

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> Sheffield Hallam University		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UOA27 – English Language and Literature		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Revitalising place through interdisciplinary art practice at a time of environmental change		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2012 – present		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b> Professor Harriet Tarlo	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> Professor of Ecopoetry and Poetics	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> 2007 to present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> April 2013 to July 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		

## 1. Summary of the impact

Place-based practice research projects in Northeast Lincolnshire conducted by Sheffield Hallam and Leeds universities benefitted local people, community groups and creative practitioners as well as the wider world of environmental, interdisciplinary arts through fieldwork, exhibitions and extensive programme of public engagement. The projects:

- increased the value placed on marginalised areas,
- stimulated community action by developing a sense of place-value based in the past, present and future of localities,
- used arts-led approaches to increase awareness and engagement with local and wider environmental issues,
- developed arts provision and vitality,
- introduced new hard to reach regional audiences to innovative cultural experiences of viewing, producing and showcasing site-responsive arts,
- engaged local, national and international audiences interdisciplinary environmental artworks  
Increased artists' engagement with environmental interdisciplinary practice.



## 2. Underpinning research

The underpinning research emerged out of Tarlo's and Tucker's collaborative interdisciplinary practice. Tarlo's contribution to, 'radical landscape poetry' was first established through her anthology, *The Ground Aslant* (Shearsman 2011), and her poetry publications. Both participants drew on theoretical research in ecopoetics; phenomenology; new materialism; psychogeography and walking and fieldwork studies, areas of the environmental humanities in which they have significant individual and joint ongoing publication histories [R3, R4]. This research underpinned

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site-based fieldwork which produced an extensive, ongoing exhibition history [R1]. Viewed together, Tarlo's texts and Tucker's paintings/drawings enabled diverse audiences at home and abroad to examine intimate relationships between people and place, understand the 'naturalcultural' balance of our environment (Haraway) and thus the importance of all citizens' responses to ecological change at a local and global level. The two fieldwork locations in Northeast Lincolnshire considered here were chosen for their relevance to such debates about land stewardship:

#### **Outfalls (2015 -2018)**

This project focused on the now defunct Louth Canal, exploring the past, present and possible futures of the Navigation, thus raising questions repeated all around the country about what should happen to these relics of our industrial heritage and surrounding landscapes? How would potential restoration affect the canal? How much and what kind of intervention is desirable and how might the arts contribute to local decision making in relation to environmental concerns, place value and well-being? These research questions were explored in Tarlo's and Tucker's series of atmospheric drawings and poems, some of the latter based on stories told by local inhabitants.

#### **Project Fitties (2013 ongoing)**

The Humberston Fitties (over 300 chalets near the seaside town of Cleethorpes but visited by many more from nearby Northern towns) is one of the last remaining functioning plotlands in a country where many once flourished. During the period of research, it was under threat, from east coast tidal surges and from the transition from public to private ownership, raising fears that its heritage and environmental status would be undermined. Here flood risk, community resilience and land stewardship were key issues. How could local people value, maintain and sustain the 'naturalcultural' heritage of their unique residence and how could artistic practice contribute to this? Tarlo and Tucker produced paintings and landscape poems situating the Fitties in the wider Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSI) marshes and beach shown alongside more intimate paintings of individual chalets accompanied by poems based on residents' chalet names and found poems based on community-written memory cards and interviews.

Both projects were longitudinal, facilitating extensive public engagement and community debate and exploring how such issues relate to class, marginalisation, taste and aesthetics [R2]. Research, fieldwork, engagement with stakeholders, creative practice and critical analysis operated symbiotically from inception to process to reception and produced new creative outputs [R5, R6]. These projects showcase methods for achieving consultation with local inhabitants over landscape decisions via interdisciplinary artistic practice around place, history, memory and present and future concerns and contribute to the development of the environmental arts and humanities as it moves beyond single disciplines into innovative interdisciplinary research and impact in response to the urgency of environmental change.

### **3. References to the research**

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- R1.** Selected Exhibitions: Harriet Tarlo and Judith Tucker, *Project Fitties*: "Excavations and Estuaries", Abbey Walk Gallery, Grimsby, 2013; "Excavations and Estuaries", Hull Institute of Art and Design, 2015; "Behind Land", The Muriel Barker Gallery, Fishing Heritage Centre, Grimsby, 2014; *In the Open* Cambridge 2015; "Contemporary British Painting", Marylebone Crypt, London, 2015; Cleethorpes Discovery Centre", 2016; "More in Common", APT Gallery, London 2018, , Arthouse1 2018, 2020, Westminster Art Library 2019. The project has received funding from the Arts Council; North East Lincolnshire Council). Catalogues, artists' book, flyers available. Exhibition images accessible via: [www.projectfitties.com](http://www.projectfitties.com)

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Harriet Tarlo and Judith Tucker, **Outfalls** work shown at the following selected exhibitions: *In the Open* Sheffield 2017; “Neverends”, The Muriel Barker Gallery, Grimsby Heritage Centre, 2017; “Under East Wind”, the Ropewalk Gallery, Barton-on-Humber, 2018; Groundwork Gallery, Kings Lynn, 2018; Yantai Landscape Biennale, Yantai Art Museum, China, 2018; “Outfalls”, Louth Navigation Trust, Louth, 2018 and Beyond Other Horizons: Contemporary paintings made in Britain and Romania, at Iasi Palace of Culture, 2020. The project has received funding from the Arts Council; HEIF funding; North East Lincolnshire Council; Arts Meridian, the British Council). Catalogues, artists’ book, flyers available. Exhibition images accessible via: [www.projectoutfalls.com](http://www.projectoutfalls.com)

- R2. Journal Article:** Tucker JA and Tarlo HAB ‘Poetry, painting and change on the edge of England’ *Sociologia Ruralis* 2019. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/soru.12232>
- R3. Journal Article:** Tucker JA and Tarlo HAB “‘Off path, counter path’: Contemporary Walking Collaborations in Landscape, Art and Poetry” *Critical Survey* 2017 105–132. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3167/cs.2017.290107>
- R4. Book chapter:** Tucker JA and Tarlo HAB “‘Drawing Closer’: An Ecocritical Consideration of Collaborative, Cross-Disciplinary Practices of Walking, Writing, Drawing and Exhibiting’, in *Extending Ecocriticism: Crisis, Collaboration and Challenges in the Environmental Humanities*, ed. William Welstead and Peter Barry (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017. 47-69). <https://manchesteruniversitypress.co.uk/9781784994396/>
- R5. Artists' books:** Harriet Tarlo and Judith Tucker, *Outfalls: poems and drawings and neverends: poems and paintings*, Leeds: Wild Pansy Press, 2018 and 2019
- R6. Poetry collection:** Harriet Tarlo, *Gathering Grounds* (Shearsman 2019) featuring over a hundred pages of longer poems from the projects contextualised within Tarlo's place-based work since 2011 with drawings from Tucker.

All journal articles and chapters were rigorously peer-reviewed prior to publication. R4, R5 and R6 available on request.

#### 4. Details of the impact

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These projects:

##### Increased the value placed on marginalised areas

Throughout the *Outfalls* project Tarlo and Tucker, worked with the Louth Navigation Trust (LNT) to organise twelve events. For example, for ‘Visions of and for the Louth Canal’ the researchers invited members of the LNT, Hubbards Hills Trustees, Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust, the Mayor of Louth, and members of the public to view their exhibition at the canal warehouse and invited them to discuss their differing priorities. As a direct result a small grant was given by the Mayor to the LNT to support preservation work. Local relations and sense of collective place value were improved - “sometimes seeing the place through someone else's eyes makes you cherish it even more” and “I hadn't realised how much of backdrop the canal has provided and how its informed where my family has grown - until I visited the exhibition” [E3]. The project contributed to preservation of the sites concerned, mobilised community action, and fostered increased value of these marginalised areas, and the subsequent wellbeing of inhabitants.

##### Stimulated community engagement in local history and ecology

The chair of the Fitties Community Interest Company (CIC) writes “Project Fitties work in 2016 highlighted both the history and ecological importance of The Fitties Chalet Park to a wide audience from our chalet dwellers to a much wider global community.” She acknowledges that the

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formation of the CIC in 2016 was directly influenced by *Project Fitties* as was their agenda, especially its environmental emphasis and successful campaign to retain the Fitties' conservation status [E1]. The CIC used text and image from the project in their representations to the new owners of the site. A local resident commented on how the project had helped community cohesion: "*People have come together and stopped arguing as much*". Again, place value increased: "*It has been a stunning piece of work and benefited so many with pride and enjoyment*" and "*Really interesting combination of images and words ... I will think a little differently of the Fitties now when I walk the dog each Sunday morning through there.*" [E2].

### **Increased engagement and awareness of environmental issues through arts-led approaches**

The Groundwork Gallery, Kings Lynn, the first and only gallery in the U.K. to be devoted to the environment, invited Tarlo and Tucker to organise and host a study day in 2018 entitled "Conserve? Restore? Re-wild? art & ecopoetics rise to the challenge" on how local projects such as *Outfalls* relate to macro issues around rewilding. This attracted 40 specialist speakers and participants from around the U.K. including writers, artists, scientists, interested public and representatives from The National Trust and Wildlife Trust. Feedback forms stated that the event "crystallised some key issues" (Norfolk), was "*hugely inspiring*" (Bristol) and that the mix of scientists and artists produced "*surprising perspectives*" (Birmingham). Similar public events took place all over the country (Cambridge, Torrington, London, Hull) bringing publicity to the projects and to Northeast Lincolnshire and focusing on environmental issues raised [E10].

### **Opened up access to arts and culture for hard-to-reach audiences**

A range of thirty-five events in varied venues (including libraries, galleries, outdoor industrial spaces, and guided walks) took arts to audiences who would not normally have accessed them. A local curator writes that the work "Encouraged pride and esteem in our area; we are in an isolated county, area of low cultural provision and aspiration". Local reach was high. For example, the Excavations and Estuaries Exhibition outreach events at Grimsby Fishing Heritage Centre in 2014 attracted 115 participants, a live audience of 2,337 and a broadcast/online audience of 57,000. Many of those who filled in feedback forms had never or rarely attended art exhibitions or poetry readings (of 39 local respondents to a Fitties event in 2016, 12 had never or rarely attended a poetry event; 9 stated they would if they felt such events were available/accessible, and 37 said they would attend a similar event in future) [E2]. Of the *Outfalls* weekend in 2018, the secretary of the LNT noted [E4] that events "attracted a wide range of people and of all ages who would not normally attend an art exhibition but who sat and gazed at a painting or read a poem about their favourite place and started reminiscing."

### **Developed the vitality of arts provision and activity**

The Principal Arts Officer for NE Lincs [E5] writes how the work "*clearly convinced the powers that be that an Arts Development Team remains something NE Lincolnshire needs.*" A local curator acknowledges that both projects "*influenced my approach to curating exhibitions and managing projects both in galleries and independent situations.*" She went on to feature place-based works and poetry in programming at Abbey Walk Gallery, Grimsby (2014-16) and Gallery Steel Rooms, Brigg 2017 -2019 [E6]. As a direct result of the research, the CIC inaugurated an annual Fitties Festival, first held in 2019, 120 participants and the LNT commenced *Culture on the Canal*, an ongoing programme of events and exhibitions at the Louth Navigation Warehouse where a storeroom has been converted into a gallery as a direct result of *Outfalls* [E4]. Their events regularly attract audiences of 60+ to the canal's banks. Encounters with the research directly benefitted writers and artists from N.E. Lincs over 6 years of exhibitions, workshops and mentoring which inspired and developed the careers of twenty individuals [E10].

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**Engaged audiences with interdisciplinary environmental artwork in the UK, China, Romania and Spain**

Texts and images from *Project Fitties* and *Outfalls* have been selected for exhibition over 30 times. This showed how environmental artwork could bring originally site-based community arts-led research on local environmental issues to national and international attention. These exhibitions included local, accessible venues mentioned above, to national galleries in London, Cambridge and Kings Lynn and, internationally at *The Sino-British Biennale*, Yantai Art Museum, China, 2018 and *Beyond Other Horizons: Contemporary paintings made in Britain and Romania*, Iasi Palace of Culture, 2020. Poems were translated into Mandarin and Romanian for these exhibitions. A strong relationship was formed with the curator of the Yantai Art Museum who recognised the significance of the work: stating “*What emerged was that despite our differences in locality there was much in common and that art and poetry can affect how we feel about landscape and place.*” [E9] Artists’ books which were accessible and affordable for all were shown at art fairs in Barcelona, London, South Yorkshire and Leeds.

**Influenced discourse and practice for writers and painters in UK and USA**

The director of The Groundwork Gallery [E7] notes “*A number of artists said it gave them the courage to contemplate trying to combine visual art and writing. ...[this] has opened up a whole new area of inspiration which has continued to develop and has been carried through to other gallery events.*” An American poet [E8] writes of the impact of the research on her, “*It has helped me think through the rich possibilities for place-based artistic collaboration ... my fifth book of poetry, Mississippi (Wings Press 2018), is a collaboration with the Delta photographer Maude Schuyler Clay*”. Tarlo and Tucker featured over sixty such collaborations (many brought together specifically for these events) into two public group exhibitions of interdisciplinary work: In the Open Cambridge 2015 (New Hall Women’s Art collection) and In the *Open Sheffield 2017* (Sia Art Gallery; Bank Street Arts). Subsequently two exhibitions were curated in Sheffield and Devon in (2018, 2019) that “*build on precedents set by Tarlo and Tucker,*” as the curator Camilla Nelson stated in her open call for “*Radical Landscapes: Innovation in Language and Landscape Art*” (Torrington, Plough Gallery, Devon) [E6].

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

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- E1. Testimonial from Chair of Fitties Community Interest Company (CIC)
- E2. Visitor feedback report from *Excavations & Estuaries* (2014) and *Project Fitties* (2016)
- E3. Visitor feedback report from *Outfalls* Public Symposium, Grimsby (2017)
- E4. Testimonial from Hon Secretary, Louth Navigation Trust regarding impact on the Trust following the *Outfalls* exhibition and workshops
- E5. Testimonial from Principal Arts Officer, North East Lincolnshire regarding role of Tarlo in vitality of arts scene
- E6. *Radical Landscapes*, Plough Arts, Torrington, Devon: open call and programme
- E7. Testimonial from Director of the Groundwork Gallery evidencing influence on discourse in arts community and increasing public awareness
- E8. Testimonial from Ann Fisher Wirth, Professional U.S. Environmental Poet
- E9. Testimonial from Curator, Yantai Art Museum regarding impact of *Outfalls*, and translation of poems into Mandarin for the Sino-British Contemporary Art Exhibition 2018
- E10. Images and selected feedback forms from public and poets and artists attending workshop events