Surge, Sway and Yaw: Mooring Performances in *The Boat Project* and *A Room for London*

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Image 1 caption: Collective Spirit, moored on Pontoon Six, Brighton Marina, 27 May 2012. Photo © Stuart Andrews.

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Abstracts

This article examines performances at moorings in *The Boat Project* and *A Room for London*, two projects which both involved performances on and around a boat. In so doing, it advocates 'mooring performance' as a critical contribution to discussions on mobility and performance. In their editorial for the first issue of the *Mobilities* journal (2006), Hannam, Sheller and Urry argue that mobility needs to be understood in combination with moorings, although this perspective has not been fully explored elsewhere. Where Hannam et al. propose that moorings sustain mobility and the flow of capital, this article understands moorings as acts and places of performance, which temporarily bring together people and places. It discusses songs written for *The Boat Project* and recorded essays in *A Room for London* that reflect on actual, remembered and imagined experiences of journeys. It considers the significance of location in these mooring performances: *The Boat Project* at coastal harbours and *A Room for London* on London's South Bank. The article concludes that, faced with climate change and economic crisis, mooring performance offers a creative, generative and adaptive engagement with intersections of land and water, people and place that is a negotiation with, as much as a prop for, mobility.

Keywords: Mobilities, Site-specific, Lone Twin, Artangel, Living Architecture

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Introduction

Despite harbouring a persistent fascination with the sea, I'm not usually one to spend much time around boats. It may be something to do with having being taken out on an inflatable speedboat as a child. I have dark memories of bouncing over waves in a 'do or die' fashion, where die seemed by far the most likely. In 2012, two performances took place on and around boats that were moored to dry land, raising questions about what a moored performance might involve, while saving me from having to develop sea legs to investigate. There have been performances on boats before, notably by Walk the Plank, and at the edge of water, including work by Welfare State International and WildWorks. Recently, WildWorks has created large-scale spectacles by and about water and the sea, including *The Beautiful Journey* (2009), set in dockyards at Devonport and Tynemouth, and *The Passion* in Port Talbot (2011). In 2012, the company constructed a boat, *Ark-ive* outside the National Theatre. The tide may be turning but, for an island nation with a long—and not unproblematic—history of sea travel, facing climate change and economic decline in its once thriving coastal resorts, it is curious that so little performance in Britain takes place on and around water.

[Insert Image 1]

The Boat Project was created by Lone Twin , a performance company with a particular interest in place and journeys. Gary Winters and Gregg Whelan, Artistic

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Directors of the company, identify *The Boat Project* as one of the company's 'public projects', in which they work with a particular community, although here, that approach took place on a significant scale, as the company worked with communities in a region and along a coastline.[1] *The Boat Project* was the successful commission for the South East of England in the Arts Council 'Artists Taking the Lead' scheme, to represent the region in the 2012 Cultural Olympiad. In *The Boat Project*, people from the South East were invited to donate wooden objects, each one with a story, which were fashioned together into the fascia of a boat. Lone Twin also invited nominations for people from the region to crew the boat, Collective Spirit, on a 'Maiden Voyage' around the South East coast. Collective Spirit stopped at ports on the way for all manner of performance events, which included songs, dances, stories, installations, boat-side gatherings and welcome and farewell ceremonies. During the voyage, Johny Lamb, an 'alt-folk' musician and crew member, wrote and performed an emerging album of songs, *The Ship's Log*, which documented each leg of the voyage.[2]

The second project, *A Room for London*, was a competitive commission by Artangel, an arts commissioning agency in London, and Living Architecture, a social enterprise which commissions architects to build houses in the UK for visitor lets. Artangel has long been interested in creating work in and about place, particularly places of accommodation. In a recent work, *Yes, these Eyes are the Windows* (2014), Saskia Olde Wolbers invited people to explore a house once rented by Vincent Van Gogh, but uninhabited at the time of the installation. In *A Room for London*, the call was to build a

[1] Lone Twin, 'Lone Twin' (*n.d.*) <http://www.lonetwin.com>[accessed 11 June 2014].
[2] Johny Lamb, *The Ship's Log* <http://theshipslog.bandcamp.com>[accessed 25-2-14].

unique room on the South Bank. The successful entry was the 'Roi des Belges' (King of the Belgians), a riverboat, ostensibly, that took the name of a boat captained by Joseph Conrad on the River Congo, and another boat in Conrad's novella, *Heart of Darkness*.[3] The Roi des Belges was designed by David Kohn Architects, with artist Fiona Banner, and built by Millimetre, a UK design and build company, which has worked with both artists and architects. The boat was perched on top of the Queen Elizabeth Hall on London's South Bank and, during 2012, was used, varyingly, as a performance venue for a handful of spectators and larger online audiences, a hotel room run by ballot, and a creative retreat in which individuals could stay a night to develop ideas to enhance the city. Throughout the year, thirteen writers were invited to spend a few days and nights on board, before recording a podcast essay, *A London Address*, to reflect on their experiences.

What interests me about these projects is how they can help us open up conversations on mobility in performance, which has become a critical area of enquiry in theatre and performance studies. What may be apparent already is that, in my own experience of these projects, neither boat moved very much at all. Collective Spirit did sail the South East coast of England, but moored in harbours en route for public performance events. While the Roi des Belges appears to have been left high and dry by a terrifyingly high tide, it was in fact carefully craned into position and completed on site. In this article, I reflect on the acts and places of these 'mooring performances' and look back to earlier forms to situate them in a tradition of mooring performance. I consider the

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[3] First published in *Blackwood's Magazine,* 1899.

ways in which mooring performances articulate and reflect on experiences of being

'moored': temporarily tied to the land, while also being, to some degree, on water or at

sea. In exploring mooring performances in these two projects, I focus on moments and

experiences before and after mobility, whether one's own mobility or that of others and

whether this mobility is actual, remembered or anticipated. In each case, I suggest that

mooring performances enable individual, situated experiences that are significant as

performances in themselves, separate from but responding to the mobility of journeys

travelled or journeys to come.

Mobilities and Moorings

Recent interest in performance and mobility is in part a response to emerging

research in the social sciences. In their editorial for the first issue of the *Mobilities*

journal, 'Mobilities, Immobilities and Moorings', Kevin Hannam, Mimi Sheller and John

Urry identify mobility as 'an evocative keyword for the twenty-first century'.[4] In other

work, Mimi Sheller and John Urry identify 'the "new mobilities" paradigm' and a

'mobility turn' in the social sciences.[5] Hannam et al. argue that mobilities theory crosses

familiar disciplinary divides and attends to movements at macro and micro levels. They

find that,

> The concept of mobilities encompasses both the large-scale movements of people,
>
> objects, capital and information across the world, as well as the more local

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[4] Kevin Hannam, Mimi Sheller, and John Urry, 'Mobilities, Immobilities and Moorings', *Mobilities*, 1 (March 2006), pp. 1-22 (p. 1).
[5] Mimi Sheller and John Urry, 'The New Mobilities Paradigm', *Environment and Planning A*, 38 (2006), pp. 207-226 (p. 207).

processes of daily transportation, movement through public space and the travel

of material things within everyday life.[6]

These movements necessarily occur in—and impact on—places and, as Tim

Cresswell notes, the mobilities paradigm has inspired 'a diverse array of work on

particular forms *and spaces* of mobility'.[7] For Peter Merriman et al., mobilities theory

addresses 'how landscapes are produced, lived, experienced, and moved through in

dynamic, embodied and highly politicised ways'.[8] Yet, while mobilities theory takes

account of places, the term 'mobilities' emphasises movement through, rather than a

relationship with particular places. Similarly, the temptation may be to reflect on

movement as it is occurring, rather than in the time before or afterwards.

In considering performances on boats at rest, I return to Hannam, Sheller and

Urry's term 'moorings'. Hannam et al. position moorings as being in an interdependent

relationship with mobilities. It is worth quoting their discussion of this relationship at

length, as they include examples and note the operation of multiple moorings,

> [m]obilities cannot be described without attention to the necessary spatial,
>
> infrastructural and institutional moorings that configure and enable mobilities…
>
> There are interdependent systems of 'immobile' material worlds and especially
>
> some exceptionally immobile platforms, transmitters, roads, garages, stations,

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[6] Hannam et al., (p. 1).

[7] Tim Cresswell, 'Towards a Politics of Mobility', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space,* 28 (2010), pp. 17-31, p. 17. Emphasis added.

[8] Peter Merriman, George Revill, Tim Cresswell, Hayden Lorimer, David Matless, Gillian Rose, and John Wylie, 'Landscape, Mobility, Practice', *Social and Cultural Geography,* 9:2 (March 2008), pp. 191-212 (p. 209).

aerials, airports, docks, factories through which mobilizations of locality are performed and re-arrangements of place and scale materialized. The *complex* character of such systems stems from the multiple fixities or moorings often on a substantial scale that can enable the fluidities of liquid modernity, and especially of capital.[9]

Hannam et al. define 'moorings' as the stations and stops that 'configure and enable mobilities' and, by association, the fluidities of modernity, particularly capital. Despite the significance they attach to the term, the role of moorings has received little subsequent critical attention. This may be because the term 'mooring' is so closely connected to water that it is a difficult metaphor to apply elsewhere. As Cresswell indicates, there is research on 'forms and spaces' of mobility but terms of debate prioritise 'mobility', 'mobilities' and fluidity and what these enable, rather than valuing moorings and their potential for interdependent and less mechanistic relationships with place and space.

Foucault recognises the complexity of these relationships in terms of boats when he argues that,

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[9] Hannam et al., p. 3. Emphasis in original.

the boat has not only been for our civilisation, from the sixteenth century until the

present, the great instrument of economic development […] but has been

simultaneously the greatest reserve of the imagination.[10]

For Foucault, boats are heterotopic; a boat is 'a place without a place' that

connects, briefly, to harbours before being 'given over to the infinity of the sea'.[11] The

limited space and limitless movement lead Foucault to conclude that, '[t]he ship is the

heterotopia par excellence'.[12] Following Foucault's theory of heterotopia, the effect of a

boat mooring at an existing place may be either to 'create a space of illusion that exposes

every real space', or 'to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as

meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled'.[13] As such,

moorings pose a compelling challenge to those on sea and shore: who and what is real on

a boat at the intersection of land and water? Foucault's work enables us to see moorings

as combinations of places and people, and as locations for negotiating reality, illusion and

imagination. This invites us to open up conversations on moorings and, in *The Boat*

Project and *A Room for London,* to consider how each project negotiated the challenge of

its moorings.

From site-specificity to mobility

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[10] Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics*, 16 (Spring 1986), pp. 22-27 (p. 27).
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid

There is a growing seam of performance that is, in Cresswell's terms, and in various ways, 'on the move'.[14] Fiona Wilkie identifies such work as marking a shift 'from performance that *inhabits* a place to performance that *moves through* spaces'.[15] Roots of such work are particularly clear in walking art and performance, leaving aside far longer traditions of itinerant theatre troupes. Such is the familiarity of walking performance that, elsewhere, Wilkie purposefully discusses mobile practices other than walking to steer research off this beaten track.[16] The two projects here appear to involve sailing, a similarly alternate mobile practice, although only one of the two boats is actually seaworthy.

Writing on *The Boat Project*, David Overend recognises that mobile performance is, in part, a response to a more mobile world, one of 'globalization, the development of communication technologies and an unprecedented connectivity across boundaries'.[17] In this context, 'movement through time and space becomes a necessary condition', to which performance must respond.[18] However, for Overend, performance need not maintain these as norms and he cites Dan Rebellato, who argues that theatre is able to enhance what Rebellato terms the 'cosmopolitan imagination'; and offer 'new ways of

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[14] Tim Cresswell, *On the Move* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006).
[15] Fiona Wilkie, 'The Production of "Site": Site-Specific Theatre', in *Concise Companion to Contemporary British and Irish Theatre*, ed. by Nadine Holdsworth and Mary Luckhurst (Oxford: Blackwell, 2013), pp. 87-106 (p. 90). Emphasis in original.
[16] Fiona Wilkie, 'Site-Specific Performance and the Mobility Turn', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 22.2 (2012), pp. 203-12 (p. 204).
[17] David Overend, 'Making Routes: Relational Journeys in Contemporary Performance', *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 33.3 (2013), pp. 365-81 (p. 366).
[18] Ibid.

grasping the enormity of the world'.[19] While mobile performance may attend to the wiles of a mobile world, grounded in capital and communication, it also invites individuals to re-imagine the world and their position within it. Such imaginative work takes on particular significance at a mooring, which Foucault enables us to read as the intersection of alternate worlds.

In one instance of re-imagining relations of space and mobility, Minty Donald discusses performances on the River Clyde, which runs through Glasgow. Donald's is one of few articles that investigate performance on water and she focuses on the curious relationship between a river and the city through which it runs. For Donald, urban rivers pass through and yet are enduring parts of cities. In this dual form, they 'facilitate an understanding of […] how contemporary cities, especially post-industrial cities, function, while offering a paradigm for a concept of space/place which productively negotiates tensions between site-specificity and mobility'.[20] Donald identifies contrasting realities of land and water: the apparently stable land and 'unruliness' of the river, and the combination of industrial and post-industrial place. Urban rivers, such as the Clyde, offer compelling opportunities for mooring performances, which tie us, temporarily, to contrasting versions of place. In such performances, we may discover new, hybrid realities, informed both by the constituents of the mooring and also the life, work, memories and stories we bring to a particular tying together of water and land.

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[19] Dan Rebellato, *Theatre & Globalization* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 74.
[20] Minty Donald, 'The Urban River and Site-Specific Performance', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 22.2 (2012), 213-23 (p. 214).

There is a pressing need to rethink our relationship with water and land. Where once we carved out land from the sea, coastal erosion, rising sea levels and recent flooding are requiring us to rethink and reimagine the relationship between water and land and to allow for this relationship to be mutable. In *Carrlands* (2007), Mike Pearson created site-specific audio recordings that explored the 'Carrs', land in Lincolnshire that had once flooded regularly, but which was subsequently managed to create agricultural land out of reach of the sea.[21] While the *Carrlands* recordings may be listened to as a walk, listening is not dependent on being in specific places, perhaps because such places may well succumb to the sea again. We are past any point of imagining that we might draw neat lines between land and sea or, by implication, between apparently separate versions of reality.

In 2000-2001, 2007, 2012 and 2014, floods in Britain provided a significant challenge to those living and working on coasts and floodplains. They required us to question how close we should expect to live, untroubled, by the sea; and to identify the places that we may need to release, intermittently or permanently, to the waves. Too often such questions are spoken in the language of loss: we must 'let go' of land as we would of a loved one. Instead, I propose that we look to the opportunities of shifting formations and experiences of place; and to the interplay between places mapped on land and those charted at sea.

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[21] Mike Pearson, *Carrlands* (2007) <http://www.carrlands.org.uk>[accessed 24 February 2014].

On the British coastline, the storms of 2014 compounded existing and longstanding issues of the decline of tourism and restrictions on the fishing industry, which have challenged the economy and life of coastal communities. At a time when the relationship between land and water is a critical feature of national conversation, performance provides a compelling mode of re-imagining this relationship at local, national and global levels. Waist-deep in floods, with houses and rail-lines torn from the land, we must reconsider how we understand land and water in a changing world. The more that land and water coalesce, the more we need to understand, allow for and engage in the experience of being situated at points of coalescence.

Performance and mooring

Moorings are both physical places and acts of securing a boat. As acts, they are as much art as science, involve single or multiple mooring lines and varying degrees of stillness. Mooring is no guarantee of stable conditions, as boats, tides and weather can all influence the stability of a moored boat. Such effects reveal a lexicon of terms for movement on water: surge, sway, heave, pitch, roll and yaw.[22] Increasingly, we will need to take up these terms to debate and discover the possibilities of performance at the intersection of place and mobility, water and land. This said, there are precedents here, as performance has long been a familiar feature of moorings.

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[22] John W. Gaythwaite, *Design of Marine Facilities for the Berthing, Mooring, and Repair of Vessels* (Virginia: ASCE Press, 2004), 2nd ed., p. 372.

Jörn Weinhold observes that, in the days of sail, the arrival of a sailing ship into harbour was a familiar public spectacle.[23] He describes 'sailortowns', which included both the spectacle of the harbour and artistic performances for sailors, those in allied industries and visitors. For Weinhold,

In the heydays of the sailing-ships, waterfront neighbourhoods around the world appeared to be very much alike. Each with their urban fabric structured by the shops and business establishments closely linked to sailors' and marine interests such as houses of ship chandlers, marine surveyors, ropewalks, sail lofts, but also taverns, tattooing parlours, music halls, souvenir shops, bars and brothels… Due to their exotic and at times dangerous appearances, sailortowns, as amusement districts of seaport cities with excitements like dance halls, wax figure cabinets or ghost trains, became popular with the middle classes and were soon turned into tourist sites.[24]

In the present, Weinhold is concerned that 'sailortowns' are being remade through urban regeneration, often to a similarly formulaic model. As he notes, this tends to involve adding high culture to a harbour, which may include museums, galleries or, in Sydney, an opera house, rather than enabling encounters with distinctive 'maritime

[23] Jörn Weinhold, 'Port Culture: Maritime Entertainment and Urban Revitalisation, 1950-2000', in *Creative Urban Milieus: Historical Perspectives on Culture, Economy, and the City*, ed. by Martina Heßler and Clemens Zimmerman (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2008), pp. 179-208.
[24] Ibid., pp. 185-86.

cultural landscapes'.[25] Donald shows similar unease with the theming of the Cyldewaterfront, 'with the water itself largely disregarded'.[26] Such transformations risk re-emphasising distinctions between land and sea in ways that may prove untenable, certainly for places without sea defences. Perched on the water's edge, these high art institutions are situated in conventional tourist economies and cultural hierarchies and are separate from river, sea or harbour life. As such, they limit opportunities to reimagine relationships between water and land, which is unsettling at a time of climate change.

Robert Macfarlane identifies a very different form of maritime performance in the stories and songs by which sailors in pre-modern times reported journeys by sea. These accounts tell of the 'ocean roads, the sea lanes' that bisect the sea and that are known and passed on in oral account, rather than through marks on the water.[27] For Macfarlane, 'sea roads are dissolving paths whose passage leaves no trace beyond a wake'.[28] Knowledge of sea roads means that, while coastal communities are situated on the edge of the land, they are also connected to communities along the coast and in other countries and continents. Through these oral performances, sailors passed on their knowledge of seaways and threaded together coastal communities. As Macfarlane writes of sea roads, '[t]hey survive as convention, tradition, as a sequence of coordinates, as a series of way marks, as dotted lines on charts, and as *stories and songs*'.[29] Through these means, sailors found their way from one place to another and recounted their experiences to those on

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[25] Ibid., p. 179.
[26] Donald., 'The Urban River', p. 222.
[27] Robert Macfarlane, *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot* (London: Penguin, 2013), p. 88.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid. Emphasis added.

land. As a result, Macfarlane finds that versions of stories exist along a coastline and document the changing experiences of those sailing the seaways.

These oral accounts are conditional modes of knowing the sea and reveal the long-understood potential of story and song to guide and enable reflection on journeys by sea. This may explain their inclusion in the two projects I consider here. In *The Boat Project*, Johny Lamb (Thirty Pounds of Bone) wrote, sung and recorded an album, *The Ship's Log*, in which he documented his time as a crew-member on the 'Maiden Voyage'. In *A Room for London*, thirteen writers each spent a few days on board the Roi des Belges and recorded a podcast essay, *A London Address,* from their temporary 'address' in London. In each case, these performances revealed individual experiences of being on board a boat. In examining these performances, I focus on these accounts, their negotiations of land and water, their connecting of reality and imagination, and I investigate the mooring places themselves. In particular, I discuss Collective Spirit's stay, first in Brighton, and later in Margate, for the 'Margate Welcomes *The Boat Project*' festival; and the curious position of the Roi des Belges high above London's South Bank and the Thames.

The Boat Project

It is May 2012. I'm upstairs in the dining room of the Nightingale Theatre in Brighton[30]. There's a band playing. It's ridiculously hot. Lamb is there with musicians from Brighton: Mary Hampton and some of Electric Soft Parade and Brakes. While the

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[30] The Nightingale Theatre was then located above the Grand Central Bar in Brighton.

event is part of *The Boat Project*, it is also a concert by local bands in a room above a pub on a Saturday night. The lines between local and regional events are indistinct. After the first band, Lamb takes to the stage and sets out on a series of songs, which include those written aboard and about *The Boat Project*.

Lamb's songs are 'snapshots' that recount the story so far. In *The Boatshed*, he questions, 'how long until / how long until we are sailing?' and his refrain yearns for the voyage to begin. With another, the project has moved on. Once on the water, Lamb reveals the risks of the enterprise. In *A Perilous 400 Yards (Portsmouth)*, he recounts falling over the side and celebrates the safety of the harbour: 'a thousand times forgive the sea / and when we're moored I'll kiss this city'.[31] The songs then bring the journey to Brighton, with the boat in the marina. They make the project and voyage peculiarly present in the room. This is not, then, a night of reflection on an event that is over. Tomorrow will bring a new section of the sea road, with new adventures and new dangers.

The songs recounted events, such as Lamb's fall, that were still very recent. Lamb wrote a song in each port of call, often on the day that it would first be performed, and he released each song before the boat left the harbour. The emerging collection reveals the crew adapting to the particular mobility of the boat and becoming a company of sailors working together on the sea. The boat and crew were safe here for the night, but this was too early in the voyage for the experience to be familiar. Each stop along the way

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[31] Lamb, *The Ship's Log*.

provided an opportunity for company and crew to rest, look back and find their way on

together. Mooring-by-mooring, knot-by-knot, the crew would discover and reflect on

each new stage of the journey. Lamb's songs mention crew-members by name and testify

to the crew's assured handling of the boat. Later, in listening to the album, I piece

together the exploits that followed the Brighton mooring. In *These People Are Brave*

(Margate), having been 'knocked down in Dover, inside Satan's Teeth', Lamb remembers

being held in by 'Damian', a guest First Mate.[32] To some degree, the songs may have

helped the crew sail efficiently and learn from each new experience, thereby enabling

fluidity on water, but they also allowed for rich readings of the crew's voyage as an

emerging, experiential practice.

Writing in 1928, William Saunders observed that the British sailor, 'from time

immemorial, made a practice of singing at his work', particularly in sea shanties.[33]

Saunders explains that the shanty was led by an appointed 'shantyman' of good voice who

guided sailors through familiar and improvised songs. While the solos, intended for the

crew alone, tended to be 'crude and vulgar', Saunders cites Sir Richard R. Terry's

observation that '"the choruses - shouted out by the whole working party - would be

heard all over the ship and even penetrate ashore if she were in port"'.[34] As a result,

choruses were devoid of 'course expression', lest they offend those on land.[35]

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[32] Ibid.
[33] William Saunders, 'Sailor Songs and Songs of the Sea', *The Musical Quarterly*, 14 (July 1928), 339-57 (p. 339).
[34] Ibid., p. 344, citing Terry.
[35] Ibid.

To some degree, Lamb's songs test Saunders' definition of shanties. They were accompanied, which would have troubled Saunders' shantyman, and they were removed from the harbour and work of sailing to the upstairs of a pub. Nonetheless, there are similarities, not least of name in *The Milton Keynes Land Shanty*, which recounted Collective Spirit's journey via the M25 motorway to the inland city of Milton Keynes. Similarly, Lamb composed these songs while sailing the boat,, perhaps testing solos with the crew and expurgating them for those on the shore. Songs heard on shore emerged from the experience of the voyage, to which singer and crew would return. Beyond words alone, the songs depicted experiences of being on board the boat. As Saunders writes, shanties provided 'parallel rhythmical sound' to the physical actions of sailing a boat along a course.[36] In *The Plunging of Gannets (Brighton)*, the slow instrumental sections told of smooth, indolent seas.

For those on land, Lamb was a documenter and even a 'witness', as Rokem has theorised it. He was the only crew-member to sail the full voyage and his songs gave those on land a way to engage with the experience.[37] Yet, in Brighton, with other crew-members sitting towards the back of the room, it became clear that Lamb was not merely sharing these stories and experiences with spectators but also with his fellow sailors. Lamb was both sailor and landsman, as he worked with both the crew on board and with Lone Twin on land. In each port, he sung with local musicians, so the growing body of songs altered a little with each new gig. He describes being fascinated 'to hear the same

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[36] Ibid., p. 339.
[37] Freddie Rokem, 'Witnessing Woyzeck: Theatricality and the Empowerment of the Spectator', *SubStance*, 31.2-3 (2002), pp. 167-183.

songs rendered so differently at each performance'[38]. *The Ship's Log* evidenced the

complexity of each mooring, which brought together previously distinct elements: locals

and visitors, crew and company. At the same time, the event established connections

with older forms of performance, specifically song, in a contemporary reworking of

seafaring culture at ports of call.

As the songs finished, a conversation began among members of the crew: the

faces of the names in the songs. For a moment, as they sat and talked among the

audience, the crew and spectators seemed to blur together. Shortly afterwards, spectators

began to leave, while those from the project gathered at the back. In that shift, we each

became part of a quiet, almost imperceptible performance in which crew and spectators

started to release the boat from its moorings. The departure of the boat would be far more

public, but it began with these small acts of loosening ties.

Margate

As Collective Spirit rounded the South East corner of England, it stopped at

Margate. From having been a thriving tourist resort in the nineteenth century, Margate is

now one of many coastal towns facing significant and multiple pressures. In 2013, the

Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) included Margate in its report, *Turning the Tide: Social*

Justice in Five Seaside Towns. The report concluded that 'Margate today is in an

advanced state of decline'.[39] This is partly economic and the report identifies that thirty

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[38] Johny Lamb, personal communication, June 2014.
[39] Centre for Social Justice, *Turning the Tide: Social Justice in Seaside Towns* (London: Centre for Social Justice), p. 13.

per cent of the population is in the poorest ten per cent of the country. It also finds the

town's housing stock is more suited to past tourist practices than contemporary

conditions[40]. In 2011, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation identified current challenges

faced by UK coastal communities: 'poverty, deprivation and isolation' and now climate

change, combined with 'a lack of adaptive capacity, which is likely to increase the

vulnerability of disadvantaged coastal communities to climate change'.[41]

Whelan and Winters explain that an inspiration for *The Boat Project* was the

building of Team Phillips, a catamaran, at Totnes, in the South West. They observed

palpable community interest in the build process.[42] The building of Collective Spirit

echoed that project, by inviting communities, several of which were on the coast, to

donate wooden objects and crew to the building and sailing of this boat. Lone Twin then

engaging artists and local communities to mark the arrival of the boat in each port. The

project brought together donors, boat-builders, crew and performers as active agents in an

'adaptive practice' in which a project that had animated a small town was reimagined to

engage an entire region.

At Margate, high winds and rain affected sailing schedules and Collective Spirit

arrived on a trailer by road. While an inconvenience, this was also a reminder of the

dangers of the sea, which would be well known to those living on the coast. This was not

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[40] Ibid.

[41] Mary Zsamboky, Amalia Fernández-Bilbao, David Smith, Jasper Knight, and James Allan, *Impacts of Climate Change on Disadvantaged UK Coastal Communities* (York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, March 2011), p. 49.

[42] David Williams and Carl Lavery, *Good Luck Everybody* (Aberystwyth: Performance Research Books, 2011).

a journey to test survival, particularly given the inexperience of some of the crew. What was critical was that the boat was present at each place on the journey. That presence returned the donated objects in their new form as part of the boat and situated objects, stories and crew in a new 'collective' context. It re-established the sea as a critical, if dangerous, means of reaching the town, connected together communities along the coast and emphasised the coast as a vital part of the region. Through this pattern of collecting and returning people and objects in new forms and with new skills and experience along a past route, the project re-staged both Weinhold's and Macfarlane's accounts of the spectacle of a boat arriving at a harbour, bringing people, objects and the tales of a journey by sea.

To welcome Collective Spirit, Margate staged a four-day festival, 'Margate hosts *The Boat Project*', co-ordinated by Parrabbola, a London-based community theatre company, and for which it was awarded funding from both Arts Council England and Kent County Council. The festival emphasised Margate's performance of welcome as separate to, albeit in dialogue with, *The Boat Project*. As James Gough of Parrabbola observes of Collective Spirit, '[a]lthough she is an incredibly special thing, she's not more special than Margate'.[43] Margate has its own cultural practices and history, particularly in the work of JMW Turner, who was at school in Margate and later became a regular visitor. The Turner Contemporary gallery, which opened in 2011, is located on the site of the guest-house in which Turner stayed to study the sea and sky (and better acquaint himself with the landlady, Mrs Booth). While the gallery is a grand 'institution

[43] Cass Productions, *Margate Hosts the Boat Project*
<http://vimeo.com/58464946>[accessed 23 February 2014].

on the edge', as Weinhold might observe, it also focuses on the distinctive 'maritime cultural landscapes', that Weinhold argues are all often separate from such institutions. Several gallery spaces incorporate windows that reveal the light and views of sea and sky that called Turner to Margate.[44] The gallery hosted the first and last collection days for Collective Spirit and was a venue for 'Margate Hosts the Boat Project'. In contributing to the welcome of *The Boat Project*, the festival and gallery demonstrated that Collective Spirit was not here to 'save' Margate but to engage in the life and culture of the town.

The festival events at Margate were similar to those in other ports of call and included *The Sailor Returns*, a welcome event; *The Ship's Log*, with local musicians; a boat-side gathering to meet project members; an exchange of gifts; a craft event; and a dance and 'feast'. In *The Sailor Returns*, crew-members were welcomed individually to venues across the town in an event that evoked the return of sailors from the sea in the late eighteenth and in the nineteenth century, during which time 'the Sailor's Return' was a popular name for public houses. In each of these encounters, the sailors were fed and entertained, in exchange for stories of their journey. *The Sailor Returns* was a meeting of town and project and a statement of intent being voiced for, if not by the town: Margate was not merely another stop on the way.

The moorings often only lasted a few days, but in that time Lone Twin enabled their collaborators and local participants at each port of call to imagine events that might accompany the arrival of a boat into each particular 'port'. However, this was not

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[44] Weinhold, 'Port Culture', p. 179.

primarily an exercise in stimulating regeneration. Instead, it emphasised the distinctiveness of journeying by sea: the embodied knowledge and experience of being at sea and returning to shore. In a series of mooring performances, crew, artists and local communities shared stories and experiences of connection and intersection that regenerated interest in the sea as much as the land. The project identified ways in which a boat and its journeys, arrivals and departures can invite responses from those on shore. Beyond this, it located coastal communities as intersections, rather than isolated outposts, restaging the connection between land and sea 'ways'. In focusing so closely on local people, practices, stories and events, the project set up a powerful model for community engagement and regeneration projects and asked how we might engage meaningfully with communities and with local mooring performances in 'maritime cultural landscapes' in the future.

A Room for London

The Roi des Belges has been 'moored' on the South Bank of the River Thames since 2012. In its first year, it was present during the London Olympics, the Thames Festival, of which it was part, and Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee celebrations, which included a flotilla of some 600 boats on the Thames. Its name and position close to the Thames connect it to Joseph Conrad's boat, the Roi des Belges, and that in his novella, *Heart of Darkness*, but also to the Nellie, the boat on which the novella begins, and which he describes as being becalmed a little further along the river,

The Nellie, a cruising yawl, swung to her anchor without a flutter of the sails, and was at rest. The flood had made, the wind was nearly calm, and being bound down the river, the only thing for it was to come to and wait for the turn of the tide.[45]

On board the Nellie and in the evening gloom, Conrad's protagonist, Charlie Marlow, begins to recount a story of his time working on the Roi des Belges on the Congo River, which, in the nineteenth century, was under Belgian rule. Marlow's tale involves his search for 'Mr Kurtz', who runs an ivory trading post for Marlow's employer. Marlow is not a 'typical' sailor, certainly in terms of his storytelling, 'to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel, but outside enveloping the tale', as if 'misty halos'.[46] This said, the need to wait out the tide allows time for an expansive tale. Writing on *Heart of Darkness*, Cannon Schmitt describes the time between tides as 'near-imprisonment', in which restriction can prove generative.[47] He relates that evening on the Nellie to Walter Benjamin's essay, 'The Storyteller'. For Benjamin,

Boredom is the dream bird that hatches the egg of experience. A rustling in the leaves drives him away. His nesting places—the activities that are intimately associated with boredom—are already extinct in the cities and are declining in the country as well.[48]

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[45] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 3.
[46] Ibid., p. 6.
[47] Cannon Schmitt, 'Tidal Conrad (Literally)', *Victorian Studies*, 55.1 (Autumn 2012), 7-29 (p. 21).
[48] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Shocken Books, 2007), p. 91.

For Schmitt, the Nellie, moored and at rest, is a nesting place in a city in which, for Benjamin, nesting is otherwise extinct. Nests on water take on particular significance for, as Donald observes, the relationship between an urban river and city can be difficult and disconnected. Here, on the river and in the city, Schmitt's reading of Benjamin and Conrad's novella suggests that moorings constitute a form of nest. In so doing, they create critical opportunities to experience the interconnection of river and city, find or rediscover connections between the two and unfold memories and stories in response. By citing and re-siting the Nellie, *A Room for London* is effectively 'rewilding'[49] nesting places in the city and inviting new negotiations of relations between river and city.

A London Address

I'm standing at a food van just below the boat. It's cold, almost too cold to hover outside and eat. The boat looms above; the windows are dark tonight. The logic of the boat is unclear: who was it that ran it ashore? On what storm was it cast up here? It might be a ghost ship, fresh from the unsavoury colonial trade routes that haunt the Thames and yet have left no trace on the water. There is something unsettling about the lack of attention that is being paid to the boat by those below. In a revision of de Certeau: these 'walkers' do not read the texts that are written *above* them or, for that matter, in the river below.[50] Once or twice, as I've walked along Waterloo Bridge at night, higher, almost level with the boat, the lights have been on in the windows. I've waited to see movement

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[49] See Dave Foreman, *Rewilding North America: A Vision for Conservation in the 21st Century* (Washington: Island Press, 2004).
[50] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

and wondered at the view from inside. There was little to see and the boat maintained its mystery while being a part of and apart from London.

With little chance to see inside, the recordings of *A London Address* are some of the only indications of life on board the boat. Through memories, stories, dreams and sensations, the authors reflect on their time aboard, almost entirely alone and removed from the surge, sway and yaw of both river and city. As in Conrad's description of Marlow, these authors were not, primarily, sailors, nor were they at sea—nor even afloat. As such, their accounts find their own form: part kernel, part misty halo. In seeking their shape, writers refer to existing texts on board: the books in the ship's library; the recordings and notes by writers and visitors before them; and, inevitably, Conrad's writing and, most of all, *Heart of Darkness*.

The recordings begin with what might be a field recording of sounds.[51] It is short and indistinct: a theme tune of sorts that marks out the words as being from a boat and transporting the listener to a time and place on board. Several writers begin with a brief comment before a more formal start to their essay. In the first recording, in January, Juan Gabriel Vásquez begins his essay by turning to Conrad,

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[51] The recordings are available online at: Artangel, *A London Address (n.d.)* < http://www.artangel.org.uk//projects/2012/a_room_for_london/a_london_address/a_lond on_address>[accessed 24 February 2014] and in *A London Address: The Artangel Essays* (London: Granta, 2013).

Day I: Arrival. I have come to the river, to this steamboat run ashore on the

rooftops of London, 121 years and 172 days after Captain Józef Teodor Konrad

Korzeniowski, on board SS Roi des Belges, wrote these instructions:

'Low land and outlying sandbanks a little to port.

Steering for a little square white patch. Stick on it.

Pass close to the sands—*Cautiously!*'[52]

Vásquez begins as if he has taken over as captain on Conrad's boat and also on

Marlow's, a boat that he confesses to knowing well. On his first night, he wakes, walks

through the boat and lies down on the floor, 'this is the part of the deck where Marlow

'seemed to see Kurtz for the first time'—Kurtz, the mystery employee whom Marlow

must find.[53] Later, turning off the light, he sees visions of 'Conradian horror' from

Apocalypse Now, Francis Ford Coppola's reworking of Conrad's novella, set in the

Vietnam War.[54] On board, albeit not imprisoned, Vásquez inhabits these multiple boats in

ways that become palpable at night. Alain Mabanckou experiences a similar sensation

and imagines Conrad emerging at night to stalk the boat. The mooring becomes a chance

to experience intersections with Conrad's writing and life—both his fiction and his

personal records of safe 'ways' along rivers.

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[52] Conrad, cited in Juan Gabriel Vásquez, 'January: Remember the Future', in Artangel, *A London Address* (*n.d.),* italics in original.
[53] Ibid., p/ 9.
[54] Ibid., p. 10.

Unlike the crew of Collective Spirit, who often slept on shore, the writers on the Roi des Belges remained on board, where night unsettled the divide between reality and imagination. Some reported that they woke accidentally or after having been disturbed. Ahdaf Soueif is woken three times one night by an alarm. By the third time, she begins reading the words of the others who have slept here, as if it is they who have shaken her awake. Waking becomes so critical for Jeanette Winterson that she sets an alarm, so as not to miss the chance to look out on the city at night. The writers found themselves moored both to the world they found on the boat and that of Conrad and his novella, at a time when, to rework Donald's term for the urban river, the mind is particularly prone to 'unruly' imagining.

Despite the secure position of the boat, well above the river, and the difficulty of others accessing this unlikely berth to release its ties, many of the writers felt a distinct potential for movement. What else does a boat do but sail? Mabanckou records his *A London Address* one evening. He describes being tired and imagines waking in the morning as the boat berths in Africa. Winterson urges that she and perhaps we, her listener, 'unmoor the boat'.[55] It is not clear how we might help with this unmooring long after her stay, except by an imaginative act. She proffers a collaborative contrivance, a daredevil trick, in which she and we, then and now, conspire together to unmoor a boat that is itself caught between times past and present: Conrad's, Marlow's, Winterson's and our own, and between fact and fiction. Living on this boat was forever marked by the

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[55] Jeanette Winterson, 'February: A Place before the Flood', in *A London Address* (*n.d.*).

possibility of falling asleep and waking somewhere new. At night, time and place were at play and distant moorings were not merely possibilities but lures.

For Vásquez, and for writers later in the year, the boat inspires memories of travel. He remembers his own journey to London from Bogotá, 'eight thousand feet above sea level in the middle of the Andes'.[56] Several writers address post-colonialism in their professional practice and so are particularly sensitive to the significance of journeys and border crossings. Alone, they re-discover past co-ordinates, personal journeys, and places in which they continue to live, while, on the Roi des Belges, they are temporarily removed from each of these. Michael Ondaatje describes his arrival to London from Sri Lanka; his walk across the Thames to and from school; and a recent journey along the Thames on a friend's 'skiff'[57]. Despite, and perhaps because of, the boat's stillness, he focuses in on memories of movement. The boat is made mobile in the minds of its inhabitants, it is they who move through this craft and their thoughts that bring the heave, surge and sway to a boat that is forever still.

On the Roi des Belges, the writers are outsiders in the city. They imagine the lives of passers-by, just as those below may imagine them on board, on nights when the lights are on. At times, the writers leave the boat. Caryl Phillips recounts his experience of walking along the Embankment to find a woman, Victoria, who lives 'in and around Victoria Embankment Gardens'.[58] Victoria is asleep and, instead of waking her, Phillips

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[56] Vásquez, 'January: Remember the Future', in *A London Address* (*n.d.*).
[57] Michael Ondaatje, 'June: A Port Accent', in *A London Address* (*n.d.*)..
[58] Caryl Phillips, 'April', *A London Address* (*n.d.*).

contemplates the surrounding buildings. This was not, then, socially-engaged performance in ways that involved others, as in *The Boat Project*. Instead, the writers found interconnections with people and places that were absent, imagined or, in this case, asleep. In so doing, the experience of mooring led the authors to focus on worlds, both real and imagined, to which they were temporarily tied.

Ahdaf Soueif suggests that one can feel 'instantly at home on a boat', as 'the transient self becomes at one with the transient boat, perhaps'.[59] Perhaps, for this reason, the writers conjured thoughts of travel even when none was practically possible. The experience of being moored on a boat loosens one's ties to land, even in a boat that will not sail. Although Mabanckou and Winterson sensed the boat may loose its moorings, it was they who would slip away after a few days on board, leaving the boat empty, dark and still. Without the memories, dreams and physical movement of individuals on board, the Roi des Belges will not set sail on journeys actual, remembered or imagined.

Casting off

In *The Boat Project* and *A Room for London*, moorings were more than supporting acts for mobility. While moorings may enable journeys by water, so journeys enable performances at and of moorings. In these projects, moorings constituted critical sites and acts of performance that are in need of further study as part of a larger investigation of performances of both mobility and mooring. This will need to take into

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[59] Ahdaf Soueif, 'September', *A London Address* (*n.d.*).

account the ways in which the terminology, experience and practice of mooring can help us understand and address acts of crossing between familiar and unfamiliar worlds.

Both *The Boat Project* and *A Room for London* might be considered socially engaged performances, particularly the former, in which the company, crew and performers engaged with one another and with local communities. Yet these were not neat encounters with single communities. On the Roi des Belges, the writers discovered themselves in a network of relations, a web of mooring lines, which they traced in their individual recordings of *A London Address*. While Collective Spirit arrived at an agreed mooring, the Roi des Belges was depicted, as the Nellie, in an accidental mooring. In both cases, this engagement with the land was temporary, tenuous and open to being undone. Rather than being simple, practical ties to the land, moorings are places and acts that hold us to both land and water for a time. At any point, a boat may slip its lines, casting off by accident or design, to rediscover past travels and previous moorings, all of which call one away from the place one is in and out on actual, remembered and imagined journeys.

In these projects, moorings were opening gambits, a welcome and an invitation to stay awhile. Moorings are necessarily multiple, as they require boat and land, land and water, place and act. As these projects demonstrate, moorings comprise rich opportunities to re-imagine and re-work past practices and present understandings. From spectacles of boats arriving at a harbour and the amusements of popular entertainment, to experiences of navigation and one's own departures and arrivals, mooring performances are not this

or that but this *and* that. They are a combination of people, places, times and practices that can be productively explored in person, in part by reimagining one's own journeys, arrivals and departures.

There's more to address here, as it may be that moorings aren't stops at all. As Foucault notes, reflecting on Galileo, 'the stability of a thing was only its movement indefinitely slowed down'.[60] Following Benjamin's dream bird of experience, we are never still, least of all when we are held in one place for any length of time. We need to look further, to other practices of stopping, to consider whether mooring is only relevant to intersections of land and water, and how our perceptions of mooring will alter given current climatic and economic agendas. It may be that the multiplicity and fluidity of mooring will help us understand other experiences of apparent stillness before and after mobility. However, there may also be a particular richness to mooring on water that should temper any temptation to apply mooring widely as metaphor.

Hannam et al. suggest that moorings enable mobility, yet the performances here indicate that there is more to discover. Moorings challenge any binary of being in a place or moving through a place: we are tied to place and movement at the same time. Moorings help us consider how we might approach an uncertain future of climate change, whereas mobility allows us to avoid such difficult questions by unmooring and moving on. Moorings allow us to notice and attend to what is around us in the place in which we find ourselves and in our memories and in fictions of travel. And while moorings may well aid

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[60] Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 23.

mobility, so *The Ship's Log* testifies to the difficulties of sustaining physical mobility on the sea, regardless of moorings. Similarly, the recordings of *A London Address* reveal that thoughts can be surprisingly mobile while, and because, one is moored. Rather than enabling physical mobility, the mooring of these two projects invited actual and imagined sensations of both stillness and mobility; and a creative and mobile mind.

The Boat Project and *A Room for London* indicate ways in which mooring performance can and, given the heritage of performance at and of moorings, *must* be a part of our understanding of mobilities. At a time of climate change and economic crisis, in which interconnected and dialogic actions will be required to deal with shifting borders of land and water, mooring performance offers a creative, generative and adaptive encounter with such borders. As Wilkie observes, we must find new ways of being on the move. *The Boat Project* and *A Room for London* indicate that these 'ways' must stretch beyond those that occur on land alone. In addressing mobility through an expanded set of ways of moving, we must also attend to moorings: the places and acts by which we stop to rest and regroup, wait out the storm, and share stories and songs amid the squall.