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Trespassing for the Right to Roam

Challenging Private Property Relations through Place-Making and Commoning in England



Drawing of a path in the Brighton Downs by author.

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Abstract

This thesis project examines the dynamics of trespass protests, particularly focusing on the Right to Roam (RTR) movement in England. I ask in what ways trespass action for roaming rights challenges private property relations and embodies alternative relations to land and nature. Grounded in historical materialist and political-economic theories, private property is conceptualised as social and spatial relations of accumulation by dispossession and alienation, resulting in the enrichment of few at the expense of many. Through a sensory ethnographic framework and a mixed-method approach, I analyse how trespass actions embody bottom-up resistance against enclosure and commodification through place-making practices, highlighting themes of loss, belonging, and commoning. The RTR movement, while advocating for wider roaming rights, transcends the discussion of mere access to land under private ownership. Instead, it seeks to reclaim the commons as a cultural framework for fostering alternative socio-ecological relations rooted in grassroots concepts of care and reciprocity. By employing tactics such as storytelling, knowledge sharing and wild service, RTR emphasises collective rights and challenges the legitimacy of private ownership of land. The research underscores the need for experiential data collection methods to capture nuanced perspectives and lived experiences of land struggles and spatial politics. This thesis contributes to the understanding of embodied knowledge and performative resistance within spatial relations and to the research on commoning practices amidst enclosures, highlighting the power dynamics inherent in landed property.

Keywords: trespass, right to roam, accumulation by dispossession, alienation, private property, commoning, England

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Introduction

And in the struggles against capitalist exploitation, the rule of property, and the destroyers of the common through public and private control, we will suffer terribly, but still we laugh with joy. They will be buried by laughter (Hardt and Negri 2009, 383).

Dartmoor, England, 24th February 2024. Rolling hills crowned by the rock formations of the characteristic tors, dark against sunrays breaking through the clouds. We just scrambled out of a quarry, now overlooking the soggy and waterlogged land before us. At the foot of the hill, an estate, blinding white in the sun. Beyond, brown splotches of moorland are enclosed by the contrasting bright greens of grazing land surrounding Vixen Tor. Folklore tells stories of a woman, a zealous and murderous witch, a powerful goddess, and Mother of the Moor, who watches, guards, and enthralls wanderers from her seat on the tor. However, all we spot with the help of binoculars is a white van parked off to the side and dark figures patrolling, intending to fend off any visitors themselves. Someone suggests we wave and greet, and we do so cheerfully and laughing (Fieldnotes 2024).

I am with a group of people from the Right to Roam (RTR) campaign¹. Vixen Tor was the destination of a planned mass trespass intended to illustrate the absurdity of so-called access islands to protest for land access reform in England and Wales. Access islands are stretches of land open to the public for recreational use, identified by the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW), enclosed by non-access land. To reach the access land, one must trespass. Trespass to land is the “unjustifiable interference with land which is in the immediate and exclusive possession of another” and is classified as a civil wrong under English tort law but can be classed as a criminal offence under incriminating circumstances (Elliott and Quinn 2013). RTR was founded in 2020 and addresses land access issues,

¹ Right to Roam (RTR) capitalised refers to the contemporary campaign. The right to roam in lowercase refers to conceptual roaming rights vis-à-vis private property rights (see Historical Background).

campaigning nationally for legislative change to access rights in England and Wales. Land access issues manifest in two connected ways: unequal distribution of land ownership and a lack of rights for the public to access land for recreational activities (Breen et al. 2023). Less than 1% of England's population owns 50% of its unbuilt, natural and rural landscapes (Evans 2019). The public has lawful access to around 8% of England's natural landscapes, namely heath, open country, mountain and moor, guaranteed under CROW (Horton 2023). Access to rivers and lakes is even more restricted at 3% (ibid.). By comparison, while 50% of Scotland's rural land is privately owned, the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 upholds almost universal recreational access rights to land, rivers and lakes for the public, strongly influenced by the Scandinavian model (Anderson 2007).

RTR emerges from a long history of social movements utilising trespass as a political tool to protest the enclosure of common lands and collective access rights and the resulting lack of access to green spaces, wilderness and nature generally (Anderson 2006; Brinkmann 2022; Breen et al. 2023; 'Right to Roam HOME' 2024). The RTR campaign gained momentum within re-emerging nature access debates in the context of the COVID-19 lockdown measures in England (Burnett, Olsen, and Mitchell 2022), bringing the right to roam specifically onto the political agenda through organised mass trespasses protesting the loss of wild camping rights in Dartmoor National Park (Bradley 2023). Alongside access to land, the right to swim and travel on waterways is promoted by the campaign ('Right to Roam HOME' 2024). Mass trespasses have also featured prominently as a tool in citizen action against private developers, such as the successful intervention against the development of a Centre Parc in Worth Forest, Sussex (Moses 2021).

The mass trespass to Vixen Tor was postponed due to concerns over safety and damage to the waterlogged land caused by heavy rainfalls throughout February. Instead, I accompanied RTR on a 'Dartmoor discovery walk' as part of my fieldwork for this thesis project. The trespass that never happened is emblematic of the historic struggle of the landless against a landed class, illustrating processes of dispossession, alienation, and enclosure of capitalist private property, which bring consequences at the ecological and social level (Linebaugh 2013; Christophers

2019; Nichols 2020). Across academic disciplines, the politics of space and questions of land ownership shape enquiry into protest studies and social justice (Lovelace 2021; Jeziorowska 2023), spatial justice issues (Christophers et al. 2018a; Lees and White 2020), decolonial critique of capitalist property (Nichols 2020), environmental and climate change issues (Fresco and Kroonenberg 1992; Clark and York 2008; Napoletano et al. 2019) and the political economy of property broadly (Harvey 1996; Polanyi 2001; Lefebvre 2022). Hence, land issues link to critical points of enquiry for a capitalist critique – who owns the land, who dwells on it or passes through, for what purpose, how land is used, and for whom. England serves as an illustrative example of universal capitalist property relations (Burgum, Jones, and Powell 2022) and studying bodily resistance moves against land injustice, such as trespass, is to engage with visions of alternative spatial relations (Navickas 2016), which is the aim of my thesis project.

Therefore, I focus on the employment of trespass action to protest for wider roaming rights on land in order to understand its challenge to landed property. I ask *in what ways do trespass protests for a broader right to roam in England challenge private property relations, specifically processes of accumulation by dispossession and alienation from nature, and what alternative visions trespasses embody*. I contribute to the abovementioned research by analysing the RTR movement in its contemporary context in England, specifically focusing on the emancipatory potential of trespass action. I draw from political economy and critical feminist geography, primarily David Harvey (1996), Hardt and Negri (2009) and Doreen Massey (2005), to study trespass through the lens of accumulation by dispossession and alienation and as a commoning practice which critiques capitalist institutions of landed property. This framework sheds light on how capitalism perpetuates itself through mechanisms that concentrate wealth and power in the hands of the few while disenfranchising and dispossessing marginalised groups, destroying ecosystems and altering people's relations to land, leading to alienating abstractions of nature and environment. These processes are resisted through commoning practices, which centre shared collective relations and values evoked in knowledge, storytelling and art embedded in the land outside individualistic private property

institutions. I apply a sensory ethnography methodology to examine how trespassers embody the loss of relations to land and nature, build belonging, practice commoning to resist the enclosure of access to land and produce an alternative vision of human-nature relations.

I rely primarily on data collected during fieldwork in the south of England during February and March 2024 and semi-structured interviews with organisers in RTR and related action groups. Line drawings produced in the field and during analysis complement the interviews. Through a reflexive, intuitive and creative engagement with trespass action, I critically analyse themes of loss, belonging and commoning as alternative relations to land and nature arising from a bodily negotiation of capitalist property relations in England. I argue that trespass for broader access rights is an embodied critique of continued dispossession and practice of de-alienation from nature and that the value of roaming rights lies in the ability to re-embed social relations in the land and offer a new cultural commons of human-nature relations. Trespass for roaming rights challenges private property relations because the action produces places that allow playful and creative sensory engagement with loss and belonging to the land, empowering individuals to imagine alternative land and nature relations and problematising private ownership structures. RTR concretises this vision by introducing the principle of wild service to build new human-nature relations of reciprocity, respect and care enabled by collective access rights. Embodiment, belonging, and commoning add new perspectives to debates on access to land, which are themselves enclosed within arguments of property rights. The strength of the RTR campaign lies in overcoming these constraints.

The first chapter of the thesis offers a brief historical and contextual background of enclosures, commons and resistance in England. The second chapter introduces the theoretical and analytical framework and its key concepts of accumulation by dispossession, alienation, commoning and the embodied geographies of trespass. The following chapter outlines my research methods, the data collection during fieldwork in the form of interviews and line drawings in England, and my methods for analysing trespass as sensory ethnographic enquiry. The subsequent three

chapters form my analysis. Engaging historical and contemporary context, related literature and my fieldwork data through the device of my walks across the Brighton Downs and in Dartmoor, I draw out themes of loss, belonging and commoning embodied in trespass action as a political tool for contesting private property relations. The concluding chapter offers some reflections on the implications of my research and ways forward.

Historical Background

Enclosure of the Commons

The scholarly literature on private property commonly links its rise as a capitalist institution to a specific geographic location and historical-political period, namely the enclosure movement in Tudor-era England. The enclosure of common land was an appropriation of the common rights to undeveloped land held by the peasantry for activities that ensured subsistence, such as grazing cattle and fuel and food gathering (Harvey 1996; Christophers 2019; Bensaïd 2021). This process formalised in the Enclosure Acts between 1604 and 1914. Christophers (2019, 77) notes, however, that the deep culture of private ownership in Britain originates in the holding and lease system from when William the Conqueror divided up land for his beneficiaries starting in 1066 and continues to shape the management of land today. The nuances in terminology also need to be considered: the enclosure movement is the enclosure of customary rights held collectively by the ‘commoners’, the community that directly benefitted from and sustained their commons, not land held under communal ownership structures, as the aristocracy, the church and the crown owned most of the land on which the commoners dwelled (ibid.). In classical political economy, Marx refers to the enclosure of the commons and the subsequent exploitation of wage labour, the hoarding of surplus values as the original, or primitive, accumulation process of capitalism (Hickel 2021, 45–46). The so-called wastelands that previously sustained the commoners ‘improved’ through the enclosure to serve the generation of profit by commodifying labour and its products. Improvement is the underlying logic of the processes of enclosure, and it continues to shape economic thought to this day. Hardin’s Tragedy of the Commons describes the over-use and depletion of resources on common land that is not held in check by the logic of improvement towards profit, and it remains a hallmark argument for the efficiency of privatisation (Harvey 2011, 101).

Historical political analysis reveals that the enclosure movement did not manifest at one moment in time or specific legislative acts, but the consequences of

enclosures are social, economic and ecological. The Tudor government in the 16th century attempted to address some of these consequences, enacting anti-enclosure acts to halt the depopulation of the countryside and the destruction of commons in the wake of enclosures (Angus 2023, 29–31). People were dispossessed of their rights to land and congregated in the cities to sell their labour, dislocated from the land geographically and socially. Political ecology analyses how the dislocation resulted in rifts in the metabolism of people-land-labour relations, alienating people from land and nature and alienating labour relations amongst people (Foster 1999; McClintock 2010). Further, landed property has socially reproduced class differences between the landowner and a landless proletariat, establishing the capitalist class (Harvey 2006b, 332). Simultaneously, the improvement logic led to the association of the commoner with the ‘wastelands’ and uncontrolled nature, with the unregulated and immoral against the progress of capitalist society (ibid.). In cases like the Highland Clearances in Scotland, enclosures were violently enforced, and improvement logic legitimised colonial ‘plunder’ in stolen lands of Southeast Asia, Africa and the Americas (Angus 2023, 192).

Ecologically, enclosures and related accumulation processes construct natural non-human elements as resources to be commodified for profit, aiding the development of the extractive and depleting character of human economic activity (Harvey 1996; Malm 2016; Dunlap and Sullivan 2020). The ecological dimension is critical in any discussion of property, as historically, the “process of enclosure of common land across rural communities becomes part of the global story of environmental depredation” (Livesey 2023, 332) and is at the root of neoliberal ecological governance structures that further dispossess people of connections to land (Dunlap and Sullivan 2020). Furthermore, views of property from Locke to Rousseau are interrelated to ideas of nature. For example, unlike Locke, Rousseau views the institution of private property as a “fall from grace” of humankind’s natural state as propertyless (Williams 1980, 76). According to Williams, this idea of the state of nature without property is re-invoked by Marx and movements such as the Diggers, who perceived individual ownership as unnatural in 17th-century England.

Other ideas proclaimed ownership of land as defined by mixing human labour with nature and making the land one's property, while paradoxically, those who worked the earth most often did not own land (Williams 1980). As Polanyi (2001, 187) notes, "what we call land is an element of nature inextricably interwoven with man's institutions. To isolate it and form a market for it was perhaps the weirdest of all the undertakings of our ancestors". Social, economic and natural history are thus linked, and a whole set of relations and constructs of human-nature relations emerge from the mixing of human activity, such as labour, with the land. Finally, enclosure moves are not geographically defined, and the theft of land and rights is exacerbated through colonial and imperial dispossession processes in which capitalist property was produced (Nichols 2020).

As this brief summary of the history of private property shows, the power over resources, social and political reproduction, power over rights, exclusion and inclusion are historically and conceptually linked to land ownership (Wright 2010; Navickas 2016). Notably, the enclosure of the commons is both a historical event and a continued process of capitalist accumulation. Literal land grabs and dispossession appear in neo-colonial and imperialist processes and under neoliberal environmental governance, foremost in the Global South, emphasising the universal structure of this process (Dunlap and Sullivan 2020; Nichols 2020; Graham 2021). Private property today is institutionalised through a bundle of rights over land assets, encompassing the ability to appropriate its produce, alter its form, and sell on the market, albeit constrained by public regulations such as building and development laws from which the private sector seeks to overcome (Löhr 2012, 410–11). In what Brett Christophers (2019, 66) terms the 'new enclosures', the process of privatisation in neoliberal Britain continues to operate in the same logic as primitive accumulation described by Marx, namely the subsumption of 'unproductive' public land to the logic of surplus generation by turning it productive on the market through development and as a financial asset. These enclosures dispossess people of spaces for social reproduction, nature connection and political activity (Christophers 2019, 80-81).

Historically, as well as today, enclosures have material and social consequences: Land has reached the status of a ‘fictitious’ commodity, dis-embedded from previous relations between people and people and the land and destroying the social substance of society (Christophers et al. 2018; Christophers 2019). New enclosures and neoliberal politics shrink public services and goods financing, so the common available for people to appropriate and make theirs diminishes. The consequences of privatisation are overlapping housing, food, and environmental crises caused by phenomena such as land ‘banking’ by investors and ‘predatory’ practices of financiers entrepreneurs and the political economy of mass dispossession that has become the new normal. Privatisation shifted the baseline under which social life and socio-ecological life are organised in the Western world, and exported outwards through imperialistic practices (Harvey 2013; Christophers 2019).

Through these historical processes, we arrive at contemporary political theory, which demarcates two moral views of property: property as an arbitrary state institution and property as somehow ‘naturally’ private (Widerquist and McCall 2021). The consequence of the latter view is an inclination in mainstream economic theory to dismiss alternative ownership structures, especially regarding land (ibid.). According to Harvey, the argument for and against commons itself has been enclosed by the focus on narrow presumptions of land held in commons, such as in Hardin’s Tragedy of the Commons, which led to limitations in arguments between either private property solutions or authoritarian state intervention, polarising political reactions (Harvey 2011, 101). Enclosure is considered a recurring process of capitalism, highlighting power relations tied to land ownership and connecting privatisation and commodification consequentially to unequal exchange, destruction of habitat, biodiversity, fossil fuel extraction, and climate change (Hardt and Negri 2009; Angus 2023). It is thus imperative to explore alternatives to enclosure, as subsequent chapters of my thesis aim to do.

Resistance, Trespass and The Right to Roam

As Lefebvre states, rural space does not disappear when it is being enclosed, and people, even if alienated from the land and the means of production, inhabit,

negotiate and contest this space carved by private property relations and continued processes of enclosures (Lefebvre in Elden and Morton 2022, xxxv). An integral part of the history of private property is the resistance by the population who act on customary rights, such as trespass, to protest and riot against the loss of commons in the form of wilful property damage and squatting (Baker 2019). In Britain, both human and animal bodies were used in performative practices of resistance. An example is the herding of cattle onto the enclosure of Moor Green in 1800 to symbolically enact common rights from ‘time immemorial’, “an attempt not merely to resist change but also to restore what had been lost” (Baker 2019, 80-81).

Enclosure resulted in a physical landscape change through hedges and fences that demarcated private property and thus changed the structure of the rural space in addition to the cultural ways of life. The bundle of private property rights emerged over time as a response to the struggles of the people who defended customary rights against enclosure moves (Anderson 2006). Enclosures in the countryside did not necessarily change how people moved in the land, so trespass as a customary practice became a part of its sociology: “Through these performances, landowner and protestor communicated their respective claims to each other and the wider world” and “trespass drew upon customary rights, communal memory and traditional practices to fuel resistance against landscape change” (Baker 2019, 73). Katyal and Peñalver (2020, 88) argue that the “intentional property outlaw, the squatter and trespasser, played a crucial role as well in producing property rights stability”. With the notion of property came trespass, handled like a bodily ‘injury’ to property and its owner (Baker 2019, 78–79).

Today, trespass is defined as a civil wrong under English Tort law, but moves by the UK Conservative party in recent years to create criminalisation mandates against trespass by public consultation reveals racist and discriminatory attacks on non-sedentary nomadic heritage. Burgum et al. (2022, 1231) argue that this move “forms part of a wider longer-term trend to solidify Euro-Liberal, formalised and rationalised property regimes”. The criminalisation of trespass falls within public order acts that seek to strengthen police power in the face of environmental activist

protests by Extinction Rebellion in 2019 and the passage of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill in 2021, which infringe on the rights of public meeting over concerns to protect private property interests (Navickas 2022).

The historical account reveals that trespassing is a technique employed by the property-less and all levels of society, co-opted by elites to legitimise further absolute land ownership and capital interest (Navickas 2016). Furthermore, in the struggle against enclosure, the logic of privatisation and consequential disparity is not unique to the countryside but extends to all aspects of society, according to Harvey. The upkeep of public space in the city as a common requires active engagement by the citizen: “There is always a struggle over how the production of and access to public space and public goods is to be regulated, by whom, and in whose interests” (Harvey 2013, 73). Importantly, the loss of rights through the enclosure of commons is not equal to the loss of agency, and spaces are constantly contested: “Space as being produced by bodily practices and performances ... producing space through ... trespassing, which in turn gives protesters the agency to change the meaning or uses of politically resonant places” (Navickas 2016, 16).

While trespass is not the only practice that resists enclosure, it is the focus of this thesis because of its historical linkage to the right to roam and access movement. The literature on access movements generally poses the right to roam as a customary right enacted by the public and the landless against the absolute exclusion from private property (Brinkmann 2022). From a legal perspective, roaming rights limit the right of exclusion from private property, and their legal and social history stands as a metaphor for the struggle to balance the common good and individual rights (Perle 2015). Roaming has a tradition nestled within England’s long history of walking, an activity which in itself is shaped by the necessity of the population to navigate a landscape that dictates access along private property lines (Thorogood, Hastie, and Hill-Butler 2022; Breen et al. 2023). Historic Rights of Way, remnants of pilgrimage and trading routes are the primary access points to private land in England today (Thorogood, Hastie, and Hill-Butler 2022).

Roamers, ramblers and self-proclaimed nature lovers made up the movements that pushed for wider roaming rights in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

These movements aimed to raise health concerns and demand nature access for leisure by predominantly working-class people from the cities, utilising trespass to reclaim a countryside enclosed for the enjoyment of the landed gentry and nobility (Mayfield 2010). The Kinder Scout Mass Trespass in 1932, attended by 15,000 people from Sheffield alone, is most prominently cited as the historical event that cemented access demands on the political agenda, even if it was not until 1949 that the UK's public path network was officially mapped as a result of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 and a right to roam, albeit compromised, passed under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW) (Perle 2015, 89).

This latest legislative act is the political reference point of the contemporary RTR movement. In the literature, CROW is widely considered insufficient in providing the quality of access demanded by the rambler and roaming movements of the 1990s (Anderson 2007; Brinkmann 2022; Livesey 2023). The Labour government was under pressure from landowner associations concerned with the loss of value of land and the costs associated with liability claims and maintaining path and access infrastructure. In its passage through parliament, roaming under CROW was restricted to common land and 'open country', consisting of heath, mountain, moor and downland "for the purpose of open-air recreation" (Anderson 2007, 245). Breen et al. (2023, 297) state that "the right to roam was accommodating the business of walking to the political economy of the time, rather than altering the meaning of all access". Ben Mayfield (2010) concludes in his genealogy of the CROW Act that it presents a point in time where the more radicalised views of a statutory right to roam enter the political consensus, but it does not offer a conclusion to the conflicting interests of open access versus private interests.

Since the introduction of CROW, the demand for and arguments against a right to roam in England, compared to the 'allemansrätten' in Sweden or similar constellations in other European countries, like Germany or Scotland, have taken an increasing environmental character (Anderson 2007; Robertson 2010). The demand for a right to access nature for health and leisure is constructed as a threat to the increasing need to protect sites of scientific interest and rewilding reserves

from human activity altogether (Williams 2001; Anderson 2007). Roaming rights thus open the debate on appropriate stewardship and governance of the environment in times of biodiversity decline and ecological degradation caused by human-induced climate change (Bollier and Weston 2012; Bavikatte 2014; Anshelm, Haikola, and Wallsten 2018).

Against this diverse historical background, I analyse trespass protests for wider access to land and nature in England today. The scope of this thesis limits more detailed considerations of the nuances in the history of the enclosures and resistance in this chapter. However, the agency of the dispossessed is revealed as a central theme that runs throughout the context and shapes subsequent enquiry of this thesis. As literary scholar Livesey (2023, 334) writes: “It becomes clear that the history of ‘right to roam’ and access to public space in the UK is also always a history of popular protest ... commons were—and continue to be—sites of resistance to private capital and the state”. In the following chapters, my theoretical framework and analysis demonstrate the relevance of this statement.

Theoretical Framework

Accumulation by Dispossession and Alienation

I utilise the concepts of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey 2004) and alienation (Dunlap and Sullivan 2020) to frame the continued enclosure and loss of access to land in England in the context of the critique by the RTR movement. Formulating his concept of accumulation by dispossession, Harvey (2004) further develops Marx's original 'primitive accumulation', which prescribes accumulation to the historical enclosure movement in England and the subsequent creation of a landless proletariat dependent on selling their commodified labour on the market. Harvey's view of accumulation by dispossession highlights capital's core dynamic as a continuous self-perpetuating process, including the enclosure of commons that forcibly deprive people of their common land, resources, and rights through mechanisms like privatisation, financialisation, and neoliberal state coercion. Enclosures and dispossession also happen at the intellectual property rights level through patent law or trademarks (Christophers 2019; Bensaïd 2021). The dispossession processes "transfer assets and redistribute wealth and income either from the mass of the population towards the upper classes or from vulnerable to richer countries" (Harvey 2006a, 153). Harvey thus conceptualises the structure of capital accumulation as continuous in the context of Marx's theory, denoting the fundamental features and dynamics inherent in capitalist societies that transcend specific historical and geographical contexts (Harvey 2006b). Crucially, this concept not only describes a critical process of capitalism but critiques its consequences at the same time (Nichols 2020). As a framework of critique, it enables the analysis of private property in land in its material aspects and as distinctly social relations (Harvey 2006a; Bensaïd 2021).

In addition to accumulation by dispossession, I utilise alienation to critically frame private property relations. Dunlap and Sullivan (2020, 567) draw attention to the alienation from nature that runs throughout the dispossession processes and that capital accumulation is socially and ecologically destructive. They draw from Harvey's discussion of Marx's original formulation of alienated labour relations,

where production is disembedded from the land, alienating and making abstract human-nature relations through the lack of physical contact with the land (Harvey 2018, 139). “[Understanding] the iterative and consequential connections between objective/material and subjective/psychological dimensions of alienation offers ‘one vital key to unlock the door of a progressive politics for the future’” Dunlap and Sullivan (2020, 552) state, concurring with Harvey. Alienation thus occurs in two instances. First, material alienation, or socio-ecological alienation, is the removal of people from the land, dispossessed from it during primitive accumulation. Secondly, relational or psycho-social alienation describes abstract consumer and producer relations at the contemporary stage of capitalism (ibid.). As one example, the authors describe people growing indifferent to how commodities are produced, even though consumption and production are interrelated, legitimising increasingly extractive and socially and ecologically destructive production (Dunlap and Sullivan 2020, 567). Thus, accumulation does not happen through dispossession alone but is accompanied by alienation, a process of “accumulation-by-alienation” (ibid.).

Furthermore, the concept of alienation is instrumental in analysing how human-nature relations are negotiated under capitalism. I use a relational definition of nature (Williams 1980; Soper 1995), which integrates well into the dialectical view of the processes of capitalist accumulation. Within this dialectical framework of the relationship between society and the environment, nature is not viewed as static or isolated but as part of a constantly evolving and interconnected system of relationships, including the human. Thus, multiple interpretations of nature are possible at the same time, negotiated inter-subjectively within the broader structures of relations between society and nature as the more-than-human materiality of the physical environment (Williams 1980). Under capitalism, nature is restricted to ideas of natural resources, separated from the social, effectively turned into an object to be commodified, consumed as scenery, image or landscape or extracted as a ‘natural resource’ (Williams 1980, 81). Analysing nature perceptions offers a point of departure to discuss “the myriad other practices of relationship, value and ethical requirements enacted by people to both each other and to natures beyond the

human” (Sullivan 2013a, 210). Williams (1980, 85) emphasises that ideas of nature always interrelate with social relations, which are exploitative under capitalism. However, a return to un-alienated relationships does not mean a return to an imagined golden past; it requires careful consideration of human labour ‘projecting’ ideas of nature (ibid.). Following this ontological assumption, I view nature as simultaneously constructed and represented in human ideas and existing outside of these constructions as a physical reality.

In conclusion, using accumulation by dispossession and alienation as a framework to critique capitalist private property relations unveils the systemic injustices and contradictions within capitalist accumulation and highlights how wealth and power are concentrated and tied to land while disenfranchising and dispossessing marginalised groups. In subsequent chapters, I identify dispossession and alienation embodied through the sense of loss by trespassers and how alternative relations are envisioned through this critique of landed private property.

Commoning

Commoning as a social practice is an antonym to the social relations of private property and enclosure (Bollier and Helfrich 2012; Linebaugh 2012). Harvey (2013, 73) defines commoning as follows:

At the heart of the practice of commoning lies the principle that the relation between the social group and that aspect of the environment being treated as a common shall be both collective and non-commodified – off-limits to the logic of market exchange and market valuations.

Commoning describes the practice of producing a common through collective labour. As Harvey's definition suggests, the common that is created through commoning practices is not only a locality in the physical external environment. Indeed, commoning includes collective labour beyond Marx's original conception of collective factory work or the concept of the city as a commons produced by its inhabitants (Harvey 2013). Rather, commoning permeates all dimensions of life, socio-ecological and intersubjective, from our shared air and earth to common habits, values, languages and customs (Hardt and Negri 2009). This conception of

the common as ‘biopolitical’, in Hardt and Negri’s terms, is crucial, as it negates the perception that the destruction of the commons in the wake of economic progress is somehow inevitable and natural, and instead emphasises that the common is everywhere to be produced, preserved and protected (ibid.). Widerquist and McCall (2021, 142) explore alternative relations to private property in a deep historical analysis and conclude that “no innate human (or animal) private property instinct exists ... early hunter-gatherer ancestors, who have the best claim to the original appropriation under all or most properterian criteria, treated the land as an open or closed commons”.

The commons is thus relatively unspecified, but its re-invention and re-production arise repeatedly as an alternative transformative vision to capitalist relations (Linebaugh 2012). Linebaugh asserts that commoning is indeed constantly produced and preserved in human relations, its values are passed on and renewed continuously, and it is always local, depending on “custom, memory, and oral transmission for the maintenance of its norms rather than law, police, and media” (Linebaugh 2013, 14). The production of the common is where anti-capitalist critique and activism have to start, as Hardt and Negri suggest (2009). The commons today can be conceptualised as a countermovement to decades of neoliberal attacks on all spheres of life, which McCarthy (2005) argues is evident in the revival of bottom-up and non-academic ideas of the commons, from education initiatives to collective rights movements to community ownership schemes.

The strength of the commons as a framework lies in its resistance to capitalist power by being produced, protected and used as resources for public social benefit, a function that privatisation increasingly fails to deliver, and because their constant revival demonstrates that private property is never absolute (Harvey 2013, 68). I found this idea of the commons most suitable for my subsequent analysis of the alternative vision to private property relations inherent in trespass actions for roaming rights of the RTR movement.

Embodied Geographies of Trespass

Private property relations are social relations, including dispossession and alienation, but they are also distinctly spatial. Massey (1994, 265) writes that “all social (and indeed physical) phenomena/activities/relations have a spatial form and a relative spatial location”. Massey defines the spatial as constructed from social interrelations and interactions from the local to the global across all space-time dimensions. Her understanding of time and space as not linear or flat overlaps with Lefebvre’s emphasis that any social phenomenon, such as private property, intersects horizontal and vertical space-time relations (Lefebvre 2022, 62). This view of space as non-static and time as not spaceless matters because it allows a dialectical view of the simultaneity of the spatial as socially constituted and the social as necessarily spatial (Massey 1994, 264–65). I apply this view to trespass action.

Trespass is a form of resistance to enclosures that embodies claims to common rights that predate private property, a performance of the politics of space and place with the body (Navickas 2016; Baker 2019). Analysing trespass action gives insight into (re)surfacing strategies to negotiate increasingly privatised and enclosed capitalist space, rural and urban (Garrett 2014; Burgum and Vasudevan 2023). Therefore, political trespass action in the context of the contemporary RTR movement is the object of my study and part of the framework of analysis to examine the contemporary debate around space, place, dispossession, alienation and commoning practices in England. By moving in and across space, trespassing bodies interact with the material aspects of the external world through the senses, but the experience of the world is also constructed out of the immaterial elements of knowledge, values and perception about the world that the trespasser inhabits (Massey 2005; Mason et al. 2023).

This framework for studying trespass draws from the literature of embodied geographies and sensory ethnographic methodology to analyse how people walk, talk, and engage with the land, private property and non-human lifeforms. Embodied geography acknowledges the importance of the particularity of sites of

political struggles in knowledge production, arguing that “the embodied aspects of walking can enable a creative and critical relationship with nature, place, politics and space”, making it a valuable entryway to examine the cultural landscape, power relations of landownership and related political economy (Mason et al. 2023, n.p.). Walking is “seeing, sensing, and hearing ... the negotiated fabrics of ‘private’ speech, property, and commerce” (ibid). These activities fall under place-making practices, where people create meaning and knowledge of a particular location and thus produce personal, political and shared values (Massey 2005; Pink 2015). Places are events produced “out of ongoing stories, as a moment within power-geometries, as a particular constellation within the wider topographies of space”, a “throwntogetherness” of human and material elements (Massey 2005, 131). Drawing on Massey, Casey and Ingold, Pink (2015, 38) emphasises that places are lived and occur as events through human agency and place-making practices but that humans are also always ‘emplaced’. However, place does not necessarily constitute only the local: “The lived immediacy of the ‘local’ as constituted through the making of ethnographic places is inevitably interwoven or entangled with the ‘global’” (ibid.). This view aligns with a conception of the commons articulated above, namely that locally particular commoning practices are embedded in universal struggles of resisting enclosure and commodification (Harvey 2013, 87–88).

To conclude, this approach to studying the social and spatial relations of private property and resistance recognises the immediate sensory negotiation of everyday materialities and the wider politics of space by people. The underlying assumption is that we inhabit multisensory places and environments, which are always contested, defended, and re-made (Pink 2015, 160). In the context of trespass protest, sensory ethnography examines the knowledge people embody about the land they walk across, private property, and the commons, which are navigated in the physical landscape through speech, storytelling, music, and art. My methodological approach to studying trespass is greatly inspired by the walking method as a device for analysis of spatial politics (Sidaway 2009) and RTR campaign co-founder Nick Hayes’ narration of his trespasses to formulate a critique

of the history and current state of private ownership in England in *The Book of Trespass* (Hayes 2020). The next chapter describes how I apply these methods for my thesis project.

Research Methods

Data Collection

Sensory Ethnography is a critical methodology, “a reflexive and experiential process through which academic and applied understanding, knowing and knowledge are produced” (Pink 2015, 4–5). This approach involves multiple ethnographic methods, such as interviews or participant observation. I adopt a mixed-method approach to collect research material, including interviews, participant observation, participation in trespass events and drawing methods for capturing my sensory experiences and analysing field notes beyond textual analysis (cf. Pink 2015; Causey 2017; Kusk 2020).

I conducted fieldwork in South England for two weeks in February and March 2024 to collect relevant data. I planned to participate in a mass trespass protest on Dartmoor, Devon, organised by RTR and a trespass walk by a local action group in the Brighton Downs in Sussex. Informal chats with fellow participants, written notes of field observations, and four semi-structured interviews form the textual data of my project. The interviews were held with two campaigners from Right to Roam (RTR 2024; RTR Cambridge 2024), with a founder of the Brighton-based campaign Landscapes of Freedom (LoF 2024), which functions as a local action group for RTR, as well as a representative from the project People’s Land Policy (PLP 2024), which works toward uniting different land reform campaigns to produce a grassroots policy proposal. The interviews followed a conceptual guide but maintained a natural conversation flow, adapted to the respective participants and the organisations they represented (Appendix 1)(cf. Madison 2012). The interviews were conducted in English, recorded via voice recorder and transcribed into text. The quotes cited in the thesis have only been altered by removing repeated words to improve readability when translating speech to text. While trespass does not constitute a criminal offence if unchallenged by the landowner under current English law, I treated the participation in trespass as sensitive personal data, and the names of my interview participants and informal conversation partners were anonymised. Written and oral consent has been acquired before the interviews. I do

not anonymise the names of persons who feature on official social media posts, press releases, or similar published work for the campaign, as I can assume that consent had been obtained prior from the people involved, or they could be considered public figures.

The oral interview data is complemented by secondary sources, namely the books written by RTR campaign founders Nick Hayes and Guy Shrubsole, *The Book of Trespass* (Hayes 2020) and *Who Owns England?* (Shrubsole 2020), as well as the book *Wild Service* (Hayes and Moses 2024), published by the campaign in April 2024. These books feature heavily in the campaign, website and social media content and form the conceptual foundations of RTR's demands. I could only effectively participate in one trespass by myself due to circumstances out of my control, and the resulting data is limited in scope by capturing only some subjective perceptions of trespass as a political tool for roaming rights. However, situating my experiences and those of my interview participants in the historical context of custom practices of trespass and given the importance of individual consciousness formation vis-à-vis alienated relations (Harvey 1996, 198), some general conclusions can be drawn when interpreting these personal sensory experiences, precisely because they embody the negotiation of universal capitalist relations (cf. Massey 2005; Pink 2015). To strengthen the validity of my empirics further, I triangulate my experiences and observations with accounts and descriptions of mass trespass events in media reports and on social media (cf. Guest, MacQueen, and Namey 2012).

Fieldwork as a participatory observation is well suited for more experimental data collection methods (Schneider and Wright 2010). Following visual anthropologist Andrew Causey (2017), I use line drawing to complement the text-based data collection and to guide the interpretation of what I am observing and feeling during the trespass. The advantage of the line drawing method is that I do not solely rely on text, such as field notes, written reflections and transcribed interviews. Drawing by hand during breaks on the walks and remembering events and impressions later during the analysis allows me to connect more deeply to the space I move in and incorporate a different way of processing knowledge beyond

the verbal code (Causey 2017). This method lends well to an analysis concerned with spatial relations because the drawing “describes a moment in space”, complemented by the narrative of a linear timeline that written field notes and interviews provide (Kusk 2020, 162). It thus speaks directly to Massey’s conception of place as an overlap of relations in time and space (Massey 2005; cf. Pink 2015). The line drawing acts as an extension to improve my perception, and the end goal is not ‘proper’ representation but instead to improve ‘seeing’ beyond simply gazing at a scene or to capture the absence of objects or emotions (Causey 2017, 131–32). If not limited by the time constraints of my fieldwork period in England, a more collaborative method, such as collaborative mapping exercises respective to the capacity for collaboration of the campaign, would have enhanced my project (cf. Hale 2006; Askins 2018).

Analysing Trespass Action

Following Pink (2015, 15), focussing my analysis on “the sensory experiencing body and exploring its interdependency with landscape”, I analyse how land, nature, private property and the commons are constructed, challenged and envisioned in trespass action for wider roaming rights. Sensory ethnography does not rigidly differentiate between data collection and analysis stages as conventional research designs do. Thus, my analysis was a reflexive process that occurred during all stages of my research (cf. Pink 2015). For the text-based data, such as the interviews and written fieldnotes, I adopt a thematic analysis to build an ‘organisational framework’ of emerging themes and concepts across my data for interpreting embodiment, situatedness and discursive regularities, legitimisation and critique (Madison 2012, 44–45). This approach allows me to contrast, compare and look for similarities between the narratives, perceptions, sensory experiences and observations in my research data and the theoretical framework of dispossession, alienation, and commoning. Reflexively, my empirics and theoretical framework informed each other throughout the research process.

During the analysis process after the in situ experience, the line drawings take the form of “something more than mere illustrations of written words, by instead

making them the starting point from which the text evolves” (Kusk 2020, 166). The analysis thus forms part of a process of knowledge production, a “re-insertion, through memory and imagination work” (Pink 2015, 142), in which my experience in the field complements my interviews and written notes as ‘sensory texts’ (ibid.). Walking itself is embodied navigation and textual analysis of visual cues, such as path signage (Mason et al. 2023). I add the reading of visual cues of infrastructure, namely fences, stiles, and path constitution to my analysis, inspired by Pinder’s work on the influence of the material composition of paths and how these are navigated and resisted by walkers (Pinder 2011). Visuals always have a strong focus in ethnographic methodology, but Pink (2015) suggests that soundscapes or smellscapes are equally crucial in grasping the embodied knowledge of a place. I pay attention to touch, taste, sound and smell to analyse how people perceive and talk about the trespass walk and action for roaming rights, but my empirical data is biased towards the visual due to the drawing method.

Reflections on Positionality

My participation in the trespass walks and the sensory experience of chance encounters lean into the auto-ethnographic realm. The knowledge produced through my writing and art aligns politically with the RTR movement while staying critical of the constraints that my subjective perception of the movement embodies (cf. Hale 2006)². Fieldwork is always embodied experience and requires expression of one's involvement and interpretation (Pink 2015, 144), which I provide through the line drawing method. Kusk (2020, 153) describes the drawn fieldnote for researchers as “a mode of expression that leaves space to include themselves, and their first-hand experiences and interpretations”. Besides being a student conducting fieldwork for a thesis project, I am also an artist, and sketching in my field notes came naturally to me. The sketchbook is “a reference point, often outside yourself and your interlocutors, which can help you hold onto your (fieldwork)self during and after intense experiences” (Kusk 2020, 156). Thus, the drawing method shaped my

² Hale (2006, 104) labels this approach ‘cultural critique’ as opposed to ‘activist research’, which involves a more collaborative researcher-activist research process than was possible for me within the constraints of a formal student degree project.

academic thinking by giving the abstractness of the political economy of the land we walked a substantial representation on paper.

During the fieldwork, I am both observer and participant, constituting “a close coupling of perception and action between the observer and those aspects of the world that are the focus of attention” (Schneider and Wright 2010, 10). The drawing process, as well as the later analysis, was shaped by my theoretical framework when conducting fieldwork, to some extent limiting what I perceived as noteworthy in my observations and resulting drawings. However, drawing and writing are representations that do not aim to produce an objective, truthful account of reality; instead, they offer “versions of ethnographers’ experiences of reality that are as local as possible to the context, the embodied, sensory and affective experiences, and the negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced” (Pink 2015, 5). My research process produces an ‘ethnographic place’ (ibid.), combining material sensory experience in actual physical places, such as active participation and encounters with people, my field notes and drawings. Lastly, to engage with walking politics, such as embodied by trespassers, is to ask questions about who moves (Edensor 2000; Mason et al. 2023). While mobility politics are not at the centre of my study, I acknowledge that to conduct walking with trespassers as part of my research methods, I exercise the privilege of an abled-bodied person with no mobility issues (cf. Breen et al. 2023).

We Lost Our Pleasant Land – Embodying Dispossession and Alienation through Trespass

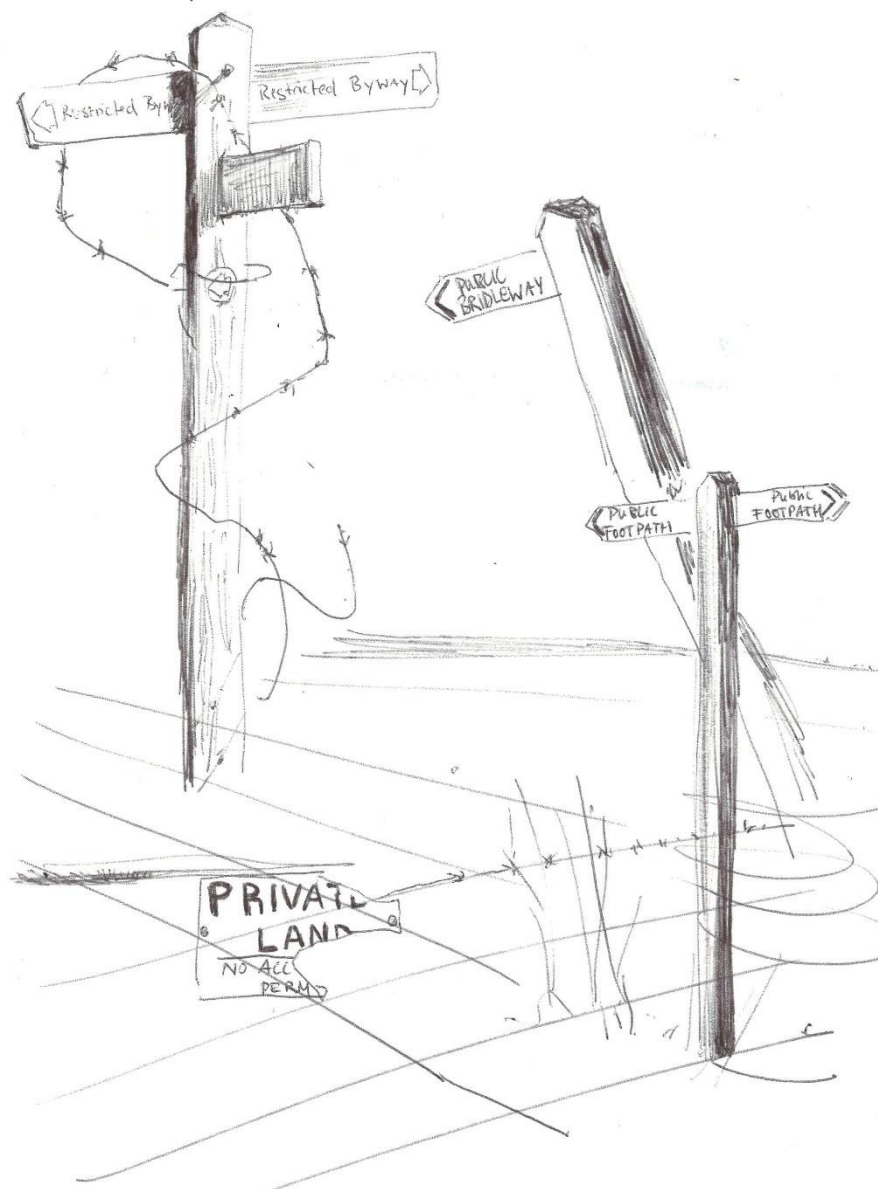
Right To Roam (RTR), as well as Landscapes of Freedom (LoF) and People’s Land Policy (PLP), centre the question of accessibility to land under current ownership structures at the heart of demands for legislative change. They also aim to address the disconnection people feel from land and nature. For example, RTR states on their homepage that “the law of England should not be excluding us from nature ... without that fundamental connection to our environment, we cannot know what we're losing” (‘Right to Roam HOME’ 2024). Their argumentative strategy for land reform heavily features the disconnection aspect and a distinct notion of loss. I analyse this theme of loss as a concrete consequence of dispossession and alienation processes, which people embody in the act of trespass. I narrate this analysis through the device of a trespass walk on the Brighton Downs in March 2024, field observations on walks with RTR and LoF and by drawing upon relevant examples from my interview data and line drawings.

A trespass walk begins with identifying places where one has no legal right to be. The creation of private property acts as a theft of rights to land that was previously organised differently, for example, held in commons, and thus results in a loss of rights and customs tied to a place (Baker 2019; Nichols 2020). When RTR was established in 2020, it primarily addressed the lack of roaming rights in woodland and other areas not covered by CROW and problematised big landowners and their sporting estates (RTR 2024; LoF 2024). Recently, the campaign has shifted towards critiquing the dominion of private ownership more generally by addressing not just the loss of access rights to particular landscapes but the related social and ecological dislocation of relations between humans to land and nature more generally, as subsequent chapters show. RTR refers to the problem they address as “the shifting baseline of access to nature” (Right to Roam @right2.roam 2023). The shifting baseline syndrome is a concept applied primarily in nature conservation and education contexts and describes the perceived generational amnesia and personal knowledge extinction of local biodiversity and species in the

face of dwindling populations (Papworth et al. 2009). Crucially, it names the inability to address and solve the state of loss of materialities which are not known to be lost in the first place, where the current state is perceived as the norm. While there are doubts about the applicability of the syndrome within the conservation scholarship (ibid.), it seems a fitting metaphor for RTR, who attempt to challenge the perceived norm of exclusion from the countryside.

In the book *Who Owns England?* and the online blog of the same name, campaign co-founder Guy Shrubsole (2020) seeks to make public and start the conversation on the landowners of England, mapping and tracing ownership to colonial pasts, hedge funds and offshore holdings ('Who Owns England' 2024). The aim to address the root cause of an inaccessible countryside – exclusive private ownership rights – is reflected in the direction of action RTR takes. Specifically, employing mass trespass illustrates the loss of access to land through bodily encounters with the materiality of enclosure, namely fences, gates, and confrontations with landowners or gamekeepers. Across England and Wales, the destinations for trespass action have particular meanings to the organisers and range from private woodlands to sporting estates to riversides (RTR 2024; RTR Cambridge 2024). For my trespass walk, I identified an access island in the Brighton Downs, a piece of access land defined as such under CROW, surrounded by non-access land. I was inspired to trespass to an access island by RTR's call for mapping access islands through individual trespass actions on their Instagram after the postponed RTR mass trespass to Vixen Tor on Dartmoor (Right to Roam @right.2roam, 2024a). The map data was also provided by RTR, which made identifying an access island easy.

According to RTR, trespass to an access island makes explicit the inconsistencies of the current access model in England and the restrictions that walkers in the countryside face (Interview RTR; Right to Roam @right.2roam 2024a). This perception resonated with themes across the interviews and my experiences walking in the English countryside. In the Brighton Downs, I encountered confusing signage indicating a plethora of paths where I was allowed to walk – public footpaths, bridleways, and byways (Drawing 1).



Drawing 1: Path signage. Imberh 2024.

Each has a distinct origin in the long history of walking bodies negotiating landownership and customs in the English countryside (Breen et al. 2023, 280). The paths those signs led me on were tarmac or concrete paths enclosed by barbwire fences or undetermined routes across access land shaped by years of the heavy foot traffic of weekend walkers (Drawing 2).



Drawing 2: Tarmac footpath in the Brighton Downs. Imberh 2024.

The material indication for private property boundaries was evident in the fences, signage and locked gates. In this instance, accessibility was limited to a tarmac footpath, a distinct place shaped by property relations that demarcates how one ought to experience the space: passing by and viewing it from behind the fence. According to Thorogood et al. (2022, 484), Rights of Way function as “literal manifestations of a politics of space”. However, the access infrastructure is not always demarcated clearly. One footpath pointed across a ploughed field, on which

a tractor was spraying fertiliser as I crossed, making me feel uncertain if I was trespassing despite the permission granted by the sign. I arrived on the other side undisturbed, but these inconsistencies are endemic across England and Wales. “Even with the Rights of Way, the countryside could seem incredibly unwelcoming” (PLP 2024). One of my interview participants recollects an episode where a landowner appeared threatening when challenged for blocking a public right of way across his land with a locked gate (LoF 2024). My trespass in the Brighton Downs occurred when I attempted to reach a public path from a long stretch of access land. I planned to walk along the hedged side of a field and had to climb through a collapsed part of a fence (Drawing 3).



Drawing 3: Trespass destination. Imberh 2024.

Only following permitted paths would have taken me an hour or more instead of my ten-minute trespass to the same location. I was not disturbed in my trespassing, and being challenged by landowners or gamekeepers is rare, according to my interview participants (LoF 2024; RTR Cambridge 2024). However, despite the empty landscape, I hesitated to assert my presence on non-access land, and the trespass required a determined act of defiance and a weak point in the barbed wire fence that otherwise reached above my elbow. Recollecting this episode through the process of line drawing after the event (Drawing 4), I remember feeling disempowered in front of the stretches of fences and unwelcomed despite the bright sunshine and the vastness of the seemingly empty space of the hills. The sound of nearby clay pigeon shooting and farm machinery added to my uneasiness.



Drawing 4: Trespassing. Imberh 2024.

While stiles provided easy access for me as an able-bodied person to climb into the enclosed access island, my destination that day, the grazing sheep on it, confused as to whether my access was legitimate or not under the current legislative model, as the enclosure may fall under ‘excepted land’ due to the livestock (CROW Act 2000). I perceived not the physical fence as the barrier to my roaming but rather the overcoming of an ingrained sense of wrongness when ignoring these barriers. When

reflecting on my trespass walk, confusion and uncertainty are the most vital impressions left in me despite the seemingly little consequences of the small act. I felt more assured when led across the land by the campaign organisers. Mass trespasses are generally well attended, with numbers reaching up to five hundred people (Right to Roam @right.2roam 2024b). What I experienced during my fieldwork is a symptom of loss that was also identified by my conversation partners: a fear of roaming freely regardless of ownership structures. As one of my interviewees asserts: “The reason people don't reclaim what's theirs is fear. Overwhelmingly, it's fear” (LoF 2024).

Dispossession thus occurs in two instances: the loss of land materially through the dispossession of access rights and a loss of knowledge of the land, a psychological disconnection. The first instance occurs due to the over-managed and rule-based behaviour dictated in private space, regardless of whether the intended use is for residential or leisure activities (Christophers 2019, 315). An illustrative example and prominent focus of RTR is the ongoing court case between the Dartmoor National Park and the landowner Alexander Darwall, who, through his withdrawal of wild camping rights, attempts a policing of space and insistence on private interest over public good (cf. Burgum, Jones, and Powell 2022). My roaming across the Brighton Downs was similarly affected by the materiality of the fences, hedges, stiles and signs, physical manifestations of the social phenomena of private ownership of land. As Harvey (2018, 139) notes, objective and material alienation occurs where dwelling and passing through the land become abstract relations steered by private property infrastructure.

Directly connected to this material alienation is the second instance of dispossession on a socio-psychological level: the loss of knowledge of the land outside capitalist labour and property relations. One interview participant said this about people who generally work and live in the countryside: “And when you ask them, how else do you know the countryside? In what broader sense do you know the countryside? Most of them don't, know it scarcely at all” (LoF 2024). A lack of direct sensory experience of the land is identified both as the consequence of dispossession materially and as the cause of psychological alienation:

Very large numbers of walkers are not used to walking in ‘difficult places’ across muddy fields, across winter fields, down slippery slopes, through dusky grass and through low scrub and bramble, bashing their way through woods, splashing across streams, fording rivers, squelching across marshes with the prospect that the mud might go over the top of your boots and you'll walk around for the rest of the afternoon with wet feet (LoF 2024).

Across my interviews and conversations, as well as in the online presence of the campaigns, the loss of knowledge of the land due to lack of sensory experience is generally equalled with a loss of connection to nature. Nature features relative to human relations (cf. Soper 1995). It is viewed as a physical material reality external to human society, such as biodiversity and ecosystems: The dwindling curlew populations, the damage to the peat and subsequent overgrazing by sheep on Dartmoor were some concrete examples. However, human influence on their environment is understood as a consequence of how nature is constructed socially as apart from nature and human-nature relations are viewed as pathological under conditions of alienation: “There’s a death of connection to nature, and our access is lacking” (RTR 2024) and “you have to address this issue of people's alienation from nature” (LoF 2024). RTR is concerned with the interrelation between the loss of biodiversity and the loss of perceived nature connectedness. England has seen a stark decline in biodiversity (Natural England 2023), which my interviewee links directly to the loss of personal connection to land:

The vast majority of people do in some general, in some vague philosophical or big picture sense, do accept that the destruction of nature is a critical existential problem ... but most people are completely incapable of translating that big picture demand into a concrete series of political demands now to stop the extinction process ... People are incapable of getting there, and the big reason for that is their alienation from nature (LoF 2024).

The loss of unalienated relations featured in perceptions of human-nature relations of the past, such as the “magical landscape” of the Downs of past generations, which ceased to exist:

An endless rolling pastureland ... A land of soft turf, dotted with wildflowers with the sun of the skylark in the sky above, gorse flowers and thyme underfoot ... A land of butterflies and sheep and shepherds and cows and villages and a peopled landscape (LoF 2024).

Elements perceived as distinct from human society are listed, but they are intimately linked with human cultural aspects of the landscapes, such as sheep farming. This quote hints towards the vision that trespass as an embodied sensory negotiation of dispossession holds, namely, a sense of belonging to the land. As a bodily practice in walking across land, trespass negates dispossession. It allows a sensory experience of the land that is otherwise not possible by climbing fences and hopping gates. It embodies the unease of facing exclusionary property rights and access difficulties.

Consequently, trespass presents a critical moment for the dispossessed, a consciousness formation in critically addressing the cause of perceived loss with emancipatory potential (Harvey 1996, 198; Navickas 2016, 16). In RTR's latest publication, *Wild Service*, a campaigner argues for allowing grief and anxiety back into conversations on biodiversity decline, as “unattended grief” fuels inertia (Shaikh in Hayes and Moses 2024, 40). One of my interviewees said: “I stopped calling myself a trespasser. Because I'm not. It's a negative word. It implies you're doing something wrong” (LoF 2024). Instead, free walking was adapted as the term for trespassing by the LoF group. Loss has not only been narrated to me through personal recollections but is tied directly to experiences of the body in the land, which climbs fences, strays off tarmac paths and delimits the boundaries of private property. Historically, the loss of access rights results in material exclusion from land, psychological disconnect, and feelings of alienation (see Historical Background), manifesting in narratives and embodied feelings of loss across my fieldwork data. Trespass, as an embodied knowledge of loss, thus addresses dispossession and alienation as underlying problems of landed private property in the English countryside.

This Land is Our Land – Building Belonging Through Place-Making

The second theme from my data is the imperative of building a sense of belonging to the land despite guaranteed formal access. Belonging is perceived as enabled by physical access to land but extends beyond that to incorporate a vision of an unalienated relation to nature on a profoundly personal, socio-psychological level, which fosters relations of care and responsibility towards nature. I narrate this analysis process through the device of a walk across Dartmoor with RTR in February 2024.

My walk with RTR was meant to be a mass trespass to the access island at Vixen Tor on Dartmoor. Because of the heavy rainfall the week prior, the trespassing was postponed, and the organisers invited us to a discovery walk in the area instead. The walk was organised similarly to many of the mass trespasses by RTR: a guided walk with stops at historically significant locations, storytelling of local history and myths, presentations about the ecology and geology of the area and creative practices, such as music, dance, and poetry. I could not attend other mass trespasses due to the short duration of my fieldwork, but the social media and newsletter updates by the campaign allowed me to make this comparison across events. For example, RTR posted about an organised mass trespass on March 17th, 2024, supporting local protesters against the introduction of an entrance fee to the 3000-acre Cirencester Park owned by Bathurst Estate (Right to Roam @right.2roam 2024b). The event drew in five hundred people and hosted a talk on the family history of the landowner tied to the slave trade, a recital by poet Daniel Grimstone and native plant knowledge shared by a botanical expert. My walk with RTR led me through quarries, learning about the geology of the local granite variant and its linkage to historic buildings in London, such as London Bridge. I learned about the myth of the witch on Vixen Tor and ‘tasted’ Dartmoor by trying a brew of local herbs prepared by a medicinal botanical expert (Drawing 5).



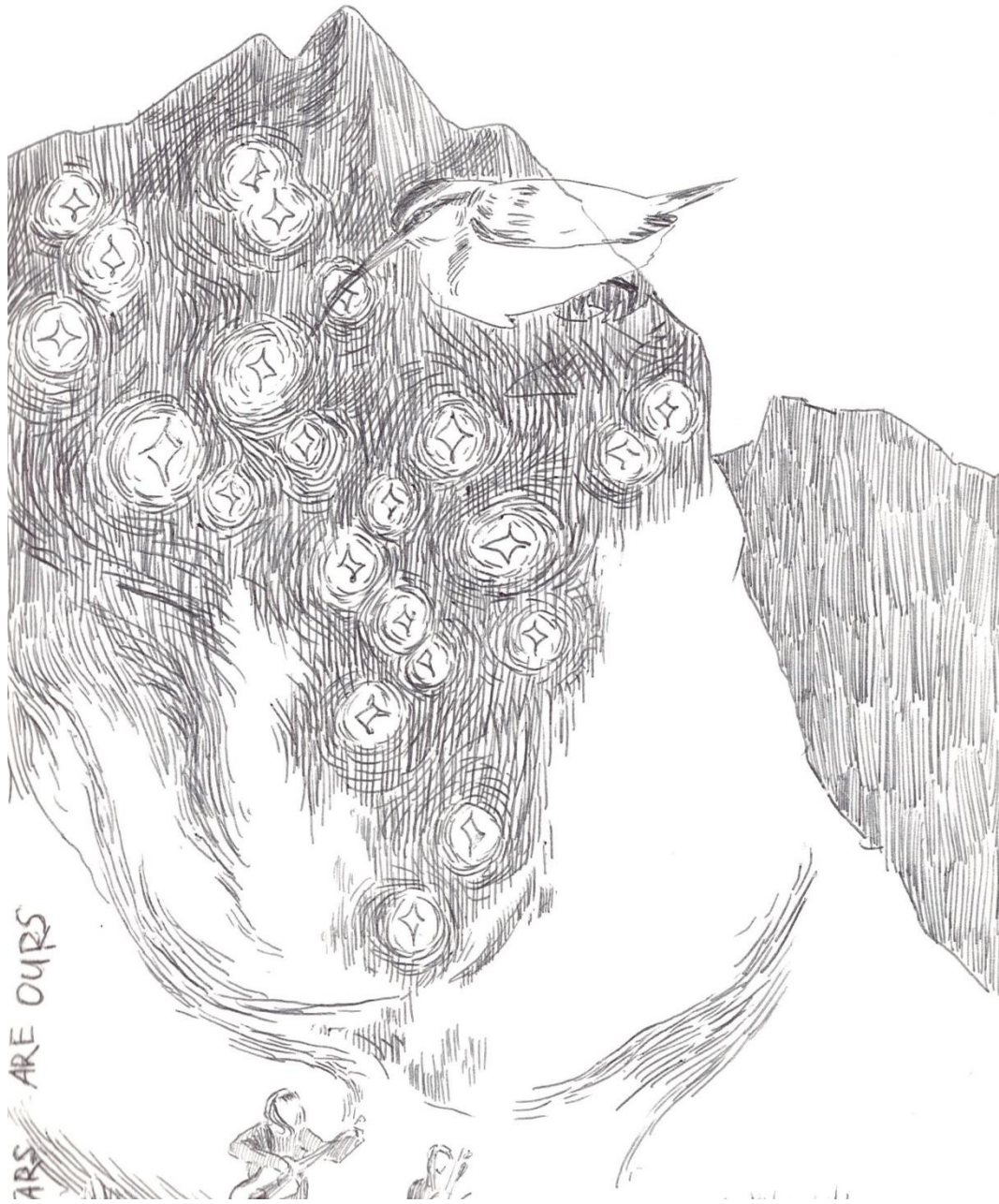
Drawing 5: Dartmoor 'brew' and herbs. Imberh 2024.

Walking across the land was thus complemented by involving all senses to gain further knowledge of it, producing the ‘sensory landscape’ of Dartmoor (Pink 2015, 38).

Myth, storytelling, and creativity were the practices that made loss known to the senses, for example, by the musician Holly Ebony, who accompanied the walk. Her song ‘Curlew’s Call’ spoke of the loss of the curlew population on Dartmoor. Another song performed on the walk spoke directly of the vision of the campaign that fights for keeping wild camping rights on Dartmoor, called *The Stars Are Ours*, who co-organised this discovery walk and the initially planned mass trespass. The song states: “The stars, the stars, the stars are ours. The stars, the stars, the stars, are for everyone” (Fieldnotes 2024). The song was performed in Foggin Tor Quarry, and we were invited to sing along. I perceived this event as a moment of connection to the campaign's purpose and a celebration of the land for which the campaign fights (Drawings 6 and 7).



Drawing 6: The Curlew Song. Imberh 2024.



Drawing 7: The Stars Are Ours. Imberh. 2024.

The general mood on the discovery walk was cheerful, and the engagement with topics of exclusion was playful and retold through light-hearted anecdotes. In subsequent interviews, one participant recalls their first RTR mass trespass:

That was a joyous, joyous event... there was a whole joyous celebration of Morris Men [traditional dance] ... It was beautifully led and beautifully arranged, and I think, just to put on record, that at the heart of RTR, there's this beautiful sense of reverence for the old folk customs of this island... it's a creative response to our sense of place and belonging (RTR Cambridge 2024).

Play, myth, and knowledge creation are tactics that RTR embodies to negotiate the sense of loss and disconnection people feel regarding the land, not just materially and in their local area but encompassing identity as well. On Dartmoor, I had the privilege to talk to someone engaged in what they call the 'creative side of the campaign', consisting of uncovering forgotten folk stories and myths and re-telling them through different media, such as art, costume- and puppet-making. One RTR campaigner spoke in an online Land Justice Session about her sense of belonging as a person of colour in the UK being intimately tied to the accessibility of physical connection to land and nature (Miknaf Ha'aretz @miknafhaaretz 2024). The second objective of trespassing for wider roaming rights after making the loss explicit is thus to connect people back to the land by creating a sense of belonging.

Trespass acts by RTR go beyond the immediate sensuous connection to land. By extension, RTR argues that people's relationship with land and nature includes more than what can be granted within current property institutions, even with wider roaming rights installed. A campaigner told me he got politically active after trespassing a local riverside – realising the lack of knowledge of the local land due to restrictive access, exploring the place, and then starting to question the wider relations of privatisation processes. Harvey emphasises that “estrangement from immediate sensuous engagement with nature is an essential moment in consciousness formation”, as in this estrangement lies the possibility, and difficulty, to return to unalienated forms of relating to nature and land (Harvey 1996, 198). He draws on Marx's politics of 'self-realisation', which requires a return to a creative

and sensuous experience of nature (ibid.). Similarly, Andrew Causey reminds us that “the loss of materiality can be intimately connected to rediscovery of it: of a different materiality, or a reconstituted access to it through memory and recreation” (Causey 2017, 149-50).

Hence, the practices incorporated into trespass attempt the individual's self-realisation through place-making (cf. Massey 2005, 131). This process produces a relation to land and nature stemming from bodily movement across the land, which negotiates distinct structures of private property, interacting with its materiality through the senses and producing one's place within it. Place-making for de-alienation is evident in how the land was walked, talked about, and treated during the walk I participated in, producing a landscape open to everyone. This approach to protest for roaming rights manifests in *The Book of Trespass*, where RTR co-founder Nick Hayes (2020) narrates the history, exclusionary politics and material inaccessibility of the English countryside through the device of his trespasses on private and Crown estates. The deeply embodied knowledge of belonging to the land, regardless of arbitrary ownership structures, runs throughout Hayes' narration. As remarked by one of my interview participants, trespass is an empowering practice of place-making:

If you trespass on areas where you feel it should belong to you, then I think it can be very powerful. And you're challenging the fact that - I'm not trespassing. I'm just here where I belong (PLP 2024).

I now know Vixen Tor and Foggin Tor Quarry on Dartmoor as places constituted of overlapping relations: private property interests of the landowner, economic history

of the quarries, local plant life and a landscape absent of the curlew cry (Drawing 8).



Drawing 8: Ruins at Foggin Tor Quarry. Imberh 2024.

The difficulty is to move on from this place of trespass as a particular event towards emancipatory action. For RTR, belonging is the answer:

[a sense of] our reason to be out, getting us all to understand why we want to be out and articulate the benefit I feel in my field being by a river or in a river or a field or around some stones (RTR Cambridge 2024).

And:

How are we when we're there, and what does it mean for people to have greater access? And for us as a campaign, words that we often use are words like belonging and care and responsibility ... it's about imagining beyond that very narrow-minded view of what it means to access (RTR 2024).

An emphasis is placed on formulating concrete political demands stemming from a sense of simply being, or belonging, in and to land, forgotten under the current system. RTR seeks to evoke this sense by addressing the purpose of being outside. Concretely, RTR addresses the extractive character of the outdoor industry: “A crucial thing is going beyond this idea of recreation being this extractive industry where people go out to have an experience” (RTR 2024). Instead, they seek to establish a new baseline for what re-enchantment with nature means. De-alienation efforts are at risk of being co-opted by commodification processes, Harvey warns, where re-enchantment with nature is a “consumer item and a central aim of the commodification and Disneyfication of our experience of nature” (Harvey 1996, 199). RTR addresses alienation from nature by arguing that relations to nature should be reciprocal to circumvent its treatment as a commodity, a thing to be experienced only and separate from human activity (cf. Williams 1980, 77). Access to land is from where notions of respect and care for nature shall develop:

If you give people access [and] the opportunity to care for their local green and blue spaces, amazing things can happen ... people get to know their local areas, get to care for them ... People dropping litter is often due to a lack of connection ... this kind of myth that you can only kind of care for land if you own it (RTR 2024).

Key ideas here include respect for the land and a form of being on the land beyond just accessing it. The decision to postpone the Vixen Tor trespass was made respective to the waterlogged land at risk of damage. By cautiously addressing the purpose of human interaction with their physical environment, RTR inserts humans

back into an idea of nature that is not separate but constitutes the material aspect of any place humans inhabit and belong to. These ideas cumulate in the concept of ‘wild service’, which RTR describes as follows:

bringing ourselves back into that idea of kinship with places and with kind of more-than-human nature and to see ourselves as part of a set of ways of bringing hope and solution to the nature of the ecological crisis ... it is a very old idea because it is about kind of what we can do through our kind of everyday acts to make the world around us a better place (Interview RTR).

Place-making practices, enabled by access and roaming rights, are thus seen as a solution to addressing ecological destruction due to alienated perception of nature on an individual level, to break with the mainstream approach through everyday interactions with land and nature. I relate this idea to Raymond Williams’s particularism of local places, described by Harvey in the following: “the ability of human beings, as *social* beings, to perpetuate and nurture in their daily lives and cultural practices and the *possibility* of common values in the midst of a striking, heterogeneity of beliefs” (Harvey 1996, 29; italics in original). This ability is facilitated through personal connection, an interrelation enabled through embeddedness or emplacement of one’s daily life (Williams 1980; Pink 2015). RTR focuses on the empowering notion of collective roaming rights, which allows the individual to interfere with ecological destruction within the boundaries of everyday lives, envisioning a negation of alienation and the loss of connection caused by dispossession in return.

I want to consider the strengths and weaknesses of addressing individual alienation through the lens of belonging. The scholarship on notions such as ‘nature deficit disorder’ – an argument correlating the loss of sensory connection to nature with the lack of support for environmentalist endeavours – is notably divided and lacking (Fletcher 2017). However, other research suggests that on a psychological level, a sense of ‘ownership’ unrelated to the legal status of private ownership fosters greater personal motivation to protect nature (Preston and Gelman 2020). Further, the study on nature connectedness as a metric for sustainability in 14 European countries demonstrates a correlation between pro-

environmental behaviours and a feeling of connection to nature (Richardson et al. 2022). RTR draws on this study to argue the need for wild service, which promotes personal sensory engagement and simultaneously a construct of nature that is not owned but rather a place that one belongs to inherently (Hayes and Moses 2024). Ownership and any association with the concept of property is thus to be avoided and replaced by belonging. With belonging, care and responsibility follow. Wild service, according to RTR, manifests in small local action groups, such as the Friends of the River Dart group, litter-picking or bird watching performed by people in their daily lives (RTR 2024). The particularity of the local serves as the first connection that makes people care – across the accessible space, building deeper connection through re-telling and re-discovering similarities of perceiving the space, sharing the same space, and making it a place that one belongs to. The demand for a right to roam thus extends to asserting a right to belong, a right to place.

I concur with Williams and Massey on the emancipatory potential of embeddedness in local places, which I see utilised by wild service acts grounded in a sense of belonging to the land (Harvey and Williams 1995; Massey 2005). Trespass in the context of demanding a right to place, critiquing the inability of private landed property to provide this right collectively, thus proves itself as a tactic that goes beyond the mere goal of accessing private land. RTR connects the particularity of local property relations to the national challenge of exclusion and land justice struggles globally. For example, RTR campaigners presented in the Land Justice sessions organised by the radical Jewish diaspora network Miknaf Ha'aretz, drawing a connection between Palestinian land struggles and displacement with the fight for a right to roam in the UK and the underlying forces of capitalism and imperialism. However, these connections from the local access issue to the global hegemony of private property culture present are also a point of struggle for the campaign. In several conversations with RTR and LoF, the lack of ‘big picture thinking’ and concrete political activity by trespass participants was regretted. For example, my interviewee from LoF noted that “most people are completely incapable of translating that big picture demand

into a concrete series of political demands now” (LoF 2024). RTR addresses this tension by attempting to build a cultural commons that unites local access issues beyond their particularity, for which place-making and emplacement of social relations are prerequisites.

How To Get It Back – Reclaiming The Common Treasury

The third theme that emerged from my data is the idea of the commons. I identify trespass for roaming rights as embodying a cultural commons of alternative relations to land and nature outside a rigid private property regime. RTR imagines land access reform for a “common, national consensus of an inherent connection with nature”, as stated on their website. RTR's vision of the commons encompasses the physical land where collective access rights are established and the broader relationship between humanity and nature. In essence, commoning is the central theme in the campaign to re-embed social and ecological relations in the land.

To reiterate, commoning describes the process of creating a commons through human labour interacting with physical materials, generating resources not necessarily tied to a specific place. Linebaugh asserts that “evidence of commons might appear particular to locale or craft... not ‘grand narratives’” (Linebaugh 2013, 206). During the trespass walks, the commons emerged as knowledge, existence, and history, shaped by storytelling, singing, and art linked to the land we traversed (cf. Linebaugh 2013). Despite being locally specific, these commons contribute to broader narratives that connect contemporary struggles to historical ones, such as the enclosures:

There was common land at the time, a lot more common land, and this is the core of Right to Roam ... commons, common people, where everybody had access to land, suddenly lost that ...

We're coming in from this kind of distinct time now where we're seeing the destruction of that way of living and that way of thinking of ‘me and my field, me and my cow’. Maybe it's time to want that community (RTR Cambridge 2024).

RTR aims to establish commoning as the core of their campaign, going beyond mere protests for legislative change. The use of crafts, such as animal costumes to dress up on mass trespasses to demonstrate a sense of kinship with the more-

than-human, or the illustrations by campaign founder Nick Hayes in the visual branding of the campaign are some examples of how the campaign incorporates commoning into its activism. Craftsmanship and art are the commons. Reviewing the exhibition *We Are Commoners*, hosted in the UK in 2022 for the journal *Craft Research*, Wendy Ward (2023) underscores the importance of crafts and art for bringing forward an idea of commons, echoing Peter Linebaugh's statement that "we need to see craftspeople in relation to the militant or the activist, people who take action... [they are] helping activists to think of what can be new" (Linebaugh cited in Ward 2023, 318).

By engaging in practices like wild service during trespass walks, the commons becomes a tangible place experienced with all senses, embodying a moment of resistance within power structures. In other words, negotiating the interrelations of dispossession, alienation and resistance, the commons emerges in trespass as a place which is "a moment within power-geometries", a "throwntogetherness" of the human elements of memory and creativity and the materiality of private property boundaries and physical attributes of the land (Massey 2005, 131). The embodied intent to reclaim something perceived as lost produces an alternative place: "If you believe that the earth is our common treasury, then behave as though it's yours. Behave as though it's yours" (LoF 2024). Simultaneously, the commoner as an identity is produced. In my experience and expressed across the interviews, a sense of solidarity and commonality was established in trespassers' creative and playful engagement with the land and private property. I recall specifically the episode on Dartmoor and the laughter we shared when observing the defences against the trespass that never happened to Vixen Tor. Hardt and Negri (2009, 382) suggest that laughter can disrupt the dominant structures of power and authority and create bonds of empathy and mutual understanding, essential for fostering the collective identity of the commoner. Laughter and joy found in being outdoors builds solidarity among trespassers and strengthens collective identity.

RTR employs commoning practices to normalise collective access rights as the default against a culture of exclusive property rights, but there are limitations to this

vision. Any debate involving access rights to land is constrained within the private property question (Robertson 2010). As one of my interviewees from PLP says: “The right to roam just says people could walk on the land to a certain extent. So it's not actually saying there shouldn't be land owners. It's saying that you have the right to roam” (PLP 2024). Land under a granted right to roam “offers nothing more proactive than the right to recreational use” (Bingham-Hall 2016, n.p.). To go beyond the access right question is the long-term goal:

land should be the cause... This is our long-term vision. That the land should not be owned by anyone. It should be the commons, and it should be managed for the public then.

And:

It's one campaigning against the power of the landowner. And on the other hand, it's trying to make the most of community land ownership, land assemblies, local plans, people coming together to make decisions (PLP 2024).

Further, a critique of the sole focus on roaming rights is that it does not include conversations about the livelihoods of people tied to the land in question, such as farmers, gamekeepers, and estate workers (PLP 2024). Indeed, as observed in the previous chapter, RTR primarily addresses leisure and voluntary activity tied to land. In this sense, the campaign's focus on roaming rights is limited in how far it can effectively address land reform that includes industries outside outdoor recreation. While RTR criticises the commodification of land and specifically big landowners, the campaign does not position itself explicitly as anti-property: On the FAQ section on the RTR website, it is stated that they are not campaigning for abolishing private property but for an amendment to property rights to serve the public interest better. If private property is a socially necessary precondition for capitalist relations (Harvey 2006a, 358), then merely infringing on property rights might not be enough. A more expansive system thinking is needed, according to one interviewee:

The big problem in nature is not our access to it. The big problem in nature is that capitalism is in the process of completely destroying it. Completely destroying all natural systems (LoF 2024).

However, significant value is attributed to employing a rights-based approach to challenge private property. Historically, protests against enclosure have criminalised property lawbreaking while also empowering the public to influence policy, as seen in the mass trespasses of the 20th century leading to acts granting permissive rights (Navickas 2016; Katyal and Peñalver 2020). The value of property lawbreaking is its ‘informational value’, signalling to the government through citizen behaviour that property law is unjust and requires accommodation of specific needs or demands: “pervasive and persistent acquisitive outlaw conduct can generate important and valuable information about the existence of possibly inefficient legal allocations of property rights” (Katyal and Peñalver 2020, 98). Trespass signals a demand for collectively shared access to common goods, such as land, air and water, which are “inappropriable goods of humanity” (Bensaïd 2021, 47). Most importantly, trespass for roaming rights challenges the perceived natural order of private property and re-invokes the commons from ‘time immemorial’ by re-engaging a bottom-up history (cf. Linebaugh 2012).

Following the analysis of commoning present in RTR trespass action, I assert that the strength of the campaign lies in its vision to (re)invent a cultural commons of care, belonging and reciprocity with the land and nature. A cultural commons is only established over a long period (Hardt and Negri 2009) and consists of a framework of social practices rooted in the everyday lives of people (Harvey 2011, 103). The intention to build this culture is most evident in RTR’s latest publication, their book *Wild Service – Why Nature Needs You* (Hayes and Moses 2024). It takes the technical demands of greater access rights for the public towards a deeply ecological grassroots approach to building reciprocal relations with nature, illustrated in a series of essays by artists, ramblers, ecologists, and small-scale farmers, and intends to give a voice to those who live in the countryside but are not represented in the agricultural industry or landowner associations that dominate the

political debate. By drawing from lived experiences, *Wild Service* takes the notion of loss and belonging towards a distinct sense of an alternative culture of the commons. The book presents a new direction in the demands of access campaigns, going beyond reclaiming a distant countryside or concerns of urban health of the past (cf. Mayfield 2010, 64–68) to urge for cultural change in how land stewardship and nature are perceived. RTR employs the concept of commons and its accompanying values of collective agency, sharing, and the embeddedness of human relations with their material surroundings to establish novel relationships despite the existing constraints and abstractions of private ownership (cf. McCarthy 2005). RTR does so by promoting acts of wild service to bring about this commons. In this context, the idea of nature as a common treasury is evoked. As Hardt and Negri (2009, 171) state, “nature is just another word for the common”.

The RTR campaign's strength lies in its emphasis on human-nature relations and its call for responsible land access and re-evaluation of land governance through private ownership. While it currently focuses on leisure activities like running, hiking, and kayaking, the campaign promotes a deeper connection to the land rooted in knowledge, care, and responsibility that extend beyond recreational activities. The vision of a land free to roam and engage with is envisioned by one interview participant as follows:

I want a landscape in which people get dirty and take risks with the earth and with growing things and animals... It's good that people are involved in all these processes... a peopled landscape. A landscape in which there was no contradiction between this being in a sense a common landscape, a public landscape, a landscape with ordinary people in it (LoF 2024).

This sentiment echoes an understanding of land and nature which was formulated by Polanyi (2001, 187) in the following:

Traditionally, land and labor are not separated; labor forms part of life, land remains part of nature, life and nature form an articulate whole. Land is thus tied up with the organizations of kinship, neighborhood, craft, and creed—with tribe and temple, village, guild, and church.

Similar to Lefebvre's (2022) analysis of the right to the city as a countermove to controlled and enclosed urban spaces, so does the right to roam have the potential to re-produce the social world of the countryside based on shared values of reciprocity instead of extraction. I borrow the term "culturally creative common" as "a framework within which all can dwell" from Harvey (2011, 103–4) to describe the space that roaming rights, as envisioned and put into practice through trespass and wild service by RTR, produce. This creative commons cannot be destroyed by over-use. Instead, it will transform through collective labour to accommodate changing needs – an ability of public good provision not granted within rigid private property logic (Harvey 2013, 72). RTR seeks to include the city in the debate of roaming rights and overcome urban-rural divides that dominate the arguments for and against wider access rights. Local action groups form in urban areas, and trespasses extend to urban green spaces to build a culture that cares for land generally as common for all (RTR Cambridge 2024).

RTR's vision of a cultural commons of reciprocal nature-relations aligns with wider countermoves to neoliberal processes. As the state retreats and public goods are increasingly seized by private accumulation, the population organises to sustain the commons perceived as inadequately governed by state and private power (McCarthy 2005, 11; Harvey 2013, 87). RTR critiques public and private power as unsuited for addressing the ecological crisis. One interviewee explained that locals increasingly employ 'citizen science' as acts of wild service, "testing water quality in the absence of water companies or the environment agency doing any of their kind of statutory testing" (RTR 2024). While state power is criticised for failing to provide legal support against private interest, exemplified by the inadequacy of the CROW Act or stronger environmental protection legislation, the private sector is seen as a threat to society and nature.

The ecological lens to critique privatisation is another powerful countermove. Increasingly, privatisation becomes the mechanism to address environmental land use, creating a 'market environmentalism' logic in addition to the financialisation of nature as a commodity (Bakker 2005; Sullivan 2013a). From a political ecology perspective, the transfer of public to private governance of land for rewilding and

carbon offsetting purposes is a worrying trend, as the outcomes reinforce privatising conservation and neoliberal economic approaches and logic of growth (Dunlap and Sullivan 2020; Knight-Lenihan 2020). As Liodakis (2010, 2604) notes, “private property is not a sufficient condition to ensure proper care of natural environment”; it often leads to environmental degradation and ecosystem destruction. Advocates for greater roaming rights echo this sentiment, citing instances of neglected private forests and trashed enclosed riverbanks. They argue that collective ownership, fostered through a sense of belonging, is better suited for environmental governance (PLP 2024; Hayes and Moses 2024). Scholarship critical of private property institutions likewise advises stewardship to be more inclusive and sensitive to social and ecological needs (Lucy and Mitchell 1996; Dunlap and Sullivan 2020). Bollier and Weston advocate for a shift towards “commons- and right-based ecological governance”, including rights for nature (Bollier and Weston 2012, 343). By promoting acts of wild service, RTR seeks to re-establish a concrete human-nature relationship that challenges the logic of neoliberal conservation governance, which currently dominates how nature protection is perceived and exacerbates alienation by depopulating and enclosing land (Dunlap and Sullivan 2020). Instead, an idea of stewardship through commoning in service to nature is promoted where the everyday lives of humans and nature are not separate:

[Recommoning] could look like land being home to all nature, including humans, where we can make shelter and grow food, as well as being places that are key to nature restoration (Shaikh in Hayes and Moses 2024, 38).

And:

We need people to be intertwined with the land like brambles in the bushes (ibid., 39).

Speculating the impact of the current campaign is limited, given its recent formation. RTR is gaining momentum and evolving towards deeper ecology-focused perspectives on human-nature relations. Its potential legislative impact in England remains uncertain amidst divided opinions on the upcoming general election's outcome in January 2025 (Stewart 2024; The Economist 2024). The effectiveness of past legislative actions, such as CROW passed under Labour in the

late 1990s, remains controversial, and the literature suggests that the right to access alone is insufficient in facilitating unalienated relations (Mayfield 2010; Brinkmann 2022). When comparing the right to roam vision with access right models in Scotland and Scandinavia, it becomes evident that, despite differences in how access to private land is organised and institutionalised, privatisation still predominates in recreational, residential, and industrial land use (Fiona and Mackenzie 2006; Sténs and Sandström 2014). In Scotland, commoning ideas were institutionalised only marginally in the form of community buy-out schemes and community forest ownerships since the Land Reform Act (Scotland) 2003, and these place-based initiatives are argued to be in danger of co-option under standardising and centralising procedures (Sharma et al. 2023).

Further, the political environment in England has developed towards a hostile defence of protectionist property rights through an increase in public order acts limiting freedom of movement, assembly and protest in public places (Navickas 2022), which arguably limits the ability of access rights to perform their desired effects to re-connect people to land. There are strong contentions to a right to roam not only by the established land-owning class, such as the Landowner Association, but from small property owners as well, who increasingly employ protectionist property logic to exclude the public for environmental protection reasons (cf. Leadbeater 2023). If a full right to roam, hypothetically, came to pass, the conversation only starts on questions of who physically can access land and how, as the infrastructure to access the countryside is largely missing (cf. Breen et al. 2023, 279).

Despite these constraints emblematic of the universal struggle against enclosure and accumulation processes, alternative practices persist. Trespasses for roaming rights enable land-entwined social relations of care, reciprocity and knowledge, previously disembedded through processes of dispossession and alienation (cf. Sullivan 2013). Despite their limitations, Doyle (2023) argues that the survival of oral histories and historical records of traditional common land governance structures was crucial for constructing community ownership models through law, policy and government support in Scotland after the Land Reform Act 2003. Similar

countermovements to absolute private property rights can be observed across Europe, specifically through changes in the legal system (Valguarnera 2017). There is a need for a similar cultural foundation in England, RTR asserts, unrelated to the possibility of legislative change to access rights (RTR 2024; Hayes and Moses 2024). RTR attempts to build a culture of collective rights to the land through commoning creativity, joy, and play and reviving understandings of land stewardship predating private property, thereby negating loss and alienation. The cultural commons are produced through roaming, trespassing and wild service in defiance of capitalist processes at the intersection of history, remembrance, knowledge creation and sharing, and creative engagement with the land. By demanding roaming rights, RTR asserts a right to place, collective involvement, and participation in human-nature relations, which are embedded in the land through collective labour for the common good and not dominated by capitalist extractive processes. Private property relations of accumulation by dispossession and alienation are challenged and not abolished, but treating the land as if it is a commons despite the enclosures opens the conversations and leaves an entry for delegitimising these relations further.

This chapter notably lacks line drawings. There are two interrelated reasons: For one, I employed line drawing to assist with converting my sense of vision, hearing, and spatiality in a format other than text for the reader and to guide my analytical process, as it allowed me to reflect on my fieldwork encounters. In some instances, loss and belonging were material, and sensory experiences easily convertible to lines forming the familiar shapes of landscapes, songs and stories on paper. Commons, however, encompasses all the above, and by that, nothing that has not been drawn by me before. The commons as place, as event, were as much my walk across the Brighton Downs as the song of the curlew now held in shared memory by those who heard it at Foggin Tor quarry.

Conclusion

The analyses of the themes of loss, belonging and commoning reveal that trespass embodies movement across the material physical boundaries of private property, such as fences and gates, as well as the overcoming of cultural-psychological barriers to the taken-for-natural legitimacy of the institution of private ownership. The alternative vision that challenges property relations embodied by trespassers of the Right to Roam movement finds a name in the idea of commons, which persists despite continued accumulation through dispossession and alienation. *Trespass action for wider roaming rights challenges the underlying private property relations that drive accumulation by dispossession and alienation by extending roaming rights beyond their meaning of mere access to private land. RTR emphasises the preservation of commons as central to a vision for land reform, aiming to delegitimise the dominion of property rights, envisioning roaming as an embodiment of the right to place and formulating an alternative socio-ecological relation rooted in grassroots land-embedded care and reciprocity, creativity and play.*

Commoning and new ecologically-focused visions are needed more than ever in how we perceive and treat land and nature (cf. Bollier and Weston 2012; Richardson et al. 2022). With its focus on the contemporary roaming movement in England, my thesis complements historical analyses of embodied spatial politics and performative resistance acts to privatisation that include a distinct ecological focus (Navickas 2016; Baker 2019). Furthermore, the thesis contributes to a growing body of literature on commoning generally (Harvey 2011; Bingham-Hall 2016; Clark and Kjellberg 2018) and argues that commoning practices prevail despite new enclosures (Christophers 2019) and the hegemony of privatisation logic in the environmental protection sector (Dunlap and Sullivan 2020). RTR's strength lies in the re-invention of a creative commons framework to address loss, belonging and the need for place through many traditions that have persisted in the struggle against enclosure by capital, such as arts and craftsmanship and land-entangled knowledge creation. The project aligns with the aspirations of artistic ethnographic

methodology to capture, explore and interpret this embodied knowledge, specifically in spatial relations (Pink 2015; Causey 2017; Kusk 2020). This methodological approach presents a promising avenue for further research into spatial politics of access and people's perception of land and nature relations and commoning (cf. Causey 2017).

Predicting the implications of trespass for wider roaming rights beyond the current political context is limited by the nature of the subject topic itself, entangled in the historical materialism of the particular English context. However, the local struggle against private property regimes always reflects wider global processes in which the commons are continuously re-invented and defended against the enclosure by capital (Massey 2005; Linebaugh 2013). Concretely, for England, the commoning concept presents a powerful intervention in discussions of environmental governance, housing, and food production, which are enclosed in debates over property rights (cf. Bollier and Helfrich 2012). The production of this commons begins with how people on trespass for roaming rights treat the land with respect and reappropriate personal connections with the land and how solidarity is built across marginalised groups and struggles tied to the land. Trespass is an effective tool to initiate that first sensory connection to land, and RTR complements this by organising wild service to construct human-nature relations. Wild service provides a valuable alternative to relating to nature as a commodity to be experienced, enclosed and extracted from and invites debate on the legitimacy of private ownership to manage land and nature.

Ultimately, the RTR movement catalyses interrogation of the prevailing notions of land ownership and demonstrates the resilience of visions of a commons to foster a deeper connection to the land and its communities. A right to roam, despite, or maybe crucially because of, the onslaught of enclosures by capital has the potential to make the consequences of landed property relations more visible and steer the focus back to essential questions of who dwells on the land, how we engage with the land and for what purpose. These questions remain relevant for transitioning from problem identification to implementing concrete alternative solutions. Incorporating place-making and commoning into discussions about the

exclusionary character of private land ownership serves as a reminder that we inherently embody the ability to engage in alternative practices – connecting through laughter, sharing knowledge, creativity, and care across space, inter-subjective interactions, and relationships with our more-than-human environment.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: General interview guide

Introduction:

Thank you so much for taking your time and agreeing to the interview!

As I said in our email conversation, my name is Alexandra, I am a master's student doing my thesis on trespass action for a right to roam and the implication for alternative relations to nature in England.

I would like this interview to be an open conversation – I have prepared some questions, but I use them more as keywords and I am interested in your perspective and own concepts concerning them.

I want to be transparent about why and how I am researching trespass:

- I want to participate in trespass action in the right-to-roam context and speak to people involved in either trespass or the broader work towards more access to land
- I am myself concerned about the state of our relationship with nature and the role that private property (in land) plays in how that connection is lost
- I am interested in what the act of trespass does beyond just accessing land, and what wider access rights might mean for alternative relations to nature
- I am recording the interview and using the data to analyse how people use trespass to protest current access conditions. The result of the project is a student thesis paper, published on LU student paper online
- In this interview I will:
 - o Ask you about the objectives and strategy of your group
 - o Ask you about trespass action
 - o And the wider context and visions of you campaign/local group

I will be recording via a recording device. I have provided you with a consent form, one of which you keep, the other is for me.

Do you have any practical questions before we start?

I would start the recording now if that is okay for you.

The person:

1. You are part of XX/founder of XX. Could you please explain your interest and background in access rights and campaigning for them?

Trespass:

2. Do you trespass, or walk freely across land and why?
3. Trespass is really just ordinary walking.. but your campaign uses it as a tool: Can you talk about why that is?
 - a. Why is it so controversial and to whom?

Beyond trespass:

1. In your opinion, what does trespass/free walking do beyond just the technicality of accessing a piece of land?
 - a. For whom?
 - b. With what wider effects?

Beyond access:

1. Can you talk about your perception of the connection to nature in the context of access to land?
2. Will access alone be enough? What else is needed for the vision of your campaign?