

In previous chapters I have described the spontaneity of Boaters’ meetings, particularly their convivial summer gatherings, all bound within a temporal experience which flows and is flexible, allowing things to happen predominantly when the time is right and when several uncertainties have been navigated. A group meeting puts a firm block into the Boaters’ diary that (although Boaters will of course be used to having calendrical commitments emerging from other aspects of their lives) is unusual in a context where the free and the flexible are normally paramount. Indeed, those meetings which I have attended have tended to begin with a description of how many Boaters have been unable to attend due to unforeseen commitments, boats broken down more than a bicycle ride’s distance away, and other examples of the daily and unpredictable life of the Boater getting in the way of their attendance. Those Boaters who do manage to attend are usually relatively few in number as compared with the regular users of the online services, with the notable exceptions where there is an immediate and tangible threat that has mobilised large parts of the boating community.

While such meetings differ, depending on the context and the hosting group, I aim to show that there are some commonalities that emerge when Boaters meet through the following case study: a comparison between the CUB and LB meetings called in order to discuss RMPs.

Roving Mooring Permits: The response in West and East London

Roving Mooring Permits, or RMPs, are an idea proposed by CaRT in 2012 and 2013. Ideas similar to RMPs had been around for some time and had been floated as a method for dealing with the “problem” of overstaying in “hotspot” areas in various CaRT proposals and circulars. The essential idea behind the RMP is that Boaters will be allowed to purchase a permit, for roughly the same price as their boat license, which will allow them to cruise within a particular area without incurring the enforcement procedures of CaRT. The Boater would be counted as having a “roving” home mooring and, therefore, would not be a continuous cruiser. There was talk of allowing RMP holders permission to moor in a particular location for a month rather than fourteen days and of making new “community moorings” available for RMP holders.

Critics of the RMP scheme argued that this would be giving CaRT money for “what we’re allowed to do already,” meaning that in their interpretation of the law there is nothing wrong with cruising around a particular area as long as one moves regularly from place to place. Supporters of the system argued that many continuous cruisers would love to have an affordable mooring, but that these are far too rare in the south east of England. An RMP would, in effect, be an “affordable” mooring which would allow a Boater to live and work around a useful geographic area without fear of legal proceedings or fines.

At the first LB meeting I attended in February 2013, Roving Mooring Permits, also called London mooring permits in some of CaRT’s correspondences, were high on the agenda. The meeting was above a rowing club on the River Lee, in a function room which was unheated and quite uncomfortable in the February chill. The meeting began with the attending Boaters, who had been chatting in loose formation, being called into a circle. I asked the permission of Melissa, who was chairing this meeting, to take notes and, quite unexpectedly, a debate occurred whereby some Boaters were unsure about whether my presence as a researcher was appropriate or not. Melissa herself was particularly sceptical, but it was agreed that as I was there as an interested Boater first and as a researcher second,

I could stay. The meeting began with those around the circle (fifteen of us at the start, although this doubled by the end of the meeting) giving our names and boat names.¹⁵¹

As became evident to me over the course of this meeting, London Boaters group decisions are based upon consensus decision-making processes rather than through representational democracy, voting, or other such standard Western political forms. Consensus decision-making has been a technique used by various left-wing anarchist, anarcho-syndicalist and socialist groups throughout the twentieth century (see Hartnett, 2011).¹⁵² Under consensus decision-making, the entire group unanimously agrees upon a course of action and then empowers individuals to take action or to “action a decision” on behalf of the group. In this way, at least theoretically, no individual is able to claim hegemony over the will of the group. The close proximity and small numbers involved mean that the decisions made in this way tend to be effective and binding, leading to concerted directly democratic action.

Notwithstanding this, because boats are so scattered around the dispersed waterways, and because Boaters are so interested in personal freedom, it is hard to make the Boaters, as a corporate body, act in any particular way. When actions are decided on at meetings, the minutes are sent out to the mailserv, at which point list members will often hotly debate the “right” of the meeting to have made such decisions and the debate will continue on; meanwhile the Boaters tasked with actioning on behalf of the group may or may not enact their action (letter-writing, creating online lists or databases, printing and distributing leaflets, or whatever action may have been deemed appropriate), with proposed “working groups” usually failing to meet or to act beyond the proposal stage. A Boater at this meeting referred to the consensus system as a “feminine more than a masculine process” in that it allowed Boaters to “find a way to co-operate more than compete.” From this experience comes the title of this chapter, (dis)organisation, as London Boaters is often referred to in this way; Boaters are proud of how their group is loose, lacking official structure, and often ineffective, just as they are proud of their victories when pressed and threatened. A Boater at the meeting I am describing here spoke of LB as a “squiggly wiggly not-quite-

¹⁵¹ Boat names are important in this context as even if the Boater is a stranger, one will recognise their boat from their travels and may well know stories pertaining to the Boater in question or know of mutual acquaintances; boat names and descriptions make connections in ways which names alone do not.

¹⁵² For an ethnography of other groups who use such techniques see Graeber (2009).

democratic thing,” but recognised that it is one of the only ways it is possible to conceive of Boaters getting together in order to make decisions to benefit the group.

This particular London Boaters meeting dealt with the question of London mooring permits in a way which was consistent with their consensus decision-making systems. There was a unanimous response from within the group that the idea should be rejected out of hand. Boaters were of the opinion that being charged to stay within London was beyond the legal powers of the authority and was not an appropriate measure. One Boater received widespread agreement when she stated that the charge was “not even a stealth tax; it’s demanding money with menaces.” It was agreed that a response would be drafted by a Boater who volunteered for the job, to be sent to CaRT, the IWA, NABO and various boating media outlets, which would state that the London Boaters would not pay to stay within London and would deem any measures to make them do so to be illegal. Thus LB’s tendency towards non-engagement, their militance with regard to CaRT’s proposals, and their reliance upon consensus processes were all in evidence at this first meeting.

CUB, by contrast, were a new organisation set up at around this time in order to deal with a concrete and immediate RMP proposal in their immediate neighbourhood. I attended the inaugural CUB meeting at around the same time as my first LB meeting. An upstairs function room in the *Malt Shovel*, Uxbridge, had been hired for the occasion and, immediately when I arrived, I realised that the evening would be different from the LB experience. I met a few of the CUB organisers in the bar beforehand and it was revealed that a few Boaters were planning on coming down “to cause trouble” and, as such, there was to be a Boater positioned on the door to act as a “bouncer.” The room was laid out in rows of seating, in contrast to the circular and inclusive set-up at the LB meeting. The rows of seating were set out before a front table, where Boaters were confronted with the chair of the meeting, a few prominent CUB members and two representatives of CaRT, including Sally Ash, CaRT’s Head of Boating.

The meeting was clearly being led by the representatives on the front table, who were questioned by Boaters with polite raising of hands and who had far more opportunity to speak than any Boater in the crowd. Rather than beginning with introductions on behalf of those present, the Boaters in the “audience” were introduced to the CaRT officials at the front of the room and to the CUB founders who were running the meeting. It was clear that

the CaRT representatives were being interrogated about the details of the scheme, but the mood towards the scheme was clearly generally positive. “Common ground” was sought and the normal Boater antipathy towards the authority was subtextual rather than obvious. As one of the CUB executive committee stated “the important thing is we’re talking to each other, seeing you [Sally Ash and the CaRT representatives] are human.”

This was the case until, from the doorway, heckles to Sally Ash’s responses such as “yeah, yeah,” and “who asked us what we want?” along with raucous laughter, interrupted the meeting. The small size of the room meant that some Boaters who had arrived later than the starting time had been left out in the corridor at the top of the stairs, leaning in through the hole in the top of the door. These Boaters were literally and figuratively excluded; they seemed to represent Uxbridge-based Boaters who were against RMPs and who did not feel represented by the CUB members inside the meeting. Sally Ash was stern with these Boaters, accusing them of trying to “disrupt the good work we’re trying to do here,” but they continued to interrupt. One shouted “You’re checking boat numbers every week, why don’t you check the facilities whilst you’re going?” and another, “Yeah, check the shitters.” When Sally Ash failed to answer a question, the response came from outside “Doesn’t know much, does she?” When Sally Ash explained that, “There [were] people in flats and houses complaining about the smoke, the noise,” the response came back, to general cheering from outside the room, “Well, I don’t like them and their ugly buildings.”

There was a sense of discomfort among the rest of the crowd. I was left with the impression at the end of the meeting that, despite the best intentions of CUB, this group was neglecting part of the spectrum of different opinions present in the Cowley and Uxbridge area and excluding Boaters with vested interests in the process. Many of the Boaters in the seats at the meeting seemed to be a self-selected group who were willing to engage with CaRT, who were accepting of being represented by a political group and who were not outwardly hostile towards the RMP proposal. But this is clearly not the whole story on the waterways. The contrast between the two meetings was immediately obvious and informative, and it was clear that CUB were trying to speak the official bureaucratic language of CaRT, to play by the authority’s rules.

LB revel in their lack of structure, even though it does frustrate many Boaters who would rather have a more traditional group in place, with an executive committee, an official

membership list, and a voice at official consultation meetings. CUB, by contrast, in the layout and format of the meeting, had chosen a structure which, although it was recognisable (legible) to CaRT and provided those Boaters who wished to discuss the RMPs a forum to make their voices heard, reflected the opinions of only a certain section of the Boaters of Cowley and Uxbridge. Those heckling Boaters outside the door in the *Malt Shovel* clearly did not feel represented by those on the inside and were keen to make their non-conforming presence felt. LB's chosen structure (or lack therein) reflects many Boaters' preferred disengagement from and cynicism towards authorities, as described earlier in the chapter, whereas the CUB meeting was based around a self-selecting sample of Boaters who had decided to enter into negotiation from within a formalised and structured group.

Two further examples illustrate the differences between these groups. First, the CUB meeting included an election for official representatives to form an executive committee, whereas LB remain a "flat" non-hierarchical organisation, and secondly, CUB produced a membership sticker to be displayed by members, whereas membership of London Boaters is open to those who participate online or at meetings and does not exist as a membership list. This becomes evident when one is asked whether or not one is a London Boater: there is no way of "joining" or "leaving" and, as such, it is simply a matter of whether or not one participates in the group's actions. The very question itself is, to some, nonsensical. In many ways CUB was the more "traditional" organisation, as most interest groups and societies in the UK have the official trappings of a logo, a constitution, an executive committee and a membership list. LB stand out against this pattern and appear as a very different kind of organisation with a notably different understanding of the democratic process.

The death and dispersal of boating organisations

It has been demonstrated above how boating organisations arise in order to combat specific threats. They then act in a fashion which, if too hierarchical, attracts criticism and questions over their right to represent and, in the case of London Boaters and the NBTA, tend towards a "flat" organisational structure, designed more to facilitate the concerted power of individuals rather than to assert power over others. It shall now be demonstrated how these groups disperse, decline, or die when they are not immediately useful as a way of combatting a specific tangible threat.

London Boaters, around the beginning of 2014, were not under the immediate threat of a new or drastic mooring proposal or an enforcement crackdown. This was evident in the downturn in attendance at their approximately monthly meetings. After one poorly attended meeting at which Boaters attempted a mapping exercise in order to achieve a consensus for what would count as a “neighbourhood,” many on the mailing list began to question what right those few Boaters who were in attendance had to create such a map, which could be used against the Boaters in the future. Messages on the mailserv questioned whether or not the meeting may have given CaRT more ammunition to enforce minimum distances of travel or, as one Boater put it, “enough rope to hang us with.” As a Boater at the aforementioned February meeting stated, “The only people who want that - subdivision, neighbourhoods - are people who want to put into place systems of control.”

At around the same time, messages began to come in on the mailserv regarding Andrew Bailles’ decision to “represent” London Boaters at the London Assembly Meeting (described above), at an Islington Residents Association meeting, and in a written response to CaRT’s Strategic Waterway Plan (the latest reworking of their plans for London mooring and enforcement), without being mandated by a large number of London’s liveaboard Boaters. This, combined with the dwindling numbers at recent meetings, led to a few Boaters questioning who it was that London Boaters represented, whether they could be considered to represent the Boaters’ of London, and whether or not they should be empowered to make statements which may appear to be on behalf of London’s boat-dwelling population. When Andrew Bailles’ wrote on behalf of London Boaters to a CaRT consultation he received several sceptical responses from members of the mailing list. One e-mail read:

“The only part I'm concerned about is the bit where it says 'London Boaters Response' and the omission of an introduction. What is London Boaters? Who is London Boaters? Who are you claiming to represent?”

Some suggested that London Boaters was becoming a clique which, despite the best intentions of these central figures, only represented a limited number of individuals and a limited array of interests and opinions. Some on the list who had had previous experience of consensus decision-making within left-wing organisations warned that such processes can become dominated by powerful cliques who ensure consensus by using the general apathy of the majority, and warned that under consensus systems, the “protest vote,”

rather than the majority opinion, can tend to control the agenda (see Blisset, 2008). Thus, in a time when LB was not being immediately affective, it became easy to criticise it and to question its role and function.

As a direct result of these online critiques, a meeting was held at which it would be decided how, and even if, London Boaters would continue. The meeting went ahead on 19th April 2014, and was one of the better-attended LB meetings to be held over the course of my time in London, with over thirty Boaters in attendance, including many newcomers. The instigators of the meeting and those with the greatest stated desire to make drastic changes to LB were not in attendance. This, combined with the presence of Boaters who were no longer active LB members but who returned to share stories of the group's purpose and successful history, led to the agreement that LB would continue as an organisation in its current form without any major changes. Once again it was a threat to the group, this time from dissenting voices within, that served as the catalyst for a vibrant and well-attended meeting.

When I interviewed Andrew Bailles, even before London Boaters as a group came under criticism and almost disappeared, he recognised that the (dis)organisation had changed greatly in the short time since its inception. He acknowledged that the lack of an immediate threat - a consultation to overturn or unpopular proposals to fight - had led to LB being less vibrant and lessened its pub-based sociality. In recognition of how the group had changed in the absence of an immediate urgent task, he told me that "the group for whom it's boats or nothing [those who would otherwise be homeless] has been lost from London Boaters, and they were a powerful, emotionally and physically powerful, group. It's more of a hobbyist thing now." This did not mean that he was despondent regarding the ability of LB and similar groups to make a difference, or that he doubted their necessity. He realised, however, that these groups change in their focus and outlook as the demographic of the membership change and the threats with which the group are dealing change. With a smile, he hypothesised that, "Maybe London Boaters will be the IWA in 20 years time?"

It is evident from the discussions around London Boaters' right to represent and from Bailles' own words that boating groups are at their most effective when they are new and not stagnant, and when they form an adaptable and immediate response by concerned individuals whose lifestyles are under direct external threat. In the social world of the wa-

terways, there is a constant background noise of disapproval, scepticism and distrust of any budding authority, as could be seen in the heckling at the CUB meeting. LB, finding itself in a time of relative peace (or, more correctly, a time when the actions of the authorities were “back-stage” and hard to gauge), was almost brought down by this background scepticism toward authority and official representation.

Conclusion

Thus it has been shown in this chapter that groups designed for the representation of residential Boaters tend to arise in response to threat, act in ways which are either contested by sceptical elements of the community or are non-hierarchically designed so as to avoid this contestation, and then change or disappear in the absence of an immediate goal or a diminishing of the threat which framed their original purpose. In this way, they tend towards what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as “the “outside thought of the nomad war-machine” (1987:376), a form of existence which tends towards the unstructured, the free-flowing, and towards flat, egalitarian structures.

The Boaters have such a variety of opinions, life histories, political orientations, and approaches to concerted action, that it is natural that they will not support one central advocacy group. As such, when such groups arise, their power is constantly checked by those within the community who do not feel their views are represented. The Boaters themselves are scattered around the waterways at long distances, meaning that they can often only act as part of a wider waterways community through online forums. They are often also fierce defenders of their political freedoms and will not be told how to act, as quotes attesting to their “bloodymindedness” and describing boat-dwelling as “pushing against something” will attest. To overgeneralise to a small degree, groups arise and are used instrumentally, and then, like the functional items which are most valued by Boaters, are abandoned when they cease to be useful. Groups with the fripperies of membership cards and paperwork who do not base themselves in immediate and direct action (structures for the sake of structure), for example the short lives CUB, do not tend to gain much traction.

In Reading, at the beginning of my fieldwork, I was not aware of any official representative groups, and yet groups - meaning in this case friendship groups of boats moored together

- tended to arise and then disaggregate in the same way. Nick, a Boater friend from the early days of my fieldwork in Reading explained that such groups naturally fall apart as an inevitable “problem with trying to coop up free spirits.” He further explained, with reference to his current small band of Boaters who were starting to go their separate ways, that “[this is] how small groups spring up and fall apart, Tony with the messy lot, us guys, other small crews.”

This pattern, this general way of being, is repeated throughout life on the waterways. There are, of course, exceptions, and there are also those who seek to change it, to bind together as a regional or nationwide corpus of Boaters, much like there have been limited attempts by the equally rhizomatic Gypsy groups of Europe to create officially representative political structures, kingdoms, and even a proposed state of Romanistan (Fonseca, 1996:278-305). Despite these attempts to build state-form structures, society on the waterways tends towards short-lived coming together, before an entropic driving apart. In this way, the Boaters tend to represent an example of what Scott calls “the local mechanisms of bands, margins, minorities, which continue to affirm the rights of segmentary societies in opposition to the organs of state power” (2014:29): a way of existing which is rare within a contemporary, bounded, post-enclosure society marked by its reliance upon bureaucracy and official representation through the mechanism of hierarchically structured groups, societies and associations.

Chapter 12: Conclusion

“Going to see the river man
Going to tell him all I can
About the ban
On feeling free.
If he tells me all he knows
About the way his river flows
I don't suppose
It's meant for me.”

Nick Drake (1969) *River Man*. [Popular song]. London: Island Records.

“Believe me, my young friend, there is nothing- absolutely nothing- half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats.”

“Ratty” In Grahame, K. (1908) *The Wind in the Willows*. London: Methuen.

Thus it has been seen how individuals and families, moving onto the waterways for a number of complex and interlacing motivations, find themselves becoming Boaters through the materiality and embodied experience of boat dwelling. Their daily interactions with their boats and with their neighbours draw them into a “community of practice,” which allows unskilled outsiders to learn, over time, the skills and habits of the liveaboard Boater. Further, they find themselves part of a community that exists in both the nostalgic rhetoric of support and security, and in the real expression and enactment of these sentiments at particular times and places.

As itinerant people in a world of sedentary hegemony, these Boaters become objects of interference and fascination from outside the bounds of this community. This is seen in at least two ways: firstly, state-linked authorities interpellate them in a confusing, contradictory and haphazard fashion, and secondly, the sedentary citizenry react to them at some times with exoticising over-interest and at others with forms of violent confrontation. In the face of these reactions, Boaters usually choose not to present an official, politically unified front, but when they do their methods are pragmatic, short-term and (as far as possible) egalitarian in nature. In these ways, they can retain a level of freedom and mobility in a post-enclosure nation, all the while ensuring that their social formations resemble the liquidity and fluidity of their dwelling place, directly in the face of the static and inflexible state.

It is important to take note of groups like Boaters, any group who create “alternative” communities and ways of dwelling within the contemporary state, as they hold a mirror up to the state itself. The Boaters are not a single political entity, but they are self-consciously political, in the sense that they reflect upon the use of power, the wielding of authority, and their position within the state. This can be clearly seen when Boaters, as have been described, use the language and discourse of human rights, or “minority” or “ethnic” rights, in their legal dealings with the authorities. It can be seen in the importance within the boating community of passing on information concerning the law, the movements of CaRT, and potential tactics for dealing with the authorities. The Boaters may not have a single or easily summarised political aim (the closest to such a stated aim would be the desire to allow continuous cruising to continue), but they are evidently political, in that they are products of and players within a political system. Even Boaters’ disengagement from particular political processes is a political choice and shows awareness of how bureaucracies and state agencies function.

As described in Chapter 1 (pages 82-89), the political system in relation to which Boaters have emerged is one that is now dominated by the overriding theories of neoliberalism, by austerity measures and cuts to government services. The Boaters are making a choice to move onto the canals and rivers based upon a number of factors, including their history of engagement with the waterways and their own personal hopes, dreams, plans, and financial circumstances. Some of the shaping factors, however, are also structural factors originating in wider governmental and macro-economic trends. When Boaters move onto the waterways, they find a community that has arisen in reaction or resistance to and is affected by aspects of the neoliberal state. These aspects, as described in the Introduction, are manifold, but four of the major factors of the modern state that affect the Boaters are 1) austerity and the reduction of governmental welfare; 2) the privatisation of government bodies, including the quango that became CaRT; 3) the restriction of movement and access to “public” land in the modern era; 4) the housing crisis, caused by neoliberal policies whereby housing is limited and expensive in the capital.

The story of the Boaters is, in many ways, a story of how a neoliberal milieu creates communities that are resistant to its actions in various ways, communities that are the “dark twin” of neoliberalism (Scott, 1998). Other examples of groups that have arisen from neoliberalism’s failure abound. A list of such groups would include the occupy movement, anti-

austerity protest movements in Greece, widespread global migration movements, a growth of traveller movements and groups, and forms of “alternative,” “off-grid,” and “stateless” living. The groups listed above do not necessarily share much in common other than that they are examples of how neoliberalism on a global scale leads to groups trying to flee its excesses and create alternatives. Some prioritise direct democracy and self-governance, some seek independence from state forces and surveillance, and some merely aim for the stability and employment, but all are reactions to the spread of the neoliberal austerity state and the inequalities it produces.

It is important, however, to study and to write about these resistant communities in their own right and with sufficient depth. It is useful, of course, to frame these groups within global political and economic trends and to find comparisons with other similar movements, but it would be dismissive to write them off as just a simple counter-reaction to or symptom of the current political situation. Deliberately trying to design and create a utopia, as the Boaters and many other resistant or mobile groups are doing, is not the same as simply reacting to the modern political dystopia; it is important to credit the agency and imagination shown by the Boaters in creating so complex and rich an alternative.

The Subjunctive Mood

The theme that has flowed throughout the chapters of this thesis is this idea of the fluidity, the flexibility, the *not yet fixed* aspects of the Boaters’ existence. As described throughout (but made most explicit in Chapters 9 and 11), the Boaters live on waterways that allow flexibility and the possibility of escape — from arrangements that they may find undesirable or, in purely pragmatic terms, from poverty and homelessness. However, boat-living is more than a simple escape. For many, it is a utopian project that allows individuals to manifest and curate the type of existence they desire; an existence wherein a nostalgic conception of “community” coexists with a more radical political egalitarianism and “alternative” understandings of economic relations and consumption practices. The waterways privilege what Turner described as the “subjunctive mood.” Turner describes this mood thusly: “the mood of maybe, might-be, as-if, hypothesis, fantasy, conjecture, desire... a storehouse of possibilities, not by any means random assemblage but a striving after new forms” (Turner, 1990:xx). Structure is most easily countered and resisted not by other

structures but by what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call the “outside thought” of the “nomadic war machine,” by the freedom and possibilities inherent within anti-structure.

The waterways are places of possibility, freedom and playfulness, and — in much the same way as Hetherington (2000) found with the New Age Travellers with whom he worked — the carnivalesque. An understanding of how the freedoms of boat life allow a prevalence of the subjunctive mood can make sense of the typical response I received when I explained that I would be working with the Boaters: that I would find a number of “interesting sorts,” “crazy folk,” “characters,” “individuals” and “free spirits.” A friend visiting me in the early days of my fieldwork remarked that the waterways (admittedly then in the height of summer) felt “like a festival” and that “there is a sense that you can do anything you want to out [there].”

Adjusting to this lack of structure and to the essential lightheartedness that supports the subjunctive experience of the waterways was, for me, a challenge, as I was told to unwind, to take things less seriously, and to allow my journeys and friendships to “flow.” Eventually, I did manage to wait; to wait for my boat to come when I pulled a rope (“It’ll come eventually; no point in rushing”); to wait for a lock to fill (“Can’t rush water mate!”); to wait to meet important contacts (“Ben, it’s Steve here; I’ve been hoping to meet you for a year now!”); and to wait to understand my field. Eventually, the rope slackened, the bow came in, the lock gates creaked to show that they were ready to be opened, and I was ready to write. In the early days of my fieldwork I’d been so concerned about driving my boat alone along the Thames that I found myself moored outside a riverside pub, talking to the landlord and shaking like a leaf, asking for any advice he could give. He thought for a moment and said, “Best advice I could give for driving a boat; two things: one, take your time, and two, never, *never* drive your boat sober.” Reverse the normal rules, in other words, and allow yourself to become part of the carnival, the festival, the project.

This sense of the unfixed, the creative, the subjunctive, is seen throughout each chapter of this thesis. In the Introduction, I asked who the Boaters (my unit of study) are. I had to conclude that there was no easy way of defining the borders of the community, which has a periphery that includes marina dwellers, holidaymakers and enthusiasts and can only be described using a number of problematic categories such as “continuous cruiser” and “liveaboard.” There is so much movement over the life-course in and out of these categor-

ies that it is hard to fix upon any meaningful answers here. In the Methodology chapter, I noted how difficult it is for the travelling anthropologist to locate the heart of the community of study for practical ethical considerations when they are so amorphous and acephalous. My presence as a permitted researcher of the boating world seems firm as I write now, but this could easily change as the Boaters need different forms of representation, or as they come to require activists working for the acceptance of their minority rights rather than the muddiness and shades of grey provided by ethnography. In the History chapter it was shown how the Boaters' historical origins are tied up with the ambiguous characters of the "working" or "carrying Boaters" (or "bargees," or "boaties"). This chapter further showed how the Boaters utilise a law that is unclear in all documentation in order to move around the waterways in patterns that it is almost impossible to identify as legal or illegal, and which could cease to be permitted at almost any time at the whim of the legislators. Again, the Boaters are seen operating in the categorical grey areas around official discourse.

In the first group of substantive chapters, this subjunctive mood is seen throughout the processes that enable individuals to become Boaters and to move towards the centre of the community of practice. In Chapter 4, it was shown that it is through active engagement with the waterways and coming to understand and to modify a boat that one becomes a Boater. Throughout these processes, the Boaters are not fixed in particular categories, but are rather creatively exploring ways of being and acting onboard as they learn skills and manners of being from their more experienced neighbours. In the subsequent chapter on Dwelling, it was shown that Boaters' understanding of being "natural" agents is fundamentally based in their ability to dwell within a world that is unpredictable and, although alienated from the imponderables of the "environment," emerges imminently from it.

Central to this is an understanding of "Boat time," a time that emerges from the unpredictable and contingent nature of task-orientation, which is never fixed and in which even vague timetabling constitutes a set of guidelines rather than formal rules. In their economic lives, Boaters further make use of the flexibility and the malleability afforded by their lifestyle, as can be seen in their livelihood strategies, which are often mixed, seasonal and creative. Boaters often "escape" the nine-to-five in order to work for themselves, to trade from their vessels and to monetarise their boating knowledge. Furthermore, in the phenomenon of "flip-flopping" it can be seen how Boaters allow financial relationships to be strongly affected by and emergent from social relationships rather than governed by the

external and fixed logic of the market. The rigidity of hegemonic consumer behaviours is further subverted by the Boaters who privilege a material minimalism and the use and value of material objects, breaking down barriers to the creation of new forms of consumption practices and new understandings of value.

In the centre of the thesis, the term “community” was discussed and its emic reality described. Community, it was shown, is not a fixed idea for the Boaters, but rather has several different situational meanings. Community can gesture backwards using a nostalgic understanding of lost solidarity, and can simultaneously gesture forwards to a utopian vision of support and protection. Community, as used by the Boaters, is a quintessentially subjunctive concept in that it refers to the acts of support that it is hoped and imagined will spring from the community’s emergent needs. Acts of community and their ritualistic expressions spring up and disappear, “covering the map” of the waterways only through abstracted online means and pervasive rhetoric. Community is always a utopian dream, a plastering over of a messy and disharmonic reality, and therefore relies on the subjunctive mood of possibility and hopefulness that Boaters come to share.

In the State chapter, it was shown how, due to the nature of the state bureaucracy, bureaucrats involved in the nation state find it hard to deal with the categorical confusion of citizens of *No Fixed Abode*: citizens of threatening randomness and ambiguity. In the face of a population that moves around the map in illegible patterns, “the state” is forced to try either to settle this disruptive element or to move them on in accordance with the laws they have inherited. Agents wielding the power of the state — which is also, notably, a set of not entirely cohesive or predictable organisations and practices and which can appear to be occasionally random, arbitrary and chaotic — find it hard to deal with these inconvenient unfixed persons or to face them head-on. The Boaters are able to come together to create busy stretches and moorings, and to drift apart, leaving stretches empty; temporary social formations come together and dissipate and, in the face of state pressure, the Boaters can always disappear into the hard-to-regulate edges of the system, beyond the state’s limited powers of enforcement. Formations of the flexible and fluid, yet again, come to define the Boaters’ way of being in the world.

Continuing to interrogate the relationship between the Boaters and the outside world beyond the water, it was shown how Boaters react to the surveillance and interest of sedent-

ary outsiders with caution or even hostility. In the face of the actions of the most invasive gongoozlers and journalists, Boaters are evasive, sarcastic and determined to not be tied down and affixed with easily legible labels and categories. This is seen in the common reaction by the Boaters: *why would you want to study us?*; and in the insistence that “we’re just some people who live on boats” and the frequent calls to not romanticise or draw attention to the lifestyle — a lifestyle that, as has been shown, is both romantic and worthy of attention. The Boaters are here reacting with flexibility, evasion, humour and rhetoric to the categorising aims of others, again affirming their subjunctive way of being in the world.

In the Security chapter, it was shown how this unfixed view of the Boaters — moving between disinterest and fascination, demonisation and romanticisation, respect and violence — can take its toll on the itinerant population. They must evoke a community of support in order to protect themselves and yet also use their literal geographic mobility to flee from dangerous areas, to moor up with friends and to carve out safe spaces in the more dangerous areas of the city. The tendency of the Boaters towards the unfixed and the spontaneous is perhaps best seen in the final chapter, in which it is shown how Boaters’ politically representative organisation tends towards a “rhizomatic” (lack of) structure. When the Boaters are forced to present a politically unified face to the outside world, their political formations are short-lived, often relatively egalitarian in structure and liable to dissipate and morph into other forms. Again, the sense of the unfixed and fluid is seen to lie at the heart of the Boaters’ experience.

Thus, throughout each chapter, a mosaic picture has been built up of a population which chooses unfixed, mobile and adaptable forms, contingent on emergent conditions, over previously fixed and rigid structures. These forms create a subjunctive mood, where a great deal is possible and where one is able to experiment creatively with one’s way of being in the world. I believe that this is why it is so difficult for those from outside to understand the Boaters and the kind of social formation they take. For example, I have heard many outsiders try to summarise the Boaters as “a bunch of hippies,” “Water Gypsies,” “people escaping the housing crisis,” “divorced guys who drink all the time” and “retired hobbyists and engineering geeks,” each of which hits upon a small amount of truth, but each of which is unsatisfactory as an overall description. Most importantly, I believe, each of these broad labels misunderstands the central and most important descriptor of the Boaters, namely that they are people who have a particular social experience resulting

from their particular material experience of living on the waterways. Each of the later chapters describing the Boaters' community and politics flows from this one central and pivotal practical condition.

Therefore, whenever the media write about the Boaters either as those making a social housing choice, or to glorify the "alternative" or "hippy" lifestyle of the boat-dwellers, the Boaters tend to scoff, realising that both of these are glosses or approximations of quite a complex social whole, wherein Boaters represent a wide spectrum of backgrounds, economic wealth, political opinion, etc. It is convenient for many to note that most Boaters are, for example, of white British ethnicity, or are politically left-wing, and to make assumptions based upon these rough correlations. I would urge caution to researchers tempted by these approaches, and I would recommend an approach which focusses first and foremost on the community processes that emerge, in the end, as a way of mitigating against the broad differences and disagreements within the scattered population of Boaters strung out, throughout the country, along thin ribbons of water.

Thus, liminality and the subjunctive mood can be seen as running through each chapter and through all of the Boaters' experience. However, there are other ways in which the waterways and the Boaters themselves can be seen as liminal or in a liminal position betwixt and between easily defined categories, and therefore as being able to experiment with their identities and ways of being, using what Turner (1990) describes as the "subjunctive mood of culture." These are considered below.

Boating for liminal people?

In several chapters I have touched on the idea that those who take to boating are those who do not "fit in" with the wider sedentary world. When first moving aboard, my neighbours were quick to introduce me to "characters," by which they meant the more unusual denizens of the waterways. Interestingly, one of the only understandings which is common to both Boaters and gongoozlers, and which bridges the usual mutual incomprehension between these two groups, is the insistence that the waterways are home for "interesting people" and "characters." Usually these terms are used with a sense of euphemism and the implication is given that many who end up on boats are too odd, too unorthodox, too free-spirited, to live in conventional settings. This is a slight exaggeration and relies on fo-

cussing on particular individuals in order to confirm these assumptions. Further, when aboard boats, individuals seem to feel more comfortable in adopting quirky and unusual modes of dress, performance, and self-expression. The waterways seems to be a liminal arena that is not entirely away from the sedentary world, in glorious separation from the norms and constraints of society, but nor is it entirely within the sedentary order and governed by its rules. Boaters can, as described already in this chapter, play with and experience with their identities from a position on the edge of society's mainstream.

Further, it is important to mention how Boaters, due to the recent upswell in the popularity of liveaboard boating, tend not to have lived their entire lives aboard and, rather, tend to have moved aboard at a particular stage of life. Many Boaters have stayed aboard for many years and show little inclination towards moving off their boats and back into the sedentary world. Having said this, it also must be noted that many Boaters live aboard for only a few years, before commitments such as a regular job, a change in marital status, health concerns, or the birth of children, causes them to move back on to "dry land." For these people, boating is a choice made at a particular stage of the life-course, usually a time when the individual has fewer commitments or things to "tie them down" onto land. These can be viewed as times in which the individual has more or an opportunity to be liminal to and partially removed from the land: when they have so few "roots" within the landscape that they can live an itinerant life.

There is a pervasive cliché that Boaters tend to be students and young people, divorced men, and newly retired people, and, although this is a massive exaggeration, there is some truth to it. It is notable that all of these are liminal stages in the life-course, stages in which individuals are moving from one status to another (childhood to adulthood, married to single, working middle-age to elderly), and that boating, in combination with their new or regained lack of roots and responsibilities, allows them to negotiate these liminal periods. Justin, for example, used the cheapness of a boat and the freedoms of life aboard to, as he put it, "escape" from the constraints he felt had bound him in his marriage in the direct aftermath of its end. Many retired couples take to boating as they now, with fewer responsibilities, find it to be a practical possibility for the first time.

I do not intend to make boating sound like an easy and convenient choice that people feel that they can take up for a while and then abandon; most Boaters feel deeply embedded in

the social world of the waterways and feel that being a Boater is an important part of their identity. Usually it is a wrench to leave the waterways and it is not a decision taken lightly. Boating is not always impermanent and some do not ever reintegrate into bricks and mortar housing, and I would not want to make boating sound flimsy, short-term or unimportant. Having said this, it is true that boating often attracts those at transitional phases of their lives, where living aboard can suddenly become a possibility or a necessity, and that it is often another change of identity (becoming married, permanently employed, or becoming a parent) which can end an individual's boating adventure.

Liminality demonstrated: Pirates and the pyrate regatta

In Chapter 7 I wrote about the Pirate/Pyrate Party or the Pirate Regatta, describing various aspects of the event through the frame of Victor Turner's (2011 [1969]) work on ritual. I described the event as occurring on the edges of the city, separated and away from the Boaters' normal haunts and most sedentary settlements. In this separated or liminal place, the Boaters broke many of their normal rules and etiquettes in acts of "anti-structure," performing both an exaggerated version of their independent, self-sufficient (piratical) status, and breaking the normal rules of interaction and negotiation by mooring on lock landings, pushing others in to the water and being, for one weekend, loud and inconsiderate in a way which contravenes the normal rules of trying not to be antagonistic in order to stay under the radar of the police, the state, and sedentary neighbours.

Many aspects of the Pirate Regatta were exaggerations or reversals of the norm, making them ritually set apart from the everyday. Firstly, the adopting of pirate dress can be considered a form of ritual clothing in order to adopt a different status, to set the event apart. The boats themselves were, in order to "save space" on the bankside and to allow boats to enter and leave more easily, moored with their bows to the banks and their sterns out into the stream (a technique known as "finger mooring" due to the boats resembling fingers coming off a palm), meaning that some boats used their anchors (not normally necessary items) for the first time. Under normal circumstances, boats would be moored several abreast with their sides to the bank; and so again the event was set apart as different. James' "opening ceremony," in which he performed tricks with fire whilst stripping naked, introduced an element of the illicit (nudity in a public place) and of unclothing: becoming naked in order to be ritually ready to enter a new condition. These elements are unusual

and outside of the norm of boating. Many of the challenges and games over the weekend, including the “court,” which would decide who was to be made to “walk the plank,” the races between rowboats, and the boat “tug of war,” where boats were tethered stern to stern and had to try to pull their opponent’s boat, are all unique to this event and practised only once a year, much in the way that annual fairs and carnivals can be the site of once-per-year special games and amusements, in a fashion that increases their importance.

The entire impression given by the event is of Boaters confirming their identity (including their identity as “Pirates;” see the discussion of the “Boaters’ Constitution” on page 195) through both exaggerations and inversions of norms. The deliberate invocation of the “pirate” as a model for Boaters, particularly at this event, is notable, due to the pirate’s twin association with, on the one hand, lawlessness and disorder and, on the other, egalitarianism and statelessness (Konstam, 2008; Cecil *et al.*, 2007). By becoming (or demonstrating that they are) pirates at this event, Boaters are demonstrating their independence, their radical approach to the state, and their affinity with a life on water. The pirate is a figure of romance and nostalgia, but also daring and danger and, thus, it is notable that Boaters must leave the confines of the city in order to properly become “pirates” and to demonstrate most explicitly this ideal type or aspect of their personalities. It is telling that the Boaters who are the most highly regarded are those who are normally, away from the pirate regatta, talked about as being “pirates” (see page 113) and that it is only the boats with the scruffiest roofs (see page 94) therefore showing the best “dirty Boater” credentials, which tend to fly the “Jolly Roger,” the traditional pirate flag.

Pirates historically (and here I am discussing images, widespread in western discourse originating from the “golden age of piracy” and not more modern piratical traditions) embody liminality in that they are beyond society and the law, yet they are partially still attached to these systems as they must live parasitically on the wealth of society through plundering ships’ cargoes (Konstam, 2008). The individuals who become pirates pass from normal society into a life of piracy, but do not pass entirely out of view, remaining near the edges of the coast, just on or over the horizon, and still close in the imagination. They are, structurally, liminal beings or ‘matter out of place’ (see Douglas, 2002) in that they do not easily conform to stereotypes, being both dangerous criminals famed for cruelty and examples of a utopian egalitarianism. Pirates elected their captains and shared their wealth, and female pirates could famously rise as high as their male counterparts, when society on

land was still fiercely patriarchal. To summarise, it is hard to know what to make of pirates and how to categorise them: are they criminals or utopians, proto-communists or a terrible scourge, within or outside our ideals of what is moral and correct?

I was unlucky to be unable to attend the Pirate Regatta that took place the year after the one that I attended and recorded. I have heard reports from the event that, on this occasion, the police objected to the Boaters' presence after complaints from residents in the nearest town. Encouraged, perhaps, by the breaking of the normal rules encouraged by the liminality of the Pirate Regatta, a number of Boaters "trashed" a local gardening project and left a deal of rubbish on the site, much to the consternation and horror of Boaters downriver who came to hear about this antisocial breaking of etiquette. I heard from an informant that a number of Boaters, after being "moved on" by the police, moved to a new site up river, where they sought to continue the party, including overstaying for more than their allotted two weeks. Encouraged by their attendance at a festival of disorder, the idea that, as pirates, these individuals could break the rules and act in mischievous and deviant ways, was clearly powerful and affective. The Pirate Regatta, on this occasion, and at least for a small minority of attendees, led to a major disturbance and a complete breakdown of the normal *modus vivendi* that tends to exist between Boaters, sedentary residents, and the police across most of the waterways. Such, it appears, is the power of anti-structural rituals in which identities can be magnified and exaggerated, particularly when alcohol is heavily used over the course of a long bacchanalian weekend of festivities.

The liminality of the canals in the city

When discussing the ways in which boating can be seen to be liminal, it is important to also look beyond the actions of Boaters and towards the material nature of water and the actual geography of the waterways. It is worthy of note that the canals are, themselves, somewhat liminal in that they are betwixt and between that which is normally considered "natural" and that which is normally considered as being "man-made." My informants did not tend to make a distinction, at least in the East End of London, between the canals and the rivers. It was frequently mentioned that the River Thames is different, especially considering its tidal nature, its massive size, and its cross-currents as it runs through and close to London; Boaters tended to mention that driving on the Thames was very different, far harder work and, some stated, more "fun." The East End waterways, however, were

treated quite similarly to each other (other than by those Boaters with river-only licenses who would remain on the Lea and Stort) and there was a lot of slippage between categories, with Boaters often calling the Lea “the canal” or the Regent’s Canal “the river.” This is partially due to the fact that it is often not clear which waterways are actually man-made and which are not, especially considering that many parts of the rivers are “canalised” (cut like a canal) or heavily modified in the name of water management and lock-building. Around the UK waterways, many canals also incorporate areas of river or local feeder streams. As a totality, the waterways are liminal, between man-made and “natural,” and are hard or impossible to easily place in either category.

Boaters do tend to distinguish between areas of waterway which are more “urban” and those which are more “rural,” a distinction which has more to do with the areas around the watercourse, including how many houses surround the waterways as compared to how many trees and fields. Many Boaters have a preference for one or the other, most usually for rural waterways, and mention the general higher cleanliness of the stream in rural areas and the lack of intervention from outsiders in such places. Most waterways are, however, somewhat betwixt and between rural and urban. By this I mean that the spread of suburbs, especially in the South East, make it hard to find an area of waterway that is too far from a train station, a settlement, or a main road. And yet, even in the middle of the city, the waterways maintain something of their “rural” character, with a higher preponderance of trees, wildlife, grassy verges and (as discussed in the following subsection), of course, flowing water.

It is thus possible to describe waterways themselves as liminal spaces. Particularly in London, due to the fact the waterways were originally working commercial spaces, they tend to be hidden away from main roads, houses, and public spaces. Many stretches of waterway in London face the back of factories, often now disused or recently purchased for redevelopment as housing as the canals lost their stigma as dirty and dangerous. The waterways are more often now, as described in the body of the thesis, popular and desirable areas, well-used by joggers, commuters, cyclists and walkers, and yet the memory of their recent past, when they were poorly lit, dangerous to walk, and full of discarded shopping trolleys, is still alive in the public memory. London Boaters, when choosing an image to front their Facebook page, at one point chose a moorhen riding on the back of a dead sheep in a waterway covered in green duckweed, which one Boater said, with sarcasm,

was “a typical idyllic London waterways scene.” It is common to talk about the waterways as dirty and disgusting, particularly in Central London and to “not trust,” for instance, the safety of fish taken from the waterways. The waterways are therefore still somewhat associated with dirt and danger, and are still partially hidden from many of London’s neighbourhoods, sometimes with local residents not knowing that they have a canal within a few yards of their homes, hidden away behind hoardings, old factories, and reservoir embankments.

Thus, in summary, the waterways themselves are liminal locations, positioned between the urban and the rural, between nature and the world of man-made, somewhere on the unstable edge of the city. Strang reminds us that water is not entirely managed by mankind, nor does it entirely constrain humanity; there is a dialectic relationship between individuals and water (Strang, 2014:136). In making this argument, she describes how “rivers shape and are shaped by human activities” (*ibid.*). A reviewer of Strang’s article summarises her argument thusly: “for all that rivers are partly shaped by humans, they retain something wild and non-human about them” (Edgeworth, 2014:159). This, the author states, is a key way in which rivers break normal dichotomies and literally flow between categories, stating that “water also has the capacity to subvert established categories, to undermine long-held assumptions, to flow around and over static structures of classification and analysis, to break out of old and established channels – and thus to carve new paths of flow, new ways of thinking” (*ibid.*).

As described by Strang, and as seen in my own work, water as it flows through the waterways, particularly through canals and cuts, is neither simply managed by humans, nor wild and unconstrained; the waterways, in the same fashion, are not quite part of the “natural” or the “cultural” world, the world of the “wild” or the “tamed.” Boat living is, of course, also somewhat betwixt and between living permanently in a house in a particular location and being entirely unrooted and homeless: between permanence in the landscape and simply travelling through. This fact is reflected in the not quite properly residential quality of mooring locations. Also, notably, the areas through which the waterways flow tend to be somewhere between impoverished and gentrified, with the canals often forming either the most “rough” or “scruffy” part of an area where the canalside is in an affluent neighbourhood, or the most gentrified and desirable part where the canal passes through a deprived region of the city, but always offering a kind of contrast. In this way, the locations in which the Boat-

ers live - in industrial zones of the city, not quite designed for residential inhabitation, on watercourses which are somehow simultaneously part of the city and removed from it - support their liminal way of being in the world and allows them to live lives which are in at least partial separation from the normal sedentary order. The geography of the waterways shapes and is shaped by the Boaters' way of being in the world.

The liminal experience of being on/of water

The idea outlined in the subsection above, that there is something essentially special and liminal about flowing water itself, is explored across several texts by Veronica Strang (2004; 2005; 2014). It would be impossible to write about the Boaters without discussing, at some point, the affects that are produced by engagement with flowing water as a material and as a co-actant on the waterways. I began this project in Chapter 5 with my discussion of how dealing with water affects Boaters temporal experience and, more generally, in Chapters 4-6 when I wrote of how water affects the ways in which Boaters come to be part of a community of practice on the waterways; I continue and expand these arguments below.

Strang's project is to observe what water does in various societies and settings, and to note how the material qualities of water create commonalities across different places in cultures, in order to summarise what is universal about the experience of co-existing with water (Strang, 2005). Thus, Strang concludes that her ambitious work,

“suggests that two important ‘universalities’ – the particular qualities of water, and the physiological and cognitive processes that are common to all human beings – generate cross-cultural themes of meaning that persist over time and space. Thus the ethnographic analysis provides the basis for a discussion about the relationship between universal and cultural experiences, contributing to the critique of cultural relativism and suggesting a need for anthropological theory to recall its comparative foundations.”

(Strang, 2005:92)

In doing to, Strang aims to describe water as an actant (in the tradition of Actor Network Theory) in human systems - transforming human cultures just as human cultures try to transform and shape water (*ibid.*). I quote below, at length, a passage in which Strang describes the ways in which water acts as a shaping participant in the life-course of societies:

“While highlighting the diversity of human– water relations.... [Strang (2004)], provides abundant ethnographic and historical evidence demonstrating major spatio-temporal continuities in societies’ engagements with water, and in the metaphors associated with it. Water’s core meanings as a life-generating, life-connecting source; as the basis of wealth, health and power; as a transformative medium; and as a metaphorical base for concepts of movement and flow, recur so reliably in different cultural and historical contexts that there is little choice but to conclude that its material properties are relationally formative.

(Strang, 2014:140)

Water is, similarly in and across time and space, a vital resource, a deep well of metaphors and symbols, and an object of fascination and worship. Boaters are quick to mention how living on water affects their way of being, including describing how relaxing it is to be in the proximity of the sounds and rippling sight of water (see Strang’s (2014:136) “mesmerizing shimmer of water surfaces”) and how this affects their levels of stress, their pace of being and of moving (as described in Chapter 5, this can be described as a “slower” pace, but also one which attends to “natural” rhythms and patterns). Boaters often speak of the gentle rocking motion of the boat on water and how relaxing and pleasurable a feeling this can be. Boaters, living aboard, cannot fail to notice the ebbs and flows of water, the level of which climbs and drops even on theoretically still canals, due to leaky lock gates, winds, and the wake of passing boats. Boaters aboard are never quite still, leading to Boaters on land sometimes coming to feel dizzy and unsteady having “got their sea legs” aboard their floating homes. Being part of the waterways, being on water, becomes an embodied part of a Boaters’ lived self.

There is a sense in which the Boaters’ dwelling on water, through the medium of water itself, helps to generate the subjunctive mood that I have been describing. The Boaters, in the ways in which their bodies and their day-to-day actions are affected by water, come to feel that they are in a space quite different and separated from the sedentary world. Not just, as described in the previous subsection, are the waterways liminal locations, but water, as a material, encourages liminality and flow. Water is always changing and flowing, and the body of the Boater is always in motion. In addition, keeping water out of the boat, and keeping the boat stable in the water (through tightening or loosening lines) takes up the Boaters’ time and attention, meaning that Boaters must always be considering the water, the weather, and the capacity of things to change and be in flux. Boaters’ frequent discussions of the changing seasons, the unexpected heat or the oncoming chill, are testimony to this preoccupation.

All of these things create the sense in which the waterways are a space of alterity or difference (see Vale's desire for an "unusual" home which reflects her self, as I quote on page 241) the Boaters are inexorably aware, through dwelling aboard, that things, like water, change and transform; the law that causes them to also move along the waterways and to change their own locations and social formations merely adds to this experience of liminality, impermanence, of being on the way to something else. Strang writes of water's "fluidity, its transformative capacities, its conductivity and its connectivity" (Strang, 2014:134). Elsewhere, she uses remarkable parsimony in summarising the "experiential characteristics of water" thus: "its essentiality; its fluidity and transmutability; and its aesthetic qualities" (Strang, 2005:115). The fluidity of transmutability of water is, indeed, inescapable when one lives aboard - the canal is literally different from hour to hour and from day to day - and thus Turner's subjunctive mood of culture, the mood of possibility, fluidity and change, is an essential part of the Boaters' life.

Water Ways

The title of the thesis, "Water Ways," is, as readers will have noticed long before now, a pun. The term refers, on a simple level, to the waterways that form the location and shaping force for my study. On another level, however, the title refers to the ways in which Boaters and their social lives are water-like, by which I mean fluid and flowing, capable of change, and hard to grasp. Each individual chapter has demonstrated the fluid and flowing nature of the Boaters world, the lack of consensus and orthodoxy therein, and the presence of the subjunctive mood of playfulness and possibility. The waterways are, in the ways described throughout the thesis and in this conclusion, a liminal space in which people, free from constraints, can experiment with their ways of being, with their social formations, and with their ways of approaching the outside world. This includes, importantly, the state and the economy.

The Boaters' economy, as described in depth in Chapter 6, is partially separated from the economy of the wider sedentary world and, here, Boaters can experiment with other ways of arranging their social and financial relationships. As demonstrated in Chapters 8-11, the Boaters - on the liminal waterways, where they experiment with the creation of utopian ways of being - resist and subvert the state. The metaphor of fluidity which passes through

the thesis, and the ways in which the waterways themselves and the Boaters' actions within them create a sense of liminality of being and a subjunctive mood of culture, has been expanded in this conclusion chapter.

However, further research could still be done to outline all of the ways in which those living on water, including the Boaters, are affected by their watery habitats. Commonalities between boat-bound groups should be explored, a project which Strang has already begun. Equally, the ways in which the subjunctive nature of the waterways is felt and demonstrated are, as shown here within even this short exploration, fascinating and manifold, making it a fruitful area for future research. It is important to ask, for example, how rivers and canals affect people differently and how, in turn, the sea differs from inland water sources. How do other countries' more regulated and privatised waterways affect their denizens? How do thinner boats, or boats of different materials, such as wood, cause different patterns of thought and behaviour? The potential for comparative and further work in this area remains great.

This emergent community and the identity that emerges from dwelling may, in future, become formalised in the ethnic identity of being a "Bargee Traveller." I feel that the growing popularity and increasing activism of The National Bargee Traveller Association (NBTA) in London is, as I write, likely to increase the extent to which boat-dwelling is viewed through the frame of "ethnicity" and the language of "minority rights" becomes part of the Boaters' discourse. In the face of increased enforcement from CaRT and, in the summer of 2015, changes to CaRT's Terms and Conditions within their license (see Appendix VI), it is likely that the number of London Boaters working with the NBTA and beginning to consider themselves to be "Bargee Travellers" shall continue to rise; later research, either by myself or other ethnographers, will likely have to interrogate these issues.

Later researchers will also have to take into account the fact that, in the fluid and seldom static world of the Boaters, the social world of London waterways is continuing to change apace, with more affluent newcomers continuing to make their way (I stress, legitimately, and in good faith) onto the canals without a history of engagement with the system, causing a skills gap and a strain on already limited facilities. The flexibility and mobility of the boating world means that nothing will stay the same for long - especially as the battle of change and resistance, consultation and response, between the Boaters and CaRT con-

tinues and even as the population and the stakes continue to rise. Again, the sense of being in the end of days, of facing an impending doom, has begun to spread across the London waterways, with wild speculation mingling with fact. For many new Boaters, this is their first time facing the authority's threat: the threat of having their licenses rescinded and, ultimately, of homelessness. The future, as always but at times more deeply, seems terrifyingly and exhilaratingly uncertain.

As I write this, and plan to end this piece of writing about the endlessly complicated and ever-changing waterways, summer is coming. The Boaters have put away their stores of coal and wood and have ceased to spend evenings tending the constantly-lit stove. It is now becoming the time for summer cruises, maybe up the Lea or Stort, in order to fully satisfy or to escape the authorities, or even up the Grand Union into the Midlands. Winter moorings have finished and, as such, all cruising Boaters are filling up with diesel, emptying the pump-out, picking up a spare gas bottle and getting on the move. It is soon going to be the time for Boaters to emerge again onto the grassy verges surrounding the towpaths and onto their back decks. It will be a time for barbecues, for "community," telling tales and sharing food, beer, cider, and endless rolling tobacco. The Boaters are again trying to imagine projects, to rip out and to re-paint. Yesterday Goo, on the boat behind me, declared that he had "ripped out" his pump-out tank, almost on a whim in order to make some space, and would be buying a new chemical toilet shortly. The subjunctive mood is becoming increasingly visible, that mood where almost anything is possible and where utopian dreams are woven into the practical considerations of life afloat.

Some of the characters we have met throughout the thesis are demonstrative of this. Gopal's project, a fibreglass hull turned by Justin into a Galleon with a wooden cabin and a plexiglass poop-deck, is complete and his journey up the river begins. Gaz, a friend from the East End waterways, is back from a winter of caring for ill members of his family. The man who rented his narrowboat during that time "was not a Boater," as was seen by his neglect of the upkeep and the fact that he "did a runner" without paying. Gaz has a new job, the first in two years, helping out a head chef friend of his in a new start-up in Shore-ditch. He is also selling his boat to buy a "sailaway" (ready to drive away) widebeam - brand new, a complete shell, replete with endless possibilities. Tom is painting his orange lifeboat yellow, as the gongoozlers continue to shout that it looks like the Beatles' *Yellow Submarine*. He may well turn it into a café in the summer, providing he can plumb in the

espresso machine and turn his packing crates into useable furniture. Andrew Bailles has switched from being a prominent member of London Boaters (if, as discussed, such a thing is possible) to being a prominent member of NBTA, as the needs of London's Boaters change and a more active organisation that can provide legal advice becomes increasingly necessary.

Perhaps most excitingly, Steve on the coal boats is turning *Indus* and *Pictor* into what he calls a "community project" called "the Mutha Ship." The idea is that the boats will be a chandlery, a floating centre from which Boaters can work, exchange their skills and sell their wares. New Boaters can come aboard and learn the skills of driving long and heavy boats, of carrying coal bags etc., and can meet other Boaters as the working pair travel through the waterways. Here they can acquire the skills requisite to live upon and to "love" the waterways, with experienced Steve as their guide. The community of practice may well, if Steve is successful, have a physical manifestation. Once again, blossom fills the air, and right now, despite the increase of enforcement and the growing tide of media exposure, the possibilities for the future (whilst the water still flows and there are 2,000 miles to explore) seem unfixed and up for grabs.

At the start of the first substantive chapter (Chapter 4), I asked how to begin such a project as the *ex nihilo* description of what was at the time two years of learning to be a part of a complex field. What must the reader know first? Even more difficult than that, I fear, is the question of how to end. What must the reader know last? Utilising her unfailing ability to be more intelligent and perceptive than I could ever hope to be, my partner Sarah suggested the perfect ending. There was only one way to summarise the Boaters' experience: the nostalgic struggle of a population most probably doomed to eventually succumb to sedentary pressures, fighting the pervasive forces of enclosure, privatisation and the constant attempts to make the free space of the waterways legible and settled; a population creatively using a discursive and physical space that they have found, positioned somewhere between Britain's industrial past and a utopian vision of a contested future. I end, therefore, with the only quote that could possibly convey these ideas, with the last lines of *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's (1925) paean to a past that may never have existed and an idyllic future just beyond our reach: "and so we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."

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Appendix I: A Note Concerning Other Boats

A description of other, less common, types of boats to be found on the inland waterways.

A note concerning “Gin Palaces”

Large, luxurious cruisers, often looking like or even functioning as small luxury yachts, form another category again. They are typically extremely expensive (upwards of £50,000) and are known locally on the rivers where they are most often to be found as “gin palaces,” due to their owner’s propensity to cruise the river drinking heavily whilst, as the prejudice runs, wearing a captain’s hat and breaking all of the existing rules of boat etiquette. They are not used by liveaboards, but rather by affluent holidayers and weekend pleasure boaters, who - due to their unwillingness to enter into the boating community of practice, their not living aboard, and their “bad manners”- are not considered to be Boaters. “Gin palaces” and their owners are considered by most to be an annoyance and a threat, as I describe in later chapters.



Figure 13. A “Gin Palace.”

Lifeboats

An increasing number of Boaters are purchasing former oil-rig lifeboats, which tend to be extremely cheap (£3000-£8000) and comparatively spacious compared to cruisers. These boats also tend, however, to be shells when purchased, with absolutely none of the necessary “fit-out” for “liveaboard” purposes. These boats tend to arrive with excellent, well-maintained and barely used engines due to oil-rig safety regulations, but with the significant disadvantage that they are too tall to fit under the lowest bridges of the rivers and canals without heavy ballasting or the roofs of the driving towers removed (one Boater resorted to lowering a bathtub full of bricks over the side when an extra foot or so of hull immersion was required). These boats are comparatively small in number and are a new option, with the first lifeboat arriving in London since the start of my research, and the population currently numbering just over a dozen.



Figure 14. A lifeboat.

Widebeams

Widebeams are wider narrowboats - although I realise that this sounds like a contradiction in terms. The widebeam is typically 10'-14' wide (approximately the width of two narrowboats). They can be used along most of the waterways system, excepting the narrow canals and those waterways where the sides of locks are so badly maintained and bowed that they have not maintained their original 14' width, for example the River Stort in my fieldsite. Widebeams are generally more expensive than narrowboats due to the extra space but are, otherwise, just as variable and idiosyncratic as narrowboats, into whose "family" of boats they broadly fall in the ways described above.



Figure 15. A widebeam.

Appendix II: Jerry Clinton's Post

A message taken from the social networking site Facebook.

Hello all you London boaters, I just thought I would say hello and offer a slightly different viewpoint. I started living on the water in the early 80's, in NB's in Springfield, Camden, Little V etc, and my second ever job was London Waterbus skipper on Perseus. In those days there was miles and miles of empty towpath, and pretty much every liveaboard in London knew each other, and could gossip or pass on a message to any other one, we used to say gossip travels at more than 4mph it must be a miracle. There were some right characters, slow Eddie, fast Eddie, Tim and Spiv, what happened to them? We all slept soundly in our beds, on the whole London canal system there was only one or two folk who would ever bother a boat, and they were well known, mainly mentally ill. It is sad to read of you all needing whistles, and the daily routine attempts to take bikes off the roof etc! I will post some stories next time of what are now, I guess, the olden days to a lot of you.

Clinton, J. (2014) *A message concerning London Boaters*. [Facebook]. 8th August. Available from: www.facebook.com. [Accessed 08/08/2014].

Appendix III: A Note Concerning Other Work Practices

A description of other work practices found on the waterways which may allow the Boaters an alternative to the “nine-to-five.”

Some boaters, exclusively those who have been aboard for several years and are knowledgeable on marine subjects, make money from sourcing and selling boats. A boater can charge commission of ten or fifteen per cent in return for acting as a broker in boat sales. The experienced boater’s knowledge and reputation is highly prized as it may allow them to negotiate money off the asking price. Steve (the working boater) spent many years buying Dutch barges in the Netherlands, where they are considerably cheaper than in the UK, and arranging their transfer to new owners in England. In such a way, prospective boaters in England receive a luxurious dwelling cheaply and can then either live aboard or sell it on for a profit, and have risked little as they have dealt through an experienced trader. Steve would, in turn, earn several thousand pounds from a brief trip. Buying boats in “Holland [sic]” and sailing them “back over” is spoken of as a way of making a lot of money very quickly. Many boaters told me that, if they had the initial investment to get in to this business and buy the first barge, they would become professional boat traders.

Steve also used to operate another trading ploy, whereby he would approach the owner of a boat which had recently sunk and offer to buy the boat for a few thousand pounds. The owner, thinking their boat a write-off and fearing a large bill to re-float and remove the wreck, would usually enthusiastically agree and Steve would “buy the boat there and then, on the canal bottom.” Steve, after a day’s work with a high-strength water pump, would re-float the boat and immediately be able to sell it to a broker for approximately double the price. In this way he would infrequently be able to earn “a few grand for a day’s work.” This practice is entirely legal and relies on the simple fact that a boat, even one with serious problems, is worth considerably more floating than it is sunk.

Work from home/ Part-time work

A few boaters have jobs which allow them to work from home. A boater named Squirrel whom I met in Reading was employed as a wine reviewer. It was easy for him to pick up deliveries of wine from a local post-office, drink it aboard, and write up his articles and reviews from his laptop. I have also met two separate graphics designers who work aboard, generating their designs at home and only infrequently travelling to an office. I know of a few boaters who are magazine journalists, artists, writers and musicians; all of which are careers which allow long periods of time to be spent away from “the office” (if official office time is required at all) and all of which are also careers in which one must spend long periods of time spent in solitary contemplation or composition. Such solitary careers seem to suit the reality of boating, which is described by many as an “arty” or “bohemian” lifestyle. Similarly, part-time or shift work, as it allows periods of time to be spent at home, is a solution for many boaters. Boaters working part-time tend to find the near-constant commuting to and from work to be stressful, but value the extra time that they can spend moving or maintaining the boat when others may be at work.

Claiming benefits

It is possible, although difficult, to claim Housing Benefit towards one’s boat rent or purchase loan. The difficulties arise as housing benefit must be claimed through a particular local council, and one must prove they are a resident within the catchment. If one is a

travelling boater, it is hard to prove residency within the area of one particular council. Luckily for boaters permanent residency is not a stipulation for the claiming of housing benefit; one must simply prove that they spend a significant majority of their time as a resident within that council. I have, however, heard of boaters finding the process of applying for housing benefit to be extremely difficult. Other boaters are simply unaware that it is a possibility. A Waterways Chaplain named Jenny Dibsall made it her primary working goal to help boaters claim housing benefit and to make the poorest boaters aware of the process, although she recently was forced to retire due to ill health.

Equally, it is possible to claim Job Seeker's Allowance or "the dole" if one is a resident aboard a narrowboat. This is also difficult, primarily in this case as one must have a permanent address to present to the Job Centre. Boaters who have only a "PO Box" or "Mail Box" address which they have purchased from a company may be denied access to such benefits. Many Boaters, therefore, have to register a family member or friend's address as their own and subsequently travel to centres far away from their current moorings. I am not aware of a great number of Boaters who claim benefits of any kind, usually due to these bureaucratic difficulties and also due to a general pervasive rhetoric in contemporary UK society against "skivers," from which boaters are not entirely immune. The majority of boaters whom I have met who claim benefits have serious medical conditions and are "long-term sick," although recent government austerity measures have made claiming and keeping these benefits extremely difficult.

Not working: Retired people, students, and those taking "time out."

Some boaters simply do not conduct wage work for a living. Many boaters, especially marina boaters or "shiny boaters" are retired and use the proceeds of their house sales and their pensions to support their lives aboard. Increasingly, and particularly in London, students are turning to boating as a way of avoiding expensive rental fees. These students will usually support themselves primarily on student maintenance loans and, more rarely, on money provided by their families. Other Boaters may simply have made enough money in their sedentary life to afford to live aboard without working. I met one such couple in Reading, who described themselves as "taking time out" from their careers to explore the waterways. Rather than selling their family home to finance their new lifestyle, this couple were renting out the property and were therefore enjoying a sizeable monthly income on top of their savings.

Some rare Boaters have inherited quantities of money or have retired early from highly-paid jobs and are using time spent aboard as either a part-time or permanent break from the working world. One example who comes to mind would be Justin, whose time spent working for auditing firms as a trouble-shooter allowed him sufficient income to buy a boat, labour for Gopal for a pittance, and support his son through university. It is notable, however, that Boaters who don't work are usually seen as being middle-class and privileged and, therefore, will struggle to be accepted as part of the Boaters' community of practice unless they can show their skills, abilities and their ability to be "down to earth" and "practical." Many will be accused of being "yuppie boaters," "newcomers" or "shiny boaters." Justin is an exception to this rule as, despite being conspicuously middle-class, he has been widely accepted by the boaters he has met due, I would guess, to his technical skills and general affability.

Appendix IV: CaRT's Guidance for Boaters Without A Home Mooring

The Canal and River Trust's published guidance for Boaters without a home mooring.

GUIDANCE FOR BOATERS WITHOUT A HOME MOORING

If a boat is licensed without a home mooring¹ it must move on a regular basis. This Guidance seeks to explain in day to day terms the nature of the movement that must take place. There are three key legal requirements:-the boat must genuinely be used for navigation throughout the period of the licence. unless a shorter time is specified by notice the boat must not stay in the same place for more than 14 days (or such longer period as is reasonable in the circumstances); and it is the responsibility of the boater to satisfy the Trust that the above requirements are and will continue to be met.

“Navigation”

The law requires that the boat “will be bona fide used for navigation throughout the period of [the licence]”. ‘Bona fide’ is Latin for “with good faith” and is used by lawyers to mean ‘sincerely’ or ‘genuinely’. ‘Navigation’ in this context means travelling on water involving movement in passage or transit. Therefore, subject to stops of permitted duration, those using a boat licensed for continuous cruising must genuinely be moving, in passage or in transit throughout the period of the licence. Importantly, short trips within the same neighbourhood, and shuttling backwards and forwards along a small part of the network do NOT meet the legal requirement for navigation throughout the period of the licence. The terms ‘cruise’ and ‘cruising’ are used in this guidance to mean using a boat bona fide for navigation.

“Place”

The law requires that stops during such cruising should not be “in any one place for more than 14 days”. “Place” in this context means a neighbourhood or locality, NOT simply a particular mooring site or position. Therefore to remain in the same neighbourhood for more than 14 days is not permitted. The necessary movement from one neighbourhood to another can be done in one step or by short gradual steps. What the law requires is that, if 14 days ago the boat was in neighbourhood A, by day 15 it must be in neighbourhood B or further afield. Thereafter, the next movement must be at least to neighbourhood C, and not back to neighbourhood A (with obvious exceptions such as reaching the end of a terminal waterway or reversing the direction of travel in the course of a genuine cruise). What constitutes a ‘neighbourhood’ will vary from area to area – on a rural waterway a village or hamlet may be a neighbourhood and on an urban waterway a suburb or district within a town or city may be a neighbourhood. A sensible and pragmatic judgement needs to be made. It is not possible (nor appropriate) to specify distances that need to be travelled, since in densely populated areas different neighbourhoods will adjoin each other and in sparsely populated areas they may be far apart (in which case uninhabited areas between neighbourhoods will in themselves usually be a locality and also a “place”). Exact precision is not required or expected – what is required is that the boat is used for a genuine cruise.

“14 days or such longer period as is reasonable in the circumstances”

Circumstances where it is reasonable to stay in one neighbourhood or locality for longer than 14 days are where further movement is prevented by causes outside the reasonable control of the boater. Examples include temporary mechanical breakdown preventing cruising until repairs are complete, emergency navigation stoppage, impassable ice or serious illness (for which medical evidence may be required). Such reasons should be made

known immediately to local Trust enforcement staff with a request to authorise a longer stay at the mooring site or nearby. The circumstances will be reviewed regularly and reasonable steps (where possible) must be taken to remedy the cause of the longer stay – eg repairs put in hand where breakdown is the cause. Where difficulties persist and the boater is unable to continue the cruise, the Trust reserves the right to charge mooring fees and to require the boat to be moved away from popular temporary or visitor moorings until the cruise can recommence. Unacceptable reasons for staying longer than 14 days in a neighbourhood or locality are a need to stay within commuting distance of a place of work or of study (e.g. a school or college).

Boater's Responsibility

The law requires the boater to satisfy the Trust that the bona fide navigation requirement is and will be met. It is not for the Trust to prove that the requirement has not been met. This is best done by keeping a cruising log, though this is not a compulsory requirement. If however, the Trust has a clear impression that there has been limited movement insufficient to meet the legal requirements, it can ask for more information to be satisfied in accordance with the law. Failure or inability to provide that information may result in further action being taken, but only after fair warning.

Canal and River Trust (2012b) *Guidance for Boaters Without a Home Mooring*. [Online]. Canal and River Trust. Available from: <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/media/library/633.pdf>. [Accessed 01/11/2014].

Appendix V: Untethered

A narrative description, written directly from my fieldnotes, of my boat being untethered at Kingston in August of 2013.

I had travelled down the canal system and through a tidal portion of the Thames to meet Tash's boat at Kingston. I was to help her back through the canal system; Tash was going travelling for a year and had offered Tom, a mutual friend, the use of her boat free from rent for the period. Tash did not "know" the Thames past Windsor and had lived and travelled solely around Reading for the last few years. As such, it was thought that I could be useful for her, both with my knowledge of the area and with my boat's more powerful engine. Boaters can be apprehensive of the tidal Thames if they have never attempted it as the width of the river and flow of current can be a danger to narrowboats with weak engines and flat keels. My boat had overheating problems on the "tidal" and I was scared that I would not make it to Kingston. I did, however, manage to complete the journey and enjoy a relaxed picnic with fellow Boaters Tash and Tom on the bankside. Finally the two boats were moored together, marking the important mid-way point of a three-week journey for each of us, the most important way-station in our lengthy trek.

That night, at around 1.30am, I felt the boat rocking and heard scrabbling noises; I was sure that there was someone on my roof. I turned on the light nearest to my bed and the sound stopped abruptly. Thinking that I was imagining things in my sleep, I turned the light off and began to doze again. When I next felt the motion and heard the noise, I gingerly went to investigate. I had had a bad dream earlier that night and had woken up in a fright, sure that there was someone in the boat with me, and so I was convinced that this was another manifestation of my current paranoia. I was unwilling to confront potential assailants on my own and in the dark and so it was with some reticence that I opened my back door and realised that I was floating away from the bank and towards the centre of the river.

In a crippling panic I ran back in to get my dressing-gown and started my engine. I have no navigation lights and so steering back in to the bank in the dark was harder than it may otherwise have been. This complexity increased when my engine made a sickening and sustained juddering noise and cut out four feet from the bank. I jumped off with a rope and shouted for Tash, who woke up, ran out of her boat and helped me to secured my mid-line using one of her own mooring pins. Running to the back of the boat, I pulled on the rear line to find only a jagged end of rope. I instantly assumed that the rope had been cut, before realising that the death of my engine must have been caused by my propeller swallowing up my floating back line, which must by now be tightly knotted around the prop shaft. When one is boating, it is very important to know where your ropes are and to ensure that none of them are loose and trailing; in the early hours of the morning and in a state of shock I had not done this and had now crippled my propulsion system.

As Tash tried to find me a spare rope in order to tie up my stern, a Boater from the nearby *Compass Rose* emerged with a powerful torch. "Been untied mate?" he asked. I replied that I had and he revealed that "they" had tried to untie him as well but had only got one line. "He must be up there still," the man said, pointing up to a couple of large river cruisers (so-called "Gin Palaces") further up the moorings from us. Shouting "Oi!" he took his torch and marched up to investigate. Tash sat me down on my back deck. I was shaking, mainly from the abrupt change from sleep to action, but also as the invasion of my property and the danger of being set loose on a busy, wide and fast-flowing part of the Thames had put

me into a state of shock. Tash fed me whiskey from a small goblet, rolled a cigarette, put it in my mouth and lit it. "Why would they do that?" she asked, shocked. "How terrible is that? You could have been killed! Or your boat could have been!" I did not want to think about this; I just wanted to go back to sleep and so I thanked Tash and told her so.

The man from *Compass Rose* arrived back having found one of the gin palaces untied. The perpetrator had just finished untying the boat and, seeing the approaching Boater, had ran to his bicycle and sped away. "It's unusual," the man from *Compass Rose* explained, "for it to just be one guy on their own; usually it'd be a gang, on the way home and doing it for laughs. This seems planned, this guy's gone out of his way to do this. Weird. Who does this?" People questioning the logic behind these boat untetherings is an important part of their aftermath; no one professes to understand the mentality that leads to these events and whether they represent hatred of the boating community or a misguided sort of prank. They are a strange and very specific type of violence against Boaters which, as it has no obvious analogue in sedentary society, can seem like abuse against the group. Eventually, after a little general gossip and checking that I was ok, the man and Tash returned to their respective boats.

Appendix VI: CaRT's Terms and Conditions (Including Important Changes)

Selected sections of Canal and River Trust's "General Terms and Conditions for Boat Licenses (Excluding Business Licenses)", pertaining to CaRT's ability to refuse a license (and therefore remove one's boat) if they are not satisfied that one is using the boat within the conditions of the licence as outlined here. This includes recent changes being made active from May 2015.

2. Use of the boat

2.1 The Licence allows you to use the Boat in any Waterway in accordance with these Conditions and only for the purposes specified in the licence descriptions, details of which are set out in Schedule 3.

2.2 We only issue a licence if we are satisfied that you either have a Home Mooring for the Boat or you will use the Boat as a Continuous Cruiser and we may seek to verify with third parties any information you provide to us. We will treat you as a Continuous Cruiser if you do not declare a Home Mooring for the Boat or if you decide to no longer have a Home Mooring.

2.3 In addition to complying with the Conditions you must also comply with any local restrictions specified in signage which may include time limits and other conditions relating to the use of a specific location...

4. Boats without a Home Mooring or 'Continuous Cruisers'

4.1 You must cruise in accordance with the British Waterways Act 1995. The Trust's Guidance for Boaters without a Home Mooring is contained in Schedule 2 and sets out the Trust's understanding of what is required to comply with the British Waterways Act 1995....

8 Termination

8.1 We will write and tell you if we think you have broken the Conditions of your Licence. We will explain how we think you have broken them and how we think you can put things right. We will tell you how long you have to put things right. This time will be at least twenty eight days or longer if reasonable. We may extend the time if you write to us and explain why you need the extra time.

8.2 If you do not put things right within the time we have given you, the Licence will end and you must remove the Boat from our Waterways. We will rebate the cost of the unused part of the Licence in accordance with our Refund Terms (details of which are set out in Schedule 4) as of the date on which you have removed the Boat from our Waterways.

8.3 In the case of a serious or persistent breach of these Conditions, or where we reasonably believe that the breach may endanger the health and safety of other people, we reserve the right either to:

(a) immediately suspend your Licence pending an internal investigation to determine whether the breach is capable of remedy. Whilst your Licence is suspended you may not use the Boat to navigate in our Waterways until further notice from us and during the sus-

pension the Boat must remain moored where specified by us unless you choose or you are directed by us to remove the Boat from our Waterways. or;

(b) terminate your Licence immediately if we conclude that the breach is clearly incapable of remedy.

No refund will be payable for any period of suspension or for what would have been the remaining period of your Licence if it had not been terminated in accordance with this Condition 8.3.

8.4 If your Licence is terminated in accordance with this Condition 8, you agree that for the remainder of what would have been the Licence period, you will not apply for a new Licence and you will remove the Boat from our Waterways. Should you apply for a new Licence during this period, we will not consider the application.

8.5 You have no automatic right under these Conditions to the renewal of a Licence. We will not unreasonably refuse to renew a Licence. If we do renew, we reserve the right to issue a Licence subject to such additional conditions as we see fit (including issuing you with a shorter Licence than you may have applied for). However, if we do refuse to issue you with a Licence, we will write and tell you why.

8.6 Upon termination or expiry of your Licence, you are responsible for immediately removing the Boat from the Waterways. If you fail to remove the Boat, we may move or remove it in accordance with our statutory powers (and in some circumstances, we may have to dismantle or destroy the Boat in order to move or remove it). The Trust may recover from you any costs, charges and/or expenses we may incur in doing so (in accordance with Condition 6.5). The Trust will not be liable for any damage or losses you may suffer as a result of our action or inaction under this Condition 8.6.

8.7 Any provision of these Conditions that expressly or by implication is intended to come into or continue in force on or after termination or expiry of the Licence shall remain in full force and effect.

Canal and River Trust (2015b) *General Terms and Conditions for Boat Licences (Excluding Business Licences)*. [Online]. Canal and River Trust. Available from: <https://canal-rivertrust.org.uk/media/library/5962.pdf>. [Accessed 03/06/2015].