

# **NK** Networking Knowledge

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## **MeCCSA Postgraduate Network 2020 Conference Special Issue: Mediating Place**

Edited by  
Harriet Parry

## **Editorial Introduction**

HARRIET PARRY *University of Brighton*

*Guest Editor Mediating Place Networking Knowledge*

This special issue features nine contributions from postgraduate and early career scholars who responded to a call for papers on the theme of Mediating Place for the 2020 MeCCSA PGR conference at the University of Brighton, which sadly had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I would like to take a moment here to thank and acknowledge the hard work of the authors in writing their articles and the reviewers who freely gave their time during a period when we were all struggling with its ongoing impacts. I would also like to thank and acknowledge those who were not able to complete their papers for the multiple reasons that the social and political fallout of the pandemic has caused. The editorial team were no less affected and particular thanks go to Dr Jo Pilcher (University of Brighton) for her work in originally pulling the project together, and to former Editors in Chief of *Networking Knowledge* Bissie Anderson and Rebecca Jones (University of Strathclyde).

### **Mediating Place/Space**

The diversity of ways in which this issue's theme 'Mediating Place' can be considered and applied is reflected in the range of responses and disciplines from which its contributors are working. In choosing this as the journal's title, acknowledging its Western ontological positioning, the term 'place' is not used instead of or in opposition to the term 'space' as can often be the case. Rather, 'place' is applied as a useful means for imagining a setting. Somewhere where something happens or has happened, working in the full knowledge that this definition is by no means absolute. For a much richer discussion on the use of both the terms 'space' and 'place', I have posed the question of their meaning to Cultural Geographer Professor David Crouch in our interview in the following section. Crouch's reflections work well to conceptually foreground the diverse work of the post doctorate and early career researchers represented throughout the body of the journal.

The variety of the contributor's conceptions of place is reflected in their differing styles of papers and the methods they have employed. What *is* common to all however is that their work remains rooted in subjective human perception. One particular research method that has been affected by the lockdown restrictions has been emplaced and in-person participant research. Journal contributor Rachel Jones took this opportunity to reflect on how she adapted her

collaborative creative research methodology to those restrictions. In her article ‘Visible Place in the Imagined Landscape’(2022), Jones describes the act of having to dismantle and piece together her work to find new meaning. She suggests that this reframing has perhaps offered a more democratic and less mediated way of gathering her data (Jones 2022). It is exciting to see the act of dismantling and reframing to offer novel conceptual frameworks resonates throughout the issue. Here we introduce research that often interferes with and questions how ‘place’ and/or ‘space’ is traditionally conceived, between and across academic disciplines.

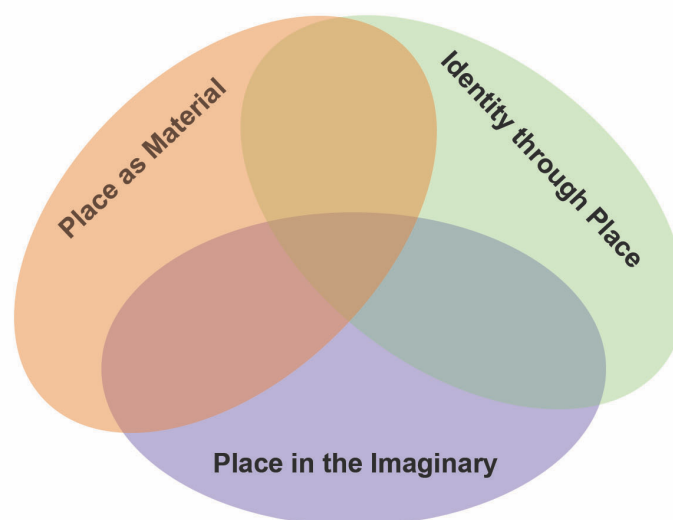
As Guest Editor, working in the field of heritage, design and material culture I would like to declare my own interventions. With such a rich cross-section of articles available I have decided to group them thematically rather than by the disciplines in which the authors are working. In the knowledge that I am creating separate sub-themes that are in reality intrinsically interconnected, I hope that the different foci will introduce readers to fields that they are not familiar and perhaps also encourage them to create their own connections.

Moving from the ‘material’ through to the ideational, the themes are:

**Place as Material**

**Identity Through Place**

**Place in the Imaginary**



**Figure 1. Venn diagram illustrating the journal’s three themes. Harriet Parry**

## **Place as Material**

The theme of ‘Place as Material’ is not being applied here to describe a place’s physical nature or fixity, but to locate its role in the research being undertaken in the three pieces herein. Guided by a research practice I was introduced to through my study of design history and material culture, the enquiry is always rooted in, and remains fixed to a core object or element, the ‘material’. The first piece I have allocated in this section is an interview between myself and cultural geographer Professor David Crouch. Here the material is place in its conceptual form and through our discussion that concept resonates through earth, bodies, art and social justice (Crouch, Parry 2022). Speaking from the fields of museology and visual culture, the second piece finds place track the cultural biography of the creation and reception of Italian Street Art taken from its physical form to digital display (Vavassori 2022). Finally, founded in the field of heritage studies, the material here is place as manifested through a people centred research methodology (Parry 2022).

The opening piece is an interview I conducted with academic and artist Emeritus Professor David Crouch (University of Derby) which took place in the autumn of 2020. Crouch’s research focuses on the vibrancy of the everyday, finds joy in the human embodied connection to the ‘mundane’ and is purposefully unapologetic about drawing on the subjective and the emotional. Entitled ‘Creatively Considering Place’ the interview explores Crouch’s general conceptions of place and his choice to foreground ‘space’ throughout his work. As our email conversation unfolded over time, his responses also began to demonstrate how his academic work has a material connection with the way he expresses those conceptions through his visual art. Examples of his art are included throughout the piece, and were created between 3 and 7 years ago. He explains ‘each emerges through my felt awareness of the where I am, have been, at the time.’<sup>1</sup> Crouch has provided brief creative reflections of each artwork to help those using e-readers draw closer to the works in addition to the shorter Alt-Text descriptions that we created together. He writes with a particular cadence and quality that reflects his artistic style and serves as an alternative to some of the traditional modes of rational academic dissemination that can disembody and displace what it means to be human.

Valentina Vavassori deals with a different form of displacement in her paper ‘(Un)placing Street Art: Augmented Reality and Urban Museums’, taking her conception of the role that Street Art has on the identity of a place through the material and into the digital (Vavassori

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from an email exchange between Crouch and Parry in January 2022.

2022). Experiencing visual culture via digital platforms has become an increasingly familiar format in recent months, and its advantages and drawbacks much discussed. Vavassori's paper looks to the role that digital platforms have had in recording and displaying urban Street Art through online mapping, a medium that has become almost globally accessible. Through her case study of The Museum of Augmented Urban Art in Milan (2017) she brings into focus the narrative role of street art in the embodied experience of place and identity. Street Art is traditionally a genre that is inherently emplaced, contextually contingent, frequently counter-hegemonic and purposefully ephemeral. In analysing the affect of digital display and mediation on the pieces she is able to gain a deeper insight into the connection between artists, their art, the viewer, cultural identity and place through the impacts of its 'un-bounding'. Vavassori explains that these pieces have been transformed to represent multiple forms of a city's memory and heritage that shift depending on their physical and digital biographies. In being absorbed into a power structure that was not considered in their creation, Vavassori argues that their digital dissemination and interpretation acts, following James Clifford, as a novel form of 'contact zone' (Vavassori 2022).

Where the Street Art that Vavassori discusses has been recontextualised by digital museological practices, the final piece in this section, 'Places of Possibility' aims to draw the reader back to an emplaced experience of a heritage site that has been explicitly preserved to represent a particular form of British national identity (Parry 2022). The video essay was originally created for the Association of Critical Heritage Studies (ACHS) 'Futures' conference in 2020, and was adapted in 2021 for publication in this digital issue. Her contribution introduces an interdisciplinary methodology developed through the theatre design art of Scenography, that encompasses the multi-faceted and multi-sensory ways of understanding and communicating experience of place. Through its audio-visual format Parry seeks to draw the viewer into the folds of a phenomenal experience of an officially designated heritage site, and in sharing these embodied encounters communicate what they might actually mean to the individual identities that they have been preserved *for*.

### **Identity through Place**

The ways in which places can shape or become aligned with personal and collective identities are considered across many disciplines that are curious about human interaction with their environment. The three pieces in this section, in their distinct variety, each offer examples of how this idea might manifest. Here the authors attend to the concept of identity in literature through the 'cultural imaginary' of the North American war veteran (Collier 2022), the

‘pilgrimage’ of Beatles fans to Liverpool (Young 2022) and the retention and inscription of identity through home-making making by Tuvaluan Pacific migrants in New Zealand (Ghezal 2022).

Rebecca Young conducted and analysed ethnographic interviews to examine the role that the City of Liverpool had in shaping the shared identities of Beatles fans visiting the band’s birth places and cultural home. She contends that through these visits to sites to which the band were connected they are conducting an act of pilgrimage ‘as a physical voyage and an inner journey’ (Young 2022). She finds that the fans are actively engaged in re-connecting with their past identities through a ‘physical experience of the site in the present’ and in some cases having what can only be described as a spiritual experience (Young 2022). The authentic experience of pilgrimage for the fans appears to rely on, for example, being able to sit where band members sat or sing where band members sang. The places remain static and the fans come to them to ‘reconfirm and connect with that part of their identity’ (Young 2022). The reassuring stability of place holding identity is one closely guarded and often culturally contested. Stability is an option no longer available to many of the continually growing diasporic communities that have been uprooted through factors such as war and climate change around the globe.

Amina Ghezal’s research focusses on the experience of Tuvaluan migrants who have migrated to New Zealand because of irreversible factors such as rising sea levels in Oceania. Migration has historically been a part of Tuvaluan and other Pacific Islander’s cultures to islands in the area for centuries. However, Ghezal explains, the shift in environmental balance and growing population have forced the Tuvaluans to seek a more permanent economically and environmentally sustainable option outside of their seafaring culture. By following a *Talanoa* approach, a Tuvaluan form of conversation and sharing, she learns of the inscription of identity that the migrants have needed to perform on the host-place in order to grow roots and make these new places ‘home’. Ghezal’s conversations with 40 participants illustrates some of the intersectionality that exists within all ‘communities’ that can so easily considered as one. Through the participant’s voices she uses her paper to discuss the many meanings of ‘home’, and how this is emotionally and practically reflected in the Tuvaluan migrant’s work to ‘expand their roots and reconfigure the sense and meaning of home in an environmentally and culturally different place’ (Ghezal 2022).

As an exploration of identity through place, the above could not be more different from Sarah Collier’s close reading and cultural critique of two works of fictional literature, *Cherry* (Nico Walker 2019) and *War Porn* (Roy Scranton 2016). Here it is the identity of the military war

veteran and its role in the ‘cultural imaginary’ of the USA that serves to define a certain sense of place and legitimise geopolitical aggression (Collier 2022). Collier explains that through their narrative both authors seek to disrupt the ideologically driven concept of the white military ‘trauma hero’ that underpins this mythology. Her analysis unpacks the way that the authors inscribe the narratives of place, carrying the ‘there’ of conflict in the Middle-East to the ‘here’ of white suburban North America, through the bodies and minds of the book’s protagonists. Collier draws her critique beyond her conclusion that the authors have been unsuccessful in their aim. Indeed she argues that these anti-heroes serve only to reinscribe and geopolitically re-territorialise a hegemonic discourse of idealised white masculinity through representing its antithesis of ‘abject masculinity’ (2022). And this in-turn problematises the privileged place that the author’s white, male voices still hold in the critique of western warfare (Collier 2022).

### **Place in the Imaginary**

Although each of the three papers within this section are rooted in the material, I consider here the necessary leaps that the authors have made to imagine the ‘place’ that *becomes* through creative human interaction with that material. It is the experience of the material, through literature (Ferrer 2022), robotic avatars (Robertson 2022), and creative deconstruction and reconstruction of landscape through visual media (Jones 2022), that forms an imaginary place in the reader’s mind. All the authors in this section are as interested in *how* this happens as they are in what happens, and this helps to draw focus on the imaginary in all of our interactions with place.

Berta Ferrer in her paper ‘The unconventional form of the novel as a place of encounter: the reader’s self-awareness’ explores four authors that have applied ‘unconventional visual devices’ to disrupt the expected relationship that a reader might have with ‘standard novel’. Beginning her journey in the mid 18th century with Laurence Sterne’s novel *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767), Ferrer explores how experimentation with printing and writing conventions have sought to transform the relationship between the text and the reader, and sets these texts against the current context of transformations in the way printed books, and our reading of them, are being ‘challenged by the immediacy, dynamism and fluidity of digital media’ (Ferrer 2022). In the examples Ferrer offers, the form of the book itself can be a physical representation of the nature of recollection (*The Unfortunates* Johnson 1969) or an agent in drawing attention to the experience of reading, where conventionally that reader might normally seek to become lost in their own internalisation of the text. As places of encounter, the books that Ferrer explores will not relinquish their materiality, and the reader is an active participant in the formation of that

place. It stimulates a question that can be extrapolated to think about how any place comes into being, and how memory performs to create and erase 'place'.

Rachel Jones in her paper 'Visible Knowledge in the Imagined Landscape' also explores how the materiality of the 'text', in this instance drawings, photographs and film, can communicate and produce a particular conception of landscape. Jones offers a rich and reflective account of how her practice based research had to be adapted to work with participants over the course of the Covid-19 Pandemic, and her role in reconstructing the Cornish landscape through their responses. Jones' insight draws comparison with those of Ferrer, that of making meaning through the process of interacting with the material, the landscape as imagined, it's representation as the place of encounter.

The location of encounter is also pivotal to Nicola Robertson's paper 'Robotic Avatars and the Vicarious Realm' where she explores the role that a small, slightly humanoid robot plays as a proxy for a young girl Jess, who is unable to attend school in person. Robertson offers a 'speculative proposition' of how and where encounters between the robot and the young girl's peers occur and in-turn how Jess then might imagine herself to be present in those interactions. Robertson's consideration of 'intercorporeality' has become increasingly pertinent to many of us as our working and social lives have relied on the virtual to interact with one another. Her article asks the reader to place themselves in a particular realm, the 'vicarious realm' to imagine the ideas she is proposing. Blurring the lines between ideas of space, place, digital and virtual, she uses the science fiction genre to help speculate how the corporeal and imaginative relationship might develop between these locations as this 'science fiction' becomes an increasing reality.

### **What's in a theme?**

To re-iterate, the act of allocating each of these papers a particular theme is purely subjective and should not work to diminish the broader complexity of each piece of work. Using a Venn Diagram to illustrate how the themes might intersect implies a certain amount of control and equal weighting in the relationships between place as a material focus, an imaginary and an identity. However such a scientifically constructed diagram cannot ever articulate the often sequential, generative and iterative relationships between the three themes I have applied. It is a model to illustrate inter-relatedness, but is also one to contest, and I hope here it might serve as a critical springboard to encourage connections that might not have been previously considered. Consulting literature and visual media that has meaning to certain communities,

harvesting or communicating through social and digital platforms, joining participants at sites that are important to them, storytelling, filming, recording, drawing, giving participants autonomy, connecting to those that may be too vulnerable to leave their homes but have proxies in their stead, these are all ways that *places* have been found by the doctoral and early career researchers that have kindly shared their work. The often implied stability and continuity that can be associated with the term ‘place’ or indeed ‘space’, has been demonstrated as important and concrete to human experience, but in the diversity of manifestations offered throughout this special issue, are also clearly multi-modal and never static.

I hope that you enjoy the papers that follow as much as I have, this special issue is certainly a place that I will be returning to as my own research develops over time.

# Flirting with Space, the Question of Space and Beyond: An Interview

DAVID CROUCH *University of Derby*

HARRIET PARRY *University of Brighton*

David Crouch is Professor Emeritus in Cultural Geography and Senior Research Fellow at the University of Derby, UK. David's vital and inquisitive praxis attends to the creative nature of human and non-human relations in and with space, an approach also illustrated through his work as a practicing artist. His most recent research monograph *Flirting with Space* (Crouch 2010) exemplifies the rich rewards for such attention to the complexity, simplicity, playfulness and possibility that occurs through the practice of everyday living. Amongst his many contributions working to open up space for innovation in his field, David recently co-edited a publication entitled *The Question of Space* (Crouch and Nieuwenhuis Eds. 2017) with political geographer Dr Marijn Nieuwenhuis then Warwick University, now Durham. The text draws together a diverse group of authors writing across boundaries and territorialities that demonstrate the liveliness and ongoing value of playing with the concept of space, an approach that we have endeavoured to reflect in this special issue of *Networking Knowledge Mediating Place*.

The interview was conducted as a written email exchange over the summer and into the autumn of 2020, when universities started gearing up for a new scholarly year and the ongoing impact of the pandemic on academic research still remained unclear. As a PhD researcher about to embark on my third year at the University of Brighton, my fieldwork had been suspended and walking tours with participants around the heritage sites that were my case-studies seemed like a memory of an alternate reality. Although it was frustrating to have to take a step back from the physical and embodied experience of these sites, it also created a space to think about what it really means to *be*, through my contrasting disconnection from the animate and inanimate materiality of my social environment.

The emails between David and I therefore became a generative space for me to think through the physical sense of detachment from 'reality' imposed by lockdown. Our conversation was contextualised by the mass media broadcasting rolling images of restriction and protest, those yearning for space and escape and the critical inequality that defines the varied everyday experiences of bodies in a global pandemic. The conceptual space created gave us the opportunity to stop, think and reflect, generating a certain cadence of communication between us. In the same way that two beings can find a rhythm when travelling side-by-side, so I found myself falling into the rhythm of David's rich and impressionistic forms of thinking and writing.



Figure 1. David Crouch (2011) Space forms I [Gouache 20x14 cm]

*DC: In gouache this image floats, suggests uncertainty but also the possibility of hope.*

**HP:** Firstly it might be best to address your position on the terms ‘space’ and ‘place’. Our journal issue’s principle theme is ‘Mediating Place’ and the two terms are often used interchangeably and, as demonstrated in *The Question of Space* (Crouch and Nieuwenhuis Eds. 2017), can have very different meanings across disciplines and non-western ontologies. Could you briefly explain what you understand these terms to mean?

**DC:** One comes across a tortuous insistence that ‘place’ is home, is close, is habitual, familiar, reliable, zenith. Safe. Space is demoted as empty, awaiting fulfilment. Yet of course these meanings and distinctions happen the other way round too. Confusion.

It seems to me, and I prioritise human lives and values, the much unrehearsed geographies (rather than just governments, institutions, countries – more on that below), that meanings not only arise from popular culture’s dimensions of the media-led. One example occurs through tourism promotion: the place to go, great places, never spaces – unless that is applied to great open spaces – are they places too?! Here space seems too often to await achievement. Place is associated with full meaning-given stuff, of sites, particular locations. Our memories can work with outward fragments of influence, the media in all its forms can link up with our recall. The two words (or can they be ‘terms’?) are muddled yet also are held in highly distinctive ways. Thus we ‘know the place’, we don’t know the space. Once a place, always a place, always the place. These categories are spoken and written as fixities: place, space, their discreteness. Nevertheless, I feel sure that the secure idea of place will continue in everyday speech. It is just that for those trying to interpret, make sense or make better understanding and interpretation, it may serve to be more particular and explicit in what we mean and understand. It seems that place is something already there, awaiting our arrival, waiting to be held onto.

Have we never felt change, erasure, unfamiliarity, disappointment, excitement, new realisations and relations with space; with place, uncertainty? Our (human, human-other than human) lives bear many spaces. We make, lend meaning to spaces; we are affected by the

space, by what is around us, is remembered, or we felt given by diverse origins, sources variously mediated. Yet in practice, we cannot necessarily 'hold on' to what we already carry over time. That meaning, significance, resonance may change, gently over time or suddenly in excitement or disappointment. We may re-visit somewhere we knew well five, ten years ago and find it's changed, the desire perhaps erased. It feels different. We may try consciously to make it revert to what it was; we may try and wipe away what it was to us, and may reach a new realisation.

Memory and seasonality change (things) too. This is what – in part – what I mean by 'flirting', as explained in the earliest pages of *Flirting with Space* (Crouch 2010): nuance, inter-active. Space is not obvious. In another way of thinking space, feeling space, we participate in its making; in what we find and feel 'it' to be; 'it' being of our relationship felt in engaging landscapes (not simplistically landscapes, that takes us far too easily into particular artistic-given rules, not everyday life) these shapes are involved with organic and inorganic character. Their affectivity that we may find to ourselves is felt.

It may be that our expectations have been over-heated; media, advertising, friends sharing feelings, particular experiences we have had elsewhere since our last time here: this is the swirl of media/political/economic/environmental/and so on merges inchoately with human, everyday, so-called mundane lived experiences.

Culture is about our making of it, in and through our lives; not bestowed upon us, although that can seep into the mix too. Our feelings in the moment are affected too by who we are with, and not with at the time, or were (not) with last time.... So if place means fixity, duration, it must also mean fluidity, thus defying the huge literature that has, and still accompanies this word that has been played as one of a double that made the cornerstone of geography's fixity fetish and that infests other disciplines too. Instead, we need to comprehend the making, unmaking, perhaps slipperiness, defiance, of our multiple relations with the worlds we inhabit: affectivities, atmospheres, flirting and so on. Flirting is something that happens uncertainly, as is its outcome; the feelings involved are uneven, unsure and fluid; open. Space is not fixed, despite how much we may seek, feel or need regularities.

I have a brief story of my feelings, relationship, with the valley down to a brook behind my parents' house. It was the location (space, place?) where I loved to walk with our then very young children, draw and paint, and walk with my parents, too. After their deaths, gradually over a few years, visiting the same valley, crossing the brook, looking back up to the house, the visit, the feeling of being there, became different in colour, in emotion, in affect, in so many intermingling ways. Of course, my experience of being elsewhere, similar and markedly different, a film perhaps, melded into my feeling, experience, responses of being there. And of course what I was doing had changed, too. 'The new' emerged partly, perhaps predominantly through the web of what had already been. I am reminded of the extreme of what has been ordained to be place: sacred, of a distinctive 'feel' beyond everyday feeling; primordial, 'genius loci' of underlying spirit; its depth and power radiating out – or simply tangible: prefigured and unavoidable. Humbly tending a garden there brought depth to earth working.

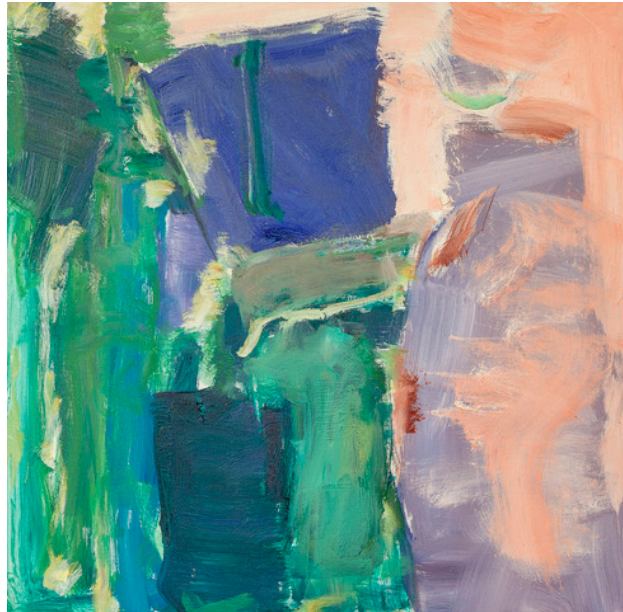


Figure 2. David Crouch (2019) *Landshapes 1* [oil on canvas 52cm.sq.]

*D.C: Here the work in oil paint resists any 'measurable' forms or shapes, and suggests fluidity; the colours and their particular forms or detail, construction or intimate relations amongst them hovers; open to change.... They flow and touch, bounce and wriggle. They seem to have their own impulse, rather than being charted or controlled by the painter, or otherwise, even expectations of others. I hope too that they commingle amongst themselves- and of course their relation with my reaction, my responses to them.*

**HP: This special issue is resolutely multidisciplinary in its consideration of space, place and epistemology in general. Could you explain from your perspective where you see the value in drawing disciplines together to share ideas on similar subjects?**

**DC:** For some time I have been working around multi-disciplinarity, only in recent decades inside it! Not in any way Post-disciplinarity, another term, an idea that is also absurd: all it would produce is mush, weak epistemology. But engaging between us is the exciting spark. For me this has been of great value, in for example in reconstructing our understanding of 'Landscape', human activities, reflections and feeling(s).

**HP: In your book *Flirting with Space* (2010), you set out a particularly creative and generative way of describing interactions with space that includes the human and non-human, the living and the inanimate. How do you think your perspective as an artist has influenced this view?**

**DC:** Undoubtedly my artwork, in its doing and in exhibiting, and gratefully having known and/or worked alongside professional/proper artists has a relationship with my ideas and ways in which I approach and find relationships in my thinking. This is one aspect of my early response to academic discussions of 'the body', although many of these can be arrived at through thinking outside the body. It is also a matter of feelings and our feeling for the world, up close and in its totality.

A particularly annoying survivor of centuries is embodied, if I may, in the peculiarity of the way many Renaissance artists thought it was all in geometrically arranged squares, a wire frame

before the artist, getting some (often awkward) resemblance, no, copy of exactly what they saw, accompanying Leonardo's 'Rules' of painting, as if there must be tight rules, imitation. It even seeps into contemporary socio-geography. A few centuries this way and we find a revival of an obsession with seeing, in for example 'the Gaze' granted to the primacy of the way we experience ('see') the world.

My late colleague John Urry found 'doing tourism' to be likened to Foucault's prison asylum control: watching and judging, exercising control. Martin Jay's book *Downcast Eyes* (1993), argues that sight, sometimes known as the 'noblest of the senses', has been underplayed in cultural content. Yet is it not now overplayed? Taken as it is, the seen image finds a one-dimensional human being, bereft of most senses and sensations. Engage also sound, smell, texture, and touch: a medley of comingling and a multiplicity of feeling, kindly, awkwardly, warmly, that John eventually did grasp, not without my pressure! My good colleague Sally Ness more recently explored the reality-of-knowing-feeling in her book *Choreographies of Landscape: Signs of Performance in Yosemite* (2016).

Much earlier I had found myself caught up in this absurd view of representation. I learned much on the importance of finding one's own way. The European artist Anne Lockwood spoke to me: 'David, you won't find your way until you make a mess!' The way took away from me the suffocation of getting it right in a way that mirrored the old 'perfectionists' and released me to a multiplicity of marks, looser, stronger; to tapping into, or opening out to, emotions: in being close to a model, feeling the character of the ground, in both, the excitement; tidiness had gone out of the window. I feel I have some identity with the way of working of Peter Lanyon; finding things mix, lines can outline movement, turning aside can give a different grasp, feel of things.  
<sup>1</sup> The artwork is partly about me.

Along with Lanyon's art, I add Richard Diebenkorn.<sup>2</sup> There's also desire, feeling the wind around one, or the heat of the sun; feeling being in the world. Lanyon wrote of how caressing one's partner can be felt as a shape that reminds us of the natural world in curves and more. Each of these energies project onto how I relate with and understand people – individuals, collectivities, and their feelings about the other-than-human (non-human alas identifies only what they are not!): around feelings, multi-sensual and so on, uncertainties, working through different moments, cultures, experiences: understanding their doing.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Peter Lanyon (8 February 1918 – 31 August 1964) was a Cornish painter of landscapes leaning heavily towards abstraction. Lanyon was one of the most important artists to emerge in post-war Britain'. (Tate.org)

<sup>2</sup> 'Richard Diebenkorn (April 22, 1922 – March 30, 1993) was an American painter and printmaker. His early work is associated with abstract expressionism and the Bay Area Figurative Movement of the 1950s and 1960s'. (Tate.org)



Figure 3. David Crouch (2017) Stillness [Oil on canvas 1m.sq]

*DC: The slabs of colour are settled, they share a stillness, certainly calm.*

**HP: From my reading of your body of work, it appears that the way that you think and engage with your research subject involves a great deal of empathetic thinking and a curiosity with what some would consider the mundane. As you have described, trying to ‘settle the arrogance of what – and whom is/are important?’ (Crouch 2016, 4). How do you think the ‘everyday’ experience informs bigger philosophical questions?**

**DC:** Everyday life, human actions and inter-actions, including with the other-than-human, has occurred over as many years as dictators have existed. No less it persists, and some, few, like John Fiske (1989), Daniel Miller (2008), De Certeau (1988), Richard Hoggart (2004), my good late friend and anarchist Colin Ward (1991), and most searchingly Raymond Williams (1989) have steadied the rush to theoretical oblivion in the bowels of media extremists and alert us to the absurdity of ‘post’ in terms of modern. I guess my response efforts here draw much as the previous question. Lived experience, gentle politics and care, empathy. Mundane ironically is the most important component, loved or loathed by participants, in existence. Power seeks to undervalue it, as do chunks of the media, even ‘big’ culture, that also often relies exactly upon the misunderstood mundane for its material – and inspiration – and creativity. Of course, the multiple and diverse interactions with power, authority, control, and more welcomingly staged culture can influence, can challenge, can critique the multiple bundles and energies that are culture, but not on its own. Dominant thinking of/on creativity without the mundane misses so much.

**HP: This interview is taking place in October 2020 at a time when existing in, and rights to space has become foregrounded in the act everyday living. In particular the ongoing**

**Covid 19 Pandemic, the call to action by the Black Lives Matter movement triggered by the murder of George Floyd in the U.S. on 25 May 2020, and the continuing migrant crisis across Europe. These events have brought into sharp focus the structural inequalities of a British neo-colonial political system and the deep fissures between political ideologies that the ‘Vote Leave’ campaign exacerbated. What role do you think creativity and the act of ‘bricolage,’ drawing on your 2017 article ‘bricolage, poetics, spacing’ plays in everyday exposure to the affects of these events, and where does this take the work of academic researchers trying to contend with these issues? (Crouch 2017).**

**DC:** Of course the issues raised here are vital. I am wary of expecting (they may hope for) dramatic change after a crisis. Indeed there is almost habitually a fall backwards following a lot of life-rocking terrible dramas. Looking back to the 60s, which chimes with aspects you highlight, especially the Black Lives Matter and more, it is a stark reminder that not all the world followed in Martin Luther King and LB Johnson’s ideas, let alone actions; of what happened to Russia after the USSR was collapsed; Bhopal and more. I do think that we/they might reflect critically on whether, how, and to what extent their actions, arguments, positions have affected things in the world; their collaborators in research and publication; their own actions in local and national culture and society, economy, environment, human life and health. That much they can reflect upon critically. Backing up this collective self-reflection is a need to review, critically and openly, such matters as metrication and values in funding, making ‘outcomes’ for local collectivities and national voluntary intervenors or NGOs no less valued than working for business and so on, if not a whole lot more.

Rather, inside our human lives, void of exploitation of course. Listening to what matters, feeling empowered to cast aside numbers, statistics, except where it is proven to be relevant as in the spread of plague, and engaging much more up-close. Fortunately, we have the continuing lean and shift toward qualitative ways of engagement. Alas, power does not always empower. But there is huge room for much more inter-communication with people, all people, of an empathetic and equal character. Our focus must be drawn by what people at large do and think; an everyday, maybe subtle, gentle politics. Not crudely vox-pops; more slow steady encounters, engagement and participation.

A number of academics do reach out openly to ‘walk with a wide public’. In various ways I try to contribute, here noted merely as some possibilities we might all adapt to where we are in our own work. This includes contribution to TV films, I was invited to produce one for BBC2; written books that accompany TV programmes (one includes allotment locations as heritage); given talks to local groups, artistic, political, who may be explicitly or quietly interested and prepared to engage. It is necessary for those who seek change prompted by often dramatic events at this time to engage – and to listen to – the wide, popular opinion, nuanced, sometimes jagged though it may be. Our content may be reshaped in ways to be more engaging with our audience.

Thinking of openness, desire to change, creativity, the arts hold considerable ability for flexibility. I happen not to paint in ways that leap into explicit anger, hard politics, or opposition. Often I find such work brings merely despair – and leaves nothing to replace it. I paint my feelings in response to or in company with what I am finding, particular situations –

or how I am affected by what occurs about me: landshapes, organic shapes around me, 'life', often unfamiliar spaces sometimes ones long loved. The colours, the marks express these moments. The human in the other-than human. Sometimes I come across a sketch done a decade or more ago. It can prompt reminders and great feeling(s); I am affected emotionally, and new ways of expressing the relation with its marks and colours emerges in a new work.

Meanwhile, the triviality of metrics currently suffocating innovative investigations and connections, does little to encourage all of this at a human level of our work. I recall Raymond Williams in his book on Hope: 'To be truly radical is to make hope possible rather than despair convincing' (1989, 118). I am not outlining a 10-step way forward; no 'programme'. I am interested here to attend to resonances, atmospheres, attitudes that may serve us progressively. Gentle politics and a desire to speak, to communicate, combine well with a flexible approach to space and accommodation of gentle politics with a recognition of bricolage in peoples' living seem to be pertinent in our progressing ideas of hope, change. But shouting too loud, presuming responses, alienate. Quieter can often be heard and better considered. I must have been affected by my years of being a Quaker.

**HP: The questions of how 'we' might see and listen, brings to the fore two particular chapters you cited within our correspondence from your recent co-edited publication *The Question of Space* (Nieuwenhuis and Crouch 2017). The first, "Knowing One's Place": Mapping Landscapes in and as performance in Contemporary South Africa' by Awelani Moyo (2017) where Moyo applies her experience as an experimental theatre practitioner and scholar to un-pick the 'social geography' of performance in contemporary Cape Town, South Africa. And secondly Yvonne Zivkovic's article 'bell hooks's. Affective Politics of Space and Belonging' (2017), where Zivkovic makes a direct call to bring the work of Black feminist, critical race theorist author and academic bell hooks to the centre of the study of space, a perspective that, as you outlined, is often overlooked. In a bid to push for the 'decolonization' of academia, still embedded in 'white dominator culture' which defines the lens through which many academics see, and goes on to influence societal norms, it would be great to discuss here why you believe these thinkers need to be acknowledged and centred in the consideration of space/place?**

**DC:** With Yvonne Zivkovic, writing on bell hooks, I agree: 'both wonder and joy, at least the way they are described by hooks, are affective states that, by initiating expansion and connection, are not vulnerable to demagogic manipulation as other collective states of affect'(Zivkovic 2017, 77). Taking ownership out of belonging enables hooks to make a reset of memory and heritage, timely in times of debate and action regarding statues and pasts. Our own bricolage, gentle politics, and sensitivity to affectivities can be liberatory.

Kathleen Stewart expresses her own handling of a scale of research inquiry:

Writing through several small cases selected out of countless potentially describable moments and scenes in which the sense of something happening becomes tactile, I try to open a proliferative list of questions about how forces come to reside in experiences, conditions, things, dreams, landscapes, imaginaries, and lived sensory moments. How do people dwelling in them become attuned to the sense of something coming into existence or something waning, sagging, dissipating, enduring, or resonating with what is lost or promising? (Stewart 2011, 445)



Figure 4. David Crouch (2016) *dance* [gouache 51 x 34 cm]

*DC: Other energies are at work here, starting from my sketching a woman at a life drawing event: she suggests making space[s]; the relation of body, bodies, in relation to all else that journeys, moving her body in the rhythm it makes; or even flirting with space! Her movements are rhythmic with her feelings and the surrounding spaces in response.*

Awelani Moyo writes, starting with the response of a homeless woman of colour [the preferred term used by Moyo] at a carnival-like festival event in a public square in Cape Town to the starting-up of music playing, recorded and live, Limbo. The woman began to sing and dance with the music – or her interpretation of it. Moyo notes the ways in which human actions in spaces are tolerated in different ways. Here, in this moment, this space, the dancing woman created her own in, out of this square, this space. In a curious way, what Moyo interpreted makes me think of a modest yet powerful, quiet book *The Man Who Planted Trees*, by Jean Giono (1989), an exemplar of hope, somehow particularly in our time. He had watched an area decline through the First World War across France. He dropped and planted acorns after an area of rich natural and human beauty and hard-won lives had been damaged. The valleys blossomed, provided fruit and more cultivation. People, families, returned.

With these I include a sensitivity of appreciation for everyday creativity and generativity in human life: working out ways things can happen, or occur, maybe sketching something of what our approach might be. As we calm our pressure towards shouting it is necessary equally to be

calm and also to try and reduce the anxious urgency of intense expectations whilst holding our values. Not such an easy way to be, but hold on, as Michael Stipe sings.

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# **(Un)placing Street Art: Augmented Reality and Urban Museums**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Street art was born with a strong connection to place. Due to its site-specificity, it is difficult to exhibit it inside a museum. There is an intrinsic risk of completely de-contextualising and un-bounding street art. Therefore, in Italy, there is an increasing adoption of online, mobile-based solution such as mapping or using augmented reality to narrate the artworks within their own placeness. However, the online mapping of Street Art and the adoption of AR is far from uncomplicated. Starting from interviews conducted with stakeholders of the Museum of Augmented Urban Art in Milan, this paper considers the various narratives involved in the creation of the museum. It focusses on the selection of the artworks, on how the ephemerality of the street art has been addressed and how the relationship between street art and AR have unfolded. It also reflects how the museum acts as contact zone and digital and physical memoryscape within the context of the city.

## **KEYWORDS**

Digiplace, Street Art, Museum, Augmented Reality, Mapping

## **Introduction**

Street art<sup>1</sup> is a phenomenon which we increasingly see daily in our urban dwellings (Schacter 2017). It has a strong connection with the place it is situated within, and with the narrative of that place. This relationship can be detailed in various ways. For example, the positioning of an artwork can tell a lot about the target audience: street art experts and members of the street art community (Ferrell and Weide 2010) or broader relationships with neighbourhoods or institutions. Even the conservation of street art is dependent on the place and its ownership, as in the case of legal/illegal artworks.

Cities are also progressively allocating spaces to street art, for example, the 'free walls' in Milan or Rome, which are designated places for street art sanctioned by the authority of local institutions within the urban landscape<sup>2</sup>. Artists can draw inspiration from the place the street

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<sup>1</sup> For a definition of street art see (McDowall, 2019). If previous definitions of street art have considered the illegality and anonymity of the artworks as central as much as their ephemerality, McDowall has considered a broader, more popular approach which stems from social media and contemporary popular culture. This definition includes commissioned street art and artworks of identifiable artists, which better reflects how street art is defined in the online sphere and in Italy.

<sup>2</sup> In the case of free walls, street art is legal and the street artist does not require any previous authorisation. The issue of finding legal walls is so important that there is a dedicated website for legal walls around the world: <https://www.legal-walls.net/>.

art is immersed within and from the networks of relationships it is embedded within. Sometimes the inspiration is drawn not only from the place but from the contingent encounter with other street artists, as shown, for example, by the interviews I have conducted with street artists active in Italy. Some street artists mentioned how, for them, the street art creation was a moment to spend with friends. In other cases, the street art is connected and born out of commissions and relationships, drawing from the place and the relationships with communities and local associations, within the frame of urban regeneration projects. In these cases, there is a theme that can be changed and adapted according to the place and the actual appearance of the wall (e.g. stains or different colours.)

Social media are progressively changing the street art landscape where there is an increasing tendency to street art 'placelessness' (MacDowall 2019). It is enough to post the street art online to be known, so then the physical artwork can disappear. Nevertheless, it is still challenging to exhibit street art inside a museum. Its exhibition in a traditional setting poses two main problems: how to address the street art processual and site-specific nature, and the disconnection between street art and local communities, which are increasingly involved in street art projects. Moving a street artwork away from its original location, usually peripheric, towards a museum which is usually in the city centre, betrays a set of power relationships. Only whoever feels at home 'inside museums' (and can pay) has access to an art which is usually freely available.

There is a constant tension between what museum professionals (e.g., curators and conservators) think of street art and what artists think of street art. The artists mentioned before have a clear idea of street art as a meeting and a processual experience where the final result has an ephemeral nature: the street art object is less important than the set of relationships that is born from and is immersed within, the ritual of the object creation (Schacter 2014).

However, museum professionals have different ideas of what street art is and how it should be conserved. In the last 15 years, there has been a rising interest in street art by museums and institutions in Italy. Exhibitions such as *Street Art, Sweet Art* in Milan at the Padiglione Arte Contemporanea in 2007 and the birth of *in situ* museums such as the Museum of Urban Art (MAU) in Turin in 2000 or the MuRo in 2010 in Rome have contributed to make street art familiar in the Italian context, identify it as part of an avantgarde genealogy, which spans from Futurism to the International Situationist, and consider it worthy of conservation. However, in the theoretical contributions of art historians, the recognition of street art as critique of the urban space and its ownership, born out of the tagging practice and 'spot appropriation' (Snyder 2017; Ferrel and Weide 2010) is always mixed and confronted with the necessity of labelling (Riva 2007; Ganz 2009; Schacter 2017) and exhibiting it.

For example, the polemics connected with *Street Art and Co: L'arte dello stato urbano* (Bologna 2016) have shown how difficult it is to exhibit street art<sup>3</sup>. In this instance, artworks were torn from the wall and exhibited in the city centre without the consent of street artists.

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<sup>3</sup> See also the court case of Banksy against the MUDEC for the unauthorised exhibition in 2018 (Art@Law 2019).

Moreover, it was a paid exhibition. Subsequently, Blu, one of the most known street artists in Italy, decided to cancel all his artworks in the city. Looking into his explanation of the choice of cancelling street art, it is clear how it is a critique of both the urban structure and the power relationships connected and showed by it (Young 2014; Schacter 2014).

It doesn't matter whether those walls were part of condemned buildings or part of the landscape in the northern outskirts of town. It doesn't even matter that seeing street art exhibited in a museum is paradoxical and grotesque. This 'street art' exhibition is representative of a model of urban space that we must fight, a model based on private accumulation which commodifies life and creativity for the profits of the usual few people. (Ming 2016)

This exhibition well represented the tension between what street artists consider as street art and what curators and heritage professionals think as street art: on the one end, the focus is on the process of street art, its presence within the place, the decontextualization and re-contextualisation of the place through street art (Riva 2007; Schacter 2014) and its public-facing value, on the other, the focus is on conservation and keeping street art as museum object in a controlled environment, in a 'cultural freezer' (Parry 2007).

### **The (Digital) Alternatives: Mapping and/or Augmented Reality.**

To respect the site-specificity of street art, digital solutions have been adopted. They vary in complexity and technologies used. Some of them propose maps of street art curated by experts or startups (e.g. Streetart Roma). Even the Google Cultural Institute has its own project on street art, showcasing the street view of the famous street art locations in the world and commissioned, sanctioned projects.

Others instead favour crowdsourcing, asking users to send photos and localise the artworks, such as Street Art Map Me in Milan<sup>4</sup> or Street Art Cities<sup>5</sup> which aims to showcase street art all over the world. The use of crowdsourcing is however complex: projects must be maintained and, when mapping is involved, need to consider ways to address uncertainty (Lasvarides and Vershbow 2014). Uncertainty is a fundamental issue for street art: even curated maps may give inaccurate information which usually results in difficult wayfinding. This is a common comment of street art hunters, people who look for street art and document it. Crowdsourcing projects must also be moderated and maintained: with street art, this would mean a constant interaction with the urban environment and an update on what is still available and what is not. With street art, it is necessary not only to add to the collection (Dunn and Hedges 2014) but theoretically to take away not-anymore-existing objects.

Moreover, crowdsourcing in heritage sometimes has a hyperlocal focus: it tends to attract people who are particularly invested in a place and have certain competencies (Stephens 2007; Dunn and Hedges 2014, 2018), therefore posing into question how partial the representation is

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.streetartmapme.com/en/map-2/>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://streetartcities.com/>

(Dunn and Hedges 2014), in particular, in cases like street art where heritage may have a hyper-local quality. The question of who is narrating the place and the street art remains, as much as with curated maps (Harley 2001; Dunn 2019).

There is also a proliferation of tour maps and private maps on Google My Maps, where users save and share their own street art paths and favourite artworks. Finally, others have created an additional augmented reality (AR) layer, which expands, narrates, and comments on the street art underneath, such as the Museum of Augmented Urban Art. In this case, the AR is accessible through a smartphone app, where the phone acts as a portal (Uricchio 2019). In the future, it will be interesting to see, if not only AR but also mixed reality headsets – which consider the entire space the user is immersed within and his/her movements – will be widely adopted, how these technologies may impact the experience of street art as well. However, their current state of the art limits their adoption in museums as ‘individual moments’, pauses inside the museum environment (e.g., HoloLens, see Richardson 2019). Until now, AR for street art has been mostly based on smartphones, even in cases where the AR element was designed by the artist himself/herself (e.g., Fat Heat or TvBoy) to guarantee the access to the experience to a wider audience without moving the street art away from its original place

These solutions respect the place of street art, but their approach is far from uncomplicated from a curatorial point of view. As much as more traditional museums or heritage sites, there is a problem related to the selection of street art as museum objects (Hooper Greenhill 2000; Parry 2007; Pearce 1994; Bennett 2017; Moser 2010). The selection is complicated by the urban nature of street art and the presence of heritage sites and objects which are sanctioned as Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) (Smith 2006) along with others which are not part of the discourse. Moreover, there is a question related to who selects and whose narrative these artworks are representative of, in particular considering the variety of actors involved such as local associations, street art experts, historians, and municipalities. These groups may read the urban place and street art differently.

If the selection process is, as I mentioned before, a common problem in museums, an additional problem arises with street art: its ephemerality. Because it is immersed in the urban environment and in places where street artworks commonly overlay one another, there is a risk of the mapped artworks disappearing. This covering is part of the game as much as the atmospheric damage on street art. There are some rules: particular pieces, which are highly significant or made by famous street artists, are conserved and progressively musealised, but there is always the risk of disappearance. Street art embraces disappearance as a fundamental part of the game. Ferrell (2017) defines street artworks as ghosts of the city, the remains of an invisible palimpsest. As shown above, some street artists identify more with the idea of street art as processual than the factual, final artworks. This matches Young’s (2014) idea of street art as not just an object but as a way to see the world and as a series of practices.

However, with digital mapping, it poses a central choice: is the mapping a current representation of the urban environment, albeit partial, or is it more a memory of the street art in a specific moment of time? Choosing the first option will mean continuously updating the map, a herculean task which will require almost daily updates and an always incomplete map, as shown by the crowdsourcing projects mentioned before.

If, instead, the choice of the institution is to present a snapshot in time of the place, an archive of how a place was in a certain time, we can think of examples such as Mobile M+: NEONSIGNS.HK in 2014, where photos of neon signs were collected from the audience and exhibited online along with commissioned mini-projects done by cultural figures to reflect on neon signs in Hong Kong<sup>6</sup>. In such an exhibition, the focus is the conservation of one moment in time. It is however problematic if the aim of a project is to organise long-term initiatives and tours because it may create expectations in the audience to see the artworks digitally mapped in the urban environment. Without a checking mechanism, street art changes remain undocumented and the result is, as it happens with Street Art Map Me in Milan, a pan-temporal representation of street art where on the map artworks which are still present are interwoven with lost ones. The street art will become a digital ghost where just one layer of the palimpsest will be displayed. If this can be said in general of street photography (Sontag 2007; Benjamin 2014), there is a difference: street art is designed to be overlaid and to disappear. Choosing just a few of them to be presented as ghosts means declaring them as heritage and creating the expectation in the visitors to see them still in the place (see for example the comments on the MAUA app on App Store). Furthermore, it interferes with the mechanisms adopted by street artists in choosing what has to be conserved (e.g., artworks done by famous street artists or which show a high level of technical skills).

Additionally, pinpointing artworks highlights them, giving them visibility. Street art situates itself in the blank gaps of the cities, in the glitches (Kindynis 2019) where there is space. Its localisation requires the user to see and experience the city differently, in moving spaces and not standing places (Young 2014), between train tracks and motorways. Street art is based on a dialectic of visibility/invisibility (Ferrell and Weide 2010), a hide-and-seek game (Ferrell 2017). Therefore, showing the artworks, making them accessible to a broader audience affects their visibility, contributing to and accelerating a process of institutionalisation (MacDowall 2019; Schacter 2017 and 2014; Young 2014) and heritagisation (Harrison 2013). This process deeply affects the relationship between public and private, which is the inherent tension within street art. Rethinking to the street art 'origin' in tagging and graffiti, the role of these practices is to leave a mark in the public place, to attribute personal ownership, to re-signify these places and to criticise them. This tension between public and private is at the core of the artistic practice of street art and it is part of the difficulty to move street art into a museum building, where its original function and public nature is lost. It is true that museum objects are memories of places and times (Merriman 1991; Gosden and Marshall 1999; Dunn et al. 2019) but, in the case of street art, the public becomes private and requires them to pass a threshold when it enters a museum, a task which is deeply influenced by the socio-cultural context (Gurian 2005).

The adopted platforms also propose a cartographic view of street art which is entirely different from the urban dwelling usually required to experience street art. The presentation of multiple times of street art recalls a god's eye view (Reddeman 2017) where multiple times and places are seen and controlled simultaneously by the visitors which see 'all the city and street art' at the same time.

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<sup>6</sup><https://www.neonsigns.hk/?lang=en#:~:text=Presented%20by%20M%2B%2C%20Hong%20Kong's,and%20documenting%20its%20neon%20signs.>

A final point can be made regarding the localisation and mapping of street art. Some of the artworks are illegal and, if these selections pinpoint locations and names, aggregating data, they can become a base for street artists' liability and legal trials. As MacDowall (2019) noted, this is increasingly happening with Instagram.

### **Localising street art: the issue of non-neutrality of digital platforms**

Most of these maps are based on services such as Google Maps and Open Street Map, which present a partial representation of the urban landscape (Zook and Graham 2007; Stephens 2013). These platforms show places in a particular time and their updating rates and information are dependent on the popularity and reputation of the location<sup>7</sup> (Zook and Graham 2007; Burrows et al. 2005). Moreover, as shown by Zook and Graham (2007), the ranking mechanisms of Google Maps are opaque but present search results as natural outcomes, making difficult for users to understand the non-neutrality of the search results and subsequent representation. Subsequently, it highlights or obscures places. Stephens (2013) has instead shown how in Open Street Maps the user-generated content is representative of a gendered perspective which is reflected in the information displayed and available on the platform. Therefore, the representation of places on these platforms is dependent of the power networks, the existing set of unbalanced relationships these places are embedded within (Massey 1995; Castells 2011). Google Maps' progressive release of features, which usually starts from a Western, English-speaking world, is based on a Western, consumer perspective.<sup>8</sup> Its popularity spans from its ability to rank and provide accurate information. It is the continuous use of people which guarantees it the data to maintain its popularity. However, because it is so dependent on users' information and behaviours, the presence of certain narratives online influences the way it represents (or not) places. For example, the analysis of Power et al. (2012) has shown how Street View has contributed to the stigmatisation of Moyross, a council estate in Limerick, Ireland, initially hiding it from the map, making it invisible and then not updating it, perpetuating the divisions and power relationships within society.

The mentioned platforms are not used everywhere: for example, in China, Baidu Maps is used. However, it is based on the same principle (Wang 2019): the more a place is explored, used, experienced, the more data the platform will have on that location, therefore representing the set of relationships the place is immersed within. Furthermore, it hides and presents a specific point of view: for example, Killing et al. (2020) have shown how it does not represent detainment centres in Xinjiang. Moreover, the way these platforms are realised and for what audience is dependent on their place of founding and background: Google Maps and Silicon Valley, Baidu and China, Naver and South Korea. For example, the data on South Korea on Google Maps are partial and outdated due to South Korean laws (Baldage and

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<sup>7</sup> Google Maps updated information is dependent on business owners, local guides and users and by their choices and interests. The same applies to contributions which users can submit after having visited a place and of the digital skills of the users.

<sup>8</sup> For example, Google first offered a more detailed view of pedestrian routes map in London, New York, and San Francisco (Perez 2020).

Cullen 2018) while on Naver, results are usually in Korean instead of English and targeted for a Korean audience in South Korea.<sup>9</sup>

Going back to contexts where the most commonly used platform for mapping is Google Maps, the issue is quite clear: using the Street View in Milan to localise street artworks is a slightly frustrating experience because the artworks may have changed over time. One of the most interesting examples is the Sarita in Via Pontano<sup>10</sup>, one of the main street art location in the city. The artwork has recently been overlaid by another one (Elena 2020): it was created on a free wall but the Sarita became the symbol of the neighbourhood. Its disappearance, therefore, sparked a debate on street art, conservation and musealisation. On Google Street Maps, the artwork is still existent<sup>11</sup>.

### **The case study: The Museum of Augmented Urban Art in Milan**

To explore the tensions between street art, digital technologies, and mapping, a case study was selected: the Museum of Augmented Urban Art (MAUA) in Milan, in the North-West of Italy. The museum was created in 2017 and it presents a selection of 55 street artworks in some of the peripheric neighbourhoods in Milan (Giambellino-Lorenteggio, Adriano-Padova-Rizzoli, Corvetto-Chiaravalle-Porto di Mare, Niguarda-Bovisa, QT8-Gallaratese<sup>12</sup>). If this museum is not the first widespread museum of street art in Italy with an urban focus (e.g., MuRo, Rome), it is however the first which systematically adopts digital tools as the core for its practice. There is no physical museum, no building, but the street art is instead mapped via an app and left in its original setting. If other experiences, such as the mapping mentioned above in Rome or Milan, have explored the potential of the digital, it is the first example of officially sanctioned digital museum of street art. Moreover, it is not based on street art commissions (e.g., MAU, Turin), but it collected and represented street art which was available in the urban environment before the start of the mapping process and it was perceived as significant by local students. Additionally, the museum does not have official curators but it is born by the collaborations of digital artists and stakeholders.

It is composed not only by street artworks but the artworks have also been interpreted and augmented by AR creatives/artists whose works comment, add, and reinterpret the original artworks. The museum is available through app and catalogues; it is experienceable in-place and 'at home' through the mobile app and the multiple available texts (catalogues, flyers, posters). The AR is accessible through mobile, acting as a portal and opening the experience of street art into another space which is always dependent by the portal (Uricchio 2019), the phone of the user, and the ability of the phone to recognise the image of the artwork and trigger the AR. The AR layer is dependent by the point of view of the user and his/her phone.

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<sup>9</sup> For example, searching 'Europe', the search result are agencies in South Korea which offer tours in Europe.

<sup>10</sup> See <https://mauamuseum.com/works/sarita-colonia-di-milano/>.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Via+Giovanni+Pontano,+696,+20127+Milano+MI,+Italy/@45.4950635,9.2285373,3a,75y,303.31h,93.82t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sfUqXXjHn90UadE2QtE26tA!2e0!7i16384!8i8192!4m5!3m4!1s0x4786c71cf5d557f9:0x8f115acc50698a54!8m2!3d45.496287!4d9.226307>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.streetartfactory.eu/en/maua/>.

Furthermore, the aim of the project has been to move tourism from the city centre, to make people explore the neighbourhoods and to go beyond the usual narrative associated with them as dangerous and uninteresting. Doing so, it opens another narrative, a sort of peripheric mythology which presents them as alternative and authentic, a mythology reinforced by the street art presence (Andron 2018).

The museum has multiple branches in Milan, Turin, and Palermo. The choice to focus only on the Milan branch was due to it being the second one created, therefore it has been present within the city for a suitable amount of time (since January 2018). If this amount of time seems at first minimal, in particular compared with the age of physical institutions, it is necessary to consider the high turnover of digital projects: some of these projects have a limited time frame or are not updated or are abandoned due to technological developments. For example, in Milan, see the lack of updates of the Quarto Stato AR app, published in the same time period as the MAUA.

Finally, as mentioned before, the museum was sanctioned and funded by the Comune di Milano. In Palermo, where the first branch was created, the process was not even defined as a museum: the definition emerged later in Milan. With the last branch, Turin, the project was defined as a museum from the start, showing how street art and AR have been progressively institutionalised.

Furthermore, this recognition of the MAUA as a museum is particularly significant in the context of Milan street art: as explained by multiple stakeholders (local associations, artists, museum staff, street art guides), street art has been criminalised in Milan. There has never been a unified project to connect various group of street artists. Consequently, street artists tended to create local groups, usually with political connotations, separated and in competition with one another, such as the one born around the Leoncavallo, an anarchist-occupied youth centre. The museum was the first official recognition of street art as heritage but also the first-time artists from different neighbourhoods ended up being connected thanks to the unplaceness of the digital mapping and the AR.

### **The double narratives of the MAUA: AR and Street Art**

These two layers, the street art and the AR, interact with each other, where the AR adds a multisensory experience and an additional complexity to the street art. The AR is inspired by and dependent on the street art, which is its trigger. If the street art is damaged, cancelled, or altered for more than 70%, the AR layer becomes unavailable and ‘untriggerable’.

However, the AR comments and presents, because it is made by a different artist, an alternative way and narrative from the street art. Some street artists appreciated this and commented on how it was part of the artist’s liberty of creating. Nevertheless, the AR work should be respectful and not cover street artworks completely or cancel their narrative. For others, instead, it would be nice to be more involved in the AR process, contributing to the interpretation of their own artworks, but they were fine with their artworks being interpreted by someone else.

### **The digital ghost of the street art**

The MAUA has decided to conserve the points indicating the artworks originally mapped in 2017 and the connected AR to guarantee the accessibility of the AR through websites, posters and catalogues. As explained by the museum, it would have been possible to change the application and ask it to recognise the new artwork. However, the digital artworks are designed to be connected to the physical ones. Therefore, they decided to leave the connections between the lost physical artwork and the digital one and to let the catalogue remain as an archive, ‘an historical memory of Milan of 2017’.

The dependency of AR on street art complicates further the mapping and the relationship with time. The AR is potentially always accessible as long as the gate, the street art or its own reproduction, remains open. Therefore, even if street art is cancelled, maintaining their images and locations makes the AR accessible. The memory of the place becomes at the same time selected and (un)bounded, a sensation exalted by the online mapping. Accessing the AR and street art in the actual place where it was located, is similar to an encounter with one of the ghosts of the city: one of the various layers is selected and presented as (forever) digitally present.

However, in this case, users are not accessing the place and the object, but the memory of the place and the disappeared object (Dunn et al. 2019; Merriman 1991; Gosden and Marshall 1999) where the object was. Street art, as I said before, is born to be ephemeral, and is therefore different from a museum object. It presents a memory of something that is not supposed to be conserved but it is supposed to be overlaid according to different rules and networks of power relationships. Moreover, it is doing it *in situ*: in a museum building or physical heritage site the conservation of memory is expected because the museum is a controlled environment. This memory conservation is not expected for street art within the urban landscape. The main memory becomes the AR one and, in an unexpected turn, it is the digital which determines what in the physical realm is remembered and conserved.

Conserving and presenting one layer over the other due to the existence of the AR creates an inversion of the intuitively understood relationship between digital and physical narratives. It is actually the AR which determines the conservation of the street art and its institutionalisation. For example, in 2018 *Cucimilano*<sup>13</sup>, an artwork done by Zed1 near the central neighbourhood of Porta Romana in Milan, was part of a controversy where the owner of the wall wanted to expand the place for advertising (Robertiello 2019). One of the reasons it did not happen was because the MAUA, as officially sanctioned museum of street art, explained how the change of the dimension of the advertisement space would have made the AR inaccessible. The project of expanding the advertising space was abandoned. This is an example of how the ownership and belonging to an authorised institution justified the conservation and recognition of the artwork within the city landscape.

At the same time, the street art legitimises the AR as being musealised and ‘heritagised’ (Harrison 2013) due to its progressive recognition as art form and symbol of place (MacDowall 2019; Schacter 2017; Young 2014). Street art is increasingly born by collaborations between

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<sup>13</sup> See <https://mauamuseum.com/works/gusto-tailor-made/>.

artists and local associations and institutions which looks at street art as a legitimization tool to gain recognition of their role and of their place within the city narrative.

### **When multiple narratives come into play: The MAUA as contact zone and memoryscape**

With this process of musealisation and the interaction of multiple memories and narratives, the museum becomes an arena for urban memory, where diverse ideas of the city and the street art interact and potentially contradict each other. In a situation where the neighbourhoods and the physical street art are not accessible, as it happened during the COVID-19 lockdown,<sup>14</sup> the AR becomes the only available memory of the neighbourhoods and of the street art. The museum proposed to users this experience of virtual touring which reflected not the contemporary situation of the neighbourhood but the memory available online.

Moreover, the MAUA and the street art objects become contact zones (Clifford 1997), where different narratives and ideas of heritage and place come into contact. Clifford defines museum collections as a set of exchanges between cultures. These relationships are not equal, but they are influenced by the broader networks the collections and the museums are immersed within. Notwithstanding, these zones can become discussion zones where multiple narratives are presented, contested and discussed. Massey (1995) has analysed how place narratives' purpose is to establish and state a specific 'envelope of space-time': the history of a place is selected to establish an identity, a name and boundaries. They are re-telling of the past in the present which aims to 'bound the place', to make it 'static' and to determine its future.

In this case, there is an ongoing contact between the everyday narrative of the place, the neighbourhoods which are usually narrated by media as dangerous and unsafe, and the heritage narrative which defines the place as having 'worth', authorised and expressed through the app and the presence of the digital museum, and a third local narrative which looks into an 'authentic', alternative, working-class, community-based identity, encapsulated by the 'streetartness' (Andron 2018) of these places. The museum is, therefore, a point of friction, contestation, and discussion. However, one of these narratives has an edge: the heritage narrative is sanctioned by the official institutions, therefore proposing the authorised memory.

The museum becomes a memoryscape (Edensor 1997; Gristwood 2014). Edensor defines memoryscape as 'the organisation of specific objects in space, resulting from often successive projects which attempt to materialise memory by assembling iconographic forms'. The past is selected and displayed within the landscape and subsequently sanctioned.

However, this displaying is not marked by a physical construction such as a monument but by a digital layer which is potentially available anywhere and anytime. Nothing suggests the existence of the MAUA in the physical landscape. For example, travelling in Via Pontano, the visitor will encounter sanctioned and unsanctioned street art but the digital layer, if the visitors are able to access it (Uricchio 2019), will highlight and declare what it is the 'heritagised' street art.

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<sup>14</sup> In Italy, during the lockdown, people could not travel farther than 200 m from their home.

The digital narrative of the place is available online, therefore influencing how the place is read and interpreted (Zook and Graham 2007; Dunn 2019; Keightley and Reading 2014). Zook and Graham (2017) define it as DigiPlace, ‘the understanding of a location based on and filtered through information about a place that is available in cyberspace’. In this blending of digital and physical, hardware and software, place and AR, past and present collapse, presenting the authorised memory as ever-present (Hoskins 2017), provided the user has a connection and a smartphone. The user can access the memory of the street art, the AR and the mapping performed by the MAUA in 2017 even if the artwork is not available anymore, making therefore its memory potentially forever-present and sanctioned in the urban landscape.

## **Conclusion**

The adoption of digital mapping and AR in the MAUA has unexpected effects on street art. It places street art within the place, within the boundaries of the city: because it makes street art visible, it drastically changes the hide-and-seek game of street art. It does not move street art away from the place, guaranteeing its site-specificity. However, it makes it visible and highlights its presence and its value as memory and narrative within the city.

Nevertheless, it also unplaces street art, making visible just a part of the palimpsest: it selects and dis-connects street art from the place using both the AR and the digital mapping. The digital mapping presents and authorises a different holistic way of seeing street art in the urban environment, a god’s eye view (Reddeman 2017; Plangen 2008) which attributes authority and artistic quality to specific pieces of street art which have to be conserved.

The presence of AR contributes to the potential accessibility of the street art anywhere and anytime. The AR, therefore, creates a digital and physical blended memoryscape: the street art, in conjunction with AR, is at the same time placed and unplaced, bounded and unbounded and the museum becomes the authorised way to perceive this art form within the urban landscape, subsequently influencing and changing the narrative of the place, the neighbourhoods.

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# Places of possibility: Applying sensory methods to inspire inclusive, future oriented development and design of heritage

HARRIET PARRY *University of Brighton*

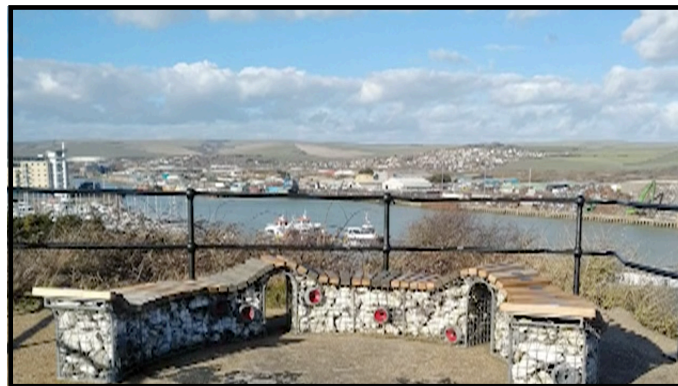


Figure 1. Newhaven Town, East Sussex. Memorial Bench 2018. Screenshot from author's presentation.

## ABSTRACT

This film (links below) introduces an interdisciplinary PhD research project that utilises principles of scenographic theatre design, more than-representational theory (Divya Tolia-Kelly 2006), and co-productive fieldwork practices to weave together sensory, cultural, and social responses to heritage sites.

By attending to the multiple ways that participants respond to heritage sites, the research explores the ways that neurodiverse and embodied entanglements with place are articulated (Ingold 2010). A scenographer reads and records the geometry and identity of a found space or purpose-built arena to understand its affective qualities to stimulate connection between performance, performers, and the audience through their design. The interplay between a heritage site's identity and locale, its visitors, and its atmosphere, has a sensory affect that influences the nature of connection to, or rejection of, that site. This methodology combines creativity with inclusivity when considering how heritage might be regarded, sustained, managed, developed, and made relevant for future generations.

## KEYWORDS

Sensory, affect, heritage, inclusive, design

**To view please follow the Vimeo link**

No captions <https://vimeo.com/458912198/ea42158daa>



Closed captions <https://vimeo.com/672250408/5f3911d51e>

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## Images

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**Harriet Parry** is a PhD student researching heritage and community engagement at the University of Brighton. Her interdisciplinary project is developing a more-than-representational and participatory methodology to better understand what heritage sites might mean to the communities that they have been preserved for.

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# **Roll Up! For the Magical Mystery Tour: An Examination of Beatles Fandom, Pilgrimage and Identity**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Through the examination of ethnographic data collected via interviews with Beatles fans who had explored Liverpool tourist sites such as Strawberry Fields, The Cavern, 20 Forthlin Road, Mendips, the Casbah Coffee Club, St Peter's Church, and Penny Lane, this project explores the connection between place and identity. It makes the claim that for Beatles fans, visiting sites associated with the band they love constitutes an act of pilgrimage, giving the individual a way to interact with a place that is important to them. In examining this action of pilgrimage, the author argues that this process links place and identity, as a fan's ability to contextualise the site is based on knowledge achieved from their fandom. The act of site contextualisation based on fandom not only gives meaning to the site but also allows the individual to reinforce their identity as a Beatles fan.

## **KEYWORDS**

Beatles, Fandom, Identity, Liverpool, Pilgrimage

## **Introduction**

The Beatles are undoubtedly iconic, as the band and their music have left an indelible impression on the world. During the eight years that they were active, the Beatles produced music that changed how the world understood rock, and their work still influences how music is composed today (Turner 2015, 14). The Beatles impact on music was matched only by the influence the band had on its fans. The music of the Beatles has an unexplainable universal quality that resonates with listeners, resulting in the continuing presence of the band on the cultural landscape (Kruse 2005, 87).

As the birthplace and home to all four members of the band until they gained international fame, Liverpool remains intrinsically linked with the Beatles legacy (Kruse 2005, 87). This connection has transformed the city of Liverpool into a hotspot for Beatles fans, who come from around the world to visit sites associated with the band. For individuals who consider themselves fans of the Beatles, a visit to these sites can be a momentous occasion, imbued with personal meaning akin to a religious pilgrimage. Drawing and building on existing academic theories of secular pilgrimage research, fandom studies, and concepts that link identity and place, this article argues that to fans, an act of fan-based pilgrimage is both a physical voyage and an inner journey. When visiting Beatles spaces, fans draw on their own fandom to give the site and their visit context. This act of contextualisation allows the individual to construct a sense of closeness between themselves and the Beatles, both confirming and rewarding their

devotion as a fan. The attachment that is created while visiting an important Beatles site fosters a sense of intimacy that allows the fan not only to feel connected to the place of pilgrimage but also to an essential aspect of their own identities; the part of them that identifies as a Beatles fan.

## **Methodology**

To explore how Beatles-based Liverpool attractions function as pilgrimage sites, this study draws on original ethnographic data collected as part of the author's PhD fieldwork. The data used in this article comes from a series of semi-structured interviews that were conducted in order to explore and understand how an individual's fandom influences how they interact with Beatles sites in Liverpool. Data was gathered from two main groups of participants: firstly, interviews were conducted with individuals who were visiting Liverpool and who identified as Beatles fans, thus providing insight to how these interview participants contextualised and understood their time in Liverpool in relationship to their Beatles fandom. The second group were individuals who work within the Liverpool Beatles Heritage Industry as tour guides or as on-site staff members. These participants who have daily interactions with both fan and non-fan travellers can provide insight into how visitors interact with and perceive these tourist sites.

Data for this study was collected via a qualitative case study method that considers how human experience shapes social reality (Bryman 2016, 493). The analysis of the data (based on grounded theory) was completed via the processes of open coding and selective coding (Corbin and Strauss 2008, 390). In the preliminary stage of the fieldwork, open coding was employed to identify critical concepts and key patterns within the qualitative data. During the early stages of the research, the process of data collection and analysis occurred in tandem, as this approach helped organise the data and allowed for the discovery of recurring concepts (Corbin and Strauss 2008, 390). After the data collection was completed (to the best of the researcher's ability, as it should be noted that data collection was affected by the closure of the Liverpool tourist industry in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, creating a smaller data set than initially intended), the process of selective coding was employed, allowing for the isolation and identification of the main themes present within the data (Bryman 2016, 569).

As no qualitative research is entirely free of bias, the researcher must be aware of their own position and strive to make sure that there is a limited incursion of personal values into the research process (Bryman 2016, 39). During the process of data collection and analysis, my impartial attitude towards Liverpool and the Beatles was informed by my own music preferences. While I enjoy the music of the Beatles, I would not consider myself a fan. Therefore, my personal opinions did not significantly influence the collection of data due to the existence of any personal fan-based bias.

## **Only a Northern Song: The Beatles-Liverpool Connection**

6 July 1957 is an important event in Beatles lore, as it was the day when a 15-year-old Paul McCartney met a 16-year-old John Lennon at a garden fete held at St Peter's Church. John was immediately impressed by Paul's ability to play and two weeks later Paul was asked to join John's band the Quarrymen (Roberts 2018, 41). Bonding over their similar family background

and love of music, the Lennon-McCartney songwriting partnership was born. Eventually renamed as the Beatles, the band (composed of John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and Pete Best) played a string of concerts in Liverpool (Loker 2009, 39). In 1960 the band travelled to Hamburg. In Germany, they learned to play for a live audience, perfecting their showmanship (Loker 2009, 2). When the Beatles returned to Liverpool in 1961, they were scouted by Brian Epstein and after Ringo Starr replaced Pete Best on drums, the band was signed to EMI's Parlophone label in 1962. The Beatles first record, *Please Please Me*, soon reached number one on the charts and from that point on, their popularity only grew (Loker 2009, 87). Screaming fans greeted the band wherever they played and Beatlemania gripped the world. Playing live finally became too much and in 1966 the Beatles became a studio-only band (Turner 2015, 174). From 1966-1970 the Beatles would release some of their most iconic LPs, including *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, *The Magical Mystery Tour*, *The Beatles* (known widely as *The White Album*), and *Abbey Road*. However, this was not to last; on 8 May 1970, the Beatles shocked the world by announcing they were breaking up (Loker 2009, 382). Despite only being active for eight years, the Beatles left their mark on music history. Their legacy and music have permeated culture to the point that it is almost impossible to imagine a world where they don't exist.

The city of Liverpool is often construed as the birthplace of the Beatles, not only because the four members of the band were born and raised in the city, but also because Liverpool is where the Beatles started their rise to fame. Within the city limits, all four members met, wrote songs, and played music together; it is where the band was originally discovered, where they performed their first gigs, and where they started their climb to the top. The connection between the city and the band has always been part of the cultural identity of Liverpool (Brocken 2015, 3). In 2008, when Liverpool was bestowed with the title of European City of Culture, this connection became globally established when the city leaders started to heavily promote Liverpool as the birthplace of the Beatles on an international scale (Brocken 2015, 200). The result of this rebranding and rebuilding was successful as Liverpool is now intrinsically linked with the Beatles. Even if people know nothing about the history of the city, they identify Liverpool as the birthplace of the Beatles. As Sadie, who works at a Beatles site, highlights:

Like I've found that if, like, I go abroad and people ask me where I am from, I go "Oh, I'm from Liverpool" they go "Liverpool?" And I go "you know, the Beatles" and it's like "Oh yah the Beatles!" It's just, it's just like a descriptor, yah, it's like a by-word.

Valerie, a Beatles tour guide, builds on the strength of this connection. She points out that the association with the Beatles is unique and that the connection between the city and the band gives Liverpool an intrinsic quality that no other location has.:

Oh, we wouldn't have won the City of Culture for a start without the Beatles. The Beatles are the icing on the cake, okay [...] Liverpool is a fantastic city, it's um a historic city, it's um earned its place in history, for both notorious as well as wonderful reasons. But the only unique selling point, is that the most iconic band, the most famous band, in the history of music are from here. They were just four lads, who grew up

here! And all of the places where they grew up are still intact, and you can go and re-visit, and it gives you hope you know. Youngsters will gain inspiration from the fact that these four lads, who didn't have any money, were pretty much poverty stricken, although they didn't know it [...] They went on, just through sheer talent and hard work, to become, you know, the icons that they are.

The connection between Liverpool and the Beatles is not static, it is a social construction that took years to generate via the development of a thriving tourist industry, the refurbishment of many Beatles centric sites, and an increase in literary and documentary coverage examining the connection between the city and the band (Brocken 2015, 199). Many tourists view a visit to Liverpool and its Beatles-centric sites as simply a journey to experience the history of this unique location. However, for Beatles fans, a visit to the place that is so deeply connected to the object of their fandom has become an event that is akin to a religious pilgrimage to a sacred site (Heelas 1998, 5). Liverpool is no longer just a simple physical location for Beatles fans; the significance prescribed to the city has transformed it into a performance space imbued with different layers of symbolic personal investment. The act of pilgrimage to Liverpool creates a link between identity and place. Fandom is personal, as each fan fashions their own unique expression of a fandom identity that is based on their own personally devised construction of what the Beatles and Liverpool represent (Kruse 2005, 103; Jamal and Hill 2004, 359). Thus, when an individual is finally able to visit Liverpool, they are not only interacting with the physical manifestation of these sites but also with the construction of their own importance they have prescribed to the location (Jamal and Hill 2004, 359). In this act of place-centric pilgrimage the fan is engaging in sense-making and identity building. When interacting with a site that is important to them, the visitor is not only experiencing the physical place but is also given a chance to engage in the activities of sense-making and identity building, that in turn allows them to interact with and confirm their identities as Beatles fans (Jamal and Hill 2004, 359).

Before examining in depth how for fans, Liverpool based tourist locations function as sites of pilgrimage and places of identity confirmation, it is essential to understand that Liverpool Beatles sites are assigned meaning from a wide variety of sources. Laura Basu's essay, *Towards a Memory Dispositif: Truth, Myth and the Ned Kelly lieu de memoire 1890-1930*, provides a strong theoretical base for examining how a single tourist space can be inscribed with multiple representations, that can be interpreted differently depending on the individual visiting the site (2012, 139). Using the famous Australian outlaw Ned Kelly as a case study, Basu explores how memory sites can develop and function through the processes of mediation and remediation. Based on Pierre Nora's (1989) theory of lieux de memoire (literal or symbolic sites, where visitors go to experience and remember the past), and Michel Foucault's (1980) concept of dispositif (the connection between separate elements, whose interplay results in historical formations that produce power structures, knowledge, and subjectivity), Basu argues that it is possible to think of a memory site as a dispositif (2012, 141). By approaching the site as a dispositif composed of multiple assortments of media texts and experiences, Basu argues that memory sites can be repurposed, allowing different representations to become entwined, creating a site with numerous meanings that function as a mixed-media dispositif (Basu 2012, 153). Because multiple sources can be used to prescribe meaning to these tourist spaces, this

paper understands Beatles sites as both physical and imagined representations, that can be prescribed different layers of significance depending on the individual and the conglomeration of texts they are drawing on. Such as music history, tourism strategies, personal memory and fan narratives.

### **Cos I'm Going to Strawberry Fields: Sites of Beatles Pilgrimage and Fan Identity**

Traditionally a pilgrimage denotes the act of travelling to a world-renowned holy site, invoking visions of the devout travelling to Mecca on Hajj, or those who flock to the Vatican to hear the Pope speak. However, these religious journeys represent only one configuration of pilgrimage. In the twenty-first century, as a result of evolving forms of travel, the types of journeys that can be classified as a pilgrimage have expanded (Hamling 2020, 11). As Dallen Timothy and Daniel Olsen highlight, a key element to a pilgrimage is not the destination, but rather the traveller's motivations (2006, 2). Spirituality is not confined to religious contexts, thus if an individual is travelling to a site that exists outside of their day-to-day lives, and that they perceive to be an embodiment of their personal beliefs and values, this act constitutes a pilgrimage (Heelas 1998; Timothy and Olsen 2006).

Using the theoretical definition of a pilgrimage laid out by Timothy and Olsen (2006), a trip to Liverpool can be analysed as being akin to a religious pilgrimage for Beatles fans. Many fans view these Liverpool sites as an embodiment of the Beatles history. To these individuals, places like St Peter's Church (where John Lennon and Paul McCartney first met), The Casbah Coffee Club (where the band first played), The Cavern Club (where the band gained fame and met their manager Brian Epstein), 20 Forthlin Road (the childhood home of Paul McCartney), Mendips (the childhood home of John Lennon), Strawberry Fields and Penny Lane (both Liverpool sites that inspired John and Paul to write songs of the same name) all have been prescribed meaning as sites that influenced the creation of the Beatles. Valerie, a local tour guide who gives speciality and customisable Beatles tours, builds on this idea; highlighting that for many individuals, visiting these spaces is an auspicious occasion. Valerie suggests that fans are finally being given the chance to experience this site for themselves, a space that they personally view as important due to its association with the Beatles.

They are places that they've known about for, many, many years, over 50 years, they are actually stood on the spot, maybe at the Penny Lane sign, or maybe at the Strawberry Fields gates, or [...] You know people do the National Trust Tour, of John and Pauls' houses and they can actually sit on the bed were John Lennon sat and dreamed about becoming the mega star that he did become.

Spaces associated with the Beatles within Liverpool are prescribed importance because they all sit in the broader discursive framework of Beatles lore, and therefore have been memorialised over time as significant sites in the bands past (Bremer 2006, 30). As Avril Maddrell suggests, memorialisation occurs when a space undergoes the process of communal and individual mapping, where meaning is inscribed on a specific site due to its connections to an important event or group (2010, 123). To those who understand the importance of these sites, a visit can be akin to a sacred journey (Bremer 2006, 30). In the case of Liverpool Beatles

sites, spaces are given meaning because of their connection to the Beatles past; they are sites that helped form and shape these four Liverpool lads into the Beatles, one of the world's most influential bands. Furthermore, for Beatles fans, these sites are imbued with a sense of importance or aura. Walter Benjamin defined aura as a quality integral to a work of art that can only be viewed in person (1936, 7). Beatles sites function in a similar fashion, as these spaces have been inscribed with meaning, especially within the fan community, and visiting these sites allows the fan to experience a sense of closeness to the band, enabling the visitor to share something that the Beatles once experienced (Rojek 2001, 12). This encounter is crucial because it allows the fan an opportunity to feel closer to the object of their devotion. Thea and Jeremy (who are Beatles fans themselves), highlight that for many individuals what makes a trip to Liverpool unique and distinct is the chance to interact with and experience the sites for themselves, to physically be in the city where it all started. Thea, a Beatles fan from America, said, 'So being in the actual place, where they were born, and they were hanging out, walking around, you know, theres a connection there that's really special.'

Jeremy, a Beatles fan from London, said, 'Since you listen to the music, and read the books, and know the history of them, and being here, in Liverpool in the place where they started [...] you feel that atmosphere, that's the thing, that's the connection.'

For fans like Thea and Jeremy, who have prescribed personal meaning to these Beatles sites, the act of visiting constitutes a pilgrimage. When touring these sites, fans are rewarded with an experience that is out of the ordinary; they have had an encounter that can only be felt within a place directly connected to the Beatles. This interaction between fan and a Beatles site has power, and can be an emotional moment. Valerie highlights the power of this interaction when she describes how monumental a visit to a Beatles site can be for some individuals:

It's the power that's built up in your imagination for years and years and years. And because I do it all the time, they've just become places I visit every single day. But I see it through the eyes of the people [...] It's places that you've always aspired to go, you've sang about them, you've seen pictures of them, you know history of them. And then at that moment, you're standing right next to that actual place. And it's... [At this point Valerie trails off, as she is lost for words on how to describe this feeling.]

Valerie's loss for words speaks volumes, because for fans the sensation of physically interacting with a site, is a powerful, personal and transformative experience. This feeling is created because the fans are able to connect with an environment they feel an emotional attachment towards (Digance 2006, 38). To fans, Liverpool has been built up as a mythical place; the city is not just a physical location, it is also the symbolic construction of the importance they have prescribed to the site (Tuan 2001, 86). Thus for fans, this act of pilgrimage is not only a physical voyage but an inner journey, as visiting these sites bestows the individual with the opportunity to connect to an essential aspect of their own identities: the part of them that is a Beatles fan.

In his seminal text *Textual Poachers* (1992), Henry Jenkins highlights that an essential aspect of fandom is that fans are emotionally invested in the pop culture content being produced. For many fans, the band has become an integral part of their lives. Over time personal meaning is

prescribed to the Beatles, their music, and other fan activities like knowledge gathering or object collection (Jenkins 1992, 52). For these individuals being a Beatles fan goes beyond an outward expression of something they love, for them the connection is more profound, their Beatles fandom is a vital part of how they construct their sense of self. Many of my interview participants touch on how being a Beatles fan is a constant part of who they are; fandom is now part of their identity.

I have been a fan of them for as long as I can remember, uh, I grew up listening to them. So it's just been a staple of my life for a very long time, I even have three Beatles tattoos, and I am working on getting the fourth one soon. (Loretta, Beatles fan from America)

I made a brave choice of changing countries, just because of the Beatles, I decided to learn English because of the Beatles [...] Like they are always going to be part of me, and do [...] I think like, a lot of the person I am is due to them as well. Ummm I am proud of the person I am, I mean I am a bit clumsy, a bit of a disaster and stuff, you know what I mean, but I think the words of the songs taught me a lot. I remember when I was a bit lonely, a teenager, I was one of the lonely kids, you know, and I used to like talk to the posters, you know what I mean, it seems a bit weird. But they have always been part of me. I still have that. I have a life sized cut out of Paul McCartney in my living room, and I will be like Hi, Paul you ok?" (Grace, Beatles fan originally from Spain who now works in Liverpool)

It's been one of those things in my life that's been constant, as a Beatles fan long before [...] like 14 years old, like excuse my language but when I saw them on *Ferris Bueller*, I was like who the heck is this? And it was like wow! And I had to find out more, you know? And you buy a tape with 'Twist and Shout' on it, and it, and you learn the other songs, and it just kinda grows from there. (Max, Beatles fan from Canada )

For Max, Grace, Loretta, and other Beatles fans like them, their fandom has become an essential aspect of how they construct their identity and sense of self (Jenkins 1992, 52; Theodoropoulou 2007, 317). In this sense, a pilgrimage to Liverpool is not just the physical excursion through the city, but also an inner journey, as visiting Beatles sites allows the fan to reconnect and reaffirm with the fandom driven aspect of their identity. This act of reconnection occurs when a fan makes a pilgrimage to a Beatles site, because while visiting, the individual uses their own experiences of fandom as a lens to contextualise and give meaning to the space. Traditionally, without some form of interpretation provided by a tour guide or informational signage, Liverpool Beatles sites would be meaningless to the casual tourist, as they are often unmarked (Sharpley and Stone 2009, 112). In contrast, fans give the site meaning by drawing on their own pre-formed understanding of the location that has been created due to their knowledge about the Beatles and Liverpool. An example of this can be seen when Rita, who is

married to Max, highlights that as a fan, Max can walk through the city of Liverpool without a guide, pointing out Beatles sites. ‘But walking down the street, Max has been like, “Oh that is where John and Paul had their picture taken on this album, or they did this here”’.

Grace builds on this, highlighting that when she visits Liverpool Beatles sites that provide a guide or have informational signage, such as Strawberry Fields, The Casbah Coffee Club, The Cavern Club, or the two Beatles-focused museums, she does not learn anything new, because she has already accumulated that knowledge over her years of fandom:

I have been into the Beatles since I was nine years old, and I am 26 now, so it has been quite a few years. Ummmm, I didn’t really learn much I am not going to lie, because I knew it all. Throughout those years [referencing her fandom] I had been reading books a lot, and I have been following them, so I didn’t really learn much.

When fans draw upon personal context to assign meaning to pilgrimage sites, they become active performers (Fry 2017, 56; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 195). To interact with and allocate importance to these pilgrimage sites, fans contextualise their own knowledge and experience of their own fandom (Young and Shooter 2020, 206). Drawing on their knowledge base allows the fan to feel closer to the Beatles while visiting these pilgrimage sites, as it grants them insider knowledge about the space. This knowledge then allows them to have a personal experience within these locations and subsequently helps confirm their fandom by creating a sense of closeness to the band, that then, in turn, grants the fans the ability to connect to the part of their identity that is a Beatles fan. Examples of how a fans inside knowledge, can create a personal experience can be seen when Grace, Max, and Thea talk about their experiences when they visited 20 Forthlin Road and Mendips.

Well, obviously where they grew up, is a beautiful tour, my favourite, the National Trust, where you can go inside the houses where John and Paul grew up. I am one of the lucky ones, I sat on John’s bed, and Paul’s bed – I shouldn’t be saying this, but I did sorry [referencing how she sat on the bed]. The National Trust Tour is amazing! So emotional, I have done it three-four times, each time it’s like, I was in tears, absolutely stunning. (Grace)

When we were at the house today, and I got to sit there in the piano seat, and before when I got up, I kind of ran my hand down the keys knowing that Paul McCartney played that piano, sat in that chair so that’s kind of like a bit of a connection there. Um and you know and in the living room [in Mendips] the one chair, I touched the seat knowing John Lennon had probably sat there, that’s kinda like [...] not freaky, but kinda like a connection thing to that, that they had done that, and things like that. But I am generally not one for [...] superstition, or something like that, but it’s really neat that they sat there and I kinda touched it or sat there [...] um I just kind of have that. (Max)

I did, the National Trust tour, which I think is the ultimate, because you get to go in their houses. And I have, like a really weird experience

with John's house. So, like, there was the porch that was covered, and had like a separate door, so it was like a room between the porch and the front door. And the lady, I forgot her name, the lady who takes care of the house, she told everyone to go stand in there and have a little sing song, because John's Aunt Mimi told him to go outside to sing because, it was too loud inside. So I went in, closed the door, and started singing "In Spite Of All The Danger", because I knew he would have sung that song there ... and the door locked on me! And that didn't happen to anyone else. So, it was like, whoa, John is here, I know it. That is what makes that tour amazing, you get to be in a place where they were standing, you know all that, yah, it's really cool. (Thea)

Grace divulged how each time she visits 20 Forthlin Road and Mendips, she takes the chance to sit down in Paul and John's bedrooms, an experience that repeatedly moves her to tears. Max, who got to run his hand across the set of piano keys Paul McCartney has played (including when he visited 20 Forthlin Road during the 2018 filming of *Carpool Karaoke* with James Corden) and touch a chair that John Lennon had sat in, had a set of experiences so profound, he could not find the words. Further, when Thea was locked within the covered porch of Mendips, she felt like John Lennon was somehow there with her. For Beatles fans Grace, Max, Thea, and others like them, moments like these, that take place within Beatles sites are deeply personal. The fans' understanding of the auspicious nature of the sites (that played a vital role in the history of the band) adds a sense of gravitas to these occasions. Deepening the sense that these sites and the experiences the fans underwent within them are so monumental, they are akin to being sacred (Bickerdike and Downing 2017, 199; Bremer 2006, 26).

The act of pilgrimage gives the fan a chance to interact with a site that they perceive as important because of its connection to the Beatles. Visiting these sites allows the fan the opportunity to come into contact with objects and environments that the band once experienced. These encounters help the fan foster a sense of closeness to the Beatles, as it creates a sense of a shared experience. This perception of intimacy, of visiting a space that has been transformed into a holy site due to its association with the Beatles, is only made possible because of the fans' own understanding and ability to contextualise this space. The capacity to understand the significance of the piano in the living room at 20 Forthlin Road, as an instrument Paul himself has played, or the emotions felt when visiting the childhood bedrooms of John and Paul, spaces where they would have composed songs such as *Please, Please Me* (Turner 2015, 31), are only made possible because of the fans' knowledge. This act of pilgrimage and sense of closeness the fan experience is key, because it is facilitating a connection to the fans' own sense of self.

In her work *Music in Everyday Life* (2000), Tia DeNora introduces the concept of a 'technology of the self' in which an individual's sense-of-self is constructed and mapped out over time through the process of identifying and linking their identity with pop-culture content such as music. Through the process of recall and life-mapping, each individual is able to compare their current 'technology of the self' to their past constructions, thus creating a chain that allows them to link their past selves to the person they are in the present (DeNora 2000, 48). In their work, *Popular Music Scenes and Cultural Memory*, Andy Bennett and Ian Rogers (2016)

expand on DeNora's theory, proposing that places can also function as 'technology of the self'. Bennett and Rogers argue that place plays a crucial role in the construction of the self because locations play a critical role in the creation and shaping of memories and an individual's sense of self (Bennett and Rogers 2016, 43; Brocken 2015, 3).

Using the argument proposed by Bennett and Rogers, a pilgrimage to the city of Liverpool, and the personal moments experienced by fans, can be conceptualised as part of the fan's construction of their 'technology of the self'. The fabrication of a connection between the city and the individual is attributed to the widespread fan practice of knowledge accumulation. As explored above, an important expression of fandom for many individuals is the acquisition of knowledge concerning the object of their devotion (Jenkins 1992). The city of Liverpool plays an essential role in the history of the Beatles; growing up in the city shaped the personality of the band members, inspired them to compose songs, and was the starting point of their rise to stardom (Kruse 2005, 87). This Beatles-Liverpool connection has ushered many fans to accumulate an encyclopaedic level of knowledge about the city and its relationship to the band. Many fans have been reading about the city and its Beatles related sites, for most of their lives. Thus many individuals have constructed their identity as Beatles fans partly around collecting information about these Liverpool sites. Therefore a pilgrimage to Liverpool allows a fan to confirm an aspect of their identity. The experience of physically encountering a Beatles site for themselves enables the fan to compare their previous technology of the self, a Beatles fan who is learning about and prescribing meaning to a location, to their current technology of the self, a Beatles fan who is physically experiencing the site in the present. Thus for fans, a Liverpool pilgrimage is not just a physical journey, it is also a personal exploration of the fans sense of self, as a visit to these sites enable the individual to reconfirm and connect with the part of their identity that is a Beatles fan.

## **Conclusion**

On the world's stage, Liverpool has been recognised as the birthplace of the Beatles, thus creating the reputation in the fan community that Liverpool and its Beatles sites are a must-see for any loyal Beatles fans. To individuals who visit Liverpool and understand the significant role these sites played in influencing the careers and music of the Beatles, exploring these sites is akin to a descending on consecrated grounds (Bremer 2006, 30). While visiting Beatles sites, fans are given the opportunity to experience a circumstance that is out of the ordinary; as they have now had an encounter that can only be felt within a place directly connected to the Beatles. Thus for Beatles fans, a trip to Liverpool constitutes an act of pilgrimage, as visiting these sites gives the individual a way to interact with a place that is important to them.

A pilgrimage to Beatles sites is an auspicious event for fans because for these people being a Beatles fan goes beyond an outward expression of something they care about, for these individuals the association is more deep-rooted, as their Beatles fandom is a vital part of their identity (Jenkins 1992, 52). Beatles fans are active performers, as they often draw upon personal context to assign meaning to pilgrimage sites (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 195). During a visit to Beatles sites around Liverpool, the creation of a sense of closeness brought about by comprehension allows the fan to connect to their past selves in the present, thus

confirming their own identity. This article's focus is the examination of the links between place, pilgrimage, and identity in the context of Liverpool and the Beatles, consideration must be given to the supposition that this pattern may be repeated in other sites of pop-culture pilgrimage (for example in Nashville or at Graceland). If a personal connection gives rise to the creation of a distinctive site visit that fosters a link between sites of pilgrimage and sense of self, a deeper understanding of the relationship between place, identity and pilgrimage could be developed.

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# "Home Away from Home": Migration, Home, and the Experience of Home-Making in the Host-place. The Case of Tuvaluan Migrants in New Zealand<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Post-migration, migrants go through the reconfiguration of place meaning and the reconstruction of home in the host-place. This article explores migrants' experiences of home-making, focusing on Tuvaluan migrants in New Zealand. Through interviews with Tuvaluan migrants, following a *Talanoa* approach, it is inferred that New Zealand becomes the vessel of the Tuvaluan community in which the journey of home-making begins, from within the community cocoon to gradual independence and expansion of self and roots in the host-place. Adaptation, connection to roots, hard work to thrive, and intercultural interaction are pivotal to understanding and mastering the system and the socio-cultural geometry of the host-place, bolster the sense of home, and preserve its constancy. Home-making in the host-place, therefore, is a relational, translocal, and transnational experience to build connection, ontological security and continuity.

## KEYWORDS

Home-making, Home, Tuvalu, New Zealand, Migration.

## Introduction

Migration has become a typical trait and a global phenomenon of contemporary societies (O'Reilly 2013). People migrate for various reasons, such as searching for better life opportunities or escaping danger and life threats. Today, environmental pressures often create imperatives for migration (Constable 2017; Mortreux and Bennet 2009; Fisher 2011; Paton and Fairbarin-Dunlop 2010; Smith and McNamara 2015; Hayes 2008; Beyerl 2018; Oakes 2019; and Farbotko and McGregor 2010). Therefore, there is an increasing focus on the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) (Petzold and Magnan 2019), due to their environmental and geographic vulnerabilities to climate change pressures. Examples include small islands in the Caribbean region (Cashman and Nagdee 2017; McField 2017; Thomas et al. 2020), African coasts and islands (Chan et al. 2020; Ingram and Dawson 2005) the Pacific island nations. Climate change, primarily sea-level rise, has become an existential threat to their territories and thus could force their inhabitants to migrate (Yamamoto and Esteban 2017). In this regard,

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<sup>1</sup> This article is part of a broad PhD project on migration, place attachment, and climate change in the case of Tuvaluan migrants in New Zealand. The project aims to understand the effect of migration that is fuelled by environmental and socio-economic pressures on Tuvaluan migrants' identity, attachment to Tuvalu and New Zealand. This article focuses on a specific aspect which is Tuvaluans' home-making experiences; namely, the reconstruction of the host-place as the home away from home.

Willcox (2016) supports the importance of recognising climate change inundation as a grave external threat to the islands' self-determination.

A pioneering example is the Polynesian island nation of Tuvalu (Farbotko et al. 2017; Corlew 2012; Murphy 2017; Macdonald 2001). Tuvalu is a small low-lying island nation in Oceania that consists of nine coral atolls (Faanui and Laracy 1983; Hunter 2002; Mimura et al. 2007; Yang et al. 2020). It has become the emblematic figure of climate change. It has been described through tropes and metaphors such as 'the canary in the coalmine' (Farbotko and Lazrus 2012) and 'the sinking nation' (Halstead 2017) as an Atlantis-style prediction of a state on the verge of disappearance (McAdam 2012). Although migration from Tuvalu is not always strictly caused by climate change, Tuvalu has become a favourite topic to debate climate change migration, neglecting Tuvaluans' experiences in the host-place and their culture of home-making post-migration.

This article highlights the experiences of Tuvaluan migrants in New Zealand, focusing on processes of building a home away from home and drawing on belonging and home-making. It presents data from interviews, inspired by the *Talanoa* approach – a traditional Pacific conversation and storytelling method (Gossai 2018) – with forty Tuvaluans. The findings suggest that New Zealand becomes not only a material host body but also a platform of connection, openness, and expansion of self and roots. The process of home-making for Tuvaluans, therefore, is a relational, personalised, translocal and transnational experience which is crucial to achieving continuity and ontological security.

### **Migration, home and home-making**

Home is an elusive term to define; it carries different meanings. Home is an amalgamation of feelings, possessions, and stories. It is a physical structure, a social realm, a cultural practice (Bahun and Petric 2020), and a space of 'being with becoming' (Mitzen 2018, 1373). Home can function as a place that anchors belonging and identity, but it can also be a space of hierarchy or repression (Lenhard and Samanani 2020). The meaning of home cannot be static; be it the place of origin, destination, or any place where people exist (Gomez and Vannini 2017). In the current era of globalisation, and although there is a growing tension of defining home between its mobile and sedentary aspects (Ralph and Staeheli 2011), migration creates diasporic communities and transmigrants who reside in 'home away from the homeland' (Markowitz and Stefansson 2004). That is to say, the homeland remains the anchor of attachment and connection to culture and identity. Therefore, the migration destinations become the home of a new life post-migration.

The process of home-making is building a physical structure, making a socio-cultural, emotional, and relational space. In the context of transnational migration, journeys of movement do not entail a simple loss of home. Instead, the home search comprises a specific relationship with the place, which entails 'a tentative attribution' of a sense of security, familiarity, and control to a particular place (Bocagni 2016). Post-migration, the reconstitution of the feeling of home and belonging are embodied, situated and relational (Cain et al. 2015). This process comes either through isolation in the new milieu or embeddedness in both; the homeland through preserving transnational ties (Vertovec 2009; Ndukwe 2017) and the host-

place through translocal activities (McGarrigle and Ascensão 2018; Allard and Caidi 2018; Kuiper 2020; Daskalaki et al. 2016). The process of embeddedness in the host-place, as an essential step towards home-making, is closely related to the concept of translocalism.

Translocalism is a 'mode of multiple emplacements or situatedness' (Smith 2011 181). It moves without diluting the importance of and association with the place (Phillips and Robinson 2015). The idea of translocality seeks to understand the tension that arises between 'mobility and locality', precisely, the social production of places through assemblages of flows, movements, and local practices (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013). Mobility can make a different place or the 'elsewhere' as a part of 'home' through the re-territorialisation of the locality. However, the translocal place-making does not necessarily mean de-territorialisation of culture (McKay 2006). Translocality situates the experiences of migrants within or across specific 'locales' without restricting them to the territorial boundedness of the nation-state (Brickell and Datta 2011). Translocalism serves as a definition of the relational connections that migrants build with the different localities. To feel at home, regular activities in public spaces are essential in developing a sense of belonging at the local scale (Rishbeth and Powell 2013). Therefore, migrants engage in 'cosmopolitan sociability' and invest in 'emotional labour' to construct novel relationships, generate a sense of comfort, sense of home (Wang 2016), learn the host/majority language, and socialisation (Paradiso 2019). For Tuvaluans in New Zealand, navigating and understanding the host-place are vital for continuity and home-making while simultaneously retaining relational and transnational ties with the homeland.

### **Tuvalu: migration and culture of connection facing climate change**

Migration throughout the Pacific, to neighbouring islands or other countries, has been historical and cultural practice for Tuvaluans<sup>2</sup> and Pacific islanders (Simati 2009). Pacific islands are intertwined with the ocean and land, and this island-ocean duality constitutes the island identity (Havea 2010). For Tuvaluans, roaming the open oceans and exploring near and distant territories is a constituent element of the Tuvaluan and Oceanic island identity. Migration, identity, and cultural sustainability are manifested in a pattern of travelling and dwelling, which has always been part of the Pacific identity and lifestyle. The islands are, in this sense, the central point for the movement, return, identity, and nationhood (Carter 2014). Therefore, connection, openness to the broader world and embracement of different localities either within or outside the island's sphere are characteristics of the Tuvaluan culture of exploration, flexibility, and openness.

Nevertheless, in the current age of globalisation and the ever-changing geopolitical, economic, and environmental map of the world, Tuvaluans struggle to secure a sustainable and continuing life in Tuvalu. For Tuvaluan islanders today, environmental pressures place heavy burdens on the population. Likewise, the growth of the population increases the socio-economic and

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<sup>2</sup> Although the island nation of Tuvalu is under climate change pressures such as sea level, there is no climate change/environmental migration scheme or category through which Tuvaluan islanders can migrate. Tuvaluans can migrate through other schemes such as overseas employment or family reunion (Malua 2012; Shen and Binns 2012). Likewise, in many cases, climate change is not the main migration imperative. Namely, it is often a contributing factor alongside other factors such as the search of better life opportunities, education, and employment prospects.

environmental pressure on the islands, such as the increasing demand for employment, access to land and resources, and the inevitable rise in the amount of waste. These pressures challenge Tuvalu's carrying capacity (Cocks and Foran 1995) to support the population growth, demand for vital resources and life opportunities. Furthermore, climate change poses a significant threat to the ontological security of Tuvaluans, such as sea-level rise, flooding, coastal erosion, and salt-water infiltration through the island (Farbotko 2010). These pressures disturb Tuvaluans' livelihood and coexistence with the environment. Thus, migration to economically advanced and environmentally stable countries has become a sustainable and adaptive strategy. For Tuvaluans, New Zealand is a preferable migration destination to seek environmental safety, better opportunities, and life prospects. Nevertheless, despite the proximity to New Zealand geographically, genealogically, and the existence of other Pacific groups in New Zealand, Tuvaluan migrants' journeys do not end by resettlement and establishing a Tuvaluan diasporic enclave. Specifically, they still need to go through different highs and lows to adapt to the new environment, reconfigure and reconstitute a new home to bolster a sense of belonging, security, and continuity.

### **Methodology and data analysis**

The data used in this article come from forty conversations with Tuvaluan migrants in New Zealand. The *Talanoa* approach has inspired the style of the conversation. *Talanoa* is a traditional Pacific conversation and storytelling practice (Havea, 2018). It is used across different Pacific islands and native languages in Oceania, which refers to storytelling (memories, stories, and longings), and conversation (Havea 2010). *Talanoa* is an in-depth and interactive conversational practice and negotiation of meaning, self, identity, memories, emotions, and events. *Talanoa* approach is a valuable tool to interact with Tuvaluans to unravel and unpack their intricate stories of migration and home-making, emotions and thoughts. *Talanoa* is mostly a deep and long conversational interaction that takes the interlocutors to the deep layers of their stories and emotions. Tuvaluan migrants, unlike their relaxed island lifestyle in Tuvalu, need to adjust to the rapid pace of life in New Zealand, which reduces their time and availability. Therefore, due to the participants' time and availability constraints, the *Talanoa* conversations did not enjoy the full in-depth nature of the *Talanoa* approach. To respect the participants' time, guiding questions that addressed migration, home, and home-making themes have been designed to allow the participants to express their ideas and talk about their stories and emotions. Simultaneously, we have engaged in conversations, asking further questions, reflecting, and sharing similar and different experiences and perspectives, depending on the participants' time, availability and how much they wanted to share. The conversations have been analysed inductively, allowing new themes to emerge throughout the analysis process.

### **Reflective account on positionality and access to the Tuvaluan community in New Zealand**

Before discussing the research themes, I must reflect on my positionality as a researcher and my relationship with the research participants. I have decided to research migration from Tuvalu due to an initial interest in climate change migration. Tuvalu appeared extensively in

the global media and academic research discourses, portrayed as the symbolic figure of climate change migration. Unfortunately, research on Tuvalu and climate change generally focuses on climate change migration and adaptation plans and the portrayal of Tuvalu under various tropes such as the sinking paradise and the canary in the coalmine. Nevertheless, minimal attention has been attended to Tuvaluans' perspectives, emotions, and experiences post-migration. These factors have shaped my academic and research interests in Tuvaluans' home-making experiences in the host-place post-migration, mainly where the chances of return migration are limited due to the environmental and socio-economic constraints in Tuvalu. This article focuses on Tuvaluan migrants in New Zealand due to two reasons. Firstly, it was not possible to focus on Tuvaluan migrants in other countries, such as the neighbouring Pacific island nations, due to time and resources constraints. Secondly, New Zealand hosts a big Tuvaluan community (around 4653 Tuvaluans) (2018 Census External Data Quality Panel, 2020), where most Tuvaluans reside in Auckland.

It has been challenging to initiate contact with Tuvaluans in New Zealand and gain their approval to participate in the research. I have looked for Pacific islanders and Tuvaluan groups and pages on social media and realised that Tuvaluans have a strong Facebook presence. I have posted my research topic, aims and my academic background on Pasifika and Tuvaluan Facebook pages and asked if Tuvaluans are willing to participate in my research. Although the response rate has been slow, I successfully managed to have a few Tuvaluans who accepted to participate in Skype conversations. These participants have been crucial to the study; they have helped me reach the wider Tuvaluan population in New Zealand. One of the early participants, who goes by the nickname Foa in this research, suggested hosting me in her house in Auckland to carry out the rest of the data collection. Thanks to Foa and her family, I have developed a close friendship with many Tuvaluans in New Zealand. I have felt a deep connection to the Tuvaluan culture and community despite being an ethnic outsider, thanks to their hospitality and eagerness to teach me about their culture and experiences of home-making post-migration.

Nevertheless, my research has not been immune to various challenges due to explicit socio-cultural differences, specifically, lacking sufficient language skills in Tuvaluan, questioning my personal and academic background's suitability to research such a topic. Furthermore, these differences have ethically and culturally burdened me; to be a good representative of my personal and academic background and respectful of the Tuvaluan culture, my host family, and the Tuvaluan community. Thus, I still need to learn more about Tuvaluans and their migration experiences, presenting the research findings with caution and further reflexivity.

### **Themes: home-making experience and connection to the host-place**

***Place acceptance and adaptation:*** Part of the home-making process post-migration involves place embracement and adaptation, meaning building familiarity with the new environment. This process develops through the need to accelerate an understanding of the system. *GB* is a fifty-year-old Tuvaluan man who obtained his BSc from New Zealand before returning to Tuvalu to work for the Tuvaluan government. After several years in Tuvalu, he decided to migrate to New Zealand, where he lived for two years. *GB* stressed the importance of understanding the people and the place. He states:

I live for two years and I studied here, so I know the place, as long you know the place and you know what to do, like you know how to go around and how to live, like familiarity with the place and people and we have to adapt to the system. I call it home as I call Tuvalu home. When you adapt to the system, everything is fine.<sup>3</sup>

According to *GB*, life becomes easier when Tuvaluans adapt to the new place and abide by its rules. *Queen of Tuvalu*, a fifty-five-year-old Tuvaluan woman, has been living in New Zealand for thirty years, said:

Adapting myself very quickly to different systems, surroundings, environments around you. And you just pick it up and just run with it and learn. You just have to adapt yourself very quickly to make sure that you understand the system, and not just for you and your family, but for the people around you as well who are new migrants, like new Tuvaluans, because we came here earlier than some of the people. So because we started to understand the system and things-- so we were able to help the newcomers too.

Place familiarity and adaptation illustrate how Tuvaluans move towards absorbing the environment and its socio-cultural geometry through observation, interaction and learning the necessary skills and information to survive. Intercultural openness with the various ethnic groups, especially the other *Pasifika*<sup>4</sup> groups due to cultural proximity, is part of establishing a sense of home and mastery of the environment. Interestingly, sharing genealogical and cultural similarities with the *Maori* indigenous of New Zealand and other *Pasifika* groups is relatively similar to being in Tuvalu. *Dave*, a 43-year-old Tuvaluan man, has lived in New Zealand for ten years and finds sharing New Zealand with other Polynesian and *Pasifika* ethnicities not different from being in Tuvalu. He said:

In New Zealand, it is still Polynesian so no difference, compared to another places, we still part of Polynesian and the *Maori*, and the presence of the Europeans do not change the perception of the place. Moving here is foreign in a way; it is more westernised compared to where I am from but still does not change my perception. Belonging, even the language is similar and *Maori*, not feeling in a different place.

Likewise, intercultural interaction with non-*Pasifika* people is essential for Tuvaluans to internalise new knowledge and expand their socio-cultural schemata. Nevertheless, this process sometimes becomes overwhelming and challenging as it presents new worldviews. *Blue Sky*, a 48-year-old Tuvaluan woman who has been living in New Zealand for five years with her family, stated that adaptation was a necessary condition for continuity and survival. She said,

We needed to adapt with the food and also the multicultural environment.

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<sup>3</sup> Note: the quotes from the conversations have been kept as they have been transcribed from the recorded conversations. No changes or corrections of language mistakes have been made to keep the words of the participants as authentic as possible.

<sup>4</sup> *Pasifika* as Henning et al. (2014) state is a term that refers to Melanesian, Polynesian and Micronesian heritage or people who have migrated to or have been born in New Zealand.

For *Blue Sky* adaption to unfamiliar food options and the variegated cultures in New Zealand equate with survival and continuity in the new home. This adaptability and coexistence with different cultures are inevitable and enriching simultaneously. She continues:

New Zealand, to be honest, is multicultural and it is good, especially for us [...] we don't have options, we live together, we share and we respect each other.

Generally, Tuvaluan communities that live in other places accept and embrace the host-place while maintaining a connection to the motherland. This connection results in hybrid or merging identities. As an example, Farbotko et al. (2017) state that Tuvaluan migrants in the Solomon Islands refer to themselves as *Solovalu*; a combination of Tuvalu and Solomon Islands identities. Thus, adapting to the new environment and absorbing its geometry and socio-cultural structures do not detach Tuvaluans from their identity and culture. On the contrary, they retain their values and at the same time, adapt to New Zealand. In other words, they live as Tuvaluans and think like a *Palagi* 'white man' or European (Havea 2018; Zalipour 2019) in a *Palagi* system, New Zealand. In this sense, *Queen of Tuvalu* added:

When I say *Palagi*, I mean white system here that you have to adapt to and everything. You have to think like one most of the time because the whole system is *Palagi*.

This process creates a space of hybridity and negotiation of different identities and values; the Tuvaluan identity and the identity of the host-place. In this regard, *Carol*, a 47-year-old woman who has been living in New Zealand for thirty years ascertained that:

So I am trying to let them [talking about her grandchildren] have part of the Tuvaluan activities, which is good because I can then teach them their identity and who they are, but at the same time, I also teach them to get adjusted to the lifestyle that we have adopted in our second home.

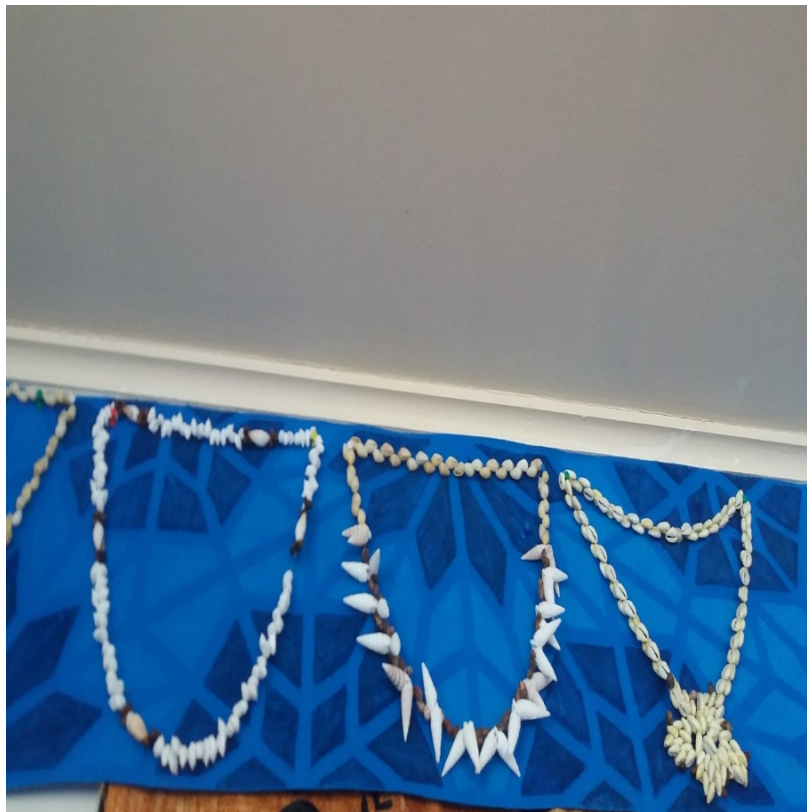
Place acceptance and adaptation, therefore, optimise the sense of stability, security and understanding of the socio-cultural milieu, leading to a gradual sense of belonging and home reconfiguration in the host-place.

***Home-making and defining home:*** Many Tuvaluans settle with immediate or extended families post-migration due to the difficulty of finding a house after their arrival. They also do this to receive further guidance and help from their Tuvaluan families and community. As Tuvaluans become accustomed to their new environment, finding a house becomes a priority for many to achieve independence and experience the new environment in its socio-cultural entirety. By far, most Tuvaluans look for homes to settle based on various criteria to allow easy navigation of the place. Such criteria include proximity to family and the Tuvaluan community, safety of the neighbourhood, proximity to the workplace and schools, and, most importantly, cheap and affordable rent. *Cat*, a twenty-year-old Tuvaluan woman, has been living in New Zealand with her family for ten years. *Cat* stressed the importance of place centrality, which made it easier for her and her family to move around:

This is the only place that is closer to where we all work (referring to where she lives). So it is easier for my parents and my brothers to go daily to work, it is closer to the motorway to go straight to uni and I

used to go to college just a few blocks down the road, so it is easier for me to go to school and closer to hospital for grandma and my mom chose this house coz it is closer to where we need to go to and the places that we need for emergency and everything. And it is also closer to the rest of the Tuvaluan community in West Auckland.

Thus, the house's location is as essential as the house itself. The home-making experience is additionally a process of imbuing the new home with meanings and items from the Tuvaluan culture and personal experiences. This process entails an ongoing attachment to the homeland and a close communal and familial attachment through the preservation of cultural practices and items to reduce the feelings of estrangement and create personalised meanings of home. *Brenda*, a 29-year-old Tuvaluan woman, who has been living in New Zealand for three years, still keeps several traditional Tuvaluan ornaments all around her house. She decorated the living room walls with various Tuvaluan shell necklaces and a small wooden canoe, an essential element in Tuvaluan culture. *Brenda* is also still connected to the Tuvaluan food flavours 'I cook Tuvaluan food,' she said, which connects her to her origins while away. Tuvaluan cultural items and activities add a distinguishable Tuvaluan vibe to their houses in New Zealand.



**Traditional Tuvaluan necklaces made of seashells, which Brenda used to decorate the walls of her house in New Zealand.**



**A small wooden canoe that Brenda keeps in her house in New Zealand.**

Additionally, the Tuvaluan community in New Zealand is lively, tight-knit, and active in community events and commemorating important Tuvaluan traditions. *Soma*, a fifty-year-old Tuvaluan man, involves himself with community events at the organisational level to facilitate Tuvaluan community functions and celebrations. He said:

Here I am secretary of small community trust and we are doing all kinds of activities. [...] Wherever you live, you practice your Tuvaluan life over there.

The 'wherever you live' reflects Tuvaluans' proclivity to infuse the new host-place with elements of their culture and retain important cultural practices as a diaspora. However, this process cannot be generalised to all Tuvaluans in New Zealand. Interestingly, a few participants preferred living far from the community due to various reasons, including the preference for a quieter life. *Bankz* is a 28-year-old Tuvaluan woman who has spent her life between Tuvalu and New Zealand but primarily lived in New Zealand for over ten years. She explained:

I am not really into the community stuff. I just do my own. But I reckon I prefer staying on my own and stuff and not like emm going through Tuvalu community stuff, they do a lot of stuff like all about money stuff, the community things they always want money, 'give us that [...] that I don't wanna join them hey. Because I will go bankrupt [laughs]. Coz every community stuff, oh you know you bring stuff, you know to

buy food and stuff or otherwise you have to give money, living over here it is all about money.

Home for *Bankz* and Tuvaluans who think similarly is the preference to stay within the confined realm of the personal space and better management of resources given the high costs of living in New Zealand.

***Work hard and thrive:*** Tuvaluans aspire through migration to chase the greener pastures, work hard to thrive and secure a living in the challenging socio-economic environment of New Zealand. Unlike the lifestyle in Tuvalu, which is relaxed and simple where the land is sufficient to provide a living, New Zealand has a far more challenging environment, especially economically. Therefore, hard work and education are essential for Tuvaluans to prosper and create meaningful existence in New Zealand. This process includes gaining higher qualifications and good jobs to earn a good position in New Zealand. *Ese*, a 26-year-old Tuvaluan woman who works as a lab technician, enjoys being a Tuvaluan and a successful young migrant. She said,

I work as a lab technician in Auckland hospital. I am the first Tuvaluan.

*Ese's* words reflect pride in her achievement and honouring her origins with her achievement. In this regard, job security is a constituent step towards independence, financial security, and the continuity in their new places; to afford rent and utility bills. *Foa*, a fifty-year-old Tuvaluan woman who has been living in New Zealand for ten years, reveals the degree of struggle and difficulty of maintaining a living in New Zealand where sacrifices and hard work are crucial to survive and continue in the host-place. *Foa* said,

So we have to get our driving license, and everything is all money, you know?

Tuvaluan migrants who go through similar experiences realise the emotional, personal, and material costs of home-making and the highs and lows they have to incur to preserve their continuity in New Zealand. Therefore, hard work is the key to survival and continuity. *Sea child*, a 55-year-old Tuvaluan man, who has been living in New Zealand for twenty years, added,

So we must prioritise our job and education. These are our land now in New Zealand.

The term 'land' here equates with independence, empowerment and security, a pattern similar to life in Tuvalu, where Tuvaluans live on their pieces of land, work them and build houses. Thus, education and job security are the equivalents of 'land' or 'home', an independent haven that is a physical structure imbued with emotional, relational, interpersonal meanings.

## Discussion

Post-migration, the host-place turns into a new home or a home-away-from-home. New Zealand hosts Tuvaluans and their cultural and social capital, where building a sense of home is necessary for attaining ontological security and progress. Home, in this sense, transcends beyond fixation within a single location (Ahmed et. 2003). It becomes a condition that nurtures

personal self-fulfilment (Tucker 1994) and a site of freedom and control around which identities are constructed (Dupuis and Thorns 1998). Home-making in the new host-place is a subjective and emotional experience that constitutes relational, transnational ties through the preservation of the Tuvaluan culture and translocal ties through the connection to the host-place, daily routines, and openness to its socio-cultural texture.

Translocally, Tuvaluans in New Zealand interact and engage with the host-place as part of the process of home-making. New Zealand becomes, in this regard, a platform, a new home where Tuvaluans acquire cultural, emotional, and interpersonal connections and consequently a sense of belonging. Place familiarity and adaptation are crucial to understand and absorb the system of the new place to feel part of its socio-cultural texture while retaining their individuality and identity particularities; live as a Tuvaluan and think like a Palagi in a Palagi system. This dual identity adopted by Tuvaluan migrants reflects a culturally intelligent behaviour or cultural intelligence, which is the skill of adaptation to new cultural settings (Earley 2002) and the capacity to function effectively in culturally diverse settings (Ang and Dyne 2015). Cultural intelligence is a social learning process that helps to disable the 'cultural cruise control'; the effect of a person's built-in cultural assumptions on perceptions and judgment and teaches careful, mindful, and creative thinking about cues in cross-cultural situations (Thomas 2010). In Addition, openness to the new milieu and the intercultural interaction with the varying ethnic groups in New Zealand build an understanding of the system, which is crucial to mastering the socio-cultural geometry of the host-place. Nevertheless, adaptation and openness come often as inevitable processes of coexisting with a system that embeds ethnically and culturally different groups, different laws, and different worldviews.

Adaptation and intercultural interaction come at the macro level of home-making and translocal connection to the outside setting of the host-place. Tuvaluans strive to attribute a sense of security, familiarity, and control to a specific locus at the micro and individual levels. For Tuvaluans, home-making post-migration begins with living within the community cocoon to the gradual independence when place familiarity is achieved. This living arrangement is a pivotal step in alleviating the apprehension of being in a new environment and building familiarity with and immersion in the new place. This immersion is consolidated further by choosing one's home, depending on criteria and preferences that serve their needs and capacities. In a similar vein, preservation of cultural and communal ties and being in a chosen house that is personalised with cultural and personal items consolidates the sense of independence, empowerment, and security and builds a sense of domesticity. Possessing cherished items stimulates positive emotions and increases a sense of home and domesticity (Falk et al. 2012; Klaassens and Meijering 2015). They incite feelings of spatial proximity that reflect family ties (Rose 2004), belonging, and closeness (Walsh 2006). Migration, in this sense, is a process of home reproduction, in which home-making is a process of attributing meanings and emotional connection to a particular place; to be domesticised'. This process is emotionally and morally laden, based both on interpersonal relationships to be negotiated and places and material items to which migrants attribute specific meanings (Bocagni 2014). Equally, job security and hard work are critical success factors in the new host-place. Success is not a mere luxury to enjoy the fruitful outcome of being in a developed country such as New Zealand. For Tuvaluans, success is pivotal to their existence, constancy, and embeddedness in

the host society. The ultimate goal of Tuvaluans' migration journeys is to chase greener pastures and environmental security. Life in a foreign country could be full of challenges and novelties that require sacrifices, robust resilience and hard work to master the spatial and socio-cultural geometry of the new place. The high costs of living and the rapid pace of life in New Zealand require that Tuvaluans challenge their comfort zone and leave their island relaxed lifestyle to adopt a lifestyle of hard work and aspiration for higher achievements.

In sum, a designated place, home, and roots are a fundamental human need (Cresswell 2006) and being a human is knowing one's place in the world (Relph 1976). The journey of home-making post-migration is seeking and making a special place to call home post-migration. For Tuvaluans, home-making in New Zealand is a journey of connection, independence, reconstruction of personal and spatial meanings of home, and new identities and life goals. The new home does not substitute the emotional and unique value of the homeland, but it becomes the host cocoon of hopes, culture, and future. Thus, home is not a static physical and material locus for migrants' post-migration; it is an interactive entity imbued with emotional, relational, and interpersonal meanings.

## Conclusion

This article focuses on Tuvaluans' home-making experiences. Forty Tuvaluan migrants in New Zealand have participated in conversations following the *Talanoa* approach, the Pacific island practice of conversation and storytelling. Participants narrated varying emotionally, personally, and culturally intricate stories and experiences of migration and home-making. Tuvaluans, as *Pasifika* islanders, are people of the sea. They inhabit their islands, their canoes, and the sea. These entities constitute their island identity. However, given the socio-economic and environmental pressures in Tuvalu, Tuvaluans and their cultural practices as sea people are under threat of discontinuity. Migration, therefore, to metropolitan and developed countries has become a sustainable strategy for adaptation and continuity. As migrants in New Zealand, they strive to expand their roots and reconfigure the sense and meaning of home in an environmentally and culturally different place. For Tuvaluan migrants, the journey of home-making and reconstitution of the meaning of home is unique as it reflects the importance of establishing home and safeguarding its constancy. The return to the homeland, Tuvalu, may not be possible for many Tuvaluans because of the varying environmental and socio-economic pressures. Tuvalu may not withstand the rising sea for future Tuvaluan generations in the worst-case scenario. In sum, the experience of home-making is an amalgamation of translocal and transnational activities in which the meaning of home extends beyond its material structure to a structure of connection, empowerment, and security.

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# **‘You could see the marks all over’: Locating abject masculinities in Nico Walker’s *Cherry* and Roy Scranton’s *War Porn***

## **ABSTRACT**

The veteran ‘hero’ is ubiquitous in the American cultural imaginary and goes largely unchallenged in dominant political and cultural discourse. This article examines the place occupied by the veteran in the cultural imaginary in relation to Nico Walker’s *Cherry* and Roy Scranton’s *War Porn*, which work to displace this narrative trope from a civilian readership’s engagement with war. Employing Claire Sisco-King’s notion of ‘abject hegemony’, I argue that these narratives succeed in this task of displacement by constructing ‘abject’ masculinities, affirming the emplacement of an ideology of hegemonic white masculinity. The logics of this ideology deny space to other voices, maintaining the primacy of the white male subject position in criticism of war. A critique of imperialism and civilian engagement with war must therefore take account of the place not only of the mythologised veteran hero, but also of the broader workings of hegemonic masculinity underpinning war and its representation.

## **KEYWORDS**

War, veteran, hegemonic masculinity, heroism, abjection.

## **Introduction**

Who, or what, enjoys privileged place in the cultural imaginary? In the UK, the COVID-19 outbreak has shone light on the rhetorical ligatures that bind a certain version of the NHS to the British imaginary: catchphrases like ‘thank you NHS’ and ‘clap for carers’ prove convenient ways to simultaneously focus on individual workers and maintain the service as a faceless and nebulous entity, leaving policy decisions – and all the important scrutiny that entails – largely out of the picture. In the USA, a similar privilege of place is reserved for the military. Roger Stahl interrogates this cultural axiom in his analysis of the rhetoric of ‘support the troops’. He argues that the movements of ‘deflection’ and ‘dissociation’ work in tandem to assert war as an unchangeable, inscrutable force against which individual soldiers must be protected, and to generate a soldier/civilian divide which maintains dissent to war as a personal and immoral attack on the soldier body (Stahl 2009, 535). This rhetoric is essential in securing and sustaining the special place of the soldier/veteran in the American cultural imaginary; it is replicated in the yellow ribbon, on bumper stickers, at sports matches, and in political speech.

Writer and veteran Roy Scranton considers the special place occupied by the soldier/veteran in the American imaginary in terms of the ‘myth of the trauma hero’. The trauma hero is a mythologised veteran hero who harbours an unspeakable truth of war and whose ‘redemptive arc of trauma to recovery’ functions as a scapegoat mechanism, absolving a civilian reader of guilt for American political violence committed abroad (Scranton 2018, 237). This mythology, he argues, is constructed through a certain set of conventions, which in turn shape political, cultural, and historical discourse. For Scranton, trauma hero narratives practice a dangerous

‘politics of forgetting that actively elides the question of what the US soldiers were fighting for and the bigger problem of whom they were killing, in favour of a narrower and more manageable question. “What was it like?”’ (2018, 234). While Hollywood and what Elliott Colla (2014) calls the ‘military-literary complex’ still cling to the myth of the trauma hero, narratives are beginning to emerge which challenge the primacy of this trope. Scranton’s own *War Porn* (2016) and Nico Walker’s *Cherry* (2018) both feature unsavoury, criminal veterans – a far cry from the troubled but sympathetic veteran of texts like Kevin Powers’ *The Yellow Birds* (2013) or in Clint Eastwood’s representation of Chris Kyle in *American Sniper* (2014). Puerile, misogynistic, nihilistic; a junkie bank robber and a war-criminal rapist, Walker and Scranton’s jarring and uncomfortable representations of veterans urge a reader to re-evaluate the cultural import we place on the homecoming veteran ‘hero’.

While *Cherry* and *War Porn* both characterise veterans in a way which problematises the hold of the veteran on the cultural imaginary, a closer reading of these texts reveals that the tools used to dismantle the narrative trauma hero are set in an ideology of hegemonic white masculinity. These texts therefore raise their own questions about the dimensions of critique of war and imperialism: Whose voice can claim authority? Who seeks to gain from this critique? Who loses out? To this end, this paper explores how the narrative ‘displacement’ of the mythologised trauma hero in *Cherry* and *War Porn* is contained within the contours of hegemonic white masculinity. This ideology mediates geo-political place in each text, from Iraq to America, places which are imbricated across white, male-embodied trauma and memory. I argue that this embodiment evinces Claire Sisco King’s conceptualisation the ‘abject’ male body and aligns with her notion of ‘abject hegemony’, a slippery ideological formation which enables the rejection of the masculinity mythologised in the ‘trauma hero’ trope, while sustaining the overarching hegemony of the white male subject position. In her analysis of David Fincher’s *Fight Club* (1999), King understands Julia Kristeva’s theory of the abject to include male bodies and subject positions, arguing that while much scholarship has focused on society’s punishment of the abject body, significant cultural privilege is placed on the abject male:

white masculinity is an abject formation, whose internal fissures, contradictions, and impossibilities allow it to accommodate a multitude of incarnations of what the ‘white’ and the ‘masculine’ can be. Culture does not afford hegemonic privilege to bodies and subjects that are easily contained but to ones that imagine and perform themselves as limitless, variable, adaptive. (King 2009, 370)

King identifies ‘abject hegemony’ as ‘the ongoing process with which ideological formations use their abjection toward hegemonic ends’ (2009, 370). This paper, then, suggests that Walker and Scranton’s texts construct abject masculinities in a way which simultaneously destabilises the trauma hero and affirms the limitless, inexorable workings of hegemonic white masculinity undergirding this critique. By invoking place both geo-politically and discursively, the abject white male in these narratives performs the double work of displacement and emplacement, displacing the trauma hero myth and affirming the abject hegemony of white masculinity.

### **‘Making sad faces’: *Cherry*’s abject addiction**

Nico Walker's *Cherry* opens in a disorienting and chaotic present:

Emily's gone to take a shower. The room's half-dark and I'm getting dressed, looking for a shirt with no blood on it, not having any luck. The pants are fucked too – cigarette burns in the crotches. All heroin chic, like I were famous already. (Walker 2019, 3)

The continuous present tense of these first lines immerses the reader into the scene and precludes any sense of a beginning. A future voice bends back into the present moment with a metafictional nod to the writer's notoriety, blurring the lines between the writer and the narrative 'I'. This temporal compression takes a spatial dimension when it emerges that our narrator is about to inject a hit of heroin, as his sensations are concentrated through his body: 'It hurts a little extra when the needle's dull like this. It can make it hard to hit a vein' (Walker 2019, 5). Drew Leder describes pain as exerting 'a phenomenologically "centripetal" force, gathering space and time inward to the center. We are ceaselessly reminded of the here-and-now body' (Leder 1990, 76). Similarly, the narrator's experience of pain echoes through *Cherry* as a spatio-temporal contraction, which manifests in his preoccupation with his body. 'I'm on the floor and my balls are cold' he announces, coming to after overdosing, rousing the reader along with himself to his immediate, uncomfortable environment (Walker 2019, 5). Revealed to his consciousness on a cold kitchen floor, the narrator concentrates our attention on his embodiment; his balls are the 'thematic object' of his, and the reader's, experience (Leder 1990, 76). The white, male body is made visible in *Cherry* as physically marked and temporally rooted in a state of suspension by the effects of trauma and addiction. As Sally Robinson observes, 'there is something irresistible about the logic whereby white male angst gets represented in bodily terms' (2000, 6). *Cherry*'s prologue thus anticipates a collision of global and local crises coded in a crisis of white masculinity.

Exemplified in the prologue, temporal shifts and dislocations bridge two of *Cherry*'s core themes: trauma and addiction. Based on Walker's own experiences, the novel begins as a fairly classic war story of a college dropout who enlists in the US Army and is posted to Iraq as a combat medic. After completing a tour in Iraq, he returns to Cleveland, Ohio, burdened by the traumas he has witnessed at war. An occasional drug habit quickly transforms into an all-consuming heroin addiction, and the rest of the narrative sees the protagonist navigate life on heroin as he eventually turns to robbing banks to fund it. Walker's novel, then, is at once a war story and a story of the opioid epidemic that has been ravaging the United States, and particularly the Midwest where *Cherry* is set, since the mid-1990s. The particular conditions of the novel thus bridge Iraq and Cleveland, seemingly disparate places, as loci of crises of white masculinity: from a war whose justification relies on the revival of a masculinist white national identity, to a health epidemic interpreted largely in terms of blue-collar, industrial decline. In this section I argue that *Cherry* bridges Iraq and Cleveland through a slippage of form, reshaping the narrative from the war to the junk tradition, and this is in turn mediated by the marked white male body. In her analysis of the marked body as a trope of the crisis of post-60s white masculinity, Sally Robinson argues that since 'white masculinity has historically been understood as coterminous with the abstract individualism which an identity politics attempts to erode, white men have most often been understood as the victims of, but not participants in, identity politics' (2000, 4). On the contrary, she identifies white masculinity in

a ‘field of struggle for cultural priority’ and argues that within this field it practices its own identity politics. The core imagery through which this is achieved is the marked or wounded white male body (Robinson 2000, 6). Images of the marked body contribute to a slippery and adaptive configuration of white masculinity through which it appears as victimised while retaining hegemonic control of the dominant discourse. Engaging with Robinson’s critique in dialogue with King, I argue in this section that the marked body in *Cherry* feeds into an ideology of abject hegemony. While *Cherry*’s representation of veteran identity rejects the trope of the sanctified trauma hero, it still appeals to a wider crisis of white masculinity, broadening its co-ordinates from Iraq to Cleveland to insist on an expansive, adaptive, malleable hegemony.

Hailed by Christian Lorentzen of *Vulture* as ‘the first great novel of the Opioid Epidemic’, *Cherry* defies genre conventions to warp a familiar war narrative trajectory into one subsumed in twenty-first century crisis: from war to the global financial crash, unemployment and heroin addiction among the worst opioid epidemic the United States has ever seen (Lorentzen 2018). The story of an Iraq War medic turned heroin addict, *Cherry* bridges the Iraq War and the opioid epidemic as crises of masculinity at the site of the body. Walker alludes to the growing opioid crisis throughout the novel as his protagonist smuggles drugs like OxyContin and Percocet onto his base in Iraq, having ordered them from a seemingly unrestricted supply at home. When he returns to his hometown of Cleveland, Ohio, the unnamed narrator-protagonist (known as Cherry) continues to use OxyContin and other drugs before eventually getting hooked on heroin. His body bears the marks of both these crises – echoing the legacy of the Vietnam War, Cherry is juxtaposed next to his girlfriend: ‘She was like a girl in a magazine. She had that whole flawless complexion thing going for her. She looked good in the sunlight whereas I looked bad’ (Walker 2019, 200). *Cherry* puts forward an embodied image of the white male identity crisis that followed the Vietnam War, as veterans lamented their supposed diminished position in society compared to the advancements made by the civil rights and feminist movements. Susan Jeffords (1989) articulates this identity crisis through what she calls the ‘remasculinisation’ of national identity following the Vietnam War, spearheaded by the media, culture and political industries. We see this drive echoed in Scranton’s notion of the ‘redemptive arc’ of trauma to recovery characterised in the trauma hero of contemporary war narratives. However, Sally Robinson warns against viewing a crisis of masculinity in terms of a teleological drive, arguing that the rhetorical conventions of the ‘crisis of masculinity’ ‘depend on a sense of prolonged tension; the announcements of crisis are inseparable from the crisis itself, as the rhetoric of crisis performs the cultural work of centering attention on dominant masculinity’ (2000, 11). Dwelling in a space of crisis are masochistic narratives that take pleasure in depictions of the white male body in pain to brandish as evidence of disempowerment (Robinson 2000, 11). Similar to Robinson’s argument, *Cherry* displays in corporeal terms a white masculinity dwelling in crisis, tracing a crisis of masculinist national identity (the invasion and occupation of Iraq) to a crisis of localised identities competing in a globalised world (the opioid epidemic). Cherry’s marked body, then, is situated at the nexus of war, trauma and addiction:

You could see the marks all over from where the sand fleas had been  
at me the summer before, when I’d been out in the marshes and the shit

canals and that. I hadn't been eating much of late either, and I had the cocaine physique. And there were the cigarette burns too, as the tendency in those days was to burn myself with cigarettes whenever I got down in the dumps. All in all I was a stray dog with the mange.  
(Walker 2019, 200)

In contrast to the wounds he witnesses as a medic in Iraq, Cherry's body physically bears the inconvenient but nonetheless inconsequential pockmarks of flea bites – the marks not of a sudden violent and completed action but of a place's gradual inscription of itself upon his skin. This accompanies a sense of stagnation conferred in the abject 'marshes and the shit canals', materialising Robinson's argument of a 'prolonged tension' or a crisis that dwells upon itself by drawing attention to the white male body as marked. This prolongation is fixed by the palimpsestic effect of cumulative intersecting crises on Cherry's body. From Iraq's flea bites, to cocaine's emaciating effect, to his combat trauma's cigarette burns, these marks converge the seemingly disparate places; Cherry's body stands out as what Edward Casey calls 'inter-place', 'in which the two epicenters of the here and the there are brought into concrete connection' (Casey 2000, 196). His body contains the memory of overlapping place, and fixes him between these 'epicenters' as a vector through which white masculinity asserts itself through a discourse of geopolitical crisis.

Marked by these intersecting crises, Cherry embodies the 'abject male body', which Claire Sisco King identifies as feeding into an 'abject hegemony' (2009, 366). Julia Kristeva defines abjection as the continual process through which we define the borders of our subjectivity by 'abjecting' that which is Other. The abject emphasises the permeability of the self, manifesting in entities that threaten the divide between subject and object, self and other: corpses, blood, shit, vomit (Kristeva 1982, 2). With drugs smuggled into the base in Iraq and the marks of war inscribed on the addicted body at home, the imbrication of the war and the domestic opioid crisis parallels this permeability of the self, rendering Cherry's body abject; an artefact of the collision of these crises. King draws attention to the Kristevan distinction between the state of being abject – 'to transgress boundaries and be "subversive" of the stability of representational systems' – and the process of abjection itself; the rejection of the abject to maintain the stability of our subjectivity and society (2009, 369). In her analysis of David Fincher's *Fight Club*, King rejects this dichotomy, arguing that subjects and societies never achieve the rejection of the abject: 'While subjectivity is typically imagined as whole, fully formed, and coherent, I understand subjects as de/composed by ambiguity, uncertainty, impossibility: the abject is not outside Other but the subject's "alter ego." The abject is the "foreigner" within' (King 2009, 370). Arguing that hegemony is marked and maintained by ruptures which allow for its constant growth and reassemblage, she contends that hegemonic white masculinity is an 'abject formation' (King 2009, 370). The abject state of Cherry's body is evident in its juxtaposition next to his girlfriend: their contrasting images embody the state's jettisoning of the abject to maintain its own borders (Walker 2019, 200). These abjected realities – the fallout of imperialism, wars, deregulation and neoliberal reform – are unsavoury but necessary to the state's maintenance of itself as 'healthy' and 'whole'. However, as King notes, 'neither subjects nor cultures ever fully rid themselves of the abject, or even want to, for that matter' (2009, 370). Similarly, Cherry's abject body exemplifies the public's fascination with the abject white male. In the same way that *Fight Club's* portrayal of fluid male bodies and subjectivities

reflects ‘hegemonic masculinity’s impulse to create multiple, even mutually exclusive, versions of itself’, so does Cherry embody the perennial hold of abject white masculinity, in its various forms, on the cultural imagination. The text – and indeed his body as text – constitutes a war narrative, so-called ‘poverty porn’, and a junk narrative; all strongholds of cultural intrigue in the (de)formations of white masculinity.

As a junk story, *Cherry* plays with narrative convention to displace the trauma hero trope from the centre of our reading experience. Like others in the junk tradition, *Cherry*’s narrative is steeped in negative space. ‘When I was gonna kill myself I went to the VA hospital’ he mentions, deferring his suicide attempt into the subordinate clause (Walker 2019, 201). This type of literary chiaroscuro reinforces a sense of subjective detachment from the society around him and is repeated in his negotiation of his embodiment within this shadowy space. As I have mentioned, Drew Leder’s notion of the ‘present-absent’ body is useful to understand how Cherry negotiates his abject embodiment. Leder notes that the body in its ‘normal’ state is ‘disappearing’: it recedes from the consciousness as it denies being the ‘thematic object’ of our experience (1990, 27). On the other hand the body in pain is ‘dys-appearing’; it affirms its presence to the consciousness by the semblance of being, paradoxically, ‘something foreign to the self’ (Leder 1990, 76). Crucial to its configuration as abject, Cherry’s addicted body is constantly articulated as something foreign. He repeats a fixation on facial imagery, recurrent in the meiotic refrain ‘making sad faces’ (Walker 2019, 250): withdrawal leaves him ‘making sad faces’; his dealer is ‘making sad faces’ when he loses his stash; even his untrained dog is left ‘making sad faces’ when forced to exist in a soiled diaper. Cherry manipulates his face as an object and experiences it as an alien presence, severing the intersubjective ties that connect him to others and the reader and rooting that foreign, abject Other firmly within the borders of his ‘centripetal’ self (Leder 1990, 76). As Robinson argues, white masculinity finds itself in a ‘double bind’, being invisible as the cultural standard-bearer and equally benefitting from a social ‘visibility’ that marginalised identities do not share – white masculinity is invisible *because* it is visible (2000, 1-2). In ‘dys-appearing’, then, Cherry embodies this visible invisibility of white masculinity, and his grasp of his face as Other emphasises his addicted, abject subjectivity as, in King’s words, the ‘foreigner within’. This interior subjective state is what roots him in Robinson’s notion of a tension or prolonged crisis. Bridging Iraq and Cleveland, war and junk, political and social, he maintains the expansive contours of white masculinity as an ideological formation, while paradoxically folding inward; his abject self afferent and interior.

Indeed, far from completing the redemptive arc of the trauma hero, *Cherry* ends abruptly and, like its temporally ambiguous beginning, precludes any sense of an ending to Cherry’s cyclical, interior existence. The novel’s concluding lines read:

I put the needle in my arm. The needle was dull so it pushed the vein away when it was going in. But the vein couldn’t run forever. I felt a little pop and my blood flashed in the rig. I sent it home. (Walker 2019, 313)

His conceptualisation of his body in these final lines reaffirms his abject embodiment. True to King’s notion of the abject as the ‘foreigner’ within, he witnesses a conflict of self and otherness, as both an integral part of the embodied self’s experience of addiction (‘I put the

needle in *my* arm') while also taking on agency of its own that must be overpowered (it 'couldn't run forever'). These last lines mirror the novel's prologue: 'It hurts a little extra when the needle's dull like this. It can make it hard to hit a vein' (Walker 2019, 5). Echoing again Leder's 'here-and-now body', these two scenes reproduce the cyclical, 'here-and-now' nature of addiction by bookending the text with scoring and shooting up. This potentially endless repetition dismantles the redemptive arc of the trauma hero and denies the reader our desired role in his teleological drive to recovery. However, by conforming to a cyclical structure, the text formally aligns itself with Robinson's notion of the 'prolonged tension' of white masculinity in crisis. While the text rejects conceptualising veteran identity within the parameters of the myth of the trauma hero, it nevertheless appeals to ideological structures which nurture and sustain the primacy of the white male subject position within a framework of abject hegemony, evoking a reader's simultaneous disgust and desire in the abject male. My argument now turns to Roy Scranton's *War Porn*, in which this model of disgust and desire takes a troubling turn as a framework through which to consider questions of masculinity, violence and agency in the representation, and consumption, of war.

### **'I just held the camera': Abject images in *War Porn***

Like Cherry, the homecoming veteran in Roy Scranton's *War Porn* (2016) is far removed from the veteran hero typical of popular American literary, cultural and political discourse. The novel appears as Scranton's narrative response to his own critique of the trauma hero, as discussed in this paper's introduction. Whereas *Cherry* follows the singular perspective of a veteran protagonist who is self-centred and apathetic, evading characterisation within a binarism of hero or villain, *War Porn* takes a polyphonic narrative structure which includes the perspectives of Iraqi and American civilians in addition to those of US military personnel. Through the collective perspective of civilian guests to a barbecue in Utah, a reader is also exposed to a veteran recently returned to the US who is unequivocally a criminal and a villain. Aaron Stojanowski is introduced early in the narrative in the story titled 'Strange Hells (Columbus Day, 2004)', which is split between the beginning and end of the text. Against a crowd of liberal-left millennials, he is immediately marked as something dark and foreign: 'Somebody watching: a lean man at the gate with black hair cut close, face taut and flat, lips compressed in a line like a trick of the fading light' (Scranton 2016a, 16). Similar to *Cherry*, he occupies a negative, marginal space, alluding to his abject position among a civilian crowd invested in the sense of nationhood maintained by the veteran mythology. The barbecue guests fall back on tired clichés of war narrative which sustain the supposed soldier/civilian divide, querying his personal experiences of Iraq and thanking him 'for his service' (Scranton 2016a, 27). When a guest attempts to probe the political circumstances of the occupation of Iraq, she is berated for unduly attacking the veteran: evoking, like *Cherry*, the legacy of Vietnam, her girlfriend protests, 'You may as well have called him baby killer. We don't *do* that anymore' (Scranton 2016a, 34). The discourse that Scranton conjures around Aaron in this story suggests a stifled conversation that is bound up in taboo; one in which the only accepted line is of no-questions-asked veneration for the veteran. This mirrors his own argument in 'The Trauma Hero' that the discourse around the veteran indulges in a 'politics of forgetting' the damage for which the military is responsible, in favour of a narrow perspective of the veteran's personal experience and psychological turmoil (Scranton 2018, 234). It also narrativises the workings

of deflection and dissociation identified by Stahl in the rhetoric behind ‘supporting the troops’, suggesting that this discourse seeps into, and is perhaps the most potent, in even the most young, liberal, educated circles.

By the end of the novel, when ‘Strange Hells’ is resumed, the redemptive arc of the trauma hero is totally severed as Aaron is revealed to have been a guard in a prison strikingly similar to Abu Ghraib. After sharing disturbing and incriminating photos of torture and abuse with the host of the barbeque, the narrative ends with Aaron raping another of the hosts in her home. In an interview with Nick Flynn, Scranton said of *War Porn*’s ending:

I wanted to fuse the generic expectations readers might have, given the dramatic structure, for some moment of redemption or truth or resolution, with a sudden, destabilizing act of violence that, in retrospect, appears totally inevitable. I wanted readers to feel complicit in the violence, implicated by their narrative desire. (Scranton 2016b)

Scranton’s novel tempts the reader to hold out for a redemptive ending before pulling the rug out from under her feet and revealing a disturbing reality about war and those who return from it. As a narrative device, however, this ‘destabilizing act of violence’ is specifically gendered – leaving us to question the cost at which this narrative destabilisation occurs. As I will shortly discuss, the very gendered tools that Scranton employs appeal to, and ultimately re-assert, the logics of a violent formation of hegemonic masculinity.

Like *Cherry*, *War Porn* performs a displacement of the trauma hero from its privileged position in the cultural imaginary. He does this not only morally, characterising the veteran as a violent criminal, but also structurally, through a slippage of place from Baghdad to Utah. Whereas *Cherry*’s structure implies cyclicity, *War Porn* instead follows a ‘nesting dolls’ structure, which literally centres the perspective of Qasim, an Iraqi maths professor who witnesses with his family the United States’ invasion of Baghdad. Containing this narrative is the perspective of Wilson, an unlikely soldier who is gradually acclimatised to military culture, and bookending the text is ‘Strange Hells’. Baghdad thus seeps from the centre to the margins of the text through speech, memories, and images. Excerpts titled ‘Babylon’ also emanate like shockwaves across the narrative, representing the American collective consciousness as ‘babble’ produced by the media, culture, and political industries in support of the invasion: newspaper clippings, quotes from films, song lyrics. The centrality of the veteran is literally displaced into the edges of the text, and the Iraqi perspective occupies the heart of the narrative, accompanied by expansive and perceptive depictions of the domestic, quotidian spaces touched by the invasion. This central story, ‘The Fall’, signals a desire on Scranton’s part to draw attention to the human toll of the war by interweaving the voices of civilian witnesses whose individualised, idiosyncratic lives are each tainted by the intrusion of a hostile invading force.

While *War Porn* takes a big step in decentring the white veteran perspective, the text nevertheless struggles to enact this decentring outside the contours of hegemonic white masculinity and it ultimately, cynically, ends up appealing to the logics of this ideology. The memory of Qasim and of Baghdad deflagrate from the centre to the end of the text in the form of memories and images shared by the white soldier, be that Wilson or Aaron. Wilson conjures the memory of Qasim, who had taken employment as an interpreter for the United States shortly

after the invasion; Qasim's bloodied image then haunts the final half of 'Strange Hells' as it emerges he is a subject of Aaron's photographs, the victim of some of the worst abuse inflicted at the facility. While Qasim is starkly present at junctures throughout the second half of the novel, his memory is nonetheless mediated along a topography of hegemonic white masculinity, reified in the embodied and digital memories of the white, male soldier/veteran. The images produced by Aaron and shared on a computer screen in rural Utah bridge place in the same way as Cherry's body. Urging 'click forward...next...' Aaron's insistence on pressing ahead with the photo presentation conveys not the stagnant, 'prolonged tension' evinced in *Cherry* but instead a perversion of the teleological drive of the trauma hero narrative structure (Scranton 2016a, 317). He doggedly pushes forward not to a final redemptive moment but to increasingly horrifying images, which later culminates in the perverse re-enactment of this abuse in his rape of Dahlia. Drawing upon Edward Casey's work on place and remembering, Barbara Kowalczyk argues that the prison is 're-implaced' by Aaron's body in this scene: 'For Aaron, re-implacing involves both return – deep mental immersion – and recurrence. [The prison] is an embodied space, an Iraqi living room which dwells within the veteran and affects his enactments in the Utah bedroom' (Kowalczyk 2019, 12). For Kowalczyk, Aaron embodies what Casey calls 'idiolocality', carrying 'the peculiarities of place in its very flesh' (Casey in Kowalczyk 2019, 13). While this analysis interprets how the violent memory of the war is transferred from the 'front line' back to the 'home front', it does not account for how this process is mediated and sustained by an ideology of hegemonic white masculinity. As I shortly discuss, the 're-implacement' of the abuse through Aaron's body gestures to the dominance of white masculinity through the assertion of an abject hegemony which is inevitable, intransigent, and endorsed among the culture and society it contains.

In his short essay 'War Porn', Jean Baudrillard considers the abject nature of the photos of torture at Abu Ghraib. Compared to 9/11, which was an 'absolute event', he regards Abu Ghraib 'a non-event of an obscene banality, the degradation, atrocious but banal, not only of the victims, but of the amateur scriptwriters of this parody of violence' (Baudrillard 2006, 86). For Baudrillard, war as 'pornography', exemplified in these images, shows 'the ultimate form of the abjection of war which is unable to be simply war, to be simply about killing, and instead turns itself into a grotesque infantile reality-show, in a desperate simulacrum of power' (2006, 86). Clearly inspired by Baudrillard's essay, Scranton's *War Porn* plays with the notion of these images as simulacra, feeding them into a wider media-driven simulation of war by abstracting them into further simulacra within the narrative. While Abu Ghraib is mentioned in the text and is a component of the narrative's world-making, Aaron's images come from the fictional 'Camp Crawford'. Paired with the 'Babylon' sections, Scranton's reproduction of these simulacra force a reader to consider their own position within the 'hyperreality' of these contemporary wars through an aggressive media cycle and consumer-driven publishing circles. *War Porn's* images of abuse echo Baudrillard's understanding of the images of Abu Ghraib as abjections of war. 'It's all a big show we put on' Aaron explains to his spectator, Matt, signalling these images as 'parody' of violence, jettisoned from the war to appear on the home front on a computer screen, compacted as digital images with the potential to be shared indefinitely (Scranton 2016a, 317). When Matt resists, Aaron retorts, 'nobody's making you look. All you gotta do is pull out' (Scranton 2016a, 311). But Matt doesn't pull out – he watches

the entire slideshow, implicating himself within the simulation. Sontagian questions of desensitisation aside, Matt's attention also speaks to the photos as abject and the nature of their position in an ideology of abject hegemony. As King notes, and as demonstrated equally in *Cherry*, cultural privilege is often afforded to the abject white male:

Understanding these men [as abject] helps to account for the public fascination they seem to elicit, whether or not they are found desirable or disturbing (or both); and, in many cases, this fascination, even when coupled with fear, translates into cultural privilege or, at the very least, historical prominence. (2009, 381)

Matt's inability to 'pull out' (converging militaristic and phallic connotations) of the photo slideshow draws attention to the abject status not only of the photos but of Aaron within this place. If, as Kowalczyk argues, Aaron 'reimplaces' the prison into the barbeque setting, and carries the 'peculiarities' of the prison 'in its very flesh', then Aaron's body acts as the abject vector for the transmission of the images and eventual reproduction of the abuse in the Utah bedroom. Aaron is the abject foreigner within this setting, an outside entity which, for all the disgust he elicits, is never fully rejected by the subjects or cultures he inhabits. Reaffirming Georges Bataille's work on the abject, King contends that 'that desire and disgust are inextricable [...] attraction toward and fear of the abject always coexist' (2009, 369). When Matt re-enters the party having seen the images, he regards the unassuming group of millennials and wonders, 'maybe they already know...' (Scranton 2016a, 329). Operating within the dimensions of this hyperreality and heightened by the effects of the weed they have smoked, Matt's paranoia speaks both to the images' abstraction from 'reality' and to the lurking presence and acceptance of the abject within society.

It is clear in this text that Scranton is aiming to replicate the structures of media and consumption at the heart of Baudrillard's work and which he applies to his analysis of Abu Ghraib. If these images are an abject 'parody', or in Aaron's words a 'show', then the question arises of who can claim agency when enmeshed in these structures. Scranton ensures that Matt, even when given the option, does not and cannot 'pull out' of the slideshow, alluding to the Baudrillardian idea that as individuals we have no option but to consume what is presented to us by a media cycle offering versions that become further and further abstractions of true reality. In this process, Aaron's agency is also compromised and he is absolved of his responsibility for these crimes; his refrain throughout 'Strange Hells' is 'I just held the camera', as if his complicity is an inevitable component of the process of 'parody' and 'abjection' of the war. To return to Scranton's own comments on Aaron, that his crimes should seem 'inevitable', his rape of Dahlia then becomes another part of this process – his 're-implacement' in the Utah bedroom, to use Kowalczyk's words, works in a way which is beyond Aaron's control. To this end, Aaron's victims are figured as 'inevitable' pawns in an 'inevitable' game, and Dahlia's rape appears as another simulacrum and the logical next step in this process of abject abstraction. If, in Scranton's words, a reader is to feel complicit in this 'destabilizing act of violence', it is not only because of their narrative desire for redemption, but is also due to the logics of a violent hegemonic masculinity which bears a perennial hold on the cultural imaginary. If abject hegemony is 'the ongoing process with which ideological formations use their abjection toward hegemonic ends' (King 2009, 370), the rape scene figures both as the

product of the cumulative abjection of the white male— the embodied artefact of the Camp Crawford’s war crimes – and as a statement of the domination of women under hegemonic masculinity. Further, by presenting Aaron as an abject inevitability, something we doubly fear and desire, the text enters dangerous ‘asking for it’ territory: Aaron and the aggressive, abject hegemony he embodies is figured as the logical response to the desires of the consumer-citizen. Scranton might have jolted a reader into questioning her faith in the redemptive trauma hero narrative, but *War Porn* also advises us that as participants in and consumers of the media cycle – the ‘babble’ of the war on terror – we are immobilised to envision any fruitful alternatives. The trauma hero successfully displaced from our reading experience, all we are left with is the exposed machinations of hegemonic white masculinity, for Scranton as immovable as it is inevitable.

## Conclusion

As an ideological formation, hegemonic masculinity has an adaptive and expansive hold on the narrative structures of *Cherry* and *War Porn*. Tightly woven through these narratives, it mediates discursive and geopolitical configurations of place through encounters, discourses and memories, from the ‘front line’ in Iraq to the ‘home front’ in the USA. The construction of the white male body as abject reveals how abject hegemony expands, reassembles, and asserts itself, even in texts which seek to otherwise dismantle ideological conventions. In *Cherry*, this means a reader’s narrative desire to engage with a redemptive arc of a homecoming veteran hero is disrupted, but is ultimately deferred and satiated by other means: the trauma hero no longer the centre of our reading experience, we focus instead on the abject white male and the social, political, and geographical discourses subsumed in his abject, addicted body. Whereas *Cherry*’s subjective stagnation suggests a crisis of masculinity, *War Porn* locates a crisis in the interactive cycle between the media, Hollywood, the publishing industry, and the consumer-citizen. In his efforts to jolt the reader into acknowledging the Baudrillardian hyperreality in which we participate when we consume versions of the Iraq War – trauma hero narratives, digital images, *War Porn* itself – Scranton displaces the trauma hero from our imaginary by insisting on a configuration of abject masculinity which is at once inevitable, unchanging and even desired by the society he inhabits. If, as Roger Stahl (2009) suggests, the rhetoric of ‘support the troops’ asserts war as an intransigent, inscrutable monolith, then *War Porn* challenges this assumption not by doing away with it altogether, but by rendering hegemonic white masculinity in its place. The object of fear and disgust, intrigue and desire, this ideology is embodied in the abject veteran Aaron. The dominance of hegemonic masculinity reaches its apex at the end of the novel, where a civilian woman is raped, having expressed a suggestive sexual desire for the abject veteran throughout. Scranton’s intention is clearly to shock, to sever a reader’s narrative expectations and force us to re-evaluate the affective weight we attribute to war narratives. The point remains, however, that this is achieved problematically, by employing a narrative device that revels in sexual violence against women. Not only does this cynically assume that a readership will not be shocked *enough* by the revelation of Aaron’s war crimes at Camp Crawford, it also punctuates the narrative with an aggressive and specifically gendered act of violence which underscores the workings of hegemonic masculinity.

The tools used in both *Cherry* and *War Porn* to displace the mythologised veteran hero from our cultural imaginary make explicit use of the gendered discourses used to justify warmongering and imperialism. For *Cherry*, this comes in the form of an emphasis on white masculinity as in stasis, in crisis. While this deflects attention from the Iraq War itself, it nevertheless contains an implicit plea for remasculinisation such as that which followed the Vietnam War and which haunted the discourse behind the wars in Iraq. In *War Porn*, the process of displacing the trauma hero from the cultural imaginary comes at the expense of emplacing a discourse of hegemonic white masculinity through the image of the violated female body. Scranton thus struggles to articulate a critique of civilian engagement with the Iraq War outside the contours of a violent hegemonic masculinity. Both *Cherry* and *War Porn*, then, displace one ideological formation while ratifying another. To truly critique the representation and consumption of war among a civilian audience, it is not sufficient to dismantle the narrative desire for the trauma hero – we must also consider the pervasive cultural appetite for representations of abject masculinity; indeed, we must interrogate the ‘place’ not only of the trauma hero but of hegemonic white masculinity in the cultural imaginary. To this end, then, we must reach further afield than the veteran writer for critiques of imperialism – to forms and perspectives which challenge the primacy not of the trauma hero but of the white male subject position as the voice of critique of war.

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# The unconventional form of the novel as a place of encounter: the reader's self-awareness

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## ABSTRACT

Conventional narrative fiction has been defined over the centuries with a linear structure and lack of visual intrusions. In a standard novel, each page looks more or less the same as the others, connected by the uniformity of page design to avoid distractions on the reader's side. This article analyses the way in which Laurence Sterne made the reader self-aware through the use of unconventional visual devices in his novel *Tristram Shandy* (1759–1767) and transformed the act of reading into a physical dialogue between author and reader. In addition, it examines its influence on the graphic dimension of contemporary works concerned with the unconventional form of the novel, such as B.S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates* (1969), Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000) and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Tree of Codes* (2010).

## KEYWORDS

Reading experience, materiality, novel, unconventional form, visual dimension

## Introduction

*The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759–1767) is considered as one of the main precursors of experimental literature, understood as literature that interrogates itself, challenges conventions and looks for alternative ways of thinking and writing. However, the term *experimental* is usually employed in a general way to dismiss and label works that challenge the established conventions of *traditional* literature. The British author B.S. Johnson<sup>1</sup> was convinced that *experimental* is commonly used as a synonym for unsuccessful. Since mainstream novels do not require any physical response or manipulation from the reader, the works in which the form and the pages of the book interrupt what would in normal conditions be a fluid and passive reading are commonly regarded as difficult and obtrusive experiments.

“Experimental” to most reviewers is almost always a synonym for “unsuccessful”. I object to the word experimental being applied to my own work. Certainly, I make experiments, but the unsuccessful ones are quietly hidden away and what I choose to publish is in my terms successful: that

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<sup>1</sup> B.S. Johnson (1933-1973) was a British postmodernist novelist, poet and literary critic, known for his unconventional use of narrative structure and the form of the book in literature. In his novel *Albert Angelo* (1964) the author cut a hole through the pages as a narrative technique. *House Mother Normal* (1971) explores thought and memory through an unorthodox use of structure, pages and space. His most relevant novel is *The Unfortunates* (1969), a book that consists of twenty-seven unbound sections put together in a box, which the reader is then asked to shuffle before starting to read.

is, it has been the best way I could find of solving particular writing problems. (1973, 19–20)

This article examines some of the main visual devices used by Laurence Sterne in *Tristram Shandy* to challenge printing and writing conventions in the eighteenth century and its ensuing influence in later and contemporary works that also bring forward the non-verbal dimension of the novel. Thus, the purpose of the article is to look at the unconventional form of the novel not as an odd experiment, but as a means to transform the passive receptive role of the reader into an active and participatory movement. By treating the graphic dimension of the novel as an integral part of the narrative development, these works generate the reader's self-awareness—who consciously navigates and manipulates the text—and make the act of reading an explicit and physical experience. As it will be seen, this paper studies the use of blank space by B.S. Johnson in *The Unfortunates* (1969), as he is considered one of Sterne's main heirs; the black space employed by Mark Z. Danielewski<sup>2</sup> in *House of Leaves* (2000); and the turning of the page present in Jonathan Safran Foer's<sup>3</sup> *Tree of Codes* (2010).

### **The unconventional form of the 18th century novel**

The history of the novel, especially in the early days of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is intimately connected to the development of print. Since the rise of the genre, standard novels have been dominated by the linear sequence of language, which fits into the structure offered by the lines of print and the sequentiality in the body of the book. Karen L. Schiff (1998) describes that this linearity in the development of narrative fiction has encouraged the modern notion of the book as a technology that offers only one fixed way of reading, from the first page to the last.

The eighteenth century saw a continuous growth in print culture, moving gradually towards mass-production and commercial literature. As Michael E. Kaufmann (1994) explains, for many early English novelists printed form offered a 'truth', despite it being fact or fiction, and that truth served as a tool to objectively document reality, or to claim to do so. Examples such as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) create the illusion of the book being an objective document where the writer is merely an editor of a manuscript or journal; in this way, the reader becomes a sort of viewer of the events unfolding within the pages. Their intention was to justify the form of the book, including it into the fiction they created and presenting it as a 'document amidst other documents' (Kaufmann 1994, 18–21) Thus, they used the physical body as a surface to present the fictions claimed as real events, turning and fading it into a secondary part of the document, a sort of

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Z. Danielewski (1966) is an American author widely known for his novel *House of Leaves* (2000) and his use of unconventional page layout and typographical structure that bring forward the materiality of the book and the physical reading experience. Other relevant works are *Only Revolutions* (2006) and *The Familiar* (2015-2017), which also regard the book as a device that can include other media.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Safran Foer (1977) is an American novelist known for his works *Everything Is Illuminated* (2002), *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005). In *Tree of Codes* (2010), Foer experiments with memory, loss and treats the book as a sculptural object that enhances the physical dimension of reading.

subordinate background.

Despite the move towards the invisibility of print<sup>4</sup>, reinforced by the appearance of copyright and the importance it gave to the text rather than to the form of the book, there exist early instances of novelists that were concerned with the interrelationship between the creative work of the author, the form it took and the reproduction of the printed artefact (Regan 2002). This is the case of Samuel Richardson and Laurence Sterne, who were involved with both the process of writing and of printing in their works. As Shaun Regan (2002) explains they were interested in how the manipulation of the printed medium could create a dialogue between writer and reader, and how the visual aspect of the book could control and influence the interpretation of the text. In particular, Sterne endeavoured ‘to force the readers to think about the material they are reading instead of blindly forging ahead through the text’ (Schiff 1998, 51) and used blank pages to request the contribution of readers, a marbled page placed on the wrong position, or a blank page to evidence the death of a character. Because of this concern in the process of meaning-making through the material form of the book and its active manipulation, they could both be regarded as early authors concerned with the form of the novel.

It is important to indicate that Sterne’s and Richardson’s works have arrived to us altered by reprintings and changes in trends and technology. Janine Barchas (1995) states that modern editions of eighteenth-century novels have not kept the original design of the early versions, being thus exposed to modifications of layout, typography, and ornamentation. For example, page sizes have changed over the centuries, which inevitably have had a direct impact on the visual games that Sterne played in *Tristram Shandy*, thus affecting his way of treating the turning of the page<sup>5</sup>. The variation in book format affects directly ‘the amount of text that can fit on one page, and few editors have seen fit to replicate the large amounts of blank space that add to Sterne’s printed text’ (Schiff 1998, 116), which inevitably also changes the inflection of the images that are dwarfed or given less space. Besides, the rise of digital technology and our living surrounded by a constant and fluid exchange of information has enhanced the value of content over form, which probably adds to the reasons why these works might not be considered nowadays as unconventional as they once were.

In his book *Textual Bodies* (1994), Kaufmann argues that by using an epistolary theme in his novels, Samuel Richardson aimed for a collapse of the distance between author and reader, but at the same time the technique also presents the events as simultaneous to the writing of the letters, fading towards narration and hiding the printed body of the work. However, Barchas (1995) claims that the printing knowledge Richardson had and his involvement in the production of his novels gave him the opportunity to use the printed medium to influence and control the interpretation of the readers.

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<sup>4</sup> Kaufmann refers to this as a dissolution of print into the voice, narrative turning gradually to be the central point no longer defined by the physical form of the book (1994, 27).

In particular, *Clarissa* (1748) anticipates Sterne's unconventional treatment of the novel and the relation author-reader. A good example of this might be the musical score, which has disappeared from later editions of the novel. This page originally unfolded to more than twice the size of any other page in the book, thus disrupting the physical boundaries of the text (Barchas 1995) and overlapping three levels of content: the visual device of the oversized engraved page, the verbal text of the fiction, and the auditory material of the score. 'Like the marbled page in *Tristram Shandy*, Richardson's musical page alludes to the materiality of book-making' (Barchas 1995, 126) and, in a very modern way, entreats the reader's participation, as it can be read, performed or sung<sup>6</sup>.

Indeed, in its unusual combination of image and text, Richardson's musical page resembles, or anticipates, the work of Laurence Sterne. Like Sterne, Richardson violates a novel-reader's expectations by self-consciously incorporating a familiar cultural artefact into the novel. And like Sterne's unconventional marbled page, Richardson's musical page calls attention to itself because it is visually and genetically inconsistent with the rest of the novel's format. (Barchas 1995, 107)

The fact that Richardson kept altering the content and appearance of his books in subsequent editions is also very significant, as it evidences an interest in the interpretive possibilities of the visual rendering of the novel through print. In the case of *Clarissa*, he used marginalia, indices, dots, and ornaments to 'tell the readers what to read and how to read it' (Barchas 1995, 141). He intended to guide readers and grab their attention through the application of print and the visual presentation of the text:

His innovations in form are not innovations in technology, but in technique: here, as elsewhere, Richardson conceives of new interpretive possibilities for the novel's visual rendering through innovative applications of established print conventions. (Barchas 1995, 161)

Barchas also explains that this concern with the visual aspect of the novel is also made obvious in Paper X, where very unexpectedly Richardson makes an unconventional use of margins and violates the layout of the page. Here he defies both the linearity of the discourse and the conventions of printing by fragmenting the page, distributing the text in multiple directions and creating a collage-like sense, somehow anticipating the way in which modernist writers and poets will later experiment with the physical page; and therefore creating an unavoidable connection with the visual strategies that contemporary authors such as Mark Z. Danielewski in *House of Leaves* will use to build their innovative works. In fact, it is important to mention that both Paper X in *Clarissa* and Appendix II-E (The Three Attic Whalestoe Institute Letters) from page 626 to 628 in *House of Leaves* do not only share the visual aspect but represent the rage and distress of the main characters after suffering a rape.

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<sup>6</sup> In fact, the absence of this page in some of the early editions points towards the possibility of a reader having torn it out to place it upon the harpsichord stand for playing it (Barchas 1995).

## The use of visual devices in the early unconventional novel

*The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* is a nine-volume opus written by Laurence Sterne between 1759 and 1767. The work, usually considered for its influence in the development of the novel and as a source of inspiration for numerous writers, is not focused on a faithful representation of the life and adventures of its hero, as was the literary tradition of the time, but is a story about interruption and digression, which dismantles the linearity of a conventional plot and creates an heterogeneous piece. The novel fluctuates through subjective ramifications, interior adventures of the mind and movements of the subconscious (Schiff 1998; Kundera 2006).

As mentioned previously, conventional narrative fiction has been defined over the centuries with a linear structure and lack of visual intrusions. In a standard novel, each page looks more or less the same as the others, they are related by the uniformity of the page design, which renders reading consistent and avoids distractions on the reader's side. It is all about focusing on the story and the content rather than on the physical medium. In *Tristram Shandy*, however, Sterne intervenes in the regularity of the continuous text in order to bring forward the non-verbal dimension and 'make the act of reading explicitly and consciously physical' (Schiff 1998, 47). For this purpose, he uses digressions; marbled, blank and black pages; punctuation and typographical elements. He plays both with language and materiality, employing design and printing resources available in his time, to create an unfamiliar form, an unconventional literary structure that the reader needs to learn how to navigate. Sterne's intention was to make the reader conscious of the very process of reading, portraying it as an integration of physical and narrative experiences of the text. He wanted to avoid reading to be seen as a passive activity:

Tis to rebuke a vicious taste which has crept into thousands besides herself; — of reading straight forwards, more in quest of the adventure, than of the deep erudition and knowledge which a book of this cast, if read over as it should be, would infallibly impart with them. (I, xx, 48)

Unlike Samuel Richardson, Sterne was not a printer himself, although he had much experience in it, which accentuated his need to be involved in the composition of the book. The author of *Tristram Shandy* worked hand in hand with printers and publishers to oversee and manage the production process, meticulously correcting every proof and making sure the visual features of the work were as he intended them to be. This is the case of the famous marbled page, the emblem of Sterne's work that has never been reproduced in the same conditions as he devised it for the original edition (fig.1). Certainly, the production process was complicated, expensive and time-consuming. Instead of cutting pages out of already marbled paper and inserting them in the book, Sterne used sheets of paper that matched the size of the volume and folded the margins to leave the identical rectangle of the print area; and 'after marbling this central rectangle only, the marbler would remove the sheet, dry it, fold the margins back in the other direction, and repeat the entire process for the other side' (Schiff 1998, 59–60). The first edition consisted of around four thousand copies, which means the marbling process had

to be repeated at least eight thousand times.

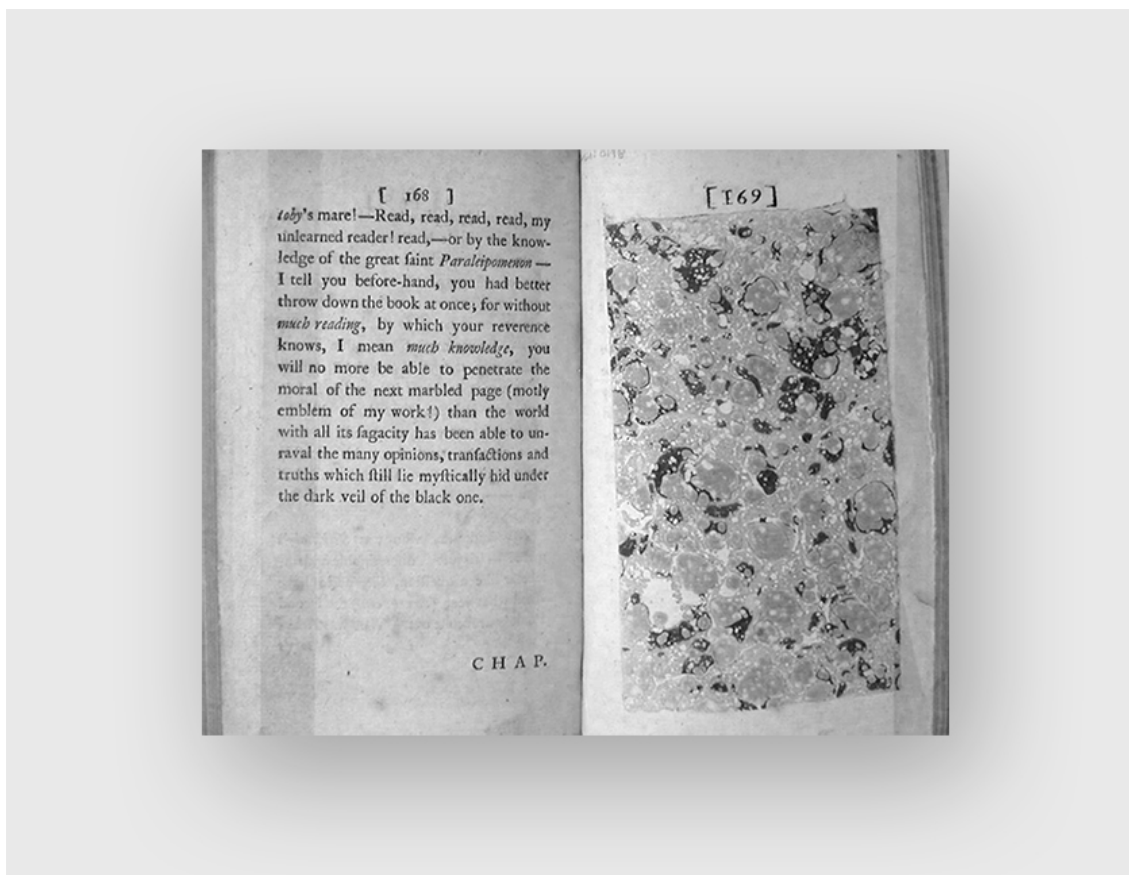


Figure 1. Marbled page from *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. First edition (1761). Publisher Hogarth; Ravenet; Dodsley, R.; Wood, H.; Monkman, Kenneth; Apencer, Walter T. Courtesy of the Laurence Sterne Trust at Shandy Hall.

The marbled page is one of the many materials and visual digressions that Sterne uses in his novel, defining its reading experience<sup>7</sup> and dismantling its expected outcome. It not only interrupts the continuous progress of the text, but also disrupts the predictable composition and structure of the physical object. Conventionally, marbled paper is used as endpaper, fixed to the inside covers of the book; however, as Schiff describes, here the endpapers are placed in the middle of the volume, reflecting ‘the Shandean habit of telling a story not from beginning to end’ (1998, 83). In this way, the material body of the book is included as a part of the story and transmits the individuality of the work by means of a mass-produced object. Regan argues that even though Sterne’s invitation to the reader, through other visual printed elements, to play and be involved with the book generates an individualised experience of the text, ‘the productive multiplication of copies again ensures that the texts purchased by separate readers will remain identical’ (2002, 308). It is through the marbled pages that Sterne accomplishes originality and individuality. ‘The

<sup>7</sup> ‘Digressions, incontestably, are the sunshine; — they are the life, the soul of reading; — take them out of this book for instance — you might as well take the book along with them.’ (Sterne, 1759-1767, I, xxii, 58)

fact that each handmade page is unique means that the experience of reading each book is different' (Schiff 1998, 68).

Laurence Sterne's interest in the participation of both the author and the reader is made obvious through the use of the black and blank pages in the book. The black pages have a sense of erasure, of information hidden beneath the ink, and the reader needs to unravel what lies behind the 'dark veil'. They also mean the death of a character. The blank pages, instead, signal the missing information, the part that the reader is asked to provide. These graphic devices work as another kind of punctuation, more visual and physical, creating digressions and interruptions of the text that, as Mariano D'Ambrosio describes:

convey at the same time a sense of trauma, the impossibility or the suspension of communication; and, on the other hand, an invitation to the reader; who is provided with a space intended to trigger his interpretation and creativity. (2018, 84)

Blank space between paragraphs is also used as a means of punctuation, bringing the attention of the reader back to the physical page. In *Tristram Shandy*, punctuation plays a very important role. As Roger Moss (1981) points out, Sterne uses dashes and asterisks as silent signifiers, graphic artefacts that mark emptiness, a silent space; which aligns with Keith Smith's claim that 'every writer uses the space between words, between lines as pauses for rhythm. Layout of the page may also be a form of punctuation' (1991, 16). Furthermore, Moss describes the use of visual interventions as a way to make the reader aware of punctuation and recognise the assumptions about the nature of reading, but at the same time defines these elements as uncomfortable devices: 'Just as you cannot be conscious of the mechanics of walking without being in danger of tripping up, so these devices, once focused on, make reading dangerously ludicrous and uncomfortable' (1981, 194). In a similar way, Kaufmann believes that 'readers usually see the printed body of a book only when some irregularity—a misspelling or a broken character—calls their attention to it' (1995, 14). However, a definition of this kind seems to look at the visual interventions from an incomplete point of view, forgetting that they are a part of the narrative and belong intrinsically to its construction: Sterne intended to create those interruptions and digressions, the awkward feeling of noticing the physical body of reading<sup>8</sup>. He used printing in an unconventional way, as a tool to represent a narrative idea, an instrument to defy conventions and challenge the reader to determine what is happening within the unfamiliar form. A couple of centuries after him, B.S. Johnson (1973) would declare that for him the novel was a device for solving certain literary difficulties, which in their turn could not always be overcome through text. Sometimes the only available way to successfully express the writer's ideas is through an unconventional form.

In *Textual Bodies* (1994), Kaufman concludes that, even if *Tristram Shandy* contradicts

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<sup>8</sup> When it comes to the body of the book, the easy choice for the writer is to deny it, as Alan Trotter (2015) argues, or to risk it to be considered strange and difficult.

the uniformity and linearity sought by eighteenth century novels, Sterne still aimed for a transparency of print. However, and according also to D'Ambrosio (2018), the attention he brings to the physical page and his concern with the materiality of the book point in another direction, which will also be concretised later on with the modernist experiments with the physical page (Paradell, 2018):

Sterne encourages readers to recognise their own bodies, instead of sublimating them in the habitual experience of reading. He finds ways to highlight a handling of the book as object, eye movement, and physical participation in the narrative's creation. Sterne's invocation of these elements disrupts the reader's usual pattern of taking them for granted. (Schiff 1995, 105)

### Visual devices in the unconventional novel

Conventional novels usually offer a reading experience focused on the verbal dimension, which is enhanced by the unobtrusive treatment of the physical shape of the text or the book. In *Tristram Shandy*, however, Laurence Sterne takes this material aspect into consideration and enhances the visual dimension to complement the basic narrative development. This visual layer offers a challenge and demands an effort from the reader, creates a system in which participation becomes fundamental in the process of generating a complete reading experience. It invites collaboration in order to activate the whole meaning of the text: 'the dialectic of the verbal narrative and the physical book only becomes activated in the presence of a dialectic between the author and the reader' (Schiff 1995, 123). This request of agency from the reader was to be explored in depth by poststructuralists some centuries later. In *S/Z* (1970), Roland Barthes differentiates between *readerly* and *writerly* texts. The *writerly* texts, in opposition to the *readerly*, are those works which give readers a role and turn them into active contributors in the development of the reading activity and the construction of their own world together with the author. Thus, *writerly* could be associated not only with *Tristram Shandy* but also with the works where the visual and verbal dimensions are built together and demand an active participation from readers in order to complete the reading experience.

As it has been explained, the works that require a physical response and manipulation from the reader are usually regarded as difficult and obtrusive, mainly because they interrupt the passive flux of reading. This was the very exact thing that Sterne wanted to avoid: 'I wish ... that all good people, both male and female, from her example, may be taught to think as well as read' (I, xx, 49).

In a conversation with Kari Driscoll and Inge van de Ven (2020, 145–160), Mark Z. Danielewski explains that he feels as if nowadays it was assumed any reader could read any novel, without realising that 'difficult' (i.e. experimental) books need a different kind of effort and involvement, a familiarity that can only be achieved with time and practice. This was concluded as well in a research project in 2008–2010, conducted at the Media and Design Academy in Belgium, where graphic design students collaborated with novelists to create prototype experimental books to be tested on a sample of thirty-one

adult persons (Bazarnik 2014). The more traditional readers complained that they found their reading experience restricted by disruptions and incompleteness; but, on a more general conclusion, ‘after being exposed to several experimental works, the readers became more accustomed to the characteristic devices’ and they gradually paid more attention to the visual part of the narrative (Bazarnik 2014, 69–70). On the other hand, digital technology has helped to raise an awareness of the unconventional form in literature and readers are now more used to the manipulation of text and page than back in the 18th century or the pre-digital era in general: ‘the contemporary reader has no problem navigating disruptions to conventional page layout. In fact, many readers now actively pursue texts that challenge and alter their preconceptions of how a page of text should traditionally look’ (Barton, as cited in D’Ambrosio 2018).

For Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), the novel is characterised with a plastic quality, it is a genre immersed in continuous development and connected with the present. Even if the novel in question is distant in time, it creates a relationship with the current time in which author and reader participate. ‘In many respects the novel has anticipated, and continues to anticipate, the future development of literature as a whole’ (Bakhtin 1981, 7). In particular, *Tristram Shandy* constitutes a good example of this, due to its recognised influence in the contemporary novel<sup>9</sup>, and more specifically in experimental literature from the 20th and 21st centuries, ‘the progenitor of all the avant-garde novels of our century’, as Italo Calvino defined it (D’Ambrosio 2018, 81).

Novels that feature graphic elements are by no means a recent development in literary innovation. An early, canonical example of a novel with graphic elements is, of course, Laurence Sterne’s much celebrated and sometimes berated *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. The book plays with the very form of the novel itself, in both a visual and narratological sense, a facet made all the more remarkable in recent revisionings such as the 2010 release of the book by Visual Editions. (Gibbons 2012, 1)

### The use of page sequencing

Despite the two centuries that separate them, both Laurence Sterne and B.S. Johnson ‘pushed the novel to its limits and beyond’ (Coe 2004, as cited in D’Ambrosio 2018, 84). This relationship is evidenced by Johnson himself, who quotes Sterne in the inside of the box that contains the loose chapters of *The Unfortunates* (1969):

I will tell you in three words what the book is. —It is a history. —A history! Of who? What? Where? When? Don’t hurry yourself. —It is a history-book, Sir, (which may possibly recommend it to the world) of what passes in a man’s own mind.

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<sup>9</sup> Virginia Woolf, Julio Cortázar, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Raymond Queneau, Michel Butor, are some of the authors that have recognised the influenced received from *Tristram*, as D’Ambrosio points out in *Black Pages and Blank Pages* (2018).

Sterne wanted the readers to be involved in the story and the book, to think and be part of the experience of reading and not just progress mechanically through it. For Johnson (1973), instead, literary texts should attempt to tell the truth. He saw the novel as a device for solving certain literary difficulties, which could not always be overcome through the verbal dimension and needed an unconventional form to express the ideas and challenge the linearity of the object.



Figure 2. B.S. Johnson, *The Unfortunates* (1969). Reissued by Picador in 1999. Photograph by Berta Ferrer.

The opposition to that linearity is represented in *The Unfortunates*. The novel presents the recollections of the author's friendship with a friend who died of cancer. It is about loss and the randomness memory encounters through mourning. The aleatorism of the mind is here conveyed to the reader through the form of the physical object and the 27 unbound sections (fig.2). Therefore, the shuffleable quality of the novel is linked to the way in which memory works. This idea is implied in the aleatory text, which the reader is asked to re-arrange in any random order, and also in the graphic layout of each page, as he uses non-uniform sentence and paragraph spacing to underline the discontinuity of these recollections (Jordan 2014) (fig.3). As D'Ambrosio (2018) points out, Johnson is a master in arranging blank space on the page. While Sterne uses blank space to interrupt with conversation and invite the reader to participate and add to the story, Johnson's blanks are silent, they represent the unreliability of memory. Besides, he creates another layer of blank space by leaving the chapters unbound, underlining the idea that these are separate moments in time. These are fragments, floating memories put together in a box to challenge the concept of unrepeatability, of the conclusiveness of death.

We acknowledge the possibility of re-reading even while reading, because it will be different each time we do; we invoke a state of possibility which, if it is not quite infinite, is still vast and unimaginable. (Jordan 2014, 755).



Figure 3. B.S. Johnson, *The Unfortunates* (1969). Reissued by Picador in 1999. Photograph by Berta Ferrer.

### The use of page interruption

*House of Leaves* (2000) marks the starting point of what has been called ‘the aesthetic of bookishness’ by Jessica Pressman (2009), a trend that has been growing among novels published since 2000 that brings the attention to the page and the format of the object, utilising it as a multimedia artefact, a physical media for readers to manipulate and interact with. These works use the ‘threat’ posed by digital technologies and experiment with the possibilities of the physical book in a time of electronic devices.

Despite *House of Leaves*’ commercial success and the fact that it has been labeled as a ‘wonderful experimental novel’ mainly because the graphically innovative pages, Mark Z. Danielewski is aware that his work is indebted to previous authors such as Sterne, Mallarmé, or B.S. Johnson: ‘anyone with a real grasp of the history of narrative can see that *House of Leaves* is really just enjoying the fruits of a long line of earlier literary experimentation’ (McCaffery and Gregory 2003, 106).

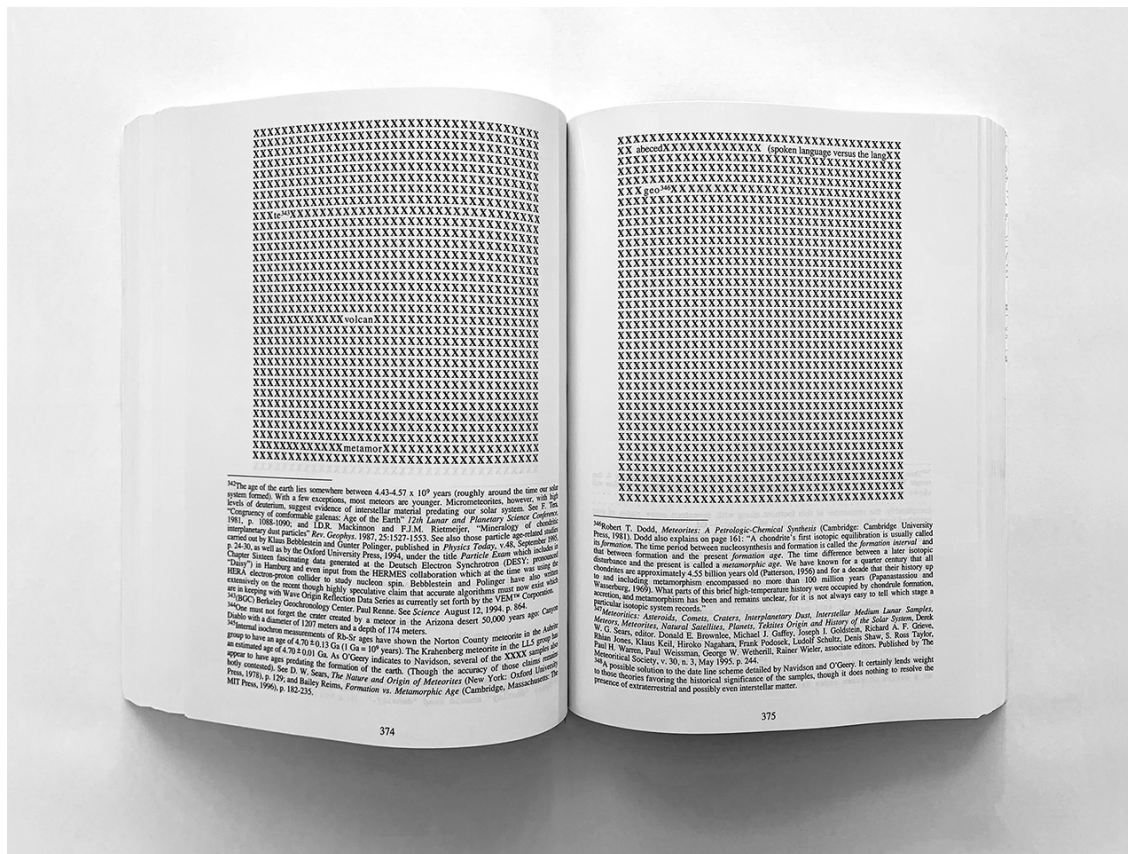


Figure 4. Mark Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, New York, Pantheon Books, 2000. Photographs by Berta Ferrer.

Among many other visual techniques, Danielewski makes use of black and blank devices as part of the page layout. He employs black Xs instead of a solid block of colour to represent missing information (e.g. pages 373–76 in *House of Leaves*, fig.4). While in *Tristram Shandy* the black page signifies the death of one of the novel's character, here it represents the incompleteness of the records presented within the story. A black square is also used in opposition to a white square (in pages 144 and 143 of *House of Leaves*, respectively, fig.5), to generate a kind of maze. The reader is then confused and slowed down in this labyrinth, trying to move within a chapter characterized by the unconventional layout of the pages: blocks of unjustified white space, columns of text placed in challenging positions. Again, like Sterne, Danielewski aims to evidence the act of reading and moving within a page. In addition, the blank space of page 310 in *House of Leaves* is an antithesis to Sterne's use of black colour, although it works in a similar way: the black page in *Tristram* is contained within margins and the type area; in *House of Leaves*, the pages are numbered, thus creating a sense of place and composition. Both devices are to be read 'as meaningful text, rather than as total absence of text' (D'Ambrosio 2018, 91).

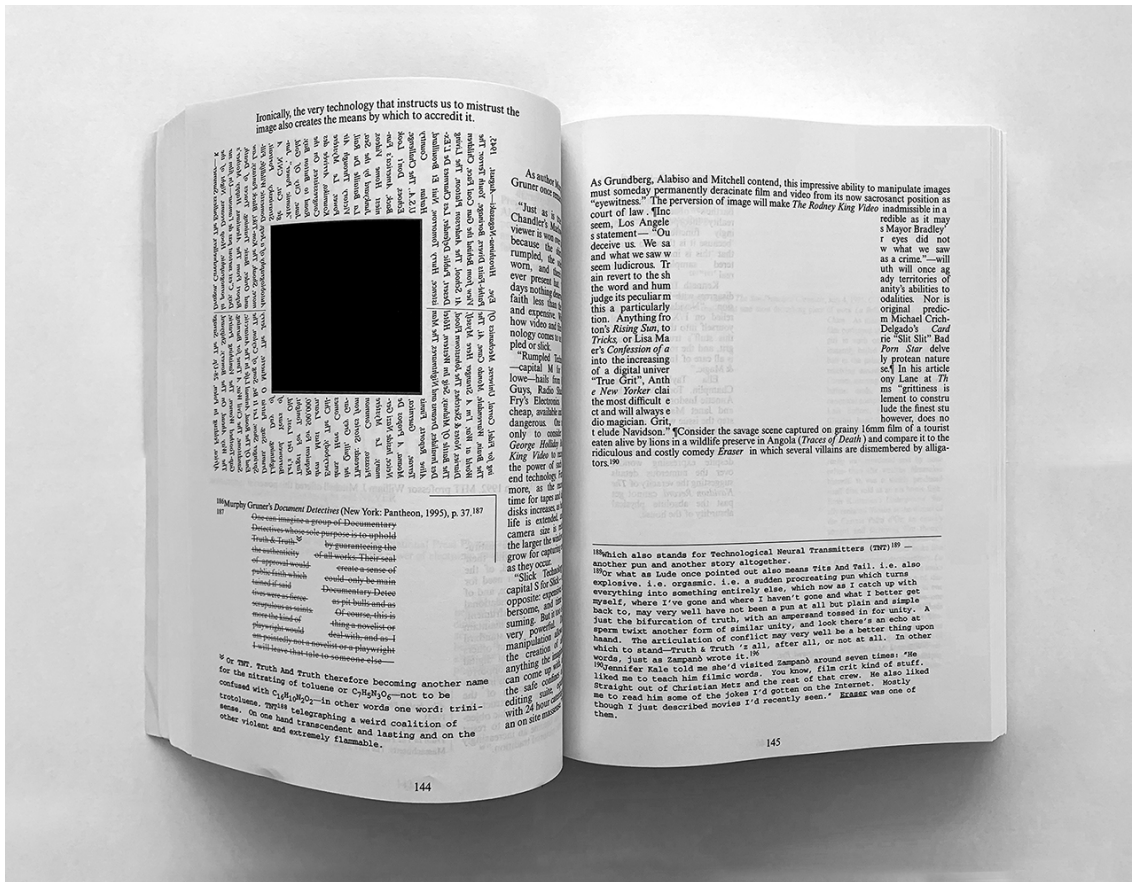


Figure 5. Mark Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, New York, Pantheon Books, 2000. Photographs by Berta Ferrer.

### The use of omissions

Jonathan Safran Foer's *Tree of Codes* also makes use of blank space, but somehow in reverse to how Sterne uses his white interruptions. Here blanks represent a physical void, they are die-cut into the book, building their own story by removing words, sentences and paragraphs from an existing one (Bruno Schulz's 1934 *The Street of Crocodiles*). While in *The Unfortunates* Johnson employs blanks to stitch the random memories together, in *Tree of Codes* the void space represents a process of erasure of memory, of things lost by remembering, evolving and moving forward (fig. 6). Foer sculpts a ruin by leaving the open gaps for the eyes of the reader to skip, to overlook and forget. As in *Tristram Shandy* where Sterne uses the visual interruptions to create an awareness of the act of reading, the die-cut holes in *Tree of Codes* halt the progress (working as well as a sort of punctuation) and make the reader aware of the blank spaces, evidencing and reinforcing the existence of that loss and the missing parts, and 'what appeared to be a (physical) act of forgetting becomes a roundabout or peripheral mode of remembering' (Brillenburger 2011, 5).



Figure 6. Jonathan Safran Foer, *Tree of Codes*. Visual Editions, 2010. Photograph by Berta Ferrer.

One of the strategies Sterne develops is to interrupt the text intentionally at the end of a recto to increase the sense of drama and even to ask the reader to go back and read again a previous section<sup>10</sup>. By doing this, the author brings the attention back to the act of reading, to the physical action of turning pages (Schiff 1998). In the case of *Tree of Codes*, Foer uses the whole materiality of the object to achieve this self-consciousness of reading. The book is only readable when the hand moves slowly through the body: it picks the page and separates it from the rest, then the eyes can scan the space, discover the few words scattered between the die-cut holes and read them in a linear and meaningful order (fig.7). In this way, the content of the book unravels page by page, little by little. It is a process: the experience of the act of reading, the physical involvement of the reader in turning the page. As Kiene Brillenburg Wurth describes (2011):

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<sup>10</sup> 'immediately turn back, that is, as soon as you get to the next full stop and read the whole chapter over again.' (Sterne 1759–1767, I, xx, 48)

*Tree of Codes* is about the kind of reading it requires: the careful handling of the pages, the mindful scanning of the words. You become aware of your fingers and hands in the process of reading: of reading as a physical intervention in the text. You experience this text, which is about fragmentation, and about the idea of a fragmented reality in the text it scatters to pieces, to your hands touching the pages. Today we are mostly touching screens: Foer has us touch paper again, as if we were discovering the medium anew.



Figure 7. Jonathan Safran Foer, *Tree of Codes*. Visual Editions, 2010. Photograph by Berta Ferrer.

*Tree of Codes* belongs to the category of literary books that react to the incorporeality and transposability of digital media by exploiting the material quality of the reading artefact to enforce an intimate relationship of the reader with the object through physical manipulation (Hayles 2013). Nevertheless, it cannot be separated from the fact that it exists on account of the digital realm. *Tree of Codes* does not disregard technology, because it would not have been possible to publish it otherwise<sup>11</sup>. On the contrary, like Sterne, Foer innovates with the materiality of the book by using the existing technologies

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<sup>11</sup> 'The development of new digital printing technologies gives the writers easier access to explore the countless possibilities of page design, while also make it less expensive for the publisher to actually put to print such experiments.' (D'Ambrosio 2018, 87).

of his time<sup>12</sup>. He appropriates digital characteristics to ‘exploit the power of the print page in ways that draw attention to the book as a multimedia format’ (Pressman 2009). As in *Tristram Shandy*, Foer’s novel creates an interaction between verbal and visual dimensions to explore the changing role of the book as a reading artefact in a time of screens.

## Conclusion

Digital technology has altered our perception of the world. Literature and the act of reading are not regarded as fixed and immutable fields anymore; books are not the main medium of information, but objects challenged by the immediacy, dynamism and fluidity of digital media. As reality changes and reframes the way in which reading and writing are understood, there increases the need to analyse what the book and its materiality have to offer in a time of screens.

*The aesthetic of bookishness*, the trend that has grown among novels published since 2000, brings the attention to the *multimedia* qualities a book can offer by considering its materiality and form as inseparable elements of the narrative dimension. However, in order to fully understand the ways in which the book can become an interactive object in our digital age, it is important to look at previous examples that have challenged the conventional form of the novel and the connection to its verbal dimension to bring forward the physical quality of the act of reading. *Tristram Shandy*, with its visual intrusions and its unconventional use of narrative structure, has had a great influence in the development of contemporary literary works that aim to exploit the power of the print page and react to the incorporeality and mutability of digital media by making the reader aware of the physical medium and the act of turning a page, by transforming the book into a place of encounter where author and reader work together to shape the physical reading experience.

Contrary to what it might seem, books such as *House of Leaves* and *Tree of Codes* are not announcing the end of the codex as a literary platform but evidence the reinvention of the physical medium in a time of screens. As Safran Foer explains: ‘on the brink of the end of paper, I was attracted to the idea of a book that can’t forget it has a body’ (Heller 2010).

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<sup>12</sup> Johnson’s *Albert Angelo* (1964) constitutes a previous example to *Tree of Codes* that also uses the technology available at the time and challenges the printing conventions of its era by cutting a hole on every page. ‘While some of the reader’s of Johnson’s *Albert Angelo* found the challenges to conventional page design hard to understand and comprehend in 1964, the readers of more recent novels such as *House of Leaves* seem more able to deal with its graphically innovative pages because they have possibly encountered similar devices in earlier works.’ (D’Ambrosio 2018, 88).

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# Visible Knowledge in the Imagined Landscape

RACHAEL JONES, *Falmouth University*

## ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the value of process, productive tension and creative limitation in the revision and development of a practice-based research methodology. Using a combination of methods relating to artistic practice and fieldwork, for example drawing and photography, the aim of the research is to reveal engagement with the landscape through dialogue between researcher and participants as collaborators. Visual artefacts made by participants will be collated and reinterpreted by the researcher into a non-fiction film, overlaying 16mm film footage to collaboratively document the landscape. Joining experimental film techniques, visual ethnography and social research, images act as material objects of engagement, where a connection between creator and landscape is evidenced through the materiality of the images and the film grain.

## KEYWORDS

Co-creation, Arts-based methods, Materiality, Landscape, Experimental film

## Introduction

The process of conducting research is always a meaning-making activity. Whether conducted within a paradigm based on ‘discovering’ and ‘revealing’ meaning, or one that posits the ‘creation’ and the ‘construction’ of meaning(s), *social research is about generating meaning from data.* (Leavy 2015, 243)

My research project concerns alternative ways of looking at and documenting the landscape, in this particular case, the Cornish landscape, as a site of social connections to the natural world. I am interested in how the tools with which we engage and record the landscape can visualise potential connections as knowledge. To get there, the process or methodology I am applying involves multi-sensory activities that draw on the ways the landscape can be seen or imagined, through an engagement with tools as material ‘things’ (Woodward 2020). The main basis for approaching my research in this way is due to lockdown restrictions. My research was to be carried out collaboratively and physically in the field with members of the Sensory Trust, an organisation that works with people living with dementia and their carers. Its aim is to make the outdoors accessible, improving the wellbeing of people through walking, being in nature and artistic activities. However, following COVID-19 Government advice, they decided to pause their working groups and looked to alternatives to face to face activities.

A large part of my research involves finding formal ways to subvert the power dynamic and vertical hierarchy traditionally found in documentary film production and visual anthropology.

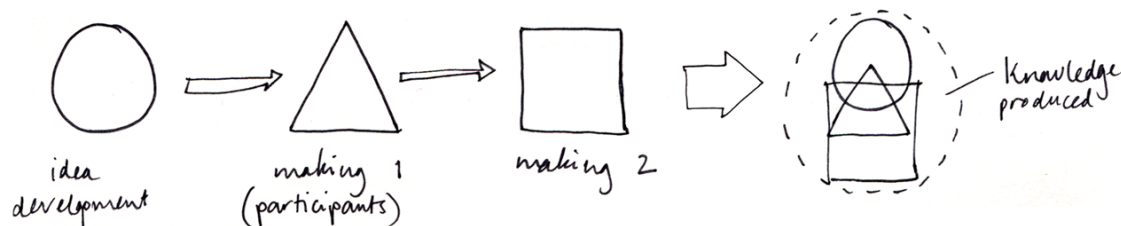
This ‘othering’ is challenged by cross-disciplinary filmmaker and academic, Trinh T. Minh-ha, who employs formal camera and editing techniques to challenge conventions derived from patriarchal and colonialist epistemologies. She creates a dynamic between viewer, maker and film that subverts an inherited language of nonnarrative filmmaking. My intention with my own practice was always to work with people who do not necessarily have, or are not given, a voice. In the case of people living with dementia, the area of the brain responsible for language becomes impaired, however other parts of the brain that relate to creativity, touch and smell often become heightened. Placing the focus on experiential and multi-sensory forms of meaning-making, I felt I could develop a non-didactic approach to making a collaborative experimental research film with non-verbal actors, including the landscape as a participant.

My practice is in film and falls somewhere between the documentary and experimental film, at times taking on the role of interdisciplinary research document. Throughout my work I have often found myself influenced by collaboration and the social interaction or social exchange that pervades films about people and place. In addition, disciplines that employ filmmaking as a way of communicating research and that use the medium of film as an output of research, such as cultural geography and visual anthropology. I am interested in making films that demonstrate or can iterate knowledge attained through socially-engaged research, which, in turn, draw connections to other disciplines.

During lockdown, I found myself dismantling and picking apart my research practice in order to relocate its centre and plan how the methodology could now unfold with restricted access to participants and the field. Since I could no longer carry out the research activities with participants as I had originally intended, the methodology and practice had to take on a new form. I realised during this disruptive process of dismantling and piecing together that I was enacting or putting into effect precisely what I do with my art and filmmaking practice: I take fragments of visual ideas and put them together to find new meaning. I often work through my practice using collage, and this technique of breaking up and placing or stitching together eventually mirrors what I do in the edit, which is where I find the film’s story or, rather, *structure*. In montage theory, the idea that placing two shots side by side creates a third meaning or different emotional response in the viewer depending on the combination of shots, is something I enjoy experimenting with and discovering when I edit. I seldom have a pre-conceived idea of what I want a film to look like, I collect, collate, reshuffle, and then make sense.

I returned to drawing as a way of visually thinking through my disrupted research. I felt the need to return to the visual as a focus in order to realise and make evident the connections between all areas of the research practice or praxis. I started drawing diagrams to reengage myself with my research, which I found an effective tool or strategy for creating knowledge and developing ideas, joining up all areas of the practice. In *Method Meets Art*, Patricia Leavy suggests that cognitive mapping is a practice and methodological tool where ‘ideas percolate, patterns emerge, and original conclusions develop’ (2015, 244). In a sense, I am constructing a map for my own visual research and practice.

The idea that diagrams can communicate knowledge or characterise manifestations of thought more efficiently than words is suggested by psychologist Barbara Tversky. The premise of her research counters the dominant view in cognitive science and linguistics that thinking starts with language; rather, she argues, it actually comes through an awareness of space through movement. Movement can be represented by graphics or gestures as spaces of action where relations to concepts are built, interpreted through maps and diagrams and their corresponding spatial schemas (dots, lines, boxes, circles). She suggests that the mind makes sense of the world and expresses meaning directly through graphics and gestures, whereas, through words it does so indirectly or symbolically (Tversky 2019). From my own experience, words organise thoughts, and from that written organisation can then express meaning; however, diagrams have the potential to communicate a more immediate relationship between ideas.



**Process-driven co-created knowledge, 2020. Credit: Rachael Jones**

I have indicated a cognitive approach for mapping my research, however, I would like to make clear that throughout this project I will not be delving any further into cognitive psychology. Although it is clearly an area that my research touches on, it is also too complex a discipline to position myself within. Rather, I will propose that my research is transdisciplinary, as although it connects with many disciplines, it is not adequately contained by any specifically. Transdisciplinary research favours a unity of ideas that reach beyond the particular perspectives of those disciplines. The idea of moving away from bounded disciplines has been described as the ‘material turn’ (Hicks 2010), which follows on from the ‘cultural turn’ in the social sciences and humanities in the 1970s. Rather than placing culture at the centre of analysis and debate, the material turn measures human behaviour between cultures and institutions based on the spaces we inhabit and the objects we use. According to Latour, this focus on the material or materialism can be seen as ‘the way we move knowledge forward in order to access things that are far away or otherwise inaccessible’ (2007, 139).

Here, the focus on the material seems relevant to a project which, while aiming for humanist connections, is largely about the landscape as the subject. Moreover, it is about the visual artefacts that capture it, offering a material connection. The landscape is the centre of my research, the place or point from which all ideas pivot. This is an idea that relates more closely to cultural geography rather than anthropology, where people not only shape their environment but are shaped by the landscape. However, in this post-industrial time we seem to have lost our connection to the landscape, except to admire it as a piece of scenery, which, perhaps, we are no longer a part. There are different ways of conceiving the landscape, whether it is seen as part of the environment or a distant view. John Wylie draws on human geography, art and cultural geography, asking questions that relate to perception and representation: ‘Is landscape

a scene we are looking at, or a world we are living *in*? Is landscape all around us or just in front of us? Do we observe or inhabit landscape?’ (Wylie 2007, 4).

Landscape architect and theorist, James Corner, writes ‘Landscape and image are inseparable. Without image there is no such thing as landscape, only unmediated *environment*.’ (Corner, cited in Corner and Hirsch 2014, 241). Assuming a photograph or drawing can provide this connection, then, for the purposes of my research, the subject becomes just as much the landscape as it is the material object or image. It is with these thoughts in mind, together with a consideration of material approaches, that I am framing this research project. One of my research questions asks, ‘whether material methods can produce documents of co-creation and form a working practice or model for collaborative engagement with the landscape?’

In the eventual iteration of this research, I will make a film that will embody and reflect the methods used, acting as a research document. However, for the purposes of this paper I will mainly focus on the evolving methodology that is deepening my research practice.

### **Mapping a research practice**

In modifying a methodology so that it can still function under lockdown restrictions, I have discovered a layered approach that substantially benefits my artistic research. The three phases of ‘data collection’ mean that I am placing myself in less of a *mediator* role and more of a fellow *artist-collaborator* one. In the first phase, participants take on the role of collecting ‘fieldwork’ or audio-visual artefacts by following one of four circular walks around an area of Cornwall. I have plotted routes that can be easily accessed, and will include diverse views that intersect with an aspect of Cornwall’s post-industrial history, for example, the clay country and Dean Quarry. These four routes also include megalithic standing stones, connecting to Cornwall’s geological and Celtic history. Apart from these more obvious features, I am interested in what is picked out from the landscape at different points during the participants’ walks. For example, will they notice specific plants or distant forms and colours? To engage the participants, they will respond to a set of instructions that limits their engagement to three points where they can stop and take photographs and audio recordings as fieldwork during the walk.

The first phase of the research practice involves individuals *with* access to the landscape: they will record a walk using an audio device and take photographs. The visual and audio material or ‘data’ collected by each of the fieldwork participants will be consolidated into a pack. In the second phase, those materials will be delivered to a participant from the Sensory Trust, someone *without* access to the landscape. This second set of participants will respond to prompts devised by the first set of walking participants, to make an artistic response to the audio walk using the photographs, with additional artistic interpretations such as drawing.

The final phase of the methodology is where I respond to the data, or audio-visual knowledge collected, through film. I will be using a 16mm Bolex camera to shoot the same landscapes both sets of participants experienced. In order to express the participants’ involvement as collaborators, I will include some of their visuals as animated collages and impositions over the footage I collect. The result may resemble the ecocritical work of Gill and Vangad, which

addresses the aesthetic and political effects of environmental destruction. *Fields of Sight* (2014) was a collaborative research project where researcher-photographer, Gauri Gill, took photographs of landscapes in Maharashtra, India, which were then painted over and inscribed by Rajesh Vangad. Vangad's paintings contribute another layer of understanding of the landscape, infused by his own cultural perspective and Warli iconography, 'His painting constitutes and inscribes the particularity of place [...] Gill's photographs become both a setting and a match for Vangad's intensities' (Grewal 2015).



**Mountains and Trees, from 'Fields of Sight', 2014. Credit: Gauri Gill and Rajesh Vangad (open access)**

This layering effect, in my mind, does two things. Firstly, it levels the voices of participant and researcher as there is no vertical hierarchy exhibited. Secondly, it disrupts the traditional artistic representation of the landscape, creating a new way of seeing and a new language removed from identifiable themes. For my own practice, impositions and layers become their own voices that lie on top of the film image. They are markers of engagement and understanding of a subject beyond figurative representation. The effect of impositions will, hopefully, provide their own particularities that will reveal a collaborative understanding of place.

There are significant ethical implications to consider with this research project. Firstly, working with vulnerable adults means that some may not have the faculties to fully understand their involvement. I am working closely with an officer at the Sensory Trust who will act as the project's gatekeeper, ensuring that the correct measures are taken so that participants and their carers understand and agree to the conditions of the project. It will be framed for them in a manner they are used to, adopting the Sensory Trust guidelines. A second ethical consideration is around the incorporation of participants' visuals into the eventual film. There will be a degree of selecting and editing the work of other people to create an aesthetic of my choosing. However, in my hope that my research reveals a democratisation of participant research, I am

aiming to exhibit the final works side by side, in dialogue with each other. Placing my film alongside the work created by the participants deprioritises the film as an outcome and celebrates the research process.

In *Method Meets Art* (2015), Patricia Leavy proposes that visual arts-based participatory methods involve strategies to promote collective knowledge construction through experience, where researchers can learn from participants' artistic interpretations. They have much transdisciplinary potential, moving beyond how conventional research practices understand art as research (Leavy 2015). Specifically, Leavy cites cases in social research where maps, diagrams and models are employed with participants to allow information as data to become visible, so a researcher is able to see her research differently 'during multiple interpretive moments' (2015, 244). Leavy (2015) explains how these visual methods or tools can provide a multi-media space for research participants to make meaning through visual art, which can both serve and represent data as subjective experience and interpretation.



Field, analogue and digital photo-collage, 2019. Credit: Rachael Jones

A visual arts-based participatory methodology seems appropriate, as it not only mirrors my own practice – informed by the experience of collaboration, interpretation and mixed-methods – but it also connects to one of the aims of my research project: to construct a film based on co-creative multi-sensory, interpretative and artistic strategies. As in Leavy's reports on visual arts-based participatory methods, the participants' interpretations and making will lead to my own artistic responses or conclusions. Where conventional qualitative research often prioritises analysis, and interpretation is not always included as part of the process, this approach can provide unexpected and insightful conclusions (Leavy 2015).

### Process and praxis

The foundations of my research practice emerged from a perceived dualism or gap between theory and practice, where each occupy their own separate space and function. In order to reconcile my (mis)understanding of practice-based research, I started exploring an approach to more effectively carry out my research project, creating a visual methodology that speaks to all areas of the research and that can be called a praxis. To be clear, I equate the terms *methodology* and *process*, not just to reinforce an idea of praxis, but where the methodology is central to this research project, it is in the processes (the tools and approaches of the practice)

that it is realised and developed. These include, the physical bodily processes such as walking and looking, and the physical and chemical camera processes used to capture and record.

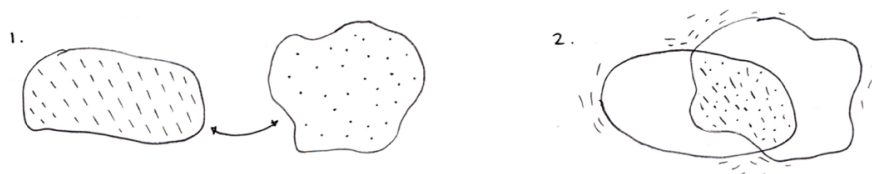
Although my practice is in film, my process as central to the practice involves photography and drawing. I make films that incorporate the photographic image and layer drawings as impositions for additional connection or interpretation. I employ a collaged mixed media approach to engage and inform a creative practice, where connections between mixed methods prove helpful in creative problem solving and idea generation. Collage artist and photographer John Stezaker suggests that ‘Collage offers the possibility of challenging the hold which pictures exert upon our imagination, perceptions, even our situation (vantage point) in the world.’ (Stezaker 1978, 5). The collaged approach is similar to what Derrida (1978) calls ‘bricolage’, which essentially means to explore a subject with the instruments or tools at hand. In a similar fashion, photographer Liz Wells reflects on how photographers use the complexities and depths of process to engage with their craft:

Artists collect, log and sift through a diversity of information about places in order to deepen the insights that will inform photographic method and processes. They are not journalists going in and getting the shot; rather they are storytellers whose depth of research and analysis is reflected in the philosophic perceptions and visual rhetorical strategies which characterise their picture-making. (2011, 10)

In her book *Material Methods: Researching and Thinking with Things* (2020), Sophie Woodward suggests that a material approach to research can help an understanding of a multi-dimensional and multi-sensory world. This concept promotes a more creative response to doing research, engaging with methods which, ‘tap into ways of knowing that are more attuned to material, embodied and multi-sensory ways of being in the world’ (Woodward 2020, 55). For example, collage relies on making connections as well as contrasts that may relate to visual and material elements that have no direct relationship. Here, the positioning of disparate images can allow ‘material and multi-sensory ways of knowing’ to emerge:

Although some of the possibilities for unusual juxtaposition are particular to the practice of collage, it clearly carries some of the potentials of other material methods, where it can ‘jar’ people into seeing or thinking differently. (Woodward 2020, 71)

Considering these approaches and relating them to my own method of working, I have developed a concept for a working praxis, which, in order to generate visible knowledge, I will argue, needs to be symbiotic and reflexive; open to movement, shifts, juxtapositions, and an overlapping of ideas that come out of a focus on the material and process.



Reflexive and emergent, 2020. Credit: Rachael Jones

## Form and content

As a filmmaker, informed by non-narrative filmmaking strategies which are, in turn, informed by artistic practices, I draw on avant-garde and experimental filmmaking. Form and content are typically aligned in the experimental film, how a film is made is indicative of its subject and content. More specifically, in the materialist or structural film, attention to the material, physical and mechanical methods of a film's construction become the subject and what is revealed to the viewer, providing a 'non-illusionist' alternative form of engagement to narrative film viewing (Gidal 1976). I am fascinated by process in all forms of art making, where the rough lines of a drawing or the chemical splodges in a hand processed photograph are where process is made visible. In *Landscapes: John Berger on Art*, Berger reflects on the drawing as the lines on paper as traces left behind from the artist's gaze (2016, 22). According to Berger, drawings, as opposed to paintings, are unconstructed and unfinished autobiographical records. A similar reflection on drawing but related to visual ethnographic research methods, is in Azevedo and Ramos' work around inter-subjectivity and drawing workshops. Here, drawing is 'not a finished product or artistic form, but as a mark of one's process, coming out of research' (Azevedo and Ramos 2016, 144).

If we do not concentrate so much in drawings as finished products but as steps in an unfinished – and ending – process, their layered and connecting nature is revealed, be it in the individual drawing itself as it comes into being, in its paradigmatic relation with other drawings in a never-ending flow of (re)invented lines. (Azevedo and Ramos 2016, 145)

Drawing is a research tool that not only intersects different disciplines from art to science to the humanities, but that can also *produce* knowledge, as opposed to simply representing it. Artist-researcher Gemma Anderson (2018) believes drawing is an important tool and process for knowing, connecting art and science, in particular, biology. She creates collaborations or interdisciplinary exchanges between artists and scientists with the intention of integrating scientific research into artistic practice, as produced through drawing and dialogue. For Anderson (2018), drawing is a tool for knowing, where visual representation can communicate and lead to process-centred understandings of the natural sciences. In addition, drawing can communicate knowledge across disciplines, making visible 'relations between things that otherwise remain invisible' (Anderson 2018, 16).

In tracing connections between the importance of form and process across different disciplines, I have turned my focus to making a research project that can be visualised. Ideas can be communicated not just through the writing on the page, as is being done here, but through a *visualised material process* and understanding that can contribute to knowledge on a subject.

## Thinking through diagrams

The framework of this research incorporates new materialist thinking towards object-oriented ontology, in particular Manuel De Landa's (2016) new materialism and assemblage theory, accommodating my own positioning and reactivation of diagrams and collage for knowledge production. New materialism's functional relationship to the diagram is in its transversality:

connecting and thinking across disciplines. According to Panayotov (2016), the diagram plays in the in-between space of both materiality and its non-indexicality, producing rather than reducing: it shows a relation to the incorporeality of matter and object without representing or signifying.

It is not uncommon for practitioners, researchers, artists, and thinkers to incorporate diagrams in their work. There are many who use maps and diagrams beyond simply working through and revealing the formation of ideas. Here, the diagrams become the work itself, evidencing knowledge and thinking beyond representation. A clear example of this practice is in the work of the Situationist International, a group of social revolutionaries mostly active during the 1960s. The group constituted avant-garde artists, intellectuals, and political theorists who mapped urban environments as a cartographic practice, subverting pre-existing maps as objects of power. It was Guy Debord who coined the term 'psychogeography' in 1955, as a way to explore the soul of a city through the concept of 'drift' or walking and becoming lost.

I began using diagrams to help mobilise my research practice into a praxis, to iterate a form that communicates and connects without relying on words to explain. As Deleuze suggests, the diagram is a possibility of fact that is not the fact itself, therefore, an ideal tool or symbol for research that is process-driven (cited in Mullarkey 2014). The diagram can be used to map theory, producing rather than reducing information (Mullarkey 2014). Similar to Anderson's drawings described above, the diagram can help make connections, sparking knowledge and ideas. In *Deleuze and the Diagram: Aesthetic Threads in Visual Organisation*, Jakub Zdebik (2012) argues for the diagram as a methodological tool. He traces Kant's concept of the 'schema' as embodied in the diagram, a device which is powered by the imagination.

The schema, as described by Kant, is what permits the movement of thought from empirical intuition to pure understanding, as it is through this device (an incorporeal machine) that concepts are formed. (Zdebik 2012, 126)

A schema joins up thoughts as lines providing a blueprint or a structure for ideas, and, according to Hannah Arendt, it provides the image for the concept (Zdebik 2012, 125). Similarly, the diagram is a 'critical mode of representation of an image that is not quite an image or, more precisely, the terrain between the visible and the articulable...' (Zdebik 2012, 139). Literally speaking, 'dia – gram' means through or between – form (writing / drawing / line). It can represent ideas and research in motion.

In Paul Klee's posthumously published notebook, *The Thinking Eye*, one of his main concerns is visual thinking, where drawing can be described as a line that has been 'taken for a walk' (cited in Spiller 1961). Lines join up ideas, form explicit relations and create a diagrammatic structure. As Tim Ingold suggests, 'The line is [...] between the finality of objects and the potentials of things' (2011, 18). The process of forming ideas through practice, in an 'in-between' state, is perhaps then where I need to be with process-driven visualised knowledge. As the content and form of my practice shifts between still images and moving ones, the diagram seems an appropriate tool to capture these developments of my praxis. They reflect

the working-out of ideas in motion, process and an in-between state where knowledge can emerge.

[T]he practice of drawing has little or nothing to do with the projection of images and everything to do with wayfaring—with breaking a path through a terrain and leaving a trace, at one in the imagination and on the ground, in a manner very similar to what happens as one walks along in a world of earth and sky. (Ingold, cited in Geismar 2014, 106)

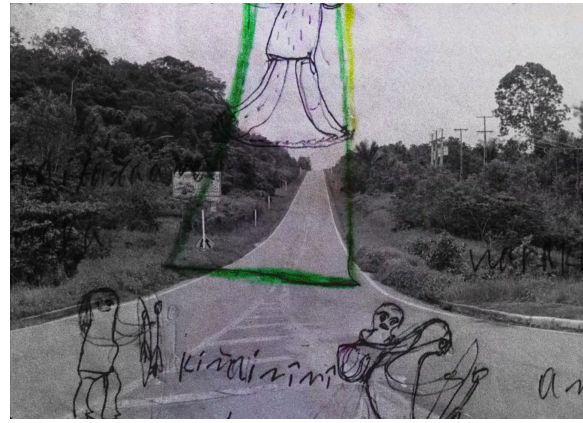
### Knowledge made visible

In his essay ‘Visible materials, visualised theory and images of social research’ (2006), Jon Wagner discusses the disregard that social researchers have towards visualised interpretations, even when they do inform a large part of their work. The reflexive relationship between ideas and visible materials can be encouraged, not just in acknowledging their importance, but by working directly with photographs or drawings, helping social researchers enrich their research by visually communicating ideas with others.

They also make visible some elements of culture and social life that we might not otherwise be able to see. But these materials also record the visual perceptions of those who made them, and they can stimulate additional visual perceptions among people who view them. (Wagner 2006, 57)

Researchers can use drawings, diagrams and words to make theoretical concepts ‘visible, visual and understandable’ (Wagner 2006, 61). In addition, by making the construction of data as knowledge visible, we can create critical visual dialogues that are removed from structural bias (Sobande 2018). In my own research, it is my intention to make visual thoughts and discoveries through collaboration and dialogue *visible*, as this I believe will have a democratising effect, documenting participant-researcher understanding and engagement. This visibility will be expressed in the form of participant impositions over footage, as in Gill and Vangad’s co-created research. Although the finished result is still an unknown, aesthetically I imagine it as a layered progression of images, with juxtaposed still images next to moving ones and a soundscape that is equally layered, incorporating the audio captured during the participants’ walks.

In Ana Vaz’s recent film, *Apiyemiyekî?* (2020), drawings as material objects are superimposed onto footage shot by the filmmaker herself. It contains voice-over of the indigenous activist and researcher who collected the drawings of the Amazon community in the 1970s, when their clash with the Brazilian government’s push for economic progress meant displacement and destruction of their villages and culture. This is a poignant example of a film that positions drawings as visual artefacts, creating collaged superimpositions to reflect on collective memory and reconnect to the land (Bittencourt 2020). The multi-layered technique creates a visual dialogue between people and place, where drawings and images can communicate different voices and collective experiences.



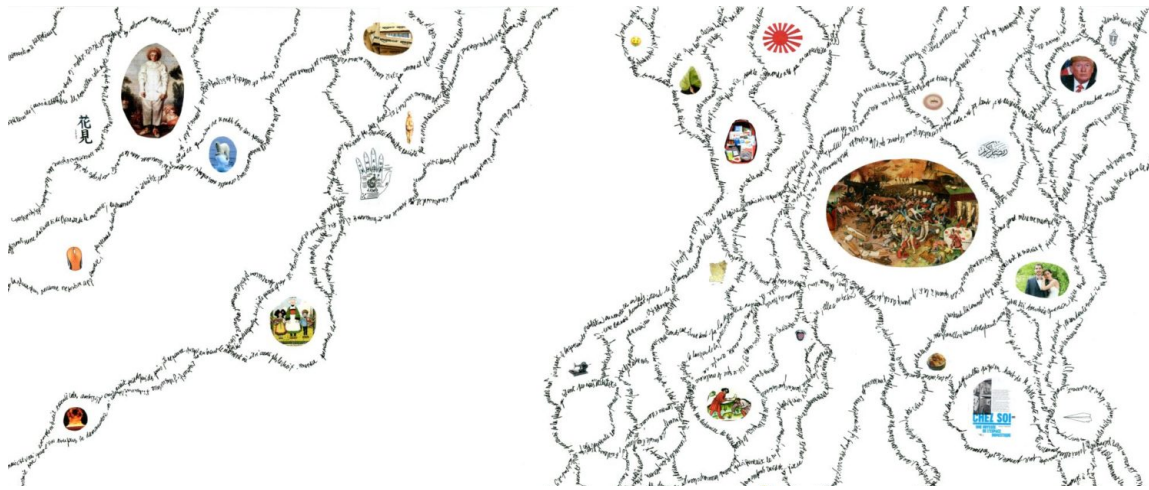
Stills from film ‘Apiyemiyekí?’, 2020. Credit: Ana Vaz (Mubi)

Mark Lombardi was an art historian and librarian turned neo-conceptual artist who wanted to reveal the connections between political scandal and international terrorism. To document this connection, he originally intended to produce a piece of writing, but in attempting to map out these connections he created a set of doodled diagrams that expressed all the information he wanted to be communicated visually. He found that by translating the information into graphic maps or ‘sociograms’ they needed no further explanation. Rather, non-hierarchical mapping can allow the viewer to make their own inferences and interpretations (Zdebik 2011).

Otobong Nkanga has a multi-disciplinary practice spanning tapestry, drawing, photography, installation, video and performance. Placing her own body and personal experience at the centre of this exploration, her work uncovers the politics of land and trauma inflicted by colonialism on territories and bodies. *The Weight of Scars* (2015), is an enormous tapestry representing a mapped network of scars as physical markings, connecting embedded or stitched in photographs of abandoned mines in Namibia.

During a more a recent historical period, Violaine Lochu’s ‘Interior Future’ project documents the quarantine experience as a ‘kind of floating journal’ (2020) composed of several drawings and sound pieces that she collected from several participants:

In this unprecedented moment, experienced both collectively and separately, the limitation of outings, practical constraints, health and/or economic apprehensions, are all reconfiguring our mental landscapes. For many, events, (reduced) activities, sensations and thoughts follow one another in kind of a *continuum*: news, telephone conversations, occasional outings, reflections, professional contacts, memories, dreams, special dates, readings, films, etc. (Lochu 2020)



**Futur Intérieur, ink and collage, 2020. Credit: Violaine Lochu**

Examining the work made by the above artists, the tension of the subject matter and the artwork's aesthetic are embodied and joined together in the physical material processes made visible in the works themselves. The diagrams and maps offer up a way of thinking *between* people and objects; society and place. The stitches of Nkanga's tapestries reflect the labour of minerals, toil and injustice and their relationship to capitalist power. Amid the limitations of quarantine, Lochu tapped into a collective experience to create a work that connects people who would otherwise have remained isolated from each other. They are connected in the integration of their own visual artefacts into one space, which are joined together by lines drawn by the artist.

## Conclusion

The advantage of adapting my methodology so that it can function under lockdown restrictions has meant I have reduced the potential tension (and paradox) of carrying out a democratised research project. My main concern prior to lockdown was that I would be there during the walks and workshops and would therefore, albeit unintentionally, influence how the data was produced and collected. Although I am still facilitating the research process, I will no longer be present while both phases of participant activity take place. This distancing, I hope, will provoke deeper insights and connections among all collaborators.

It is regimes of expression that intersect, creating unique combinations of exchange, fusion and distance. These combinations create forms of pensiveness of the image that refute the opposition between *stadium* and *punctum*, between the operative character of art and the immediacy of the image. The pensiveness of the image is not then the privilege of photographic or pictorial silence. This silence is itself a certain type of figurativeness, a certain tension between regimes of expression which is also a set of exchanges between the powers of different media. (Rancière 2009, 125)



**Goonhilly, analogue photograph with imposition, 2019. Credit: Rachael Jones**

What I experienced during lockdown, apart from the initial frustration and despair, was an opportunity to reimagine how my research could unfold with severe restrictions in place. I feel there is a certain productive tension needed for the development of ideas and sparks of discovery to happen, and for my experimental practice I often engineer this tension by creating limitations in the form of a creative manifesto. For this research methodology, I have decided to put in place a set of instructions for the first set of participants to follow, as a way into the project, but one which they can veer from if they wish. They will have the opportunity to take their time on the walks and consider the landscapes and environments they are capturing and why. These connections will be relayed to the second set of participants for new connections to spark, which will be formally incorporated into the film I make as a response, through layers and impositions. I imagine that these layered pieces will reproduce and visualise an experience *in* the landscape, creating a document that goes further than artistic representation. My hope is that unexpected connections will emerge in the physical conjoining of different experiences, physical and remote, in the landscape.

To imagine a landscape is to evoke a memory that is a multi-sensory experience; to document this imagining gives significance to an act of engagement, connecting person to place; object to landscape.

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# **Robot Avatars and the Vicarious Realm**

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## **ABSTRACT**

I introduce the concept of the vicarious realm as existing between physical ‘place’ and virtual ‘space’. Using the words of students who employ telepresent robots to attend class for them, I speculate on the role of the robot as a pliable representation of a person, and how it offers the human the opportunity to retain an embodied presence in a place (classroom) in a way that is impossible via the use of a screen. Embodiment and interaction – known as intercorporeality – is unique to the notion of ‘place’; without it, we cannot lay claim to being in any place. This assertion has implications for the argument that there can be such a thing as an online ‘place’. It is my intention that my paper will provide an inspirational base for future researchers to consider our relation to place as our notions of being somewhere come to be questioned.

## **KEYWORDS**

Robotics, disability, identity, representation, virtual

## **Introduction**

In August 2017, Jade, a disabled British student introduced the world to Bee (figure 1) – the telepresent robot who attends school for her when she is too ill (Gee 2017). Bee is present in the classroom while the student interfaces with a tablet to stream video, sound, and also to transmit her voice via Bee. Vaguely humanoid in appearance, Bee’s head can be controlled remotely, thereby allowing the student to have a 360-degree view of the classroom. This capability sets the functionality only slightly apart from current teleconferencing software which has the potential to do most of what Bee can do and is much more readily available.

Bee is, by no means, a unique case as there appears to be a trend in the use of robots (albeit with varying levels of functionality) by students who feel that, without their mechanical emissaries, they would otherwise be missing out on at least some elements of an educational experience (Gilani 2011; Metro 2011). This is a curious phenomenon but one with some pertinence. As events arising from the Covid-19 pandemic marked a necessary shift to online environments in all spheres, changing relationships with people and places, and with robotics ever growing as an industry, in what ways could a robot offer the user (student) a different experience than that which could be offered by the screen alone?

Answering this main question will require addressing the sub questions contained within. Given that it acts as an agent for the student user to interact with the environment, it is necessary in the first instance to consider the relation that the student has with the robot and, further to this, thought should be given to the relation between the robot and others present within the environment – in this case the classroom. Secondly, a distinction must be made between the realms of online, physical, and vicarious experience (as I have termed it). An understanding of the distinctions will allow for a comparison between differences in experience between the use



**Figure 1.** Bee the Telepresent Robot (Gee 2017)

of robots and technology with similar functions which offer a virtual presence, as well as how this might compare to being physically present.

### **Methodology**

The aim of this paper is to advance a speculative proposition on the use of the robot as an ‘avatar’, or a representative of oneself, and to offer an introduction to my original concept of the vicarious realm – as a middle ground between physical and virtual – with a view to considering how this impacts on a feeling that one can ‘be there’ (in Jade’s case, in class) while somewhere else. In order to advance my arguments, I have undertaken a hermeneutic analysis of literature chosen for its relevance to the paper’s themes and performed conceptual analyses of the main concepts ‘avatar’ and ‘vicarious realm’, presented here in their briefest forms.

The literature I have engaged with crosses a range of disciplines, as I have referred to philosophers of education, mind, psychology and imagination; academic discourse in robotics and artificial intelligence; and science fiction.

As this paper will be addressing student experiences to an extent, it is only logical that it will refer as directly as possible to the words of the students using the robots, especially Bee's primary user as she has been most articulate in her experiences with the robot, as quoted in the newspaper articles referenced above (Gee 2017; Gilani 2011; Metro 2011).

In setting out the difference between 'place' and 'space', or physical and online, I will refer to the work of the contemporary educational philosopher (and technologist), Norm Friesen (2011). His account of the phenomenological differences between the classroom as a place – an identifiable, enclosed destination with a value – and online as a space – imbued with freedom, blank possibility and nothingness – provide a backdrop to the discussion on the distinction between these two forms of experience (which, despite clear differences in definition, Friesen tells us a determination of experiential difference between them is not so simply defined), as well as allowing me to introduce my own conceptualisation of the vicarious realm as a middle ground.

As well as philosophy of education, I refer to writers of philosophy of mind, imagination, image, and psychology to support me in constructing the argument that the role of the imagination is imperative when considering the robot to be more than just a tool to its user. Similarly, writings from contemporary researchers in artificial intelligence and robotics are used to consider human-robot interaction, and the possibility of robot to become a representation of one's identity.

Furthermore, due to its propensity as a genre to articulate concepts beyond the scope of current common-sense thinking, I intend to use some ideas drawn from science fiction. Science fiction as a field of inquiry itself has been studied by academics since the 1960s (Williamson 1996), and its inspiration may be felt in research fields across the sciences (for example, the field of Robotics bears a name invented in fiction by Isaac Asimov). I use it here, however, as a means of speculating on a present day reality through projections of alternate created worlds (Latham 2014); it is a useful way of critiquing what is now, based on what could be/could have been. In this case, it has been used to speculate on the role of robot as a means of representing identity, or holding a role beyond mere tool or machine. This is something which is addressed often in a fictional sphere, but less so in the academic sciences and so I look beyond them in order to draw inspiration. Particularly interesting here are the robot stories of Isaac Asimov (1995) which speculate on the potential relationships between human and robot from a number of perspectives. Furthermore, the imagining of the world as populated by remotely controlled robotic representations of humans as posited in the film *Surrogates* (Mostow 2009) has pertinence when considering vicarious experience and robot as extension of self, both of which are ideas with some relevance in this paper.

**'Bee makes people feel comfortable': Human-robot relation, anthropomorphism, and identity expansion**

In describing her relationship with Bee, the student who uses it – Jade – refers to it both as a tool, in terms of performing a function for her, but also explicitly assigns human-like qualities to it. Bee has been given a name, the student has engendered Bee as female, and she even goes further to suggest that Bee has experiences independent of her: ‘Several times, she’s come back [from friends’ houses] with big red lipstick marks all over her’ (Gee 2017). It occurs to me that, although anthropomorphism refers to a tendency to give human-like attributes to any non-human entities (consider the idea of pets treated as children, for example), in the field of robotics and artificial intelligence this is something which is especially prevalent. It is suggested in literature that the design of the robot lends itself to ‘higher anthropomorphizability’ (Zlotowski et al. 2015, 347), meaning that those machines designed with a humanoid appearance make it easier for us to project human qualities onto them. At first glance, this theory may seem logical; it retains echoes of the idea that, regardless of how abstract something may appear, there is a general inclination to look for a human face, or a human characteristic, within it (Balazs 1970). This is a short journey to make when the machine already displays some of those physical, human characteristics. However, this theory does fall down somewhat when considering that consumer AI products such as the Google Assistant, Apple’s Siri and the Amazon Alexa do not look in any way human, but their voices, their names and their quasi-conversational method of interaction encourage the user to treat them as though they *were* human. Our intrinsic inclination to anthropomorphise still happens, but without a physical hook, the journey becomes a little more challenging.

It is a familiar science fiction trope: the notion of robot created in the image of a human. The first use of the word robot occurred in the 1920s (in Karel Capek’s play, *R.U.R.*, referenced in Asimov 1995) to describe machines that were identical to humans in appearance. Since then, it has been a staple of the science fiction genre to represent robots in the humanoid form – C3P0 from the *Star Wars* (Lucas 1977) franchise; Marvin from the *Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, complete with personality prototype (Adams 1995); and Mr Data, the incredibly lifelike droid from *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987), among countless others. For the purposes of this inquiry, though, we are concerned primarily with Bee – and others like it – with its comparatively naïve design and functionality far from the level of the aforementioned sophisticated, autonomous robots. The question of whether Bee can be considered strictly humanoid could be debated with regards to Asimov’s description of the humanoid as ‘indistinguishable from the human being’ (1995, 189), however such a debate is not wholly necessary here. It is enough to consider how the modelling of the head and ‘eyes’ render a vague semblance of a person, and how this approximation of a particular concept, or image, of person impacts on those people who come into contact with it. I suspect that the cultural familiarity of robot, certainly in a Western context, represented in the (vague) human image is what ‘makes people feel comfortable’ (Gee 2017) around Bee and its counterparts. Indeed, the ‘Uncanny Valley’ theory posits that there is a non-linear relationship between how realistic a robot is and how likeable it is (Zlotowski et al. 2015). According to this theory, people do not relate well to robots that are too lifelike, although Sethumadhavan (2012) counters that we expect human-like robots to have more warmth and, for that reason, this is the preferred design for machines built to interact with people. Perhaps Bee’s popularity, and what has been an

apparently successful integration, among Jade's peers can be attributed to its appearance as an appropriate balance of human-like but not so lifelike as to elicit feelings of discomfort.

Unusual though it may seem to give human characteristics to something which functions as a tool (consider whether you would name a screwdriver, to give a glib example), it is my contention that Jade's assignation of human characteristics to her robot is a necessary consequence as she uses it to represent (at least part of) herself to others. There is a plurality here as Bee could be described as both a tool which performs a function for Jade, and a representative of her in a world from which she would otherwise be excluded. This echoes Bainbridge's (2014) assertion that developments in technology both extend the scope of human action and permit the extension of our identities. Another student in Moscow named his robot after himself (Metro 2011) – a clear indication that he viewed his identity and that of the robot's to be very strongly linked, if not one and the same.

I have referred, in this article's title, to the robots used by these students as avatars, a term which is commonly associated with the online gaming world and can be identified as 'an interactive, social representation of a user.' (Gunkel 2010, 128). Avatar also seems an accurate term to use when describing these robots as they act as representational proxies, allowing the students to access the interactive and social domain of the 'real world' classroom. Online avatars are not always fully representative of the real-life physical attributes of the user – Gunkel (2010) suggests that they offer opportunities for both exploration of one's identity and deliberate concealment of (perceived) less appealing attributes; however, it is interesting to note that when choosing online gaming or social avatars, it is more common than not for users to choose ones which closely resemble how they look in real life (Best & Butler 2013). Robot avatars do offer further opportunities for experimentation with identity as explored, somewhat exaggeratedly, in the movie *Surrogates* (2009). In a world populated almost entirely by robot avatars (surrogates) which are remotely controlled by humans from the safety of their own homes, the main protagonist in this film encounters one user controlling multiple surrogates in multiple configurations – none of which bear any physical similarity to the original, root user. Indeed, everyone with a surrogate has configured it to be, at the very least, a more physically attractive version of themselves. Sadly (or not, depending on your point of view), such sophisticated machines are yet to exist outside of the realm of science fiction and the robots currently in use by disabled students are not so amenable to aesthetic customisation. However, with its strikingly neutral appearance, Bee offers possibilities for Jade to assert a part of her identity among her peers by allowing her to represent herself to them in a way that conceals physical attributes with which she is uncomfortable. She admits, 'I don't want people to see me stuck in a nappy' (Gee 2017), and Bee definitely spares her this indignity.

Further to this idea, Bee, in its role as robotic avatar, whilst assuredly remaining not Jade, also comes to be *essentially* Jade. This is an idea which will come to be referred to again in the following section as the realm of vicarious experience is discussed, but pertinent to be introduced here as we consider the robot as a representation of identity. Just as a photograph or image can present the essence of a person – 'the presence of the thing in its absence' (Lechte 2013) – by appropriating the image of that person, so too does Bee present Jade's essence by appropriating the aspects of her identity that it is possible to show (given the inherent

limitations of the technology), and those which Jade herself is comfortable showing. It may even be argued that the robot, by virtue of its ability to streamline one's identity by obscuring that which the user sees as less appealing, could become representative of an 'ultra-essence'. I am reluctant to speculate too far in this regard as it would require a discussion which lies far out of the scope of this paper so it is sufficient to understand that robot and user maintain a link beyond that which is purely communicative.

Referring back to the original question of the difference between the experiences offered to students by the robots and those offered by similarly functioning technology, I conclude, partially at this midway point, that the key distinguishing factor between telepresent robots and telepresence hardware and software is the establishment of the robot as a pliable representation of the identity of the human user. Where an on-screen presence gives the student the chance to *see* what is going on and offer a contribution in a kind of passively participative way, the robot presents an opportunity for something of them to *be* present while they are not strictly present themselves. I accept that, in terms of base functionality, it may be argued that the robot is essentially a slightly more sophisticated version of the kinds of video communication technologies that are gaining traction across modes of life for some of us; however, a digital communication link between two people can only exist in a virtual space, with the only recourse to the physical being that which can be glimpsed in the background of your interlocutor(s). A representative present in the physical space of the classroom transitions from entirely virtual to, I suggest, somewhere between the physical and virtual. In the next section, I will attempt to distinguish between the realms of physical, online, and vicarious experience to determine how the use of robots may offer a different kind of experience than the use of, for example, telecommunications software and a laptop.

### **'Bee allows me to be part of the class': Distinguishing between physical, online, and vicarious experience**

"Bee lets me do everything I didn't think I'd ever be able to do," says Jade. "It allows me to *be there*, and hear first-hand what's being said, and be part of the class." (Gee 2017, emphasis added). At first glance, this does not seem like an odd comment to make. Indeed, often it is spoken about 'being' on social media, on a video call, or online when it is probably more semantically correct to say that we are using social media, making a video call, or using the internet. Nevertheless, *Jade's* assertion that she can be in the classroom when she is, in fact, sitting on her sofa at home in front of her tablet screen is one that remains curious for the very reason that it exploits this minor semantic inaccuracy to suggest something greater: that it is possible to be in two physical places at once – classroom and home – via the manipulation of a virtual space using a physically embodied subject.

In the previous section, I determined that the robot could be viewed as a representation of the human user, one which carries something of the identity of the person at the controlling end (their essence, perhaps) and allows for the possibility of identity expansion and exploration. In making distinctions between physical and online experience, I will argue that it is this ability to represent the identity of the human in a physical form, as an extension of their own body, which allows the robot to offer, for the user, a middle ground between the entirely physical and the entirely virtual – a realm which I have called vicarious.

A well-quoted axiom which attempts to succinctly identify the main difference between physical and virtual is that which appears in Jay Griffiths' *A Sideways Look at Time* (2004, cited in Doyle and Kim 2014; Doyle 2010): 'There is no place in cyberspace – there's no Africa there, no mud, no beads or wells or such humanity in the air.' What I interpret from Griffiths' quote is that cyberspace lacks the sensory experience that we associate with being in a place. In the example, anyone present in Africa, provided they held the requisite sensory faculties, could see the beads, smell the mud, and touch the wells although in cyberspace, the quote assumes that could never happen (debatable though this may become as technology continues to advance). This echoes the definitions of 'place' and 'space' I have adopted from Friesen (2011) in his attempt to distinguish between pedagogical relations in classroom and on screen. Place, as he defines it, is a destination with an identifiable value which is always enclosed. Africa, it can be agreed, is an enclosed place (by virtue of its borders); the interactions with the mud, beads and wells, and the sensory experiences resulting from these interactions how we identify and evaluate the place. Space, on the other hand, is without such experiences or enclosure; it is a nothingness. The idea of a nothingness can be construed in a positive sense, whereby it can foster freedom from the enclosures of place. It may be considered to have a negative aspect, in that its emptiness leaves the space without the sensory experiences we come to value.

These definitions represent an attempt to make a distinction between the ontologies of place and space; however, Friesen (2011) suggests that the difference between experiences in place and space, or, as in the quote above, real and virtual, is not so easy to define. The multimodal nature of the lifeworld, the world experienced by us, means that we cannot only describe it in terms of sense. It must also be thought of in terms of lived time, lived space, lived body, and lived relation. The place (of the classroom, in this case) and the space (of the screen) encourage differences, sometimes subtle, across each of the modes of experience. For example, Friesen discusses the similarity between the classroom and the computer in regimenting 'time, space and body' (2011, 81), but identifies a difference in the possibility of the students in the classroom being able to interact directly with the teacher and others in the classroom; whereas online, the screen remains a mediating entity – a barrier, it might be suggested, with all of its connotations of obstruction and obfuscation. I understand this to mean that the classroom, or indeed any physical place, brings forth opportunities to share lived time, space, body and relation where the virtual space has limited potential to share these experiences with others (despite attempts by some to overcome these limitations by sharing much of their lives online).

The placing of the robot in the classroom, rather than the exclusive use of video-based communications, draws something from the idea of intercorporeality – the connection between embodied subjects (Friesen 2011). Embodied subjects are connected in both the physical place and the virtual space; however, there are significant differences between the experiences of the embodied subject within the classroom and the embodied subject at the computer. In the classroom, the subject has the ability to sit and move with other people while receiving a multitude of sensory input. Embodied subjects in a place share a body, spatial, and time relation. The experience of the embodied subject at the computer sat alone, looking at a screen, moving around to make things happen, cannot share a bodily relation, by virtue of being alone; nor a spatial relation since, even if they were accessing the same program as someone else,

their experience would be constrained to being unique due to the individual configuration of their hardware, software and environment. Only in synchronous activity with others can we claim that they share a relation in time, although this can also be argued in terms of delays in connection due to variations in speed or bandwidth (much more neatly termed ‘lag’). As such, intercorporeality as the connection of embodied subjects in terms of body, space and time is not something we can claim fully exists in the online world. All that is lacking, however, can be mitigated by having an embodied subject at the computer connected to an embodied subject in the classroom (the robot). In terms of Bee and Jade, although I have argued that Bee is representative of Jade in the classroom environment and is therefore a part of her identity, Bee is still a mode by which Jade can experience school vicariously, using her imagination to share the experiences that she perceives Bee to be having.

Such a mitigation, occupying a potential middle ground between physical and virtual, which I suggest is achieved by the use of robots by students who cannot otherwise attend school, are experiences which occur in the realm that I have termed vicarious, based on the definition of vicarious as something which is ‘experienced [...] through imaginative or sympathetic participation in the experience of another’ (Merriam-Webster 2019). As I have established that robots are, at the very least, an expansion of the identity of the students who use them, vicarious experience can be thought of as a midpoint between real and virtual as the actual presence of the robot in the classroom means that the life-world experiences of the students are a little less limited than if they were to be present entirely virtually via screen.

At this point, it may be tempting to draw comparisons between the vicarious realm and virtual reality technologies given that virtual reality, as an immersive experience, allows a person to be in two places at once (Heim 1993) – embodied in their living room, while the requisite equipment seemingly transports them to a space station near Jupiter, for example. Conceptually, though, the realm of virtual reality cannot be considered similar to that of the vicarious. In order to experience vicariously, at least two distinct, embodied subjects would be required, with an imaginal link between two places, whereas experiences in virtual reality require one subject to travel between worlds.

The role of the imagination in the realm of the vicarious cannot be underestimated. Pointedly, Currie and Ravenscroft (2002) tell us that it is the obvious function of the imagination to allow us to perceive the world from alternate perspectives: those of other, ‘real’ people, or the hypothetical perspectives of fictional characters. In the case of Bee and Jade, robot and user, the alternate perspective offered in Jade’s imagination is neither strictly real, nor strictly hypothetical. Nevertheless, the close relationship she has with the robot as a representative of herself encourages the depth of imagination required for effective transit to the vicarious realm. Imagination, if we accept the viewpoint of Vygotsky (2004), is bound up in our own experiences. It is a faculty by which we store, recall, and recombine past experiences in order to apply them to new situations and ideas. When this is used to consider the perspective of other people, real or fictional, it is an inherently solipsistic projection; any perspective gained can only ever be rooted to oneself, regardless of how much we want to believe that this is not the case. Notions such as empathy, particularly when it is defined in the popular way as to ‘put oneself in the shoes of another: emotionally, cognitively’ (Elliot et al. 2011, 133), rely on the

idea that it is indeed possible to see from another's perspective. Considering the social and relational significance given to empathy (Boella 2018), and the level of normative value assigned to the ability to empathise, it is little wonder that we may be reluctant to admit that while we may claim to be attempting to take the perspective of another person, it is more accurate to suggest that we are executing the inevitable transposition of our own perspective onto them.

Freed from this gordian knot of what it is to be human and the value of empathy in this, it is a much simpler task to consider the role of the imagination in attempting to gain the perspective of non-sentient objects as we can begin from the notion that our mind, and the image of our mind as it is projected onto the object, are one and the same. Such a projection of the user's mind onto the robot is further indicative of the capability of the robot to represent the identity of the user and perhaps reach beyond to represent their essence.

It is the imagination, therefore, which elevates the robot to a status above that of ordinary tool. As the user comes to employ their imagination as a projection of mind, the robot and the user overcome the limitations of technology as a tool only connected to the user by virtue of an 'extended mind' (Rudder Baker 2009): the idea that we might seek to expand ourselves by coupling with nonbiological entities via the extension of one's cognition onto tools in such a way that 'we become physical and cognitive hybrids – part biological and part artifactual.' (2009, 645). The concept of extended mind could become intertwined with that of the imagination as I have previously noted that Jade sees Bee as both a tool and as a representative of herself. It could be argued that even as a representative of a user, a robot remains a tool performing a specific function; however, even if we were to accept that this is the case, the thesis of the extended mind alone cannot account for the imaginative projection of the mind which must necessarily happen if the robot is to be used as a mediator of experience, or a vicarious subject, as in the case of Bee and Jade. Consider: an 'extension' of mind suggests an extrusion of what already exists to accommodate a second entity (the robot/tool); the tool is still external to the user. A projection of the mind places (at least part of) what already exists onto the second entity; the robot and the user are not only linked; they are the same thing. I will offer an analogy here to help illustrate my point: if a cinema projects a movie onto the screen, it is fundamentally the same movie that exists on the original celluloid. When presented with either and asked what they are, we would be likely to reply, 'It is [a movie]'. Thus when Jade makes an imaginative projection onto Bee, they become the same – the robot is the user.

This may suggest difficulties in using the term vicarious, given its definition of imaginative participation in the experiences of another; however, I have noted previously that Bee's role as an avatar representing Jade pits the robot in a position as not-Jade, since the holistic version of Jade exists as an entity in herself, but it could also be considered *essentially* Jade, as it manifests an imaginative projection of Jade's mind. As it occupies both positions, it is therefore possible for the robot still to be considered 'another'. Furthermore, we can argue whether Bee is able to experience anything at all as it is not really sentient and it is, after all, entirely under the control of Jade. However, it is my contention that, for Jade to be able to experience school vicariously through her robot, there is no need for the robot to be sentient. As I have noted, imagination is key in defining vicarious experience, therefore it only requires the student to imagine what Bee

is experiencing and this imagination can only be aided by her concrete knowledge of where her robot is and what it is doing at any given point.

## Limitations and Conclusion

In this exploration of how the use of robots in classrooms by disabled students might affect their experiences, I have identified two key factors which could have an impact and I suggest that these may be influencing the decision to send the machines into schools rather than to use more readily available, similarly functioning software. It is an exploration of some pertinence recently as online activity across the board has increased exponentially due to the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the differences between the physical and the virtual have come to our attention more than ever.

The proposition that robots can be potentially viewed as a representation of the user in a way which allows them to assert, expand, or, in some cases, conceal their identity (or essence), allows the student to feel like they have a presence in the classroom. An on-screen presence may not elicit the same kind of feeling of ‘being there’ as it does not encourage the sharing of lived relations such as time, space and body (incorporeality) in a way that is inevitable with a physical place. In my view, in the virtual realm, the screen can act as a barrier between the people at either side – both metaphorically and literally.

Furthermore, the idea of vicarious experience compounds the feeling that the student has of ‘being there’. Introduced as a kind of middle ground between entirely physical and entirely virtual, I have suggested that having the robot mitigates the differences between the two to find a way for the student to have an embodied presence within the class.

This paper represents a speculative proposal of the vicarious realm, using literature that has undergone hermeneutic analysis. This is not without its constraints, as each paper/book/article/film referenced here has been included as the result of interpretation on my part; an interpretation which cannot be fully separated from my social and intellectual context as a white, Western female.

Furthermore, this paper does not represent a comprehensive delineation of any one of the contained concepts – it is intended to inspire further discourse and thought on the roles of robotic avatars, and our relations to ‘place’ and ‘space’ via the vicarious realm. As technology increases in sophistication, future research may look at the use of autonomous robotic assistants taking our place in a variety of roles and environments. Further questions could be asked about holographic representations of students and the experiential differences in which the use of such things could result. If a robot can be considered an embodied subject, can a holograph? Technology, it seems, will continue to provide a rich source of inquiry for a long time to come.

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