Beyond the boundary

An exploration of the unplanned aspects of wasted spaces in the Pomona docklands, Manchester

M.Sc.Thesis
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Last but definitely not least, I would like to dedicate this part to friends and family – without whom I would not have been able to complete this study to the extent I have. Special thanks to my parents and my brother for their support.

Preface

This study draws inspiration from one of the most mundane aspects of urban life: waste. In the context of this study, waste is more than just discarded items. It is also the part of life that is often desired to be overlooked – 'wasted' human lives, 'wasted' spaces and 'wasted' time. There is one place in the modern city where waste – in both a material and intangible sense – is ubiquitous: urban wastelands. Think of old harbours, abandoned industrial sites and forgotten strips of land. Urban wastelands are tricky terrain for urban planners, because they often harbour a multitude of unexpected and illegal uses – including drug use, street art, fly-tipping and uncontrolled vegetational growth. Urban wastelands are often perceived as 'unplannable'; a sign that urban planners have failed to regulate, map and control these spaces. This piqued my interest, because the very notion of 'unplanned' spaces challenge entrenched ideas of orderliness in urban planning. As the term *urban planning* might suggest, a key part of being an urban planner is to 'plan' things. Nevertheless, urban planning practice is concerned with the creation of inspiring, balanced, spontaneous, and green spaces. However, the phrase 'planning for spontaneous spaces' seems like a contradiction in terms. Perhaps for these reasons, wastelands have been deemed unfamiliar territory in planning theory. This study attempts to make a modest contribution in this regard by exploring the ways in which unanticipated uses of space and unruly urban natures challenge entrenched ideas of formality and order in one particular wasteland: the Pomona docklands in Manchester.

For me, the Pomona docklands were an obvious choice. It is a wasteland located in the heart of Manchester. It used to be a bustling dockland – which is reflected in its decaying materiality. As you walk through the docklands, you can find the many traces of its recent past as an industrial powerhouse: rusty bitts, the concrete silhouettes of the old quaysides and abandoned machinery. The 'loose' nature of the site becomes apparent at first sight. Amidst the decaying spaces of the Pomona docklands, with plants pushing out new growth between them, are the physical signs of unexpected human uses of space; graffiti sprayed on a brick wall, dumped sofas, abandoned mattresses, litter stuck in corners, doggy bags tied up to branches and faint footsteps imprinted in a desire path. This study presents a diverse assembly of nine short stories that delve deeper into the ways in which people appropriate urban space to meet their needs and desires, as well as the ways in which these physical traces are covered by subsequent uses and emergent urban natures. Each story is meticulously montaged using the results of twelve extensive walk-along interviews and twelve informal encounters in the Pomona docklands – as well as a review of academic studies, photographs, newspaper articles, blog posts, artworks, descriptions of footages and poems. This study presents a wide array of 'snapshots' – stories that invoke different versions of the area's industrial past and its future; stories that alert us to the temporality of the social order and materiality of the docklands; stories that illustrate the emergence of unruly urban natures; stories that show the neglected side of everyday urban life.

At the heart of this study lie the things that I have learned at Wageningen University – which has greatly shaped my understanding of planning practice. A key strand in contemporary urban planning is the 'bottom-up' movement – which has been discussed to great extent during the course of my degree in Landscape Architecture and Planning. The mantra here is that urban planners should 'get back in touch with reality' and 'work with local residents'. Through the method of literary montage, I attempted to get a flavour of what these phrases might actually entail in practice – that is, to get out 'there' and talk to people. Presenting a diverse assembly of competing narratives inescapably raises as many questions as it answers – which is a central motif here. The aim of this critical representation is to compel deeper thought about the implications of the unplanned aspects of urban wastelands for planning practice.

Reading guide

This study can be roughly divided into six parts. The introductory chapter briefly reflects on the societal and academic importance of waste(lands), including a brief overview of key issues. The second chapter pieces together a selected number of theoretical strands, which form the theoretical framework of this study. This framework principally formulates and critiques key theories about the social and ecological aspects that incessantly transform urban spaces in the face of urban regulations and rules. The third chapter sets out the main research question and the key topics. The fourth and fifth chapter constitute the methodological framework, which heavily draws on Walter Benjamin's strategy of literary montage – a social research strategy for collecting and re-arranging fragmentary accounts of ruined spaces for the purposes of analytic and poetic exploration. The sixth chapter includes a selection of nine short stories, which form the main text. As was argued previously, the act of collecting and re-assembling fragmentary accounts is employed for the purposes of critical reflection. It is a tool for exploring the ways in which people appropriate urban space to meet their needs and desires, and examining the ways in which these physical traces are covered by subsequent uses and unruly urban natures. Last but not least, the final two chapters present a critical reflection on the implications of unexpected uses of space for contemporary urban planning practice.

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" *No matter ever vanishes.*
It can, at most, change its form. "

Ivan Klima , 1999:6

1. Introduction

Elsewhere a ghost net drifts across the ocean's
surface, a floating island unconsciously
gathering its catch. From a distance it looks
like a small reef breaching the surface. Close up,
it's another story. Caught in the net's mesh are
seaweed, drift wood, plastic bottles, lengths of
blue polymer twine, twisted drinks cans, a paint
can half full of toxic sludge, empty crisp packets,
an aerosol can, dead fish, various bird carcasses,
a dolphin cub, and a fluttering tern, its feet
caught in the fine nylon filaments: its wings are
the only visible sign of life.

David Williams, 2010:1

The *ghost net* from Williams (2010) presents a doom-laden image of death and decay. It tells the story of a floating cluster of waste, the toxicity and sheer volume of which inflicts hazards on unfortunate animals. Like the *ghost net*, waste is often defined as harmful matter – something unneeded, something worthless, something disorderly rejected in the process of ordering (Engler, 2004; Lynch, 1990). Waste is intrinsically a matter of materiality, and, yet, much of what has been written on it is staunchly immaterial. Waste is closely associated with notions of morality; it is a term employed to define the part of life normally desired to be overlooked. This notion extends beyond material waste, but also includes 'wasted' lives, 'wasted' time and 'wasted' lands (Gregson and Crang, 2010; Engler, 2004; Zaman and Lehman, 2010). Nevertheless, waste often sustains the most marginalised groups, particularly in cities. A good example of this is the district of Dharavi in Mumbai – a vast slum where approximately 80 per cent of the city's plastic waste is said to be recycled by its inhabitants (Southworth, 2001; Williams, 2010; Engler, 2004). This raises questions about the complex interrelations between human purpose and our living environment – is waste nothing more than harmful matter to modern society, our cities, and the wider whole we call 'nature'?

Concrete, glass, steel –
meaning limestone, silica, gypsum, sand,
manganese, sodium, sulfur, ore –
anything unnatural here?

Meg Kearney
(Quoted in Bosselaar, 2000)

Meg Kearney's poem evokes a different notion of materiality. It reveals that no place – even the largest metropolis – can exist outside of nature. Cities did not spontaneously materialise out of thin air – even seemingly 'unnatural' material such as plastic is essentially a refinery product of raw oil (Marris, 2013). Contrary to popular belief, people did not invent the concept of 'waste' or 'waste products' – nature did. Volcanoes spew hot ashes and lava, all plants eventually wither and some parts of the ocean floor even leak oil. In due time, these excretions are gradually decomposed and recycled in a chain of matter and energy flow – fertilising new growth. Nature has therefore perfected its 'waste circulation system' – as opposed to human societies. As a species, we are creating waste products in excessive quantities, which simply overwhelm both natural and anthropogenic waste management systems. Consequently, waste does only partially flow back into recycling chains – while the rest is stuck in places like a *ghost net*, posing a hazard to some organisms, and in some instances, a health hazard to people. Subsequently, societies have sought to distance themselves from these growing volumes of waste as harmful matter (Williams, 2010; Engler, 2004). As a species, we assign meanings to things like 'waste' and 'decay' – while the rest of nature carries on.

No matter ever vanishes. It can, at most, change its form. Rubbish is immortal, it pervades the air, swells up in water, dissolves, rots, disintegrates, changes into gas, into smoke, into soot, it travels across the world and gradually engulfs it.

Ivan Klima, 1999:6

Waste is a pervasive process that shapes the environment we live in, and yet, is often underrepresented in academia and human society (Heynen et al., 2006; Swyngedouw, 2009). In everyday urban life, waste is nearly invisible – authorities often dispose of their wastes as quickly and effectively as possible. Just as much as societies have tried to get rid of their wastes, academia has been shy of it; waste has rarely been subject to scholarly study due to its mundane nature (Engler, 2004; Greyson and Crang, 2010). In the social and environmental sciences, waste is chiefly discussed in terms of disposal strategies and related policies. As such, waste is defined in relation to treatment technologies – mainly including the established methods of landfills and incineration, novel technologies such as anaerobic digestion, and the possibilities of recycling techniques. In this perspective, waste is generally converted into tonnes and targets. As a result, waste becomes fixed through management, and, thus, remains the preserve of engineers. Waste is treated as the 'stuff' of management, rather than the matter that is crucial to the realms of people interacting with their environment (Gregson and Crang, 2010). This study attempts to make a modest contribution in this regard by re-examining the mundane nature of waste in the modern city.

There is one particular type of urban space where waste is both ubiquitous and apparent: urban wastelands. These lands are often post-industrial infrastructures such as old harbours, abandoned industrial sites, derelict railways and vacant shopping centres. These derelict spaces are the result of unintentional decline following abandonment; bricks crumble, paint peels, and rubbish piles up (Jorgensen and Keenan, 2012; Hall, 2013). Urban wastelands are often perceived as spatial eyesores – dumpsites for stolen cars and obsolete items, or an area that has simply become a bit too 'wild'. In urban wastelands, the physical and social order has quite literally crumbled – making way for heaps of decaying materiality and intrusive vegetation. Subsequently, wastelands are defined as a sign that the city is not managed properly. Wastelands often survive through default, and their management seems very rarely to be taken seriously. These management strategies often include the continuation of benign neglect (Lynch, 1990; Lynch, 1972; Engler, 2004; Jorgensen and Keenan, 2012).

Wastelands constitute some of the most repulsive and unconventional cultural spaces, making them tricky terrain for urban planners (Atkinson and Parker, 2011). Society has a tendency to victimise urban wastelands as inherently inferior, or even threatening sites. Just as the abandonment of an area creates opportunities for pioneer vegetation to settle and transform the site, so it creates a vacuum that enables human 'pioneers' to use that space in ways that are not allowed within more regulated public spaces. Wastelands form the stage for a wide range of activities, ranging from the illicit to the respectable. These activities include drug-taking, sexual encounters, fly-tipping, rough sleeping, lighting fires, guerrilla gardening – and activities such gathering fruits, observing nature, taking shortcuts and walking the dog. As a result, wastelands are often characterised by a unique layeredness – meaning that they contain physical traces of previous uses that become gradually obscured by subsequent uses and by urban vegetation that invades the derelict site (Jorgensen and Keenan, 2012). Thus, wastelands present a key challenge for planners who attempt to address the unanticipated uses of 'wasted' and forgotten urban spaces.

Perhaps our life is still governed by a certain number of oppositions that remain inviolable, that our institutions and practices have not yet dared to break down.

Michel Foucalt,
1986:23

A fundamental claim of this study is that wastelands are testament to the fact that, however perversely, societies shape their living environment – not entirely under conditions of their own choosing (Heynen et al., 2006; Spirn, 1984). The spatial configuration of wastelands constantly changes as evidence of previous (unanticipated) human uses become gradually obscured by subsequent

uses and by the emergence of urban natures (Jorgensen and Keenan, 2012). In this light, the notion of indeterminacy extends beyond environmental characteristics, and allows for an examination of wastelands as a cultural space (Sheridan, 2007; Hall, 2013). Concepts such as 'chaos' and 'order' are dialectical concepts. They are intrinsic to the workings of society, because they dictate what the 'good' and orderly city should look like. Subsequently, landscapes are forced into a binary categories of 'good and bad', 'chaotic and orderly', 'valuable and invaluable'. Postmodern thought has disputed these oppositions, reframing seemingly adverse consequences as opportunities for urban planners (Engler, 2004; Swyngedouw, 1996; Spirn, 1984). For example, Jacobs (1961:444) refutes nature-culture dichotomies and concludes that cities are as natural as 'the colonies of prairie dogs or the beds of oysters'. She argues that the modern city is the product of complex human-nature interactions. In this sense, buildings create unique microclimates like rock surfaces elsewhere; our waste attracts other organisms; and large colonies of rodents dwell in urban sewerage systems. Jacobs argues that binary positions between nature and culture nurture the pernicious disbelief that we are involved with nature on a much deeper level than trimming grass, planting flowers and maintaining parks (Geurts, 2016; Jacobs, 1961). This study attempts to make a modest contribution by re-examining the nature of these apparent oppositions between natural and the man-made, between the ordinary and the unconventional, between order and chaos – and their implications for one particular urban wasteland, the Pomona docklands in Manchester.

This study is based on primary research including twelve walk-along interviews and twelve informal encounters that occurred over the course of four site visits to the Pomona docklands, as well as a secondary literature review of academic studies, photographs, poems, blog entries and descriptions of footages. These sources form the text, which is narrated in an analytical voice – as is explained in greater detail in the methodology of this study (Chapter 5). This critical representation lies at the heart of compelling deeper thought about the implications of urban wastelands for planning practice. It needs to be stressed that this study is *not* a guide for the management of urban wastelands. Rather, it provides a number of general speculations on how spatial planning practice might address those unanticipated aspects of the urban environment – it is an attempt to contribute to the theorising of 'unplanned' urban spaces.

" *The Latin term 'vastus' serves as the root for both modern terms: vast and waste.* "

Alan Berger
(Quoted in Waldheim, 2012)

2. Theoretical Framework

In his work *Drosscapes*, Berger (2007) defines waste – or *dross* – as something inherently ubiquitous and driven by contemporary modes of production. The term 'dross' stems from a manifesto called *Stimm & Dross*. Its author, Lars Lerup, saw tremendous potential in the spaces normally overlooked – the in-between spaces left over by the dominant forces of urbanisation such as land investment and land-use policies. Lerup conceptualised the urban surface as a 'holey plane', the 'holes' being unused areas in the urban matrix. Dotted by trees and criss-crossed by old roads and blocks of houses, the 'holey planes' of the modern city are dominated by a continuous struggle between the man-made and the 'organic'. Leftover urban spaces – and the organisms that dwell in it – emerge as the result of that struggle (Lerup, 1994; Waldheim, 2012). Expanding upon Lerup's phrase of *dross*, the *scape* in Berger's *drosscape* implies that urban wastelands are continuously programmed by human intention. In this perspective, Berger discusses the Latin root of the word 'waste' – *vastus* – which translates to 'vast expanses'. It is a reference to the ubiquitousness of waste. However, Berger discusses another meaning of the term *vastus*; its connection to words like vain and vanish. These terms directly relate waste to 'empty' or 'wasted' human efforts (Waldheim, 2012). Thus, Berger's *Drosscapes* redefines leftover urban space as the product of complex interactions between 'wasted' human purpose and the raw forces of nature.

As is true for organisms, the faster they grow the more (potentially hazardous) waste they produce. This is a natural process that can be ignored, maligned, or embraced, but never stopped.

Alan Berger
(Qouted from Waldheim,
2012:203)

Berger re-conceptualises the city as a living organism whose complexity inherently produces unplanned excess in accordance with the laws of nature. In this perspective, cities are not static objects, but dynamic arenas characterised by continuous material transformation (Barr, 2015; Berger, 2007). However, as is true for organisms, rapid development results in potentially hazardous waste. Take guano – the excrement of seabirds. Most seabird species congregate in large colonies on rock cliffs near the sea to breed. The sheer volume and toxicity of guano renders the bird's habitat sterile – killing off most plants. In a way, that is exactly what is happening in rapidly expanding urban areas. We dispose of our mass excesses such as leftover building materials – polluting our environment in the process. However, this also creates a niche for those species – mainly generalists – that can thrive in these new conditions (Engler, 2004; Marris, 2013). In this sense, the material transformation that provides the energy for the growth of cities are more like processes – instead of just 'things'. The creation of drosscapes is the direct product of alterations in these processes – say, changes in the housing market. Urban processes are akin to those of living organisms, whose

sustenance depends on flows of waste products. Take calcium. It is routinely extruded by cells in the marine environment, however, it is also the most important building block for the human skeleton. This example is arguably a homology for the ways in which waste is continuously incorporated into man-made structures and biological function (Waldheim, 2012). Waste represents not only decay, but also growth and maintenance. Cities cannot exist in a vacuum. In the absence of environmental stimuli and processes, cities will inevitably perish – like an organism locked up in a sensory deprivation tank (Waldheim, 2012; Berger, 2007). Thus, as Berger emphasizes, urban wastelands are indicators of healthy urban development; the urban counterpart of the entropic energy that sustains all life.

This study acknowledges Berger's claim that cities are dynamic, organism-like arenas that transcend those aspects of it that can be consciously controlled. Through his series of aerial photographs in *Drosscapes*, Berger takes a 'bird's eye view' – allowing him to highlight the continuously evolving urban condition. Berger's photographs illustrate the diversity and ubiquitousness of urban wastelands that puncture the urban matrix; the road networks that resemble a meticulously developed network of veins, the clusters of buildings that protrude from the ground like rock cliffs; and the small settlements that dot the landscape. The limitations of Berger's writings do not lie in the book's diverse collection of aerial photographs, but in the argument they represent. Aerial photographs cannot possibly do justice to the fine-grained details of urban life on the ground – in the lived, everyday spaces of the city. As a result, Berger inevitably dwells on a more non-physical notion of space, using the word somewhat metaphorically to describe urban spaces as the loci of conceptual relationships between humans and their environment. In doing so, he disregards almost completely the notion that real people live in actual spaces (Treib, 2008). Thus, Berger's study fails to address a number of crucial questions: if cities are like organic beings, does that make human purpose and use equally 'diverse' and 'unplannable', and what implications does this have for development of everyday urban spaces in contemporary urban planning?

This study is an attempt to illustrate the finer details of the social, cultural and ecological aspects that incessantly transform the decaying materiality of urban wastelands. This brings us to the idea of informality – those casual interactions between people and their environment that are neither prescribed nor proscribed by any rules. The concept of informality is commonly associated with the 'shadow cities' constructed by squatters in Third World megacities (Neuwirth, 2016; Roy, 2009). In this sense, the informal dynamics of urbanisation in the global South are mostly related to issues of social justice e.g. employment opportunities and housing provision. Although these issues do play an important role in the urban dynamics of the global North, they do not result in 'mega-slums', like those in the Global South. Nevertheless, the forces of informality are equally relevant for cities in the global North – particularly urban wastelands. In the global North, the concept of informality is more closely concerned with the disregard for formal rules such as vandalism. In this sense, informality performs in the shadow of the formal; it is a mode of production that has its roots in rule-transgression and resistance (Roy, 2009). The relationship between informality and planners is plagued with difficulty. Planners often attempt to integrate derelict spaces into the urban fabric,

but, such spaces are more often than not denounced as 'unplannable' eyesores. Subsequently, the existence of wastelands is often perceived as the failure of urban planners to regulate, map and control those spaces. Perhaps for these reasons, urban wastelands have been deemed unfamiliar territory in planning theory. In this sense, informality is almost like a natural phenomenon – a seemingly chaotic process that is external to those examining and managing it (Jorgensen and Keenan, 2012; Roy, 2005; Roy, 2009).

In this context, the notion of informality goes beyond merely describing the spatial characteristics of an area. This resonates with Sheridan's notion (2007:98) that wastelands can be defined as 'any area where the city's normal forces of control have not shaped how we perceive, use, and occupy them'. These 'normal' forces of control include regulations of ownership, development, planning policy, building regulations, policing and surveillance. Through their informal nature, urban wastelands challenge the social and professional conventions of urban planning, which is mostly rooted in the ideology of 'urban wastelands as disturbances' – problems that require a fix. Clearly, our discomfort with urban wastelands triggers an impulse to tidy things up and discourage activities that break the rules. The tendency of urban planners to clear away nuisances is symptomatic of a 'blind spot' in urban planning (Engler, 2004). Trained in the art of identifying trends and presenting general narratives, urban planners may be at a disadvantage when dealing with indeterminate spaces that run against the grain of more regulated urban spaces. Urban wastelands challenge urban planners to acquire an appreciation of the contrasting ways of knowing a place, as opposed to the more formal practices of land use policies and regulation (Jacobs, 1961; Geurts, 2016). Thus, in labelling a place as 'wasted' or a wasteland, we must always ask ourselves: *waste to whom*?

"Our questions change during the process of research to reflect an increased understanding of the problem.

Creswell, 2007: 43

3. Research Question

This chapter briefly sets out the main research question, which follows from the previous chapters. The main research question is principally concerned with the examination of those spontaneous interactions between decaying materiality, people, and emergent natures that challenge ideas of formality in urban planning. At the heart of this question is the multitude of informal uses – the ways in which people appropriate urban space to meet their needs and desires, and the ways in which these physical traces are covered by subsequent uses and emergent urban natures.

Main research question:

How does the 'waste' landscape of the Pomona docklands challenge entrenched ideas of formality in urban planning practice?

Instead of parsing up the aims of this main research question into sub-research questions, I have identified a number of relevant topics, which guide the main text. The main reason for this is the explorative, iterative nature of this study. This study should be read as a search – a search for ways to articulate the ways in which (un)anticipated human uses of urban space and unruly urban natures incessantly reproduce wastelands like the Pomona docklands. In order to present such an exploration, this study presents a collection of short stories or 'vignettes' about the Pomona docklands, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapters. These stories revolve around the following topics: (I) unanticipated human use of space (II) emergent urban natures (III) the different stories that are told about the Pomona docklands. It is hard to pull these topics apart. As was argued previously, they are inextricably connected to one another in the context of lived, everyday urban spaces. Therefore, each story in Chapter 6 focuses on one, or a combination of these three topics – to greater or lesser extent.

The philosophy behind these short stories, as well as their content, will be elaborated upon in the methodology chapters 4 and 5.

> *Method of this study: literary montage.*
> *I have nothing to say, only to show.*

Walter Benjamin, 1982:574

4. Methodology (I): Literary Montage

This study draws inspiration from Walter Benjamin's literary montage – the process of collecting and re-assembling fragmentary accounts of ruined spaces as a social research method (Geurts, 2016; Swanton, 2012). Walter Benjamin was a German-Jewish literary critic and philosopher. He was fascinated with the modern metropolis (Wolin, 1994). The *Arcades Project* was one of his major studies, in which he presents a literary montage of the decaying materiality and old architectural forms of the Parisian Arcades (Williams, 2010, Leslie, 1998). Benjamin spent a lot of time in libraries and the Parisian arcades, meticulously collecting visual and written fragments – all deployed for the purposes of critical awakening. The result of Benjamin's efforts is a comprehensive collection of concentrated essays that spans over 900 pages – which took him approximately 13 years to put together (Benjamin and Tiedemann, 1999; Benjamin et al., 1999). After his sudden death in 1940, Benjamin left an incomplete collection of sprawling notebooks including reflective notes, studies of poems, quotations, academic writings, and photographs – all held together with the barest minimum of commentary (Geurts, 2016; Gilloch, 2013). Benjamin's unfinished and convoluted writings have been influential in shaping understandings of ruined spaces in the modern city (Swanton, 2012) – which has important implications for this study. Benjamin's work presents a highly viable point of departure for exploring the mundane nature of the Pomona docklands.

Through deliberately deploying the devices of montage,
one may attempt, simultaneously,
to reveal what is most central to the place and time in question
by confronting the ordinary with the extraordinary,
> *the commonplace with the out-of-place,*
> *the (would-be) hegemonic with the counter hegemonic,*
> *the ruly with the unruly,*
> *the power wielders with the subjects of power,*
> *the margin definers with the marginalized,*
> *the boundary drawers with the out-of-bounds,*
> *the norm makers with the 'abnormal,'*
> *the dominating with the dominated*

Alan Pred,
*　2014:25*

Benjamin's writings revolve around this sense of 'illumination' and 'revelation' (Swanton, 2012). To Benjamin, montaging was a form of involuntary memory, wherein things 'step into *our* lives, not we into theirs' (Buck-Morss, 1989: 352). Montaging, for Benjamin, could not be disassociated from the act of salvaging and repurposing scraps that appear to be worthless. Much in the same way that children re-appropriate old wood and discarded cans using nothing more than their imagination, Benjamin set out on a quest to examine the degraded materiality of the Parisian arcades in order to uncover the mundane traces of everyday life (Leslie, 2008).

Benjamin defined the city as a poetic object that resists a permanent, one-dimensional perspective. In executing his analytic and poetic exploration of the modern city, Benjamin adopted an approach akin to a rag picker (Swanton, 2012; Gilloch, 2013; Buck-Morrs, 1989; Karvonen, 2008). For Benjamin, assembling the fragmentary accounts for his literary montage was not a rescue of tradition. Rather, it was a way to gain a deeper understanding of experiences unacknowledged and materials on the point of disappearance. It was not the grandiose events that caught Benjamin's eye, but rather the half-hidden, forgotten traces of everyday life (Swanton, 2012; Buck-Morrs, 1989; Clark, 1999; Leslie, 2008; Wolin, 1994; Benjamin, 2003). Thus, this study employs the method of a literary montage in order to juxtapose competing narratives about the decaying materiality in the overgrown Pomona docklands.

Not to find one's way in a city may well be uninteresting and banal. But to lose oneself in a city – as one loses oneself in a forest – that calls for quite a different schooling. Then, signboard and street names, passers-by, roofs, kiosks, or bars must speak to the wanderer like a cracking twig under his feet in the forest

Walter Benjamin, 1999:598

Fundamental to Benjamin's work is a sense of bewilderment, which is reflected in his use of the phrase the flâneur – the practitioner of flânerie. The term flânerie derives from the French verb flâner, which at its most literal means 'to stroll or to loiter'. The world of the flâneur revolves around movement – principally the pleasure attained from leisurely walking through the city (Kramer, 2009). The flâneur intentionally walks at a slower pace than other pedestrians to register the subtle expressions of social practices, as well as the casual interactions between individuals and (decaying) objects. Yet, the practice of flânerie is more than idly strolling around. The reason for this is that a distant outsider cannot understand understand these complex human-environment interactions that occur in the city as anything other than an urban spectacle (Clark, 2000; Geurts, 2016). Rather, the flâneur's unique, slow-paced perspective is most useful when combined with the analysis of other fragments and methods. This is exactly why Benjamin combines a wide array of written and verbal sources with his own observations in order to produce his literary texts (Karvonen, 2008; Kelly, 2014; Clark, 2000). In this sense, the act of walking is a critical tool for exploring and re-examining everyday life in urban spaces.

Walter Benjamin did not invent the figure of the flâneur, rather, his writings draw inspiration from Charles Baudelaire's take on flânerie. Baudelaire placed the figure of the flâneur into the context of urban exploration. Baudelaire vividly describes cities as if they are breathtaking natural scenes – a diverse environment full of what he calls 'accumulations of stone' and 'obelisks of industry' (Benjamin 1982:238).

In this perspective, modern cities evoke a sense of immensity – a status predominantly reserved for the natural sublime (Clark, 2000; Geurts, 2016). Baudelaire's description of the flâneur evokes this image of an explorer who sets out on a journey in search of new frontiers. Using Baudelaire's writings as a source of inspiration, Benjamin likens the experience of solemnly walking through a forest to the intriguing vitality of one of the most familiar environments: the city. In this perspective, urban wanderers can disorientate themselves in the seething materiality of the city as if it were a majestic, breathtaking natural environment (Clark, 2000; Swanton, 2012; Buck-Morrs, 1989; Gilloch, 2013). In Benjamin's view, cities offer simulations of natural landscapes – the glittering window displays being the 'flora' and 'natural scenes' of the Parisian arcades (Kramer, 2009). Thus, using Baudelaire's writings as a source of inspiration, Benjamin draws metaphorical parallels between the city and the rest of our environment.

The figure of the flâneur has a number of practical limitations – which mainly concern its male-centred roots. Back in the 19th century, the role of 'solitary, eccentric, strolling dandy' was predominantly reserved for men as they enjoyed a dominant position in society. Women, on the other hand, did not possess the rights to enjoy the required freedom of movement (Parsons, 2000; Bijon and Gacon, 2009). Wolff (1985) argues that the prominence of women as subjects of the 'male gaze' indicates a classic misogynist duality – Baudelaire's and Benjamin's writings being excellent examples of this. Baudelaire's writings reveal a double standard in the way he treats women – showing respect towards the old widow, but assuming a condemning yet inquisitive attitude towards the prostitute and the lesbian. Although the French language also includes a female equivalent of the flâneur – the flâneuse – both Baudelaire and Benjamin never acknowledged its existence (Geurts, 2016; Wolff, 1985). There are some interesting parallels between Wolff's findings and the case of the Pomona docklands in Manchester. Like the Parisian Arcades, the Pomona docklands used to be a men's world; male workers were the driving force behind the Manchester's canals and the city's thriving industry (Darwell, 1987; Geurts, 2016). However, things have changed over the last few decades. Today, women's rights have improved dramatically, allowing women to claim some of the privileges that only men could enjoy back in the 19th century (Parsons, 2000). Manchester's docklands are no longer the preserve of male workers – women, including female researchers like me, have acquired the freedom of movement necessary to wander along the canal.

To address the practical limitations of the flâneur, this study uses the phrase 'urban exploration' instead. Above all, it reflects the advancements in gender equality that have occurred over the last few decades. Although the term 'explorer' is traditionally more associated with male endeavours, female explorers were not a rarity. The travel accounts of female explorers represent an important escape from convention that has become the norm today. Until recent history, travelling abroad was deemed an unsuitable pursuit for women, because they found themselves confined to the domestic sphere – immobilised by the chains of convention. Some women, however, aspired to become more than domestic drudges and therefore traded in their place in the home for a taste of adventure. Exploration was the triumph of female authorship – each travel log reflects an exercise in individual freedom, both physically and intellectually, in a context that was strikingly

misogynistic at its core. Each travel account written by a female explorer represents a rejection of traditional gender roles, which has become more of a norm today – particularly in Western countries (Bijon and Gacon, 2009). In addition, the concept of 'urban exploration' fits within the focus of this study. Like waste, the phrase 'urban exploration' evokes a strange paradox. The act of 'exploration' finds its origin in pioneering missions whose aim it was to push the human frontier further into unchartered and pristine territory. However, this study takes the city – a highly familiar setting to most – as its 'frontier'. Upon closer inspection, urban wastelands are chaotic places where the familiar is strangely alien – its materiality looks familiar, but does not fit within convention (Kelly, 2014; Roy, 2009; Edensor, 2005). In this study, I adopt the role of urban explorer – wandering through the Pomona docklands in order to gain a deeper understanding of the unexpected, informal uses that have shaped the area.

"

Benjamin's montage is a highly suggestive point of departure
A source of intellectual inspiration
Not a work of art to be mechanically reproduced

"

Alan Pred, 2014:24

5. Methodology (II): Encounters

This study presents a literary montage of fragmentary encounters with overlooked and neglected elements of the post-industrial landscape of the Pomona docklands. It is a stuttering account that brings alive the different co-habitations and competing ways of knowing a place. As such, this study presents a purposeful selection of narratives – or 'vignettes' – which attempt to construct an account that evokes the materiality, textures, and memories of the Pomona docklands (Geurts, 2016; Swanton, 2012). These stories are based on a diverse assembly of visual and written materials including newspaper articles, written descriptions of footages, summaries of blog posts, academic literature, ethnographic evidence, artworks, poems and photographs. At the heart of this literary montage is the act of walking. As Solnit (2001:9) argues, it is about evoking a 'sense of place' wherein urban settings do not flash by, but whereby spaces can be perceived on a more human scale.

In attempting to re-present the present
         and its modern antecedents
through the medium of montage,
through the juxtaposing of verbal and visual fragments,
through the juxtaposing of quotations,
         newspaper reports,
         anecdotes,
         song lyrics,
         jokes,
         assorted ethnographic evidence of symbolic discontent,
         aphorisms.
         and more conventional summary statements and notes
with photographs, art reproductions and cartoons,
one may attempt to articulate
as well as resonate at several levels at once.

Alan Pred,
   2014:25

This literary montage is *not* a tool to smooth over inconsistencies, rather, it is a partial and suggestive account of the Pomona docklands. The moment is a central motif here; urban wastelands are like shifting sands – continuously transforming and changing form over time. Any representation of it cannot be reduced to a definitive description, rather, it is more like a snapshot – an attempt to illustrate and capture the materiality and meaning of that particular landscape at one particular point in time (Farley and Roberts, 2012; Geurts, 2016). This does not mean that written, visual or oral accounts of the landscape should be viewed as mere external illustrations of it (Cosgrove and Daniels, 1998; Rose, 2016; DeLyser et al., 2009, Osborne, 1988). The relevance of fragmentary materials does not hinge on whether their claims are 'true' or 'false'. Rather, they are social facts in themselves, representing a particular worldview held by a particular group or individual.

Social facts emerge from the context of these unique opinions and perspectives, making them components pivotal to a wider narrative (Geurts, 2016; Rabinow, 1986; Pred, 2000). In collecting and re-assembling a selection of fragmentary materials, the researcher fulfils the role of analytic instrument in order to juxtapose and bring alive these competing stories.

The methodology of this study heavily draws on the findings and research strategy of my previous dissertation at the University of Edinburgh. The main aim of that study was to examine cultural perceptions of nature-culture dichotomies in the Pomona docklands – using Benjamin's tactics of revelation as a source of intellectual inspiration. It was an experiment in re-inventing Benjamin's literary montage so that it could be applied to juxtapose different perspectives on the urban natures in the Pomona docklands (Geurts, 2016). In this study, I am more interested in a performative understanding of 'wasted' landscapes. Nature-culture dichotomies remain a key element, however, there is a stronger focus on the role of unanticipated uses of space within the context of 'informality'. Like the methodology of my previous dissertation, the material fragments of this study were collected in various ways: (I) a scientific literature review, including material from the Central Library in Manchester (II) a comprehensive review of visual and printed representations of the Pomona docklands, including pictures that I took in the area (III) a series of twelve walk-along interviews and twelve informal encounters in the docklands that I conducted during four site visits (three of which I carried out for my previous dissertation). The short stories of this study are the product of the combined use of these data-collection strategies, as is discussed in the following sections.

Like my previous dissertation, the 'walk-along' method forms a methodological starting point. A walk-along is essentially an in-depth qualitative interview, whereby the researcher accompanies an individual on their everyday activities in their familiar environments, such as a neighbourhood. It has therefore great utility as a tool for studying peoples' experiences, memories and the ways in which they navigate their environment (Carpiano, 2009). Through assuming the role of 'active listener', the researcher is quite literally walked through the people's experiences and the stories that flow from these memories. The walk-along interviews can be conducted in accordance with a wide variety of design formats, ranging from open-ended approaches to more rigorous formats (Carpiano, 2009; Kusenbach, 2003). This study, like my previous dissertation, adopts a more casual and open-ended approach. Rather than pre-selecting the participants for the walk-alongs, I interviewed passersby whom I happened to meet in the Pomona docklands. I briefly introduced myself followed by a request to the participant to take the lead in the discussion about their experiences and opinions of the area. Based on what the participant told me, I asked guiding and clarifying questions on an ad-hoc basis. The open nature of these walk-alongs evokes a certain sense of serendipity, because the content of the stories greatly depended on who I happened to meet in the docklands. This reflects the notion of fragmentary materials as 'snapshots' of the landscape (Geurts, 2016).

The walk-along interviews were part of a comprehensive research strategy – an ongoing

process of understanding the unanticipated activities and co-habitations in the docklands. Walk-alongs are most useful in combination with the analysis of other visual and written materials (Carpiano, 2009). During each site visit, I observed people's behaviour, and took pictures of the area's decaying materiality. I combined these observations and the quotes of the walk-along interviews with other secondary sources including newspaper articles, blog entries, descriptions of footages. This diverse assembly of fragmentary materials guided the scientific literature review. As with Benjamin's writings, collecting and re-assembling these fragmentary accounts is a highly iterative and organic process – a qualitative inquiry in which data collection and analysis reciprocally inform each other. As Creswell (2007:43) notes, the focus of research questions and the content of studies often change over time to 'reflect an increased understanding of the problem'. Creswell's conclusion reflects the iterative process of this study, through which different narratives are constantly added, amalgamated and edited after each encounter or novel insight.

The empirical material that I had previously collected formed a solid starting point for this literary montage. As part of my previous study, I conducted three extensive site visits to the Pomona docklands. The main aim of these site visits was to conduct open-walk along interviews with passersby, to observe people's behaviour, and to take pictures of the area's emergent urban natures. As mentioned previously, the underlying objectives that guided that study deviate from the aims of this study, but the philosophy (behind the walk-along interviews in particular) is the same. This meant that some of the unused material I had collected previously could be fitted in perfectly within this study. Quotes about the presence of 'waste' and 'rough edges' caught my eye – particularly after reading Berger's Drosscapes. It enticed me to put the decaying materiality of the docklands into a new perspective – namely the forces of 'informality' that shape the modern city. It prompted me to think about the implications of 'waste' – both physically and socially – for urban planning practice, which was outside of the scope of my previous dissertation. This provided me with an opportunity to re-visit and edit previous findings – all for the purposes of placing them within a novel academic perspective.

This study offered a unique opportunity to sharpen my arguments and analysis of earlier material, particularly with regard to the method of the walk-along interviews. For starters, I arranged a meeting with my previous supervisor at Edinburgh University, Dan Swanton, to discuss potential adjustments – which were approved by Marleen Buizer, my current supervisor at Wageningen University. One of the key themes that emerged from these meetings was the issue of respondent engagement and feedback. Contrary to my previous study, I made a stronger effort to reach out to the interviewees by giving them a business card with my details – including an e-mail address that I created for the purposes of this study. The business cards offered the participants with a means to follow up and to get in touch with me after the interview if they felt the need to. It also gave them the opportunity to share other visual and written materials with me. For example, two interviewees sent me pictures of the docklands they had taken that afternoon during a long walk around the quaysides. As they explained in their e-mail, those pictures represented what they particularly liked about the area, that is, its wildlife and vegetation. Another aim was to expand upon my previous empirical material in order

to get a more diverse representation of the various narratives involved. In the end, I managed to conduct 12 extensive interviews in total, seven of which I carried out for my previous dissertation. The length of these extensive interviews took between 10 minutes to almost 2 hours. In addition, the empirical material of this study also included 12 unrecorded informal encounters, six of of which I carried out for my previous dissertation. These encounters are exploratory interviews that took between 5 minutes and 1 hour. For example, I briefly asked several people about an artwork in the docklands i.e. what they know about it, and what they think it represents.

It needs to be noted that this literary montage has a number of practical and epistemological limitations. First and foremost, the success and length of walk-along interviews generally hinges on favourable weather conditions. Most of the interviewees were on their way to somewhere else – limiting the options for extensive interviews, particularly if weather conditions were unfavourable. This draws on another potential limitation of walk-alongs: urban rhythms. Most people I spoke to use the Pomona docklands as a cut-through. As a result, social activity greatly fluctuates throughout the course of the day, with most people visiting the area around 1pm in the afternoon and 5pm till 7pm in the evening. Outside these peaks of activity, I noticed that the docklands were mostly abandoned. Although this is not a constraint *per se*, it is important to keep this in mind as it has obviously dictated the timeframes most conducive to the execution of walk-along interviews. This relates to another limitation; being a lone (female) researcher poses particular safety issues, as I did not feel comfortable venturing into the docklands during the night – restricting my ability to study the more nocturnal uses of the Pomona docklands (Geurts, 2016). Thirdly, the walk-along method is limited by specific localities. For instance, participants often used broad expressions such as 'that graffiti tag over there' or 'that area'. Such vague statements potentially complicate the interpretation of the walk-along interview. Vague terms make it hard for the researcher to pinpoint the exact location or feature afterwards (Carpiano, 2009). To address this limitation, I recorded the interviews, and actively took notes during the interview. However, some people did not allow me to record the walk-along due to privacy reasons. In these cases, I actively took notes with specific references to particular localities (Geurts, 2016). Lastly, this literary montage has another major drawback in the sense that it heavily draws on ethnographic, visual and written material. Although this study includes written descriptions of videos and short footages, it obviously has its limitations in capturing the (visual) richness of these sources.

NB: A selection of the fragmentary materials that I collected for this study, including a chapter containing the transcripts of the recorded walk-alongs, is presented in a separate document titled 'Appendices'.

" This montage refuses to tell a coherent, or complete story

Dan Swanton, 2012:6

6. Stories

The following sub-chapters present a number of stories – or 'vignettes' – about the Pomona docklands. These are short stories that invoke different versions of the area's industrial past; stories that alert us to the temporality of the social order and materiality; stories that attempt to capture the emergence of urban natures; stories that show the disjointed side of everyday urban life. In part, these stories look back to the past, but they also represent different visions for the future. Each vignette presents an assembly of fragmentary accounts including photographs, excerpts from poems, newspaper articles, notes, photographs, descriptions of films, excerpts from blog posts, quotes from the walk-along interviews and other empirical materials. For privacy reasons, the identity of the respondents of the walk-along interviews is concealed through the use of pseudonyms. The exception to this rule is Matt Dalby – an artist whose work features in the chapter 'Sculptures'. During the interview, I asked for his consent to include his name and references to his blog '*Santiago's Dead Wasp*'.

The short stories are presented in nine separate chapters, which, in turn, can be roughly divided into five parts. The first chapter '*Waste land*' presents a brief introduction to the recent history of the Pomona docklands. The following chapters '*Artefact I: Pomona Island*' and '*Artefact II: Manchester Waters*' discuss competing narratives about the dynamic history and potential future of the Pomona docklands. These chapters illustrate the importance of storytelling in urban planning. The next two chapters '*Weeds*' and '*Dumpsite*' are mainly concerned with the presence of urban natures in the Pomona docklands, as well as the wide range of opinions on these urban natures. The subsequent chapters '*Tents*' and '*Graffiti*' illustrate two examples of unanticipated human activities that take place in the docklands. Last but not least, the chapters '*Sculptures*' and '*Lines*' highlight examples of more 'accepted' forms of informality.

This collection of vignettes refuses to tell a complete story – or a consistent narrative, for that matter. Rather, it is a diverse assembly of fragmentary accounts that plays on tensions between the city and nature; between order and chaos; between the ordinary and the unconventional. These short stories may not achieve the 'social and political awakening' that Benjamin sought, but they do provide a methodological strategy for examining unanticipated uses of space in the Pomona docklands. Re-telling these competing stories inescapably raises as many questions as it answers (Swanton, 2012; Pred, 2014). The overarching aim here is to compel deeper thought about the origins of 'informal' and unplanned wastelands – as well as their implications for urban planning practice.

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Waste land

The site of the Pomona docklands in Manchester is an urban wasteland that straddles Old Trafford, Salford and Manchester. The 22-acre dockland area is a tapering slice of land over a mile in length. The Pomona docklands are almost completely cut off from the surrounding areas, trapped between the Bridgewater Canal and the Manchester Ship Canal (Figure 1, 2 and 3). Only a small footbridge connects the docklands to Manchester's city centre (Fitzgerald, 2015; Flynn, 2017; Lindner and Meissner, 2016). When you walk through the area, it is hard to imagine that the overgrown quaysides used to be part of a bustling dockland.

The name 'Pomona' has its roots in a more distant past. In the 18th century, the Pomona docklands were a place of leisure called the Pomona Pleasure Gardens. Originally named Cornbrook Strawberry Gardens, the area was renamed to the 'Pomona Pleasure Gardens' – after Pomona, the Roman Goddess of fruit – to reflect the vitality and splendour of the area. The Pomona Palace, the grand central hall surrounded by pavilions, formed the stage for a wide variety of activities that were held on the premises such as meetings and dances. The surrounding botanical gardens served as the grounds for animal shows, roman chariot races, and even archery classes. The Pomona Pleasure Gardens were marketed as the perfect escape to the countryside, and, more importantly, and escape from the polluted cities of Manchester and Salford (Flynn, 2017; Gray, 1997). As Manchester's industry expanded in the 19th century, the Pomona Pleasure Gardens lost their appeal as the site gradually became surrounded by factories. The year 1887 marked the end of Pomona Pleasure Gardens, when a neighbouring chemical factory blew up. The explosion severely damaged the Pomona Palace and the surrounding gardens. No measures were taken to rebuild the area, as the gardens would have rotten away in the shadow of industry anyway (Schofield, 2015; Flynn, 2017; Gray, 1997).

A few years after the explosion, the Pomona Pleasure Gardens were transformed into the 'Pomona docks' – a part of the Manchester Ship Canal (Schofield, 2015). Manchester was an ideal location for a port – the city is connected to the sea by the river Irwell and Mersey, providing easy access for ships and cargo. Soon after its opening in 1984, the Manchester Ship Canal rapidly developed into a major seaport, partially thanks to its extensive rail network. By the start of the 20th century, Manchester's Ship Canal had expanded to become one of the largest ports of the UK. During World War II, the Manchester Ship Canal played a crucial role as an industrial powerhouse and a logistic hub. Its factories, particularly those on Trafford Park, were frequently targeted by German air raids in an attempt to cripple the UK's military power. The end of World War II marked a new era, wherein the pre-war trade of the Manchester Ship Canal was revived. Subsequently, the Ship Canal expanded until the 1950s. However, containerisation put an abrupt end to these times of abundance. During the 1970s, the Manchester Ship Canal gradually fell into disuse as freight-carrying ships experienced increasing difficulty in accessing the shallow canals of Manchester. For the 41 years that followed, the Pomona docklands existed in limbo (Gray, 1993; Gray, 1997; Geurts, 2016) – up until now.

The Pomona docklands are about to change – yet again. In November 2015, landowner and developer Peel Group confirmed plans to build 164 apartments on the Pomona

Figure 1 (left): Aerial photograph of the Pomona docklands, which is the green island in the middle of the photograph (Copyright: oceangateway.com)

Figure 2 (right): Landscape of the Pomona docklands (Photograph by author)

Figure 3 (right): Landscape of the Pomona docklands (Photograph by author)

Docklands, after the masterplan had been approved by Manchester Council in a final town meeting at Trafford Hall. The application paves the way for future development, as Peel Group has already confirmed masterplans for approximately 3000 homes on the entire Pomona dockland site, which is set to be rebranded as 'Manchester Waters'. The Manchester Waters scheme is part of the larger umbrella title of 'Peel Strategic Waters', which covers seven waterfront sites in the North of the UK including Liverpool Waters, Wirral Waters, Glasgow Harbour, Trafford Waters, Chatham Waters, and MediaCityUK. These schemes, including Manchester Waters, will feature a mixture of housing – ranging from individual housing opportunities to open market sale (Fitzgerald, 2015; Unger, 2016).

'The land has had it's time, it's served industry, and thankfully we're moving on. Let's get on with it.'

Councillor Walsh,
(Quoted from Fitzgerald,
2015)

Peel Group's Manchester Waters scheme is all about transforming urban areas into attractive waterfront living opportunities for families, young professionals and workers. The fact that the site is next to the canals, adds value for Peel Group (Unger, 2016). The Pomona docklands begin in the gentrified neighbourhood of Castlefield and end near Old Trafford. The site is also close to MediaCityUK – a waterfront centre for digital creativity and leisure in the neighbouring Salford Quays. This makes the Pomona docklands a prime spot for new homes – it is the link between Manchester's City Centre on the on hand, and MediaCityUK on the other. Peel's vision therefore resonated with most Council members, as the Manchester Waters scheme would offer a solution to Greater Manchester's struggle to meet demand for affordable housing. Additionally, Peel Group and the architecture agency argued the site does not satisfy the necessary environmental standards for it to be conserved as a site of biological importance (Fitzgerald, 2015; Geurts, 2016). In this perspective, Pomona is a 'scrubland' that needs to be repurposed once again.

'Like it or not, there will be development on open space. The lack of open space does concern me. These things are piece-meal. We would prefer a full plan for the whole site and have all the open space as required, but it does not work like that; these things do take time.'

Councillor Walsh,
(Quoted from Fitzgerald,
2015)

At the town meeting at Trafford Hall, a number of councillors raised their concerns about the lack of a more detailed masterplan. They argued that is important to get these things right as this proposal sets the tone of future development. According to them, the current proposal is not sympathetic to wildlife, and will therefore inevitably lead to piecemeal development of the entire dockland site. Yet, the need for housing meant that the council set concerns aside in favour of the re-development scheme (Fitzgerald, 2015).

'This vision is not well-researched with care or concern. There is a lack of concern for the heritage of the site and how the area was historically used. There must be a much better way to negotiate a truly green area; not just private residential blocks.'

Adam Prince,
(Quoted from Fitzgerald,
2015)

The proposal was met by a fierce backlash from local campaigners, some of whom were also present at the final meeting at Trafford Hall. Adam Prince – a key member of the Save My Pomona campaign – argued that Peel's plans are nothing more than a 'quick fix'. In his opinion, the development should be put to a stop until there is a public consultation to revise the Peel's plans. A common perception amongst the campaigners is that Peel's proposal is wasteful – the tall towers will take up valuable green space, and, thus, will negatively impact urban wildlife. James Walsh of the Manchester Ship Canal Heritage Group urged the council to re-examine the ecological impact of the proposal, and, ideally, halt the development altogether. By approving the proposal, he commented at the town meeting, the council and the developers will miss the perfect opportunity 'to achieve something world class on the land' (Fitzgerald, 2015). Thus, these action groups do not perceive the Pomona docklands a 'useless' scrubland, but as an ecological haven that ought to be preserved.
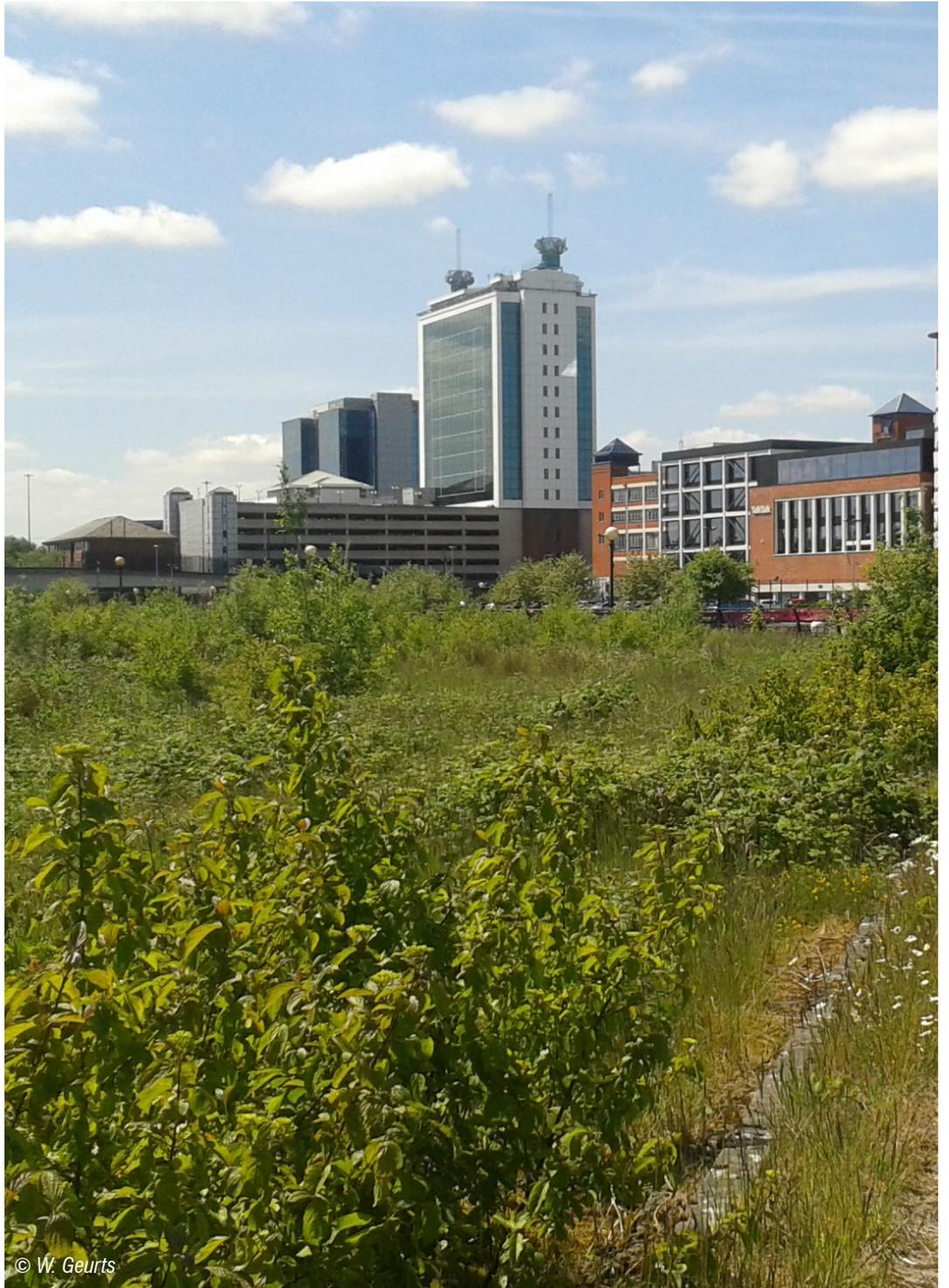
© W. Geurts

Artefact I:
Pomona Island

In 2014, local campaigners created a short documentary titled *Pomona Island* – which was intended to highlight the existing ecological and recreational value of the Pomona docklands. The documentary features members of local actions groups and individuals who wish to preserve the site – key contributors include Richard Brook, James Walsh, Luke Blazejewski, Luke Bennett and Hayley Flynn. An interview with the director of *Pomona Island*, George Haydock, reveals that he is fascinated with the Pomona docklands (Flynn, 2014a) – particularly how it has existed in a strange limbo between its former industrial use and its imminent erasure for the purposes of re-development. Although the area is over a mile in length, it is forgotten – most people are not aware of its existence (Flynn, 2014a; Lindner and Meissner, 2016). In making this documentary, Haydock hopes to capture the fleeting beauty that lies hidden in the chaos.

Pomona Island tells the story of how nature has taken back its space in an area which used to be on the fringes of an industrial powerhouse. It shows footages of bushes pushing out new growth between abandoned concrete blocks, gulls stopping by on lampposts, morning dew sticking to plants, snails sliding through the vegetation, insects swarming around grass helms and feathers stuck in a tree – all whilst a melancholic classical tune is playing. The documentary celebrates the lack of human control in the Pomona docklands. As Luke Blazejewski mentions in the documentary, there is no editing or taming – nature 'is what it is'. According to him, Pomona's wildlife is 'staggering'. Another contributor, Hayley Flynn, points out that there is an uncanny disparity between the overgrown docklands and the city. The canals and the railway cut through the grassy wasteland – creating a peculiar geometry that could only belong to the city (Flynn, 2014a; Flynn, 2014b). The derelict green space forms a stark contrast with the tall buildings of the BBC Media City and the Salford Quays (Figure 4 and 5).

James Walsh, a member of the Salford Docklands Heritage and Nature Group, commented that the Pomona docklands are full of 'hidden history' – even though everything seems so jumbled up. To the idle eye, the Pomona docklands look just like a bit of waste ground. James adds that it is difficult to translate Pomona's history to someone who is unfamiliar with the area. The issue here is that the rich assembly of post-industrial remains mean little without context. The history of the Pomona docklands is not well-known, apart from a small group of appreciators. That is mainly because – as he calls it – 'shouted about'. That is why he strongly believes that the Pomona docklands could serve as an important historic and ecological landmark in Manchester (Flynn, 2014a).

Figure 4: Skyline of the Pomona docklands (Source: Flynn, 2014b)

Figure 5: Waterfront views from the quayside in Pomona (Photograph by author)

'The amount of life that is going to be lost when this place becomes crushed and the big blocks flats become sky-high…it's going to be astounding. Maybe it won't even be missed, maybe people won't even notice that it's gone.'

Luke Blazejewski,
(Quoted from Flynn, 2014a)

Pomona Island hails the docklands as an 'Eden of the North' – a narrative that draws heavily on the area's past as the Pomona Pleasure Gardens of the 18th century. Much in the same way as the pleasure gardens were marketed an escape to the countryside, *Pomona Island* celebrates the overgrown docklands as a place of vitality. Hayley Flynn explains that this is part of the reason for its success historically, as it was close to the city centre – it was a rural setting only a stone's throw away from the hustle-and-bustle of the city. A common perception amongst the key contributors of the documentary is that the docklands offer a quiet refuge. As Luke Blazejewski commented, you rarely see anyone in the Pomona docklands; it all adds to this sense of isolation. For him, and Pomona's appreciators, the docklands are more like a secret place to come and enjoy – a place where you can get a sense of nature. Another contributor to Pomona Island, architect Richard Brook, commented that his personal ambition for the area would be to see it preserved as a piece of residual space, because nobody is in control (Flynn, 2014a). Compared to the regulated urban areas in the vicinity, the Pomona docklands feel like freedom to him.

'I think a site like this can act as a provocation to thought, particularly as you look around and you see how close built up Manchester is, and perhaps how precarious and temporary this pause for this particular land actually is(...)Maybe there is something to celebrate, and maybe the thing to celebrate is, that here, today, for an indeterminate moment of time, this site just was. It wasn't something else, it was just...just'

Luke Bennett,
(Quoted from Flynn, 2014a)

According to George Haydock, the dockland site is an ecological haven because it has laid dormant for decades – a place known and appreciated by a few. It is this unplanned transience that makes this place so special for its appreciators (Flynn, 2014b). The contributors to the documentary admit that opening up the dockland site to the wider public would demystify it, however, they still believe that the area should be preserved as an Eden Project for the North. Nevertheless, the documentary was not intended as a political message, rather, it is an attempt to celebrate the site's unique state of limbo.

The main intention film, as Haydock argues, is to capture the beauty of Pomona's unusual space and let it dwell for a while (Flynn, 2014a) – in order to encourage people to visit the area while it still exists in its current state.

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Artefact II: Manchester Waters

As opposed to *Pomona Island*, Peel Group's *Manchester Waters* scheme tells a different story – a story about renewal. Peel's vision is to regenerate the Pomona docklands, the canals and riverbanks into attractive waterfront living locations. It is a mixed-use scheme, which will bring new infrastructure and housing – as well as commercial, educational and leisure opportunities (Unger, 2016). The new neighbourhood is strategically located between the residential area of Castlefield and Peel Group's other major Salford Quays development, MediaCityUK. According to Peel Group, Manchester Waters offers unique private rent and market sale opportunities for young professionals and families who would like to enjoy the 'buzz of city living' (Peel Group, 2017).

'This is all about regenerating urban areas, where there is a shortage of housing, into attractive waterfront locations where young professionals, families and key workers can live.'

James Whittaker,
Development Director at Peel
(Quoted from Unger, 2016)

Peel Group's narrative is underpinned by different ideas about what the docklands are and what they *should* be. From a developer's perspective, the Pomona docklands are full of potential – however chaotic and derelict they may seem. It is one of the last remaining large regeneration opportunities located close to the heart of Manchester's city centre, benefitting from extensive waterfront views – hence the name Manchester *Waters* (Peel Group, 2017). The old canals running along the docklands are places of leisure, offering a change of scenery for passersby and residents (Farley and Roberts, 2012). There is the romance of narrowboats, or the excitement of party boats coming from elsewhere in Manchester and Salford. *Manchester Waters* draws on the recreational and aesthetic value of canals to offer high-quality living along the waterfronts. To accommodate this image of 'city-living', the old needs to be erased (Edensor, 2005; Mah, 2012). Manchester Waters erases the area's current identity as the Pomona docklands in different ways. Peel's diggers, bulldozers and builders have already moved in – erasing the physical traces of Pomona's wildlife and altering the traces of its industrial past (Figure 6). The name Pomona is superseded by Manchester Waters – the old brand Pomona, which represents the area's green spaces, is gradually erased from space and consciousness for the purposes of the *Manchester Waters* scheme (Figure 7 and 8).

The Salford Quays, a neighbourhood next to the Pomona docklands, gives us an idea of what such a 're-branding' might entail. Previously the site of the Manchester Docks, the Salford Quays is one of the largest urban regeneration sites in Manchester – it is also owned and developed by Peel Group (Peel Group, 2017). The Salford Quays still contain post-industrial remnants such as old lampposts and bits, albeit with a lick of paint.

Figure 6: The Pomona docklands after clear-cutting in 2016 (Photograph by author)

Figure 7: Visual impression of the residential dwellings of the Manchester Waters scheme (Source: Peel Group, 2017)
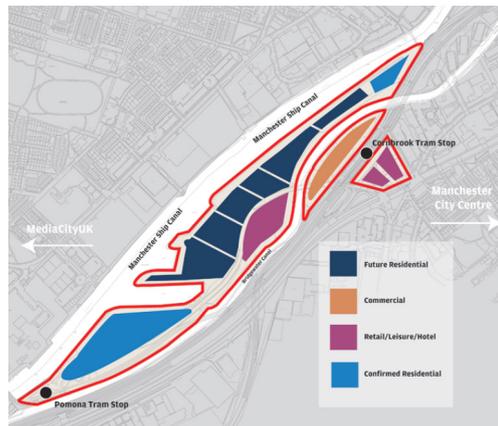
Figure 8: Initial visual impression of flats to be built on Pomona **(left)** and masterplan map of Manchester Waters **(right)**. Dark blue = future residential; Orange = commercial; Pink = Retail; Blue = confirmed residential (Source: Peel Group, 2017)

The area's industrial past is fossilised at various sites, and particular landmarks are highlighted as historic remnants for the enactment of Salford's regional identity (Swanton, 2012). A good example of this is 'Silent Cargoes', an artwork that was commissioned by the Trafford Park Development Corporation in 1994. The artwork consists of a diverse assembly of industrial artefacts including old barrels, bales, crates, trolleys, horseshoes, oil drums, metal pipes, chains, and machinery (Figure 9 and 10). Upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that some of the artefacts, in fact, bear the names of Ford and the Lancashire Dynamo Company – former industries associated with the Manchester Ship Canal. The workmen's flat cap and clothing lying on tops of boxes evoke an uncanny sense of industrial degeneration – a clear reference to the missing dock workers, whose jobs were lost as the docklands fell into disuse. All of the objects in the composition have been painted grey. Some of the artefacts' top layer has slightly chipped off – indicating that some objects were created through the process of filling a vacuum mould with concrete or similar material (PMSA, 2017). The objects of 'Silent Cargoes' therefore present a modern reproduction of history that fits within narrative of urban regeneration in the Salford Quays.

Narratives such as *Pomona Island* and *Manchester Waters* are good examples of storytelling. They represent competing narratives – stories that invoke different accounts of Manchester's industrial past and different visions for the future (Sandercock, 2003; Swanton, 2012). This suggests that there is no such thing as a 'true' story about an area. Rather, there are only constructions of its past, present and future (Throgmorton, 2003). *Pomona Island* and *Manchester Waters* are careful reconstructions of the Pomona docklands. They highlight – and more importantly – *exclude* different aspects of the dockland's history in order to present a narrative that fits the authors' intention and purpose. For example, the documentary *Pomona Island* tells a tale of an unplanned ecological haven in the heart of Manchester. The area's past as the Pomona pleasure gardens is instrumental to telling this tale of an alternative countryside that has thrived on the fringes a former industrial powerhouse. On the other hand, Peel's *Manchester Waters* tells a story about the erasure of the obsolete in order to make way for the new, but this does not mean that the area is wiped clean. Rather, the area's history is reproduced in such a way so that it suits the residential and commercial nature of the future development. Narratives like *Pomona Island* and *Manchester Waters* are neither 'false' nor 'true' – they are simply different reconstructions of the same area.

Figure 9: Silent Cargoes
(Photograph by author)

Figure 10 (left and right): Silent Cargoes
(Photograph by author)

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Weeds

Urban wastelands like the Pomona docklands live a double life, particularly with regard to their plant life: they are neither urban nor rural. They are a type of space endowed with distinctive vegetational characteristics, including an anarchic mix of species (Shoard, 2000; Jorgensen and Keenan, 2012). Plants have invaded virtually every corner of the Pomona docklands – weeds are growing out of the tiniest cracks between bricks, living bushes pushing out new growth, moss and lichen carpet the corners of cracked paving, and thorny vegetation has taken over the old quaysides (Figure 11). The Pomona docklands have existed in limbo for 41 years, allowing the natural order of succession to run its course. Generally, this natural process can be described as vegetational succession – whereby pioneer species first settle in an area, followed by tall herbs, (long-stemmed) grasses, and eventually, small trees (Farley and Roberts, 2012). In the Pomona docklands, these processes of succession have created typical grass swards interrupted by clumps of thorny bushes, shrubs and small trees. This eclectic mix of vegetation, in, turn, has attracted insects, birds and other wildlife to the docklands (Flynn, 2014b; Flynn, 2017). It all forms a stark contrast with the abandoned materials in the area (Figure 12).

Paradoxically, human intervention has also played a role in shaping the vegetation of the Pomona docklands. Urban habitats are characterised by high levels of disturbance, which can take many forms. It can be something as mundane as a person trampling over patches of grass as they walk, or something as invasive as a construction site. All these activities alter the composition of soils and surfaces – to a greater or lesser degree. These changes generally create favourable conditions for stress-tolerant vegetation. For example, wild poppies (*Papaver rhoeas L.*) are very common in urban wastelands – much more so than in their native countryside. The reason is quite simple: arable land is a more predictable environment with frequent and large-scale disturbances, while the urban environment is more unpredictable with irregular disturbances of varying spatial extent, which produce heterogenous mosaics of different succession stages (Del Tredici, 2010; Jorgensen and Keenan, 2012; Lososová et al., 2006). In the Pomona docklands, a wide variety of disturbances has shaped the vegetational composition – ranging from the imprints of faint footsteps cutting through a patch of grass to a construction site. So far, Peel Group – in cooperation with contractor Rowlinson – has sent in several groups of diggers to remove the site's vegetation. Each time, however, the site would sprout into a thriving green space afterwards. As it turns out, the churning of the land awoke the seeds of certain stress-tolerant species. One could argue that the measures taken to clear the site might have even resulted in a more diverse landscape than before (Flynn, 2017; Flynn, 2014a). Again, it is for the same reasons as to why wild poppies have become a more common sight in urban areas.

Apart from the order of natural succession and human-induced disturbances, local campaigners have also had a significant impact on the vegetation of the Pomona docklands. Local writer Hayley Flynn celebrates the unique state of limbo of the docklands on her personal blog the *Skyliner*, and later in *the Guardian*, calling the dockland site Manchester's 'hidden oasis' and an 'alternative countryside' (Flynn, 2014b; Flynn; 2017). In March 2014, Flynn, and a growing coalition of local campaigners, organised a so-called 'protest picnic' to raise awareness of the ecological

Figure 11 (left and right): Plants growing through cracks in bricks in the Pomona docklands (Photograph by author)

Figure 12: Abandoned concrete blocks amongst the vegetation of the Pomona docklands (Photograph by author)

and historical value of the Pomona docklands. It was an attempt to promote and protect the site as an 'Eden Project' – a wild meadow in the heart of Manchester. Nevertheless, their plea fell on deaf ears; Peel Group went ahead with the plans and started to clear the site. A common perception among campaigners was that Peel's clear-cutting strategy was essentially a disingenuous attempt to purge the site of its rare plant life – a type of 'scorched earth policy' employed for the sole purpose of preventing the Pomona docklands from being listed as a Site of Biological Importance (SBI). Ultimately, however, it is the Trafford and Manchester Councils that hold the power to assign SBIs. So far, Peel Group has been unwilling to comment, making it impossible to tell whether the campaigners' suspicions are warranted, or not. Either way, this did not keep the local campaigners from organising a 'seed bombing' protest in March 2014 – whereby they scattered seeds on Peel's construction site in order to enhance the area's plant life (Lindner and Meissner, 2016). A few weeks later, the seeds from the protest had grown flowers (Flynn, 2014a). It goes to show that the urban vegetation in front of our eyes may have surprising origins, indeed.

'It would be nice if they kept some of the vegetation – a lot of it – for the wildlife. But it does need some work.'

Chantelle,
(Quoted from the walk-along)

The site that is dubbed a 'hidden oasis' by Pomona's appreciators, is perceived differently by others. Chantelle and Aisha – whom I met during one of my visits – had a different opinion on Pomona's plant life. They explained that they often come to the Pomona docklands to meditate and relax. For them, the area offers an opportunity to enjoy the wildlife and to clear their minds. They highly value the Pomona docklands as a valuable green space, because there is not much greenery in Manchester. Nevertheless, they felt that Peel Group's re-development scheme could offer a lot of opportunities in terms of urban regeneration. Aisha explained that the dockland site is a prime location, thanks to its waterfront views. She, and Chantelle, would like to see a mixture of affordable housing and more exclusive housing, with some eateries and restaurants along the canal in order to preserve the area's identity as a historic dockland. On the other hand, they feel that it is important to preserve the area's wildlife and vegetation as that is exactly what makes the docklands a unique space. They added that this does mean that the vegetation as it is should be fenced off. Rather, Chantelle and Aisha feel that the docklands as they are now are rather 'wild' and 'unkempt' – and that the vegetation could do with some trimming in order to make to whole area more desirable.

These competing narratives about Pomona's vegetation highlight the complex interrelations between emergent plant life and human purpose – one man's trash

is literally another man's treasure. Some view the Pomona docklands as an unkempt scrubland; others see a physical expression of 'pure' nature; whilst others see a scrubland that could do with a bit of trimming. It highlights the competing ways of knowing and perceiving unruly urban natures in relation to the rest of the city.

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Dumpsite

The Pomona docklands are full of discarded items – piles of cans, plastic wrappings, food scraps, old clothing, used doggy bags, dumped mattresses, mouldy sofas, used syringes and an eclectic mix of items that have degraded beyond recognition. Litter forms large heaps next to overflowing bins; it floats in the canals; and it is stuck in corners underneath Pomona's bridges (Figure 13 and 14).

'When you look at all the rubbish and cans and stuff, you just think that it doesn't take a lot to pick up after yourself.'

Steven,
(Quoted from the walk-along
in Geurts, 2016)

Rubbish is often perceived negatively – which raises the question of what makes discarded items such an eyesore. In his book *Plastic Panda's*, Haring (2011) argues that it is actually quite hard to reason *why* rubbish often seems so out of place – particularly in natural environments. To illustrate this point, he describes a personal anecdote of a guided tour through to the rainforests of Suriname. As he passed through the forest on a small boat, he noticed a discarded can, which he found particularly irritating. Subsequently, it made him wonder why he, and the other tourists, felt that way. Eventually, Haring reaches the conclusion that those cans simply do not fit within his image of what 'nature' should entail – that is, a green 'paradise' untouched by humans. Haring makes a clear point: waste simply distorts our *ideas* of nature. It is important to realise that waste is not necessarily bad for natural processes *per se*. He argues that dumpsites, the potential toxicity of which could pose serious health-hazards, are often ecologically diverse. The discarded items of dumpsite, as hazardous as they might be to people, provide small living spaces for a wide range of organisms – such as fungi, bacteria, rodents, birds and even large mammals (Haring, 2011; Beisner et al., 2013). This is happening in the Pomona docklands on a much smaller scale. Pomona's bins are rarely emptied. As a result, tasty morsels are up for grabs, which do not go unnoticed by the common gull – arguably one of the most successful urban dwellers. Gulls are not fussy eaters, making them the perfect opportunists. The natural diet of most gull species is variable: earthworms, flying insects, fish, insect larvae and small mammals. The garbage of our cities perfectly supplements the urban gull's diet. It is estimated that household garbage constitutes for about 40 percent of their diet (Beisner et al., 2013). Like rats, the gulls of the Pomona docklands have learned that food will likely be handed out on a silver plate if you follow the people.

Like Pomona's gulls, non-human organisms continuously interact with urban matter – transgressing notions of the man-made and the 'organic'. Powered by the processes of decay, things in the Pomona docklands are in a transient state of becoming something else –

Figure 13: Dumped items in the Pomona docklands (Photograph by author)

Figure 14: Dumped items in the Pomona docklands **(left)** and plastic bags tied to fence in the Pomona docklands **(right)** (Photograph by author)

losing their solidity and shape over time. Initially, a thing will retain its form but gradually becomes hollowed out as it develops its own moulds and warps. Paradoxically, things become steadily indistinguishable from dust or rubble, merging with their surrounding materiality. Things get wrapped around each other, spill over into one another and fuse to form unusual hybrids. Their identity may even change as they become inhabited by life forms, which will seize every opportunity to occupy neglected spaces following abandonment – fungi settle on damp wood, seedlings take root in the tiniest cracks, birds nest inside old cupboards, items get gnawed at by animals and insects, or is worked upon by bacteria. These activities leave their mark on the materiality of the docklands – as holes created by woodworm, as the delicate cobwebs made by spiders, as intricate nests assembled by birds, and as the extensive root networks running through mounds of rubbish. These subtle traces reveal the unheralded, non-human ways of interacting with decaying materiality (Edensor, 2005), which challenge the binary boundaries between 'objects' and 'nature', between the 'orderly' and the 'chaotic'.

And minibars missing their caster, the catalogues
Turning to mush, the unnameable objects
That used to be something with knobs on,
And now they live here, by the siding, by the fish house,
The building whose function is no longer known

Sean O'Brien,
(Quoted from Geurts, 2016)

The poem by Sean O'Brien evokes a strange sense of alienation; it presents a description of discarded items as they rot away and lose their status of separate objects (Farley and Roberts, 2012). The abrupt loss of what Edensor (2005: 320) calls the 'magic of the commodity' – a self-evident thing that is inherently valuable – seems to undo assigned functions and meanings. It rebukes particular aesthetic codes that inform the conventional ways in which we tend to organise 'stuff'. For instance, the interiors of art galleries, shops and homes are replete with such notions, wherein objects are situated at a proper distance from each other – against a neutral backdrop so that the identity of each item remains stable and clear. Although such aesthetic codes are culturally variable, they are universally beyond critical appraisal – rarely noticed, except when they are absent or violated. This absence is particularly apparent in urban wastelands, where conventional schemes of material ordering are completely missing (Edensor, 2005; Jorgensen and Keenan, 2012). Wastelands are characterised by a chaotic blend of items, with often little clue to their previously assigned contexts. This spatial re-contextualisation foregrounds the object's material qualities rather than its former value as a commodity. This confrontation with the bare materiality of objects can provoke a sudden sense of disorientation –

a heightened awareness of the ways in which we are often sensually alienated from the materiality of our environment through aesthetic codes of order (Edensor 2005; Edensor et al., 2009; Franck and Stevens, 2013). Random montages of objects therefore challenge our usual sense of the way things and 'stuff' are supposed to be organised.

'If it is too clean, there must be shit underneath the surface'

Jill,
(Quoted from walk-along)

During my visits, I met Jill, a woman originally from Hungary. She told me that she has lived across different countries in Europe for the last couple of years. Out of all places, Manchester was one of her favourite places to live. The thing she likes most about the city are its rough edges. Informal, unexpected aspects give a place 'character', she added. In her view, a bit of 'rubbish' is crucial to city life– a place runs the risk of becoming boring and plain if there is no deviation. She told me more about her life in Switzerland, where the streets were *too* clean for her liking. It was almost suspicious, as if there was something bad – or in her own words, 'shit' – that laid hidden beneath all that orderliness. In her opinion, not all waste is bad matter; a 'waste-less' world would be sterile – which resonates with Southworth's (2001) argument that cities could actually benefit from a certain amount of ruined land and derelict structures. By virtue of its incompleteness, ruined matter compels us to re-create the missing pieces with our own imagination – invoking a response that is deeply personal and creative (Edensor, 2005; Jorgensen and Keenan, 2012). Jill's story seems to confirm Edensor's (2005: 325) observation that aesthetic conventions of ordering are 'so normative that when disrupted, it can be highly disorientating but also extremely pleasurable'.

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Tents

As I walked through the Pomona docklands, I noticed three young men sitting in front of a small camp, which constituted of a couple of abandoned sofas, old mattresses and two tents (Figure 15). The sun had drawn them out of their shelter. As I initiated a brief conversation, I learnt that they were homeless (Geurts, 2016) – and that the improvised camp of tents and dumped items was a place that they called their (temporary) home.

'This is paradise'

Ricky,
(Quoted from Geurts, 2016)

The three men told me more about their most recent experiences, which, as it turns out, was one of their main reasons for moving to the Pomona docklands. To them, Manchester's city centre is danger zone. They have nothing to fear from the public, but fellow homeless people generally pose a real threat. One of the men, Ricky, explained that the abolishment of a synthetic drug called 'Spice' lies at the root of this issue. Now that the synthetic drug cannot be bought legally anymore, violence on the streets has intensified as homeless people have been fighting amongst each other to obtain drugs. Then there is the increased risk of people getting extremely violent when they are high on Spice, the men added. As a result, stabbings and violent attacks in the homeless community have become commonplace, particularly in the city centre. The men added that one incident in particular had forced them to move away from Manchester's city centre. They had recently lost a dear friend, Daniel Smith, with whom they socialised a lot. They explained that Daniel had recently been brutally murdered by a group of other homeless men high on Spice. They had heard the news from fellow rough sleepers. Out of fear, they decided to move away from the city centre, seeking refuge in the quiet and overgrown Pomona docklands. To them, docklands are a safe space where no-one will threaten or attack them – it is a hidden 'paradise' (Geurts, 2016). It also provided a change of scenery, which helped them to deal with the tragedy of Daniel's death.

Manchester's local newspapers confirm the men's story – Daniel was murdered by Luke Benson (25) and Adam Acton (25), two fellow rough sleepers. The body of Daniel Smith, aged 23 at the time, was found in a burning tent in a squat under the railway archers at Irwell Street near Salford in January 2016. It turns out that Daniel had suffered multiple injuries before being set on fire. Newpaper articles in the BBC News and the Manchester Evening News, both dated the 11th of August 2016, described the violent attack on Daniel in great detail based on witnesses' accounts. A small incident on the evening on January the 19th triggered the chain of events that would eventually lead up to Daniel's death. As Daniel woke from a drunken sleep, he accidentally urinated on the bedding within a homeless camp. This angered Luke Benson, a friend of Daniel's who

Figure 15: Tents in the
Pomona docklands
(Source: Geurts, 2016)

also held a grudge against him as they had exchanged blows earlier in the day. In an act of retaliation, Benson beat Daniel unconscious. Another rough sleeper, Adam Acton, stepped into the fray and dragged Daniel back into his tent. Acton's girlfriend, Amanda Briggs, covered Daniel with a blanket in an attempt to cover their tracks. The group then split up, leaving Daniel to fight for his life. When they returned, they discovered that Daniel had already died of his wounds. After some deliberation, Benson attempted to dispose of Daniel's body by setting fire to him. The smoke coming from the tent did not go unnoticed, and emergency services were called soon after. The brutal and sustained attack on Daniel was witnesses by a number of the killers' friends and acquaintances, who were also high on drugs and affected by drink. A number of key witnesses, including Briggs and a 16-year old witness, later cooperated with the police and gave a detailed account of what had happened that night. Subsequently, Luke Benson and Adam Acton were eventually found guilty of murdering Daniel Smith (BBC, 2016; Manchester Evening News, 2016).

'Love' is not a word used very often to describe homelessness – which paradoxically underplays the crucial role of emotions in the lives of homeless people (Cloke et al., 2011). Academic writings on homelessness often use terms such as 'exclusion' – highlighting the tactics deployed by homeless people to negotiate their banishment. In this sense, homeless people have agency – they actively shape their living environment (Smith, 1996). Such a rationalist explanation is often used to illustrate the tactical choices made by homeless people to 'survive' or 'get by' in an increasingly restrictive, hostile urban environment. Although the relevance of such explanations needs to be recognised, they have one particular limitation: they leave little room for discussing the more personal aspects of homeless people's lives – including emotions such as generosity, compassion, fear, despair and anger. These emotions are not dictated by rational choices, and, therefore, not all the movements made by homeless people are tactical in nature. For instance, homeless people often form complex social networks and alternative communities – as was the case with the three men in the Pomona docklands. They made a temporary home by assembling rags, old tents, dumped sofas and mattresses. By sticking together and settling down in the docklands, they could escape Manchester's city centre and mourn Daniel's death at their own terms. To them, the Pomona docklands are much more than a sleeping place or a resting place – which would only reflect their rational tactics. Rather, the Pomona docklands are made *meaningful* only by their emotional interactions with other homeless people (Cloke et al., 2008; Cloke et al., 2011). As the encounter with the three young men suggests, the physical traces of such interactions and emotions may be hidden in plain sight.

When I visited the Pomona docklands a few weeks later, the three homeless men were no longer there – they had already moved on. The paved site near the canals was abandoned, with only a few ghostly traces of the small camp left behind (Figure 16) – a burnt mattress, a drenched blanket, food wrappings, pieces of paper, mouldy rags and the big sofa that one of the men was sitting on during our conversation (Figure 17). The items were left behind in surreal disposition. When I talked about the docklands with a passersby – not telling him about its most recent history – he pointed to the exact site of the former camp, saying that people should stop dumping things (Geurts, 2016).

Figure 16 (left and right): Abandoned items of the former homeless refuge (Source: Geurts, 2016)

Figure 17: Abandoned sofa, one year later in 2017 (Photograph by author)

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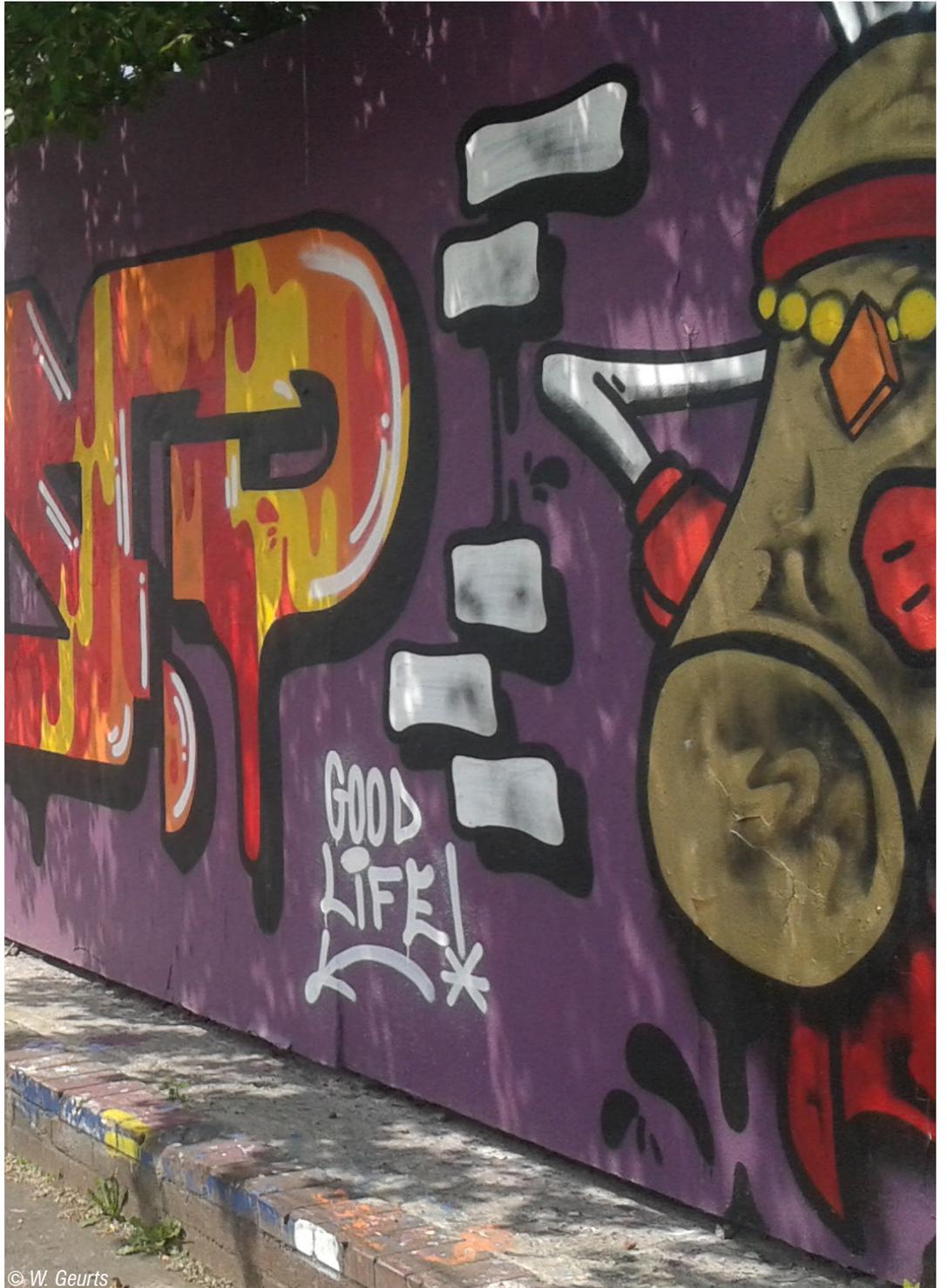
Graffiti

Graffiti artists have left a clear mark on the Pomona docklands. Their murals and tags adorn the railway bridges, the brick walls running along the canal, the rusty bitts, and old warehouses – even smaller objects such as bins and lampposts. Then there is the overhang: somebody has taken a considerable risk in order to leave a message on the side of a pedestrian bridge. Graffiti is everywhere, carrying the ghostly messages from their creators (Figure 18). Owen, a man whom I met during one of my visits, explained that the railway arches – which are now blocked off because of Peel's and Rowlinson's construction site – used to be a popular spot for graffiti artists. At some point, people started dumping things there as well, but they were doing it in a way that he thought was quite interesting. According to Owen, people put a couch there at some point. It was still in excellent condition. He added that, strangely enough, the dumped couch invited passersby to stop for a moment to gaze at the street art on the railway arches.

As you walk along the Pomona docklands, it is hard to miss one particular building – a warehouse on Salford's industrial estate that is covered in graffiti. One appreciator of Pomona's street art is Hayley Flynn – the author of the blog the *Skyliner*. In one of her posts, she mentions that, at some point, the whole building was covered with a tag reading 'AMP'. A picture on Flynn's blog shows that each letter was perfectly nestled among the triangular peaks of the roof. A few days later, the wall suddenly read 'Satow'. Flynn explains that this was done by a coalition of street artists led by Danny LSD. The aim of the movement was to pay tribute to Satow – a street artist who had died from a drug overdose. In an act of solidarity, the street artists painted over their works with Satow's tag – turning the old warehouse into a larger-than-life memorial. The warehouse in question is known as the 'Graffiti Palace', which is one of the few tolerated sites for street art in the area. The site has spread from the large warehouse, to a half mile section along the canal (Figure 19). It is a unique space where street artists have been honing their skills. The Graffiti Palace was due to be covered up as part of Manchester and Salford Council's redevelopment plans in 2011. However, the owners of the Graffiti Palace have repeatedly resisted appeals to remove the graffiti from the walls (Barford, 2013; Mould, 2015). When I visited the docklands a few weeks ago, the 'Satow' memorial had been painted over with new works of street art – again (Figure 19 and 20).

'Graffiti is all about being seen'

Gary
(Quoted from walk-along)

During one of my visits, I met two graffiti artists – Gary and Peter – who were taking pictures of the Graffiti Palace. They said that they had been travelling across Europe to gain inspiration from other street artists, and to leave their own mark. Peter explained that graffiti is very personal – it is more than just spraying a pretty picture on a wall.

Figure 18: Graffitied bitt **(left)** and tag sprayed on pedestrian bridge in the Pomona docklands **(right)** (Photograph by author)

Figure 19: Graffiti Palace as seen from the Pomona docklands (Photograph by author)
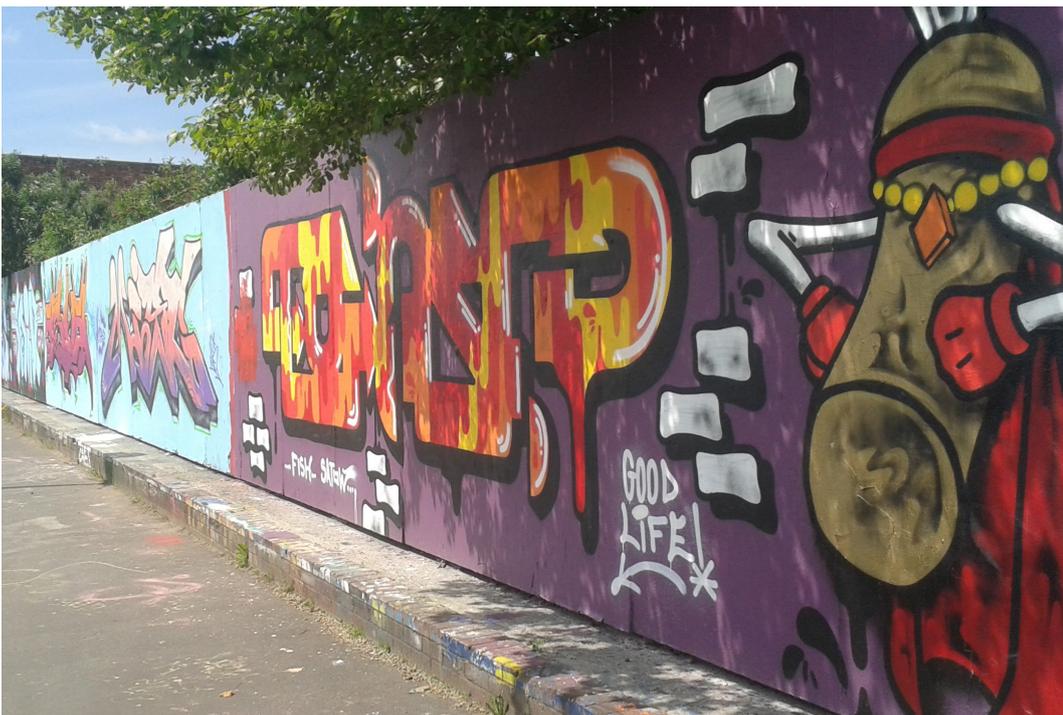
Figure 20: Adjoining street ar wall of the Graffiti Palace (Photograph by author)

Although they always bring sketches to the site, the actual execution of their murals reflects their mood – to greater or lesser extent. Gary added that public opinion plays a very minor role in the form of their artworks. For them, graffiti is simply a means to showcase their art and express themselves, whatever the public makes of it. They are not trying to make a political point either – and admitted that they are quite sceptical of 'political' street art. Gary added that social media has had had a huge impact on street art culture. They used to travel around all the time in order to find new sources of inspiration – which are now just a few clicks away on Instagram. More importantly, he feels that more artists are getting sponsored by big brands as part of a wider marketing strategy – fuelling what he calls a 'celebrity culture', as opposed to the 'underground' scene that they associate themselves with. Social media has also blurred the line between what is allowed, and what is not. Graffiti featuring on social media could be sprayed on a wall without the owner's permission. Yet, it is out there – actively seeking attention, even.

Gary and Peter lament the erasure of the old Pomona docklands, which they consider to be a creative hotspot for street art. On the other hand, they added that it is the 'name of the game' – they do not expect their works of art to last. To them, that is the beauty of street art – you can find it in unexpected places, tucked away behind an old building or bridge. This resonates with Jorgensen and Keenan's (2012) notion that creative engagement with the environment is woven into street art culture. Graffiti artists often gravitate towards the desolate, and, therefore, are good at taking over spots that society has forgotten about. These derelict spots could be an old building that is set to be knocked down – or an urban wasteland like the Pomona docklands, where users are allowed to modify the area in unanticipated ways. Tolerated sites like the Graffiti Palace near Pomona, better known as 'Halls of Fame', occupy a vital position in street art. For street artists, they offer a safe space to paint – a place where they will not be disturbed by the police or public, provided that the work of art is not offensive. Tolerated sites often coincide with tourist hotspots. Take the street art tours of Shoreditch in London, which have become an integral part of the area's identity as a trendy and vibrant artistic area (Barford, 2013; Jorgensen and Keenan, 2012).

Graffiti is a pervasive feature of urban life. However, street art culture can be secretive, with artists wanting to take credit for their work and stay anonymous at the same time (Barford, 2013; Foth et al., 2011). Generally speaking, graffiti is defined as the application of images on public surfaces, which is not illegal *per se*. However, when graffiti painting is applied without the property owner's permission, it could be considered an act of vandalism, which is a criminal offence under the UK Criminal Damage Act 1971 (Marsh and Forensics, 2007). Local authorities, including Manchester and Salford Council, devote significant resources to the removal of illegal graffiti on the grounds that it negatively impacts the quality of life. This is due to the popular belief that graffiti is a clear sign that the area is not managed properly. Local councils in the UK tend to respond as quickly as possible to reports of vandalism in order to combat illegal graffiti (Marsh and Forensics, 2007; Mould, 2015). On the other hand, there are those that argue that 'good' graffiti can enrich urban areas (Iveson, 2010, Burnham, 2010; Foth et al., 2011). It raises questions about the conflict between crime and the aesthetic value of street art, particularly in relation to its benefits for urban regeneration.

'Why would you want to spray that onto the wall? It looks horrible and (it) communicates jealousy and resentment'

Aisha
(Quoted from walk-along)

When I asked an interviewee, Aisha, about the graffiti in the Pomona docklands, she answered that she sees 'jealousy and anger' – particularly when she looks at tags. She explained that tags are like a stamp – it is basically someone marking that space as their 'territory'. From her experiences of living in London, she strongly believes that tags mostly convey animosity and anger. 'If you cut off access, people will get divided', she added. She explained that developers are not really going to care, because they are just going to sell it and 'move on'. If there is any backlash, in the form of graffiti or vandalism, it is the future residents that will have to pay for it. Aisha added that developers should therefore be aware of such consequences. Nevertheless, she sees a lot of potential in street art, particularly murals. In her opinion, murals are a legitimate form of street art. She feels that graffiti has the potential to add a bit of character to the area – in her view, it is an expression of local values and meanings.

Gary and Peter, on the other hand, analysed the tags in the Pomona docklands with more of an eye for technique. Gary took a few minutes to teach me about the basic rules of graffiti. The first rule is to 'claim your space', and to clearly mark the boundaries of your artwork with a single colour. It prevents other artists from spraying over parts of your work, or encroaching on it. However, it sometimes cannot be helped that others paint over your work – especially when space is limited, which is often the case on legal walls. The second rule is to be prepared – practice makes perfect, after all. Out of respect for the area and your own work, it is of key importance to invent and perfect concepts at home before you spray anything on a wall, Gary added. He often shows his conceptual drawings to his family before he goes into the field and executes his ideas. The third, and final, rule is to experiment and re-invent your work. Otherwise, you run the risk of doing the same thing all over again. Gary pointed at a tag on one of the bridges (Figure 18 on the previous page), which he believed to be sprayed on the wall by a total beginner. First of all, Gary argued, the artist did not demarcate his piece properly. The clumsy design of the tag indicates that the artist has probably duplicated this particular piece of work several times. That is what happens when you do not practice at home – you end up with, as he put it, 'this horrible tag'.
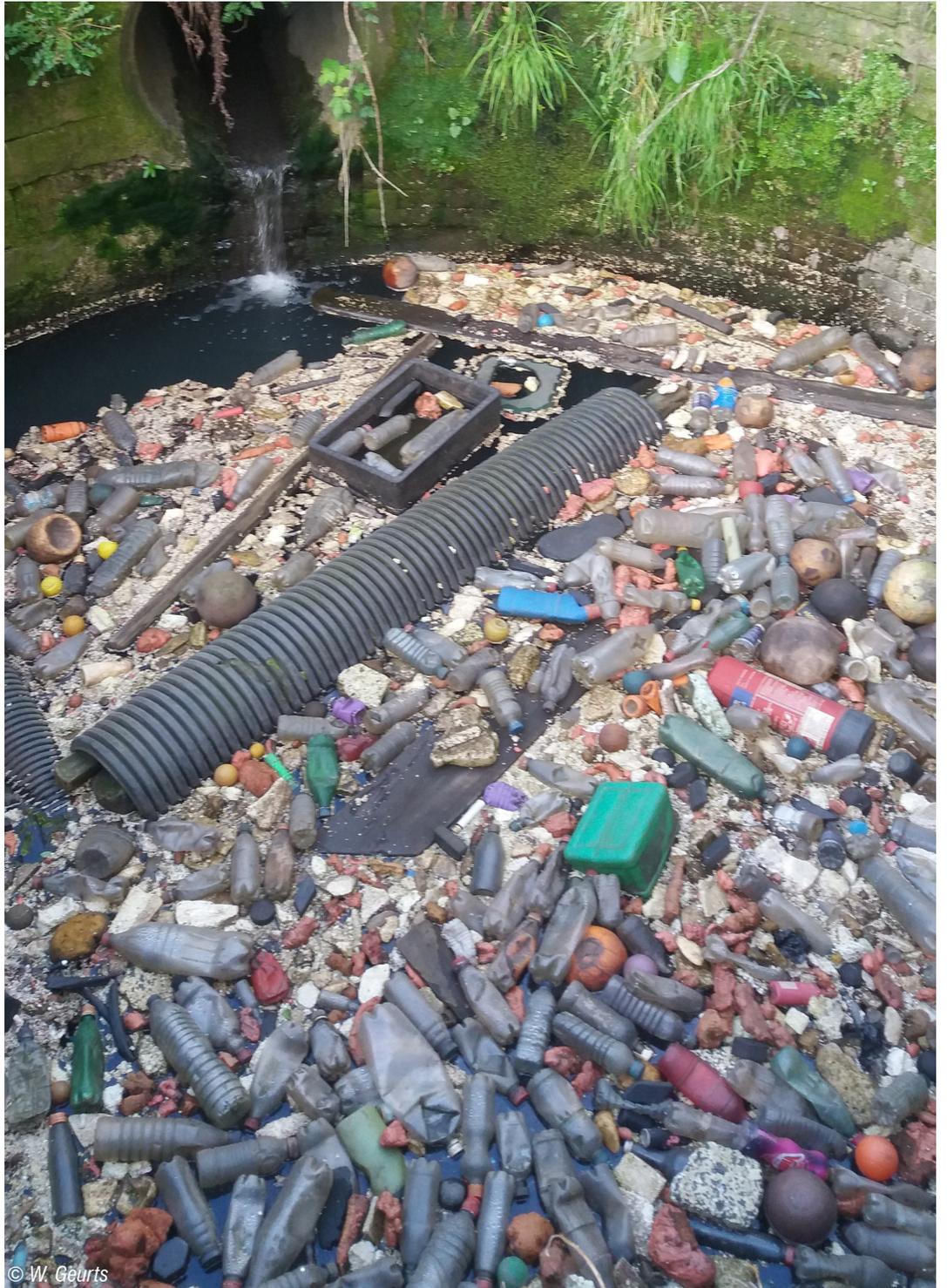
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Sculptures

Syringe floating in canal.
cyclist in dark glasses on
path sun in his eyes.
shaky photo of heron taking off from water. listening
to some films on headphones
it's obvious the dialogue was recorded in
a studio.

Matt
(Quoted from Dalby, 2009)

The poem above is written by Matt, an artist whom I met during one of my walk-alongs. Matt draws a lot of inspiration from the Pomona docklands – particularly its decaying materiality, its diverse sounds, and its transient urban natures. Matt explained that he often comes to the docklands to create short written pieces, 'sound poems', performance-based pieces and sculptural forms. At the start of our conversation, he pointed at an old reservoir that used to be part of Cornbrook. The round, concrete opening was filled with rubbish. 'I like the oddity of it', he said, pointing out the colourful assembly of plastic bottles and other discarded items floating around in the murky water (Figure 21). He added that he had recently taken a picture of a similar assembly of rubbish – in an attempt to capture its bizarre juxtaposition in relation to the rest of the environment.

The Pomona docklands are an obvious choice for Matt, because he finds inspiration in seemingly crude and unfinished textures. He likes to physically engage with the environment in order remake powerful aesthetic experiences. His artworks often feature off-the-shelf items or found objects, because he finds the challenge of making art with limitations more interesting. Matt explained that the Pomona docklands are a treasure trove – it is basically a free studio full of free materials such as fallen branches, discarded items, stones, leaves, and water. From a creative point of view, the ever-changing materiality of the docklands provides endless possibilities. Matt's creative practice – whether visual, written or sound-based – is primarily improvisational. Sometimes there will be concepts, but most of the time he spontaneously engages with the materiality of the docklands. He often carries around copper wire, fishing line, or something similar to allow him to make three-dimensional objects outdoors whenever he feels like it (Dalby, 2017a; Dalby, 2017b). During our conversation, Matt added that he often walks around the docklands, using his phone to take photographs or to record sounds and footages.

Matt's blog '*Santiago's Dead Wasp*' features several examples of his artwork (Dalby, 2017a). He often creates sculptures with a specific intention, only to deliberately leave them to the processes of decay afterwards. A good example of this is a meditation retreat that he made out of bushes and branches. According to Matt's blog, that artwork was a reaction to the the earliest stages of Pomona's redevelopment, when Peel Group had removed most of the vegetation on the site. Matt felt that the landowners had rendered the area an 'ugly, unkempt and barely useable mess'. In the weeks and months that

Figure 21: Rubbish floating in old reservoir, Pomona docklands (Photograph by author)

Figure 22: Initial stage of Tam Lyn sculpture (left) and finished sculpture (right). (Source: Dalby, 2017a)

followed, the grubbing-up of thorny bushes formed a knotted barrier, making some parts of the docklands impassable on foot. Hence, in creating a sheltered meditation retreat, Matt set out to create his own 'barrier'. A near square of seven bushes in the Pomona docklands formed the foundation of his construction. Matt's first move was to strip the branches off each bush, and to remove the neighbouring vegetation immediately encroaching on the square – using nothing but a pair of scissors. He stripped the longer branches bare, so that they could be weaved into the structure. Matt then bent the twigs over the structure to create a kind of roof, and then weaved the leftover branches into the structure or balanced them on top to complete the retreat (Dalby, 2016). According to Matt's blogs, it was possible to sit inside comfortably without damaging the structure – it was a bit tight, but possible. The mediation retreat was pretty small and unassuming – which is exactly why Matt enjoys creating such 'easy to ignore' constructions. Like its surroundings, it is impermanent and fleeting.

'The dead branches shrinking and beginning to be consumed; the living bushes pushing out new growth and seeking the sun; birds, animals and perhaps intrepid walkers and their dogs kicking through; and rain and wind shaking it. In two or three years most likely nothing will remain'.

Matt
(Quoted from Dalby, 2017a)

Pivotal to Matt's artwork is 'incompleteness'. Like the meditation retreat in the Pomona docklands, he intentionally leaves most of his work unfinished. As he argues on his blog, a finished work is just that – 'finished'. It risks becoming a one-dimensional surface, a static object that has not much else to it. On the other hand, incomplete work allows for emotional occupation and the re-imagining of his art. This could include the physical alteration brought about by the raw forces of nature, or the more intangible workings of the human imagination supplying the missing pieces of information (Dalby, 2017a; Dalby, 2016). According to Matt, an unfinished structure can evoke a more profound and lasting experience. The *Tamlyn 11* project is a another good example of how Matt physically allows the elements – and other people – to 'finish' his artwork. The project includes eleven sculptures made of objects found in the Pomona docklands – which are performative pieces of artwork that include images, sounds, objects and constructed sculptures. For Matt, one of the most outstanding pieces of the *Tamlyn 11* series was the sixth object – not because of its shape, but its transformation throughout time. The sixth object was a grave-mount shaped arrangement of brick fragments completely covered in sticks, all of which he found in the Pomona docklands. The object was intended to resemble a burial mound or barrow (Figure 22 on the previous page). The shape draws inspiration from a personal interpretation of the balled 'Tam Lyn', which is a legendary ballad originating from the Scottish borders. Since he was a small child, the early part of the song made

him visualise the main character, Tam Lyn, waiting under a hedge, with a barrow rising beyond it (Dalby, 2017b). Another key part of the object was based on death and the temporal nature of life itself – which is why the sculpture resembles a burial mound.

'I feel that broken traces of a piece – and the process of it collapsing and being dispersed – are as interesting as the work itself. So too are the ways in which pieces are perceived and the uses to which they're put.'

Matt
(Quoted from Dalby, 2017a)

As usual, Matt went to check up on the state of the sixth *Tamlyn* sculpture he had left there a few weeks earlier. It initially seemed that the object was no longer there. However, a closer inspection revealed that all that was left of the sculpture was a pile of charred remains. On his blog, Matt concludes that his sculpture had probably been used as the basis of a fire or barbecue. For him, this is very exciting as he feels that it really adds value to his artwork – not because someone added utility to the piece, but because that person managed to find their own meaning in it and make use of it in a practical way. That was exactly the intention behind the *Tamlyn* sculpture – it is a piece that resembles ritual folk art, but without context. The absence of context puts the ball in the viewer's court, meaning that the object can be experienced or interpreted without explanation (Dalby, 2011). This is exactly why Matt was so delighted to see his Tam Lyn sculpture burned.

The fleeting nature of Matt's artwork resonates with Edensor's (2005) notion that chaotic assemblies of materials allow people to reinterpret and use discarded objects otherwise. Arbitrary montages of 'stuff' strike peculiar chords of meaning, because such ad-hoc ensembles are not deliberately arrayed to conform to familiar associations. Random assemblies of items like those in the Pomona docklands are not devised to articulate 'normality and 'political sentiments. Rather, they are fortuitous montages which challenge normative meanings, allowing people to see nothing but the materials' bare materiality.

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Lines

Matt's more sound-based work includes a video called 'Place' – a 16-minute footage of him walking around barefoot in the Pomona docklands. The focus of the frame is continuously aimed at Matt's feet and the ground below (Dalby, 2017a). The ground's textures are constantly changing; from concrete to grass to thorns and bushes, with pieces of rubbish in the frames too. The changing frames evoke a unique sense of place.

Unlike Matt in 'Place', most of us keep our eyes on the horizon – which obscures the significant impact that our feet have on urban spaces. Public spaces are often characterised by a sheer smoothness of space, which is achieved through constant vigilance and maintenance. Such urban regulations are about banishing rubbish, as well as promoting seamless walkways and clear sight lines. Pathways regulate sensory experiences, and dictate how people should navigate public spaces. Through paved paths, people are enabled and coerced to behave in prescribed ways (Edensor, 2005). Pedestrian zones, roads and motorways run in well-defined directions, which restrict speed and regulate circulation. They signal where one should walk, and more importantly, where one should *not*. Traffic control is an important spatial tool for the safeguarding of urban order. Yet, as a collective, people tend break these urban regulations on a regular basis (Farley and Roberts, 2012; Murray et al., 2007; Luckert, 2013; Solnit, 2001). This is why urban spaces, including the Pomona docklands, are full of desire lines.

Desire lines are those dusty, worn paths cutting across a field or a grassy space. They slowly gather definition over time when people travel in past patterns of footsteps over and over again. Without this constant maintenance, desire lines are forgotten and lose their form. Desire lines are often a means of expediency – they gain their form as people cut corners to find the shortest and easiest route. In this sense, desire lines represent a human consensus that their way is worth walking (Farley and Roberts, 2012; Murray et al., 2007; Luckert, 2013; Solnit, 2001; Geurts, 2016). Desire lines are also a means of exploration. In most instances, desire lines abruptly split off from paved roads – veering into new directions. Desire lines lead into unpaved territory, opening up new places that were previously not connected to formal infrastructures. Figure 23 is a good example of such an exploratory path; it strays away from the large asphalted road, straight into the quiet and overgrown quayside of the Pomona docklands. Figure 24 illustrates a desire line that is used as a means of expediency; it is a shortcut through the thick bushes – straight to the BBC MediaCity and the Salford Quays. These examples of desire lines offer a more appealing alternative to the asphalted roads; they take people deeper into the docklands, or they are simply a more scenic route from A to B.

The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered.

Michel de Certeau (1984)
 (Quoted in Luckert, 2013)

Figure 23: Exploratory desire line in the Pomona docklands (Photograph by author)
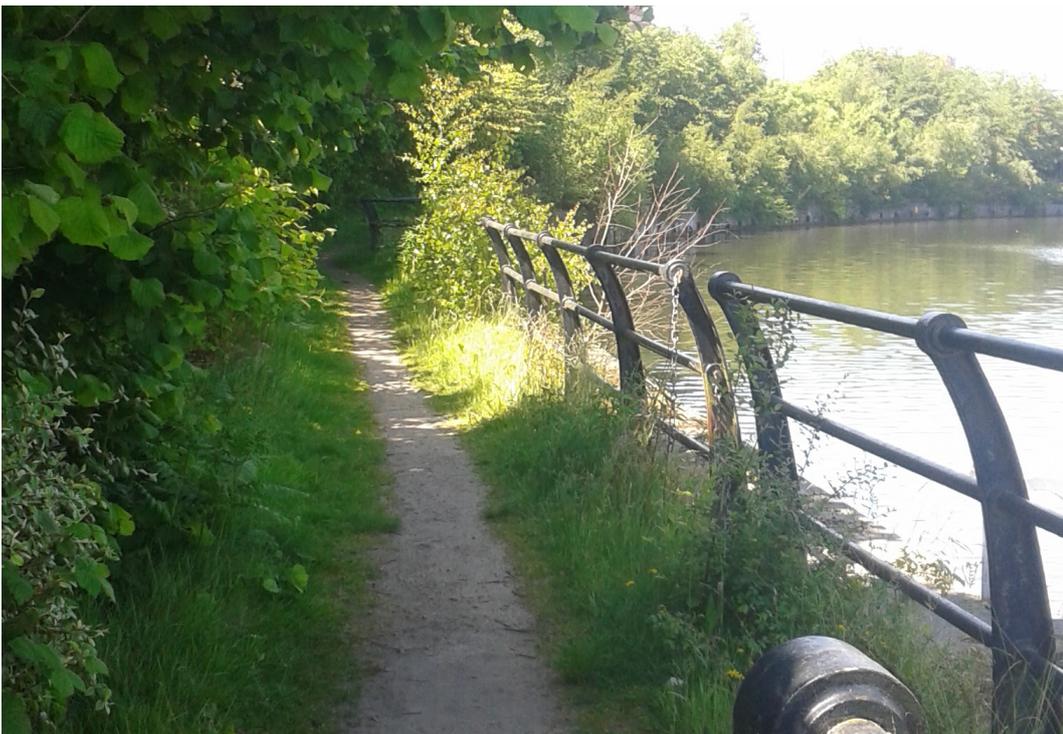
Figure 24: Desire line that is used as a shortcut to the Salford Quays (Photograph by author)

In lived spaces of everyday performance, desire lines are a tangible representation of the ways in which people navigate the city and make it their own. Perkins (2012) argues that desire lines are a form of communication; a medium that city dwellers can employ to 'write back' to urban planners with their feet. In this perspective, desire lines basically provide the public with a means to impose their preferred connections – even when they do not follow paved paths. Desire lines could therefore be thought of as acts of popular resistance against urban rules. This resonates with Luckert's (2013) notion that if we were to equate the formation of desire lines to the act of writing, then people's feet must be the pen. Like words written on a piece of paper, desire lines are characterised by different modes of formation. Obviously, some words are written in crayon or chalk, but the pen seems to represent the fundamental form. The same goes for the formation of desire lines; they come into being through various means. Some desire lines start out as the dusty track of a car, or a subtle line left by a cyclist. However, most desire paths begin as footpaths, because pedestrians do have a strong advantage when it comes to freedom of movement – particularly compared to car drivers. While the car is confined to paved roads and formal infrastructures, the pedestrian's exploratory possibilities are not constrained by pavements. In most cases, a pedestrian is limited only by their own interests and purpose (Luckert, 2013; Solnit, 2001; Geurts, 2016) – if a desired line does not exist, they can literally take the 'first step'.

"

What is now emerging is an intermediate description of reality that lies somewhere between the two alienating images of a deterministic world and an arbitrary world of pure chance.

"

*Nobel Laureate Ilya Prigogine
(Quoted in Waldheim, 2012)*

Discussion and conclusion

This study set out to explore the ways in which urban wastelands challenge entrenched ideas of formality in conventional planning practice. Waste is key to answering to this question, because waste and urban wastelands seem to represent a number of apparent oppositions that have plagued the modern city: between the natural and the man-made, between the ordinary and the unconventional, between order and chaos. Through the method of literary montage, this study attempted to re-examine these dichotomies by re-telling short stories that alert us to the temporality of the social order and materiality; stories that attempt to capture the emergence of urban natures; stories that show the overlooked, often neglected side of everyday urban life.

Urban wastelands cut deeply against our most deep-seated prejudices of nature. The chaotic arrangement of derelict spaces juxtaposes rubbish with concrete, asphalt and bits of green – it all seems contrary to our intuitive sense of 'pure' nature (Engler, 2004). This paradox is rooted in cultural expectations. Landscapes are generally positioned on a sliding scale ranging from the 'untouched' to the 'most disrupted'. This intuitively appealing framework has a particular flaw; it is a cultural lens, through which we might mistake picturesque landscapes for pristine environments (Nassauer, 1995). A good example of this is the Białowieza Primeval Forest – a temperate forest that straddles the border between Poland and Belarus. It is promoted as a pristine forest – one of the last truly 'wild' spots in Europe. However, a closer inspection reveals that subtle traces of people's influence are all over the place. For example, the forest harbours traces of Iron age settlements and Slavonic graves dating back to the 9th and 11th century. In the 14th century, the king of Poland and Lithuania protected the forest as a hunting ground. Over time, these diverse and small interactions between humans and the forest influenced the configuration of the ecosystem. Therefore, holding up places like the Białowieza forest as 'pristine' disables people to accept the origin of seemingly 'untouched' ecosystems in human purpose – fostering the peculiar belief that nature is 'something out there', something that can only express itself in the absence of people (Jacobs, 1961; Marris, 2013; Geurts, 2016). Although the scraggly vegetation in the Pomona docklands has flourished in the absence of human management, it does not conform to any stereotypes of nature in terms of its species selection and spatial organisation (Shoard, 2000; Jorgensen and Keenan, 2012). This is exactly why the Pomona docklands are hard to place on a sliding scale – they are neither 'natural' nor conventional. Thus, the notion of urban wastelands as cultural anomalies are as revealing as cultural perceptions of 'pure' nature.

Urban wastelands also seem to be the antithesis of the rest of the city. Their existence seems to be fraught with paradox: shunned by some as spatial eyesores, yet admired by others as casual urban spaces – or a mix of both sentiments. The current fascination with Britain's urban wastelands adds a thick layer of complexity to the debate around the re-development of the Pomona docklands. Peel Group is hesitant to acknowledge the historic, recreational and ecological appeal of the site as it currently exists. Nevertheless, Peel Group landholder leases it out to film crews as an authentic post-industrial wasteland (Lindner and Meissner, 2016; MediaCityUK, 2017). The Save My Pomona campaign has also cleverly harnessed the growing interest in urban wastelands, and in particular, the need for accessible green spaces in Manchester. The debate about

the re-development of the Pomona docklands illustrates that treating a site as a blank space becomes fraught with difficulty when that space is valued. It highlights that a derelict site like Pomona was never a 'wasted' space, because the area harbours a multitude of informal, everyday uses – including dog-walking, meditation, sculpting, street art and so forth (Lindner and Meissner, 2016). Amidst the decaying spaces of the docklands, with plants and animals thriving between them, are the physical signs of these informal uses – graffiti sprayed on a brick wall, a sculpture made out of twigs, the charred remains of a barbeque site, a food wrapping next to a bench, and faint footsteps imprinted in a desire path.

The debate around urban wastelands is complicated by yet another struggle; between order and chaos. The decay of materiality erodes the human-imposed order of urban spaces. This enables people to re-appropriate that particular space to meet their own needs and desires. Local authorities often devote significant resources to combat any form of unexpected use. Some of these formal measures are pre-emptive, but most of them are intended to counteract undesirable uses as they arise e.g. the removal of illegal graffiti (Franck and Stevens, 2013; Schneekloth, 2007; Marsh and Forensics, 2007). Nevertheless, these counter-measures are constantly negotiated in turn. For instance, the street artists of the Graffiti Palace near the Pomona docklands have gradually been able to gain the tacit approval of Manchester and Salford Council – mainly due to the approval of the warehouse's private owners. Even more so, the Graffiti Palace formed the main stage of a local festival, which was approved by the Salford and Manchester Council (Quays Culture, 2016). Hence, the relationship between the Council and the street artists has evolved from one of animosity to co-habitation. The evolution of Pomona's Graffiti Palace highlights the fact that the right to pursue activities other than those deemed acceptable is often hard won. Competing forces of 'informality' and 'formality' are not perpetually locked in a stand-off. Instead, both forces form a synthesis, wherein spatial and behavioural limits are continuously negotiated. People are constantly exploring new ways to 'beat the system', whether the activity is minor or overtly political. Subsequently, new definitions of 'desirable', 'acceptable', and 'strange' behaviour emerge (Schneekloth, 2007; Franck and Stevens, 2013). It goes to show that new ways of 'breaking the rules' are incessantly re-invented – fuelling a constant process of spatial negotiation and political contestation.

One could argue that there are striking similarities between urban spaces and natural systems – in the sense that both have been mischaracterised by entrenched ideas of stability and permanence. Take the concept of the baseline – a reference state used to describe the state of an ecosystem before any negative impacts occurred. For many people, particularly conservationists, the main goal is to nurture 'sick' and 'disturbed' ecosystems back to the 'original' state before the damage was done. In this sense, baselines are more than just reference states of 'zero points' – they become the goal, the ideal state. The problem here is that no ecosystem could possibly exist in equilibrium, because ecosystems constantly shift from one state to another. Today, even the world's most pristine ecosystems are estimated to be around 12,000 years old. This may seem like eternity – however, on a geological timescale, it is the human equivalent of the blink of an eye (Marris, 2013). Like ecosystems, cities are often wrongly treated as static

objects. As Berger (2007) argues, the modern city is the product of continuous material transformation, which are fuelled by (wasteful) human intention and emergent urban natures (Lerup, 1994; Waldheim, 2012). In this perspective, there is no such thing as a 'permanent' or static urban space.

The most difficult wastelands to convert are those that are also occupied and used, however ineffectively, and where the attachments, interests, and activities of the occupiers are an intimate part of the conditions of the site. Coming to terms with those conditions and allowing the users to join the process of waste removal and rebuilding are things we have not yet learned to do well.

Lynch, 1972:234

The vignettes presented in the previous chapters suggest there is no such thing as a 'true' or 'formal' story. For example, narratives such as 'Pomona Island' and 'Manchester Waters' present competing accounts of Manchester's industrial past, different visions for the future and different value judgements of the site's emergent natures (Sandercock, 2003; Swanton, 2012). The documentary *Pomona Island* tells the tale of a ecological haven, a hidden place where people are free to appropriate the vacant site according to their needs. On the other hand, Peel's *Manchester Waters* tells a story about the erasure of derelict spaces in order to make way for the new. These different narratives suggest that each story is merely a construction of the past, present or future. Stories cannot tell themselves; one must transform an assembly of memories and events into narratives before any one story can be told. This act of construction is inherently selective – one chooses to include *this* but to exclude *that*, to use *these* words rather than *those* words, to put it *this* way instead of *that* way (Throgmorton, 2003; Sandercock, 2003). Each story is a product of people's purpose and desires, which is a crucial part of planning urban spaces. However, the notion of 'planning as storytelling' contradicts one of the main principles of planning practice; the application of technical expertise. Most planners want to believe that their texts have a single literal meaning – that they they can assume a neutral position as rational adjudicators of the public interest (Throgmorton, 2003). The outcomes of this study highlight that urban spaces cannot be reduced to a one-dimensional story. Rather, they are the loci of complex reconstructions.

Embracing this idea 'planning as storytelling' might be easier said than done, because several lines of critique have been directed at it (Throgmorton, 2003; Harvey, 2000). These critiques boil down to the argument that deliberative storytelling runs the risk of encouraging fabrications of the 'truth' – which favour process over substantive issues. However, one could argue that, in telling stories, urban planners inevitably start from a normative position. After all, each story purposefully tells readers and listeners what is

possible, desirable and acceptable. The issue here is not about which story is 'truer', but how each aspect of it is interpreted – and what this means in the wider context of urban planning. In selecting relevant facts, planners do more than just regurgitating the facts, statements, opinions and emotions of others. Rather, they purposefully reconstruct what the issues at hand *are*. Urban planners should therefore not only consider the facts at hand, but they should also reason *why* these facts matter. This not only helps urban planners to better understand the political arena in which they operate, but also allows them to get to grips with the wide range of emotions that shape urban spaces – including courage, hope, fear, despair and resolve (Forester, 1999; Throgmorton, 2003). Take the story of the homeless men who made a temporary home in the Pomona docklands. Rationalist explanations are usually deployed to explain the tactical choices made by homeless people to 'survive' or 'get by'. The value of this explanation needs to be recognised, however, the problem is that it underplays the importance of emotion and affect people's lives – particularly the homeless. The Pomona docklands may cater to the men's need to avoid the dangers of Manchester's city centre, but, more importantly, that site is made *meaningful* only by their emotional bonds with other people (Cloke et al., 2008; Cloke et al., 2011). The key message here is that the act of storytelling can help urban planners to value judgements and set priorities in the face of diverse, fluid narratives.

Unexpected uses can also be thought of as a form of communication between users and urban planners – which could potentially inspire concrete planning tools. Take the desire lines of the Pomona docklands. Desire lines are impressions of human purpose; they show which way people prefer to walk regardless of paved pathways. Instead of blaming those creating the desire lines for not following protocol, paying attention to desire lines will enable urban planners to respond to people's needs and desires more directly (Perkins, 2012). Urban planners cannot design in a vacuum; the best way to align desire lines with people's purpose is, in fact, to *not* design them at all. It usually takes nothing more than planting some grass seeds, and letting the erosion of the worn paths speak for itself. The reconstruction of the paths network across Central Park in New York was famously designed using this approach. Over the course of a few weeks, desired lines were allowed to gather form so that they could inform the construction of paved pathways. Rather than fighting unexpected behaviour, the urban planners quite literally followed the desire lines, which the community fondly used on a regular basis. The lesson here is that urban planning is also about observation; real people will have their own preferences and desires, and will act on them – whether or not it conforms with the paved paths laid out in front of them (Luckert, 2013; Myhill, 2004). Basically, desire lines teach urban planners that a clever creator observes and facilitates human behavior, rather than creating a perfectly thought-out plan from their own heads.

This brings us to the issue of 'organised fun' – what will happen to wastelands if we try to take back control? After all, the purpose and form of a wasteland cannot be fixed, for it will not be a spontaneous space anymore (Franck and Stevens, 2013). Take the example of desire lines, again. In academic literature there are numerous examples of university campuses whose trail networks were designed according to the forms and directions of desire lines. As Luckert (2013: 324) rightly questions: 'is it, in a way, akin to painting

over an already finished canvas?' One could argue that this is not entirely the case. As was argued previously, the notion of a stable and permanent city is a myth. However, this is not to deny that the paving over of a desire line will inevitably alter its nature as a spontaneous aspect of urban life. The result is more desirable on a practical level. On rainy days, dusty trails quickly become soggy ruts in no time, which often prove to be particularly problematic when people are walking in and out of buildings. Paved over desire paths provide a practical solution to this problem, in the sense that people can still take their preferred routes without risking muddy shoes in wet weather conditions (Luckert, 2013; Perkins, 2012). The key message here is that urban wastelands could hold clues to more creative tools for urban planning – which could prove to be at the expense of truly 'informal' urban spaces.

Wastelands are dynamic places to say the least, however, this does not mean that they should be glorified as such. Neglected spaces often harbour a wide range of illegal activities; concerns over criminal offences and anti-social behaviour must therefore be taken seriously. There are situations where there is '*laissez-faire*' is simply not an option – where tightening of urban space is needed in order to ensure the safety of the users of that space (Franck and Stevens, 2013; Scheeckloth, 2007). Take the Bijlmermeer in Amsterdam. This neighbourhood of large-scale housing estates of the 1960s and 1970s became 'non-spaces' – characterised by pollution, drugs, and violent crimes. Subsequently, local residents avoided these spaces in fear of brutal attacks. The root of the problem lied in the area's openness and lack of control, which was recently dealt with. The renewal of the Bijlmermeer included limiting access and drastically re-designing its open spaces so that their intended uses are much clearer (Helleman and Wassenberg, 2004). Hence, the line that separates the virtue of spontaneity or people's justified fear is *very* fine (Franck and Stevens, 2013). There is a lesson to be learnt here: indeterminate spaces are a manifestation of a planner's inability to interpret the complex socio-ecological system through which plans must be implemented. In this light, even a handful of homeless people or a couple of syringes left behind by drug users in wastelands represent much deeper failings – such as the gradual breakdown of the welfare system, or the lack of shelters (Cloke et al., 2008). In this perspective, the vignettes presented in this study are far from playful – they are like a mirror, reflecting the crucial issues to be addressed in urban planning.

Conclusion

A world without waste would be sterile – an unattainable ideal. This study rejects the apocalyptic images of 'death and decay' that have plagued urban wastelands in recognition of the fact that, however perversely, societies shape the environment they live in. Nature pervades the modern city – as is reflected by the fungi that thrive on dumped mattresses, the cheeky gulls that rip open bin bags, and the thorny bushes that push out new growth. These natural processes can be acknowledged, ignored, or denounced – but never stopped. Living organisms seize every opportunity to colonise the city's unique topographies – however marginalised or hostile that space might seem to us. Like these unruly urban natures, people like to defy the rules as a collective. The

vignettes of the previous chapters highlight that urban rules are broken in the most mundane ways – think of littering, graffiti, seed-bombing protests, the creation of artworks made of leftover materials *etcetera*. Unexpected uses of urban space are the product of a continuous struggle: between intended and unexpected activities, between fixed rules and unanticipated interpretations. In this light, urban rules are not social conventions set in stone. Rather, they are the everyday subject of continuous re-negotiation and political contestation. In this sense, the realms of urban wastelands like the Pomona docklands may prove to be strangely familiar.

Planning the modern city in its entirety is a myth – its inherent complexity transcends our ability to manage and control every square inch. Urban wastelands are testament to the fact that processes of decay and neglect incessantly puncture the urban matrix. However, this does not mean that derelict spaces can be shrugged off as 'unintended consequences'. Instead, they are expressions of urban natures and people's needs and desires – which, contrary to popular belief, are not binary oppositions of one another. Urban natures and cultures are the product of pervasive socio-ecological interactions, about which many different stories are told. Urban wastelands challenge planners to acknowledge that, they too, start from an inherently normative position in re-telling these stories and identifying the issues at hand. This presents urban planners with the challenge to *quite literally* to step into the matter of everyday urban life – instead of fighting the people that use urban space in unexpected ways, or micro-managing unruly urban natures. In re-telling and examining these different stories, urban planners should *not* try to tell 'wrong' from 'right'. Rather, they should reason *why* particular facts matter in the planning process. This study reflects the notion that urban planning is inherently normative, in the sense that it presents a purposeful selection of narratives intended to illustrate forces of informality that have shaped the Pomona docklands.

This study could serve as the basis for a future research agenda, which is concerned with harnessing the unique qualities of urban wastelands for the purposes of urban regeneration. Think of the paving over of desire paths, the promotion of street art, as well as the ecological, historical and recreational value of urban wastelands. This study forms a viable starting point for a more detailed 'guide' for designing with wasted spaces – providing urban planners with a more concrete toolbox for taking inspiration, and dealing with, unexpected uses of urban space. It raises another vital question: what will happen to unplanned spaces when we try to bend them to our will – which could be out of necessity, for the purposes of ensuring people's safety? How will these interventions change their unique characteristics – both socially and ecologically? These questions could form the foundation of an extensive study into dealing with the transformation of derelict spaces, and its impact on these spaces. This would enable urban planners to juxtapose and critically compare the strategies of 'organised fun' and '*laissez-faire*'.

This study contains a clear message that will aid these future endeavours. The challenge for urban planners is not to achieve a 'waste-less' world, but to work with the people and emergent urban natures that move beyond assigned boundaries and rules – all for the benefit of more creative, organic urban regeneration.

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