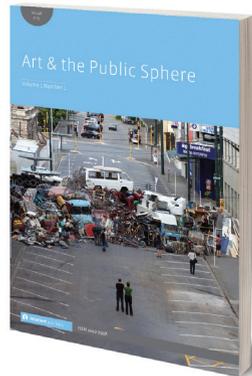

CONTENTS

Editorial		127–143	<i>South Home Town:</i> Film and the imaginary city STEVE HAWLEY	173–191	<i>Violet City:</i> Fantasizing Liverpool in song, story and film DAVE JACKSON
103–107	Place-based arts: Post-industrial landscapes KATE AUGHTERSON AND JESSICA MORIARTY	145–150	Poetry inspired by Genoa JULIAN STANNARD	193–215	Re-placing Malcolm Lowry: From the Mersey to the world (and back again) HELEN TOOKEY
Articles		151–171	Picturing the M62: The Trans-Pennine motorway: A work in progress KEVIN CROOKS	220	Index
109–125	On ungrounded ground: A poet in residence at the dump JOHN WEDGWOOD CLARKE				



Principal Editor

Mel Jordan
Loughborough University
mel@hewittandjordan.com

Editors

Dave Beech
University of Arts, London
Chelsea School of Art
& Design
dave.beech@clara.co.uk

Andy Hewitt
University of Wolverhampton
andy@hewittandjordan.com

Gill Whiteley
Loughborough University
G.Whiteley@lboro.ac.uk

Reviews Editor

Paul O'Neill
University of the West of England
pauloneillp@aol.com

Art & the Public Sphere

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Aims and Scope

Art & the Public Sphere provides a new platform for academics, artists, curators, art historians and theorists whose working practices are broadly concerned with contemporary art's relation to the public sphere. The journal presents a crucial examination of contemporary art's link to the public realm, offering an engaged and responsive forum in which to debate the newly emerging series of developments within contemporary thinking, society and international art practice.

Call for Papers

We seek interdisciplinary articles which confront orthodoxies, propagate debate and reflect on art's role in the public sphere. We encourage fresh approaches to research arising from practice, theory, philosophy and politics. The editors welcome full-length articles, shorter research papers and contributions to our reviews section.

For further information or questions, please contact the editorial team.



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EDITORIAL

KATE AUGHTERSON AND JESSICA MORIARTY

Place-based arts: Post-industrial landscapes

Iain Sinclair's assertion that 'Place becomes our autobiography'¹ posits our world as one in which we are humanly, physically involved in creating: actively working our stories and histories into narratives we can, however fleetingly, feel at home in.

Iain Sinclair's ghost haunts this edition in a number of suggestive routes: most tangibly, he gave the keynote talk at the 2015 conference *Writing Place: Brighton Writes*, out of which the articles for Place-based Arts (*JWCP* 8.1) and this volume have evolved. Sinclair's articulation of psychogeography as the quintessential fusion of a critical and creative response to place has now become mainstream, to the extent that most contributors at the conference cited at least one of Sinclair's works. His literary haunting of these articles physically replicates the theoretical concept of a 'spectral geography': an acknowledgement that in our human engagement with place we are always also engaging with the physical and ghostly evidence of past encounters with the land or the place, as well as imagining possible and potential future ones, enabling the past and future to meet in the present.²

The articles collected in this volume reclaim and re-imagine the forgotten and lost pasts and presents of our post-industrial cities, liminal spaces and forgotten rural by-ways using a variety of critical and creative media. From Hawley's self-reflective photographic *dérive*/homage to Southampton to John Clarke's eloquent and sensitive engagement with the materiality and spectrality of a city dump, from Jackson's gothic re-imagining of Liverpool's past and future landscapes to Tookey's reclamation of Malcolm Lowry's literary debt to that same city, from Crooks' reconfiguring of the picturesque in the landscapes around the M62 to Stannard's lyrical reconfiguration of life in Genoa, the writers in this volume share a passion about re-visioning place, about re-situating and disturbing our commonplace perceptions about places we think we know well, and making us see places we would not usually visit or know as intimately bound to all our lives.

John Clarke's article 'On ungrounded ground' reflects on the poet's 'residency' at a landfill and resource-recovery facility in Rufforth, through an extended lyrical prose meditation intercut with poems he wrote during the residency. His conception and elucidation of the dump as both a physical place and an imaginary space 'of the dark matter of late consumer capitalism' (p.109) creates the dump as a dormant imaginary of the post-industrial world. His lyrical hymns to the lost objects of commercial capitalism act as elegies to our own lost or found selves, anchoring us to past desires at the same time as awakening our environmental conscience.

Steve Hawley in 'South Home Town: Film and imaginary city' discusses a video installation, *Stranger than Known*, collaboratively produced by Hawley with Tony Steyger in 2014, which used multiple video perspectives of Southampton, both historical and contemporary, traditional and innovative (e.g., some shot through drone technology or with ultra-slow motion). The resulting installation established multiple perspectives on the central metaphor of departure and new beginnings associated with Southampton's identity. The article interweaves photographic stills from the installation with a critical discussion of South Home Town's urban imaginary and a plea for us all to rediscover and acknowledge place as a palimpsest over the layers of past histories, experiences and events, even in the most ordinary of cities and towns.

Julian Stannard's poetic evocation of the city of Genoa was written as a soundtrack to Guiglielmo Trupia's short film *Sottoripa* (2013), which was shown at the Place-based Arts conference in May 2015. The urban imaginary of Genoa is both gritty and surreal, edgy and evanescent, concrete and magical. His final poem 'The Necropolis' images forth Genoa's spectral geography, finding the cemetery transformed with a celebratory panettone tied with red ribbon on each grave, enabling Stannard to wittily re-vivify the Genoan dead as celebrants in a festive and sensual reunion with the living. The poem's *mise-en-scène* encapsulates a simultaneous evocation of loss and belonging, which defines our postmodern sense of place, and echoes the spectral qualities of both Clarke and Stannard's creative/critical interventions.

Kevin Crooks' 'Picturing the M62: The Trans-Pennine motorway' is a discussion of his work-in-progress photographic project to document and re-imagine a motorway and its

1. A phrase used by Iain Sinclair's keynote address ('In Praise of Silence: caves, shrines, secret places and their war against virtual imagery and false narrative. With special reference to a series of expeditions across the Gower Peninsula, Port Eynon to Worm's Head, in quest of the Red Lady of Paviland') at the May 2015 conference Writing Place: Brighton Writes, in preparation for the publication of his 2015 novel in July.
2. For the turn to spectrality in geography, see McCormack (2010), Wylie (2010) and Brace and Johns-Putra (2010).

relationship to its local environment as a means of conceptualizing the Anthropocene. Crooks uses the camera as a *dérive* to enable the viewer to reconceptualize the motorways not as industrial interruptions onto a natural landscape but as intimately bound up in, and bound up by, nature and landscape in Anthropocene time. Romantic conceptions of the picturesque are thus reworked and re-imagined for post-industrial landscapes and eyes.

This reworking of post-industrial landscapes has also inspired Dave Jackson's Gothic reconfiguration of Liverpool's imaginary in his films and music, culminating in his novel and film *Violet City* (2015). The article here merges film stills, songs, narrative from the film and personal encounters across the city and history to create a unique collage (in homage to Iain Sinclair and Mervyn Peake) of how a city can be both made strange and recognizable through fantasy. The year 2015 has been a year of reconceiving Liverpool's cultural consciousness in its post-industrial moment, with the winning of the Turner Prize by the artists' collective Assemble for their re-building of condemned and derelict housing in Toxteth, and both Jackson's re-imagining and Helen Tookey's article 'Re-placing Malcolm Lowry: From the Mersey to the world (and back again)' share in this cultural moment. Tookey's work with Bluecoat, the Liverpool Centre for the contemporary arts, has combined curatorial work with literary detective work, and enabled events and readings of Lowry's work to be re-situated in the city of his birth. The article is a key case study in how universities can work collaboratively with local communities, artists and galleries or museums to offer up and create new work, new insights and new engagements with their local histories and culture. Place and engagement with place is both personal and communal, looks to the future, but is grounded in history, speaks with our voices, but allows the spectres to speak from the past.

John Clarke's poem 'Television Henge' (published in his article on pp.109–25) captures this spectrality perfectly:

Slabs of glass and weary plastic piled head-high
show the same sun differently grey.
Rain glints on the circlet of an ancient aerial,
dirt haloing push-button and sensor.

It had to go, took up too much space.
The place was strange until I'd hoovered through
the square of dust and hair it grew
during the seasons while I'd gazed elsewhere,

then moved a chair and plugged the new one in.
And while I gazed elsewhere, the boxes melt
and stain the blood of those who poke the fires
shadowing our bright and managed dream.

Our post-industrial waste (and wastefulness) is here transfigured, the screen acknowledged as a cultural sacral object simultaneously with its transience: the poet's gift is to translate us from our present into a perspective a millennium from now, and a millennium ago.

The contributors to these two volumes on Place-based Arts share this passion for reconceiving and reworking our encounters with place, and they share with the twenty-first-century phenomena of 'new nature writing' (see MacFarlane 2015) that urgent sense of our precarious and temporary presence as humans on the vast and fragile complexity of the earth. Creative engagements awaken us to that fragility, remind us of our stewardship, and alert us to what it is that makes us human.

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Contributor details

Jess Moriarty is a Principal Lecturer at the University of Brighton where she specializes in Creative Writing. She has been awarded a Teaching Excellence award for her work with undergraduates and building inspiration and motivation with their writing processes. Her research is in autoethnography, creative practice and engaging students with community projects.

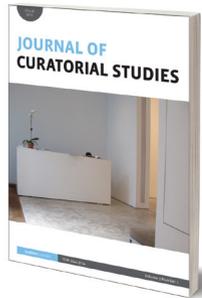
Contact: School of Humanities, College of Arts and Humanities, University of Brighton, Checkland Building, Village Way, Falmer, Brighton, BN1 9PH, UK.
E-mail: jsm@brighton.ac.uk

Kate Aughterson is Academic Programme Leader for Literature, Media and Screen in the School of Humanities at Falmer. Her publications focus on gender and drama in the early modern period,

including discussion of how dramatic space creates and critiques gender. She also dabbles in critical writing on contemporary fiction. She is currently part of the editorial team on the complete works of Aphra Behn, Cambridge University Press.

Contact: School of Humanities, College of Arts and Humanities, University of Brighton, Checkland Building, Village Way, Falmer, Brighton, BN1 9PH, UK.
E-mail: ka2@brighton.ac.uk

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The *Journal of Curatorial Studies* is an international, peer-reviewed publication that explores the cultural functioning of curating and its relation to exhibitions, institutions, audiences, aesthetics and display culture. As a critical and responsive forum for debate in the emerging field of curatorial studies, the journal will foster scholarship in the theory, practice and history of curating, as well as that of exhibitions and display culture in general.

Call for Papers

The *Journal of Curatorial Studies* seeks original research articles on the subject of curating and exhibitions, as well as case studies, interviews and reviews of recent books, exhibitions and conferences.

Editors

Jim Drobnick
Ontario College of Art & Design
jim@displaycult.com

Jennifer Fisher
York University
jefish@yorku.ca



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JOHN WEDGWOOD CLARKE

University of Hull

On ungrounded ground: A poet in residence at the dump

Keywords

landscape
poetry
ecology
nature
landfill
waste-management
edgelands
shadow places

Abstract

'On ungrounded ground' reflects upon a writer's yearlong 'residency' at a landfill site and resource recovery facility. The article explores the significance of contemporary waste management within an archaeological, ecological and geological context. It reflects upon the psychological and aesthetic impact of rubbish, and describes some of the challenges faced by a writer trying to describe an object that contains so much contemporary, ephemeral material culture. How should they begin to decipher this monument constructed from the dark matter of late-consumer capitalism? The article suggests that the dump ultimately passes beyond the power of metonymic representation and remains other to the text that tries to represent it. It also asserts that the dump is an intense combination of natural and man-made processes. Referencing Val Plumwood's concept of the 'shadow place', it identifies the dump as a hidden landscape upon which our celebration of natural landscapes and places depends. Quotes from interviews with staff and visitors to the dump are included, and, despite the impossibility of representing the dump, an attempt is made to give a taste of the physical, emotional and intellectual impact of spending time at the site.

John Wedgwood Clarke

One grows to hate these things except on the dump.

(‘The Man on the Dump’, Wallace Stevens 1984)

They are closing the last active cell at our landfill site. I make my way on foot towards the action, the ground a scintillating mix of broken mirror and crockery. The leg of a Barbie doll sticks up through the clay. A trainer bares its tread to the sky, as if clay were air, air the earth and whoever’s body it once belonged to were still running upside down on the inside of the mound. Skylarks sing over a barrow crammed with traces of absent bodies. We no longer bury our dead among their things. Little wonder: this place is made of old clothes, bags, nozzles, yellow twine, dish-cloths, intimate liners of all kinds, chicken carcasses and on and on. I’m climbing an endless reminder-list of all we’ve lived with, eaten and thrown away. It’s a growing medium as complex in its record of human products as an ancient forest floor is with seeds, tubers, bulbs and fungi. From this earth of our making, topped with a little cosmetic soil, wildflowers at £20/ kilo will spring, attracting, as elsewhere on the dump, bees, butterflies, beetles, grasshoppers, rabbits, cats, bats and on and on.

The dump is a place of beginnings and endings, of unexpected collisions of thought and desire. One of the first poems I tried to write in response to my self-declared residency attempted the literary equivalent of this mingling of material by bringing together the reality of the landfill-site landscape with one of our literary canon’s earliest celebrations of the landscape and its seasons, the Mediaeval English poem, ‘Sumer Is Icumen In’. Why shouldn’t the dump also have its peculiar seasons named?

Sing, summer,
in our plastic bags,
sing tatters
in the shining buds,

a zephyr, tumour,
inflated heart,
snag and fritter
in the May.

The ground farts,
generators start,

1. All poem titles will be given as footnotes so that the reading experience of the article will not be interrupted. This poem is 'Dump Song'.

merry spin
the cowls,

our leaking sacks,
all simmering black,
mount up, enter
in the May.¹

What I discovered during my time on the dump was that, far from being 'other' to our so-called 'natural' landscapes, it was a place of intense ecological significance and an indivisible part of the human artefacts that are the fields and woods surrounding it. Forget the vista from the front of the country house, or the summit of a hill or mountain, the view from the landfill mound provides the most revealing perspective if one wants to understand the meaning of contemporary land use.

At the brow of the mound, large white rolls of felt-like fabric sag on top of each other, as if a carpet warehouse had recently vanished from around its stock. A squall has just passed through, intensifying the sense of exposure. But it won't damage this industrial carpet designed to go down on top of polyethylene sheeting to draw away moisture in the topsoil to ditches and wells at the perimeter of the dump. In less than a year, the trucks and bulldozers shoving and spreading the mess and earth in front of me will be gone, their 'remediation work' complete. The only sign of all this out-sized industrial activity will be the network of plastic pipes installed to draw off usable methane gas generated as the waste ferments. This unlikely off-shoot of Romantic landscape gardening, carefully planned to hide the dark matter of consumption, will be as successful as an eighteenth-century ha-ha in its conjoining of our power to consume with an acceptable version of nature.

The closure of the cell comes with a carbon-footprint price-tag. Our waste must now travel 46miles in high-sided containers to the mega-dump at Rufforth on the other side of York. Between collections, it accumulates and festers in the enormous 'transfer shed':

There's no end to this in sight. The stuff
they can't recover waits to be transferred
in drooling bucket-loads. For now,
the work's on hold, all engines off,
just extractors blasting out the *eau*
de us. Swifts speed round the gloom,
measuring the scale of bin-bag heaps,
white buds clustering among the black.

One blooms, rippling into another's
wings lifting another's from the rot
until all are up, wobbling light stacked,
an ascension of herring gulls
making for the gap between hangar doors,
flying out like bats from a cave at dusk.²

2. 'Transfer Shed'.

In *Odyssey*, the dead roost as bats in caves and return to the surface of the earth at dusk. Herring gulls, not bats, are the spirits of the dump. Birds that once followed the boat and the plough now perch on the roofs of sheds awaiting fresh opportunities to rip open the sacks of the living and find out how we've been filling our time.

It feels like everything is going to seed today. Despite the burst of rain, all around me thistles unpack in the breeze, transmitting their rogue genetic information to surrounding mono-cultural fields. Surveying the last of the silvery wheat and the clusters of cattle in lush green fields, I'm standing on 50-odd metres of compacted landfill waste. One cubic metre of the stuff will, if disturbed, 'fluff up' to four times its compressed volume. So that means I'm stood on a 200-metre-deep cyst of concealed and well-managed waste. If ever a patch of ground were a source, this is it. The ground is dense with us, a poem of our place in the ecosystem. It's a boil that might burst and great care is taken to make sure that it doesn't. I'm implicated in this hill, as is everyone in the area where I live. I'm certain I've seen the cat-litter tray I threw away a month ago perched on a mountain of plastics waiting to be carted off for recycling. The view I have of the Vale of Pickering is a testament to our collective ability to gather resources from around the globe and end their contact with us here.

Beside the rolls of industrial textile there's a three-metre-high compost rampart. It is so lush and dark I would like to burrow my way in there and sleep in its warmth. Crows and jackdaws lift away as a digger launches its shovel into its soft froth. Biodegradable bags, which haven't degraded due to an error in the composition of the plastic mix, flicker from its surface like flames from an ash heap. Signs have been pegged into it, numbering the bays that each digger must work, hollowing it out and transporting it to places where the bulldozers mix it into the metre-deep growing medium or 'veneer'. Careful 'veneer calculations' and surveying ensures that the plastic sheets, white fabric and the topsoil are positioned accurately. Our past must be sealed in precisely. The engineer responsible for closing the cell tells me they use GPS to ensure there are no mistakes. Opening up a landfill cell to fix a leaky membrane is 'a nightmare' and expensive, for whatever went in fluffs back up to near its original volume: it's chaos beneath, millimetre precision at the surface. Under the soon-to-be-green hill a dragon of excess consumption sleeps; above it, a lucrative, innovative industry casts its magic spell.

3. 'Biosphere'.

To the south there's the non-descript low ground of drained Lake Flixton, with its silos, wind turbines and general agri-business. At the edge of this absent body of water is one of the most important Mesolithic sites in Europe. Archaeological digs at Star Carr, little more than 400m from the edge of the landfill site, have yielded antler headdresses, the timbers of a slipway and bone fish spears (Milner et al. 2013: 47–53). I've seen these objects in the British Museum and the Yorkshire Museum and they have a luminous quality that comes from the improvised knowledge worked into their surfaces. I've imagined, in failed attempts at shamanic concentration, an antler headdress fusing with my skull so that I can almost imagine crashing like a deer through woodland, fleeing hunters. Almost: it's a compelling fantasy that both draws me in and locks me out. But it is clear that these were precious objects and many of them were kept close to hand and used daily throughout a life or even lives. Their fabric is haunted by this intimacy and makes my hand long to hold them. By contrast, our everyday objects are a revelation of addictive, wasteful, habitual behaviour. I want to moralize and complain, but they are also made strange as a result of mass collection and processing, acquiring monumental shapes, becoming inadvertent sculptural objects resonant with metaphor:

Flies rise as my shadow passes over
squashed plastic bottles
heaped like the shell middens
at Skara Brae

their dwellings built into waste,
box beds and stone dressers
gathered from the shore,
the stones chosen.

A wagtail drops from a rogue sycamore
and blesses with shit
a two-litre empty

fallen out of the system, inflated
by lemonade and sunlight
greening its interior.³

Opposite the plastic bottles, compressed cubes of cans await collection, glistening in the sunlight. I would like to take a lorry-load of them, build a temple in an elegant city square and dedicate it to

our thirst for anything but water from a tap. Public water fountains would spout from it, dedicated, like the Victorian water-trough up on Scarborough's South Cliff, to All God's Dumb Animals.

The factories and logistics sheds of the town's industrial estates spread out to the east beside a half-finished business park of undeveloped land grown wild in the elongating pause of the credit crunch. New roads complete with street furniture reach into the scrubland like a series of jetties. Plans for air-conditioned offices and identikit hotels collide with the facts of gorse, bramble and wildflower. Walking the business park a month ago, I found a new bus stop with a sofa dumped next to it and sat down to wait for a bus that would never arrive. The mosses growing in its velour seams had raised their sporangia like little golden oars. Clouds processed along the vale and out to the North Sea at Cayton Bay. Butterflies toppled by. Beyond the narrative of progress and destination, things were revealing themselves again. The old landscape rose back into its mute, material solidity bringing with it a brief sense of the timeless presence of things I knew as a child. In the field opposite, an old chest freezer, end on, resembled an entrance to a cold-war bunker, and then became an entrance to the earth itself. Earth barriers, like the rippled landscape of Neolithic dykes up in the Wolds, had been bulldozed into place in an attempt to prevent joy-riders rallying stolen cars and burning them out. This would be a good site, I thought, for a council chamber, a Parliament of Waste for debating our perilous ecological position as a top predator. I rose from the sofa with a wet backside.

As if the fog of unsatisfied desires had been absorbed into the older parts of the landfill mound, wandering around on it brings a peaceful sense of finality and clarity: is man no more than this? But over the brow of the hill and in the vast industrial waste-processing sheds, it's a bonfire of the brands, brand iconoclasm, the packaging of lifestyle breaking down into common material denominators. Waitrose and Aldi, Apple and Asda, *The World of Interiors* and *Breast Man's Choice*, *The Mail* and *The Guardian*, all mingle in the skips, hoppers and on concrete pads. It's all the same where they're going. In a society shaped by social segregation based on the ability to buy choice, the dump is one of the few remaining places where we might see ourselves together, that is, if we were allowed access. But waste is dangerous, political, levelling. I've visited this place regularly for over a year to create an anti-pastoral record of the changing seasons of rubbish that gather in our ever-fruitful bins and skips: Christmas trees and fairy lights; the lawnmowers and garden furniture that bloom in spring; the barbecues and DIY debris of summer; the pumpkins of Halloween littering the heaps of bin bags with their cracked orange skulls. Our unique, individual impulses and lifestyles appear so obviously predictable that, faced with the seasonal glut of plastic garden furniture, one might begin to question what we're up to. At the dump we can see the triumph of marketing ridding itself of the evidence of its success.

The dump is also a dangerous place in other ways. I've felt psychologically overwhelmed and oppressed by its relentless, mechanical processing of the signs of our dying. The landfill site is a

4. 'Waste of Space'.

crematorium for the living process, for the immediate erasure of our recent history. It stands in relation to the midden as the crematorium does to the graveyard. It's there that we export disturbing signs of time passing, of things prematurely aged by fashion and innovation. We want to bury the inevitable for as long as possible. Rot is shameful, rubbish, crap, disgusting. During the first few weeks of the project, I had a dream in which I was living in a dilapidated Victorian mansion. I descended the staircase from my bedroom at the top of the house into piles of old papers, bikes without wheels, filing cabinets, stereo-systems, soda-water bottles, souvenirs and other junk. I was drowning in rubbish, the house sinking into the earth under its weight. I passed through a door in the basement and stepped out into meadow by a cliff. The ground tilted until I was clinging to the grass, gazing at a little plastic cage from which a toilet freshener had melted. I had been rereading Thomas Hardy. I had also been told that the bridge over the railway line that ran past the entrance to the dump was a local suicide spot, and of one incident in particular:

He was hanging around the railway bridge
 torn between one side and the other.
 We thought, here's a jumper. Just a boy really,
 distracted, in a world of his own.
 He came to the fence like the ghost of a prisoner,
 as if saying goodbye to the space
 between waste oil and the lighting locker.
 We called to him through the chain-link
 but he shied off back up the access road,
past the fly-tipped mattress, the drawers
without a chest, a blister pack's edge
finning through raw clay. Turned out
 it was a dry run. Came back after hours,
 laid himself on the line. He was no jumper.⁴

For a couple of months there was a heap of old doors in the wood-reclamation area piled up like a poorly dealt hand of cards. As I looked at them I felt the rooms they once opened into crowding the space with their various shapes. The air was alive. Then they were gone, taking with them their histories of entrances and exits to the incinerator.

At Malham Cove, I've worked hard to experience awe amongst the crowds gazing up at this celebrated natural wonder, but at the dump, awe and awfulness confront the visitor at every turn: the impact is physical, visceral and not a matter of willed defamiliarization. The landfill site must be one of the last refuges of a materialist sublime: I've felt insignificant and shuddered at the

enormity of the mess. I've been lost for words in the face of this indecipherable intertextual object, this disjunctive poem of consumption. It's gripping and thrilling, a repetitive, epic, empty performance. The price it exacts for this catharsis is a sense of dislocation and emptiness. There's so little time, when faced by a skip of waste, to restore the stability of narrative to discarded objects. And because the objects discarded are so often generic and ephemeral, reading the history of use on their surfaces is nigh-on impossible. A plastic bottle of Persil, among so many other Persil bottles, becomes a strange and empty thing in much the same way as a word repeated over and over will become a curious sound. This reappearance of the materiality of an object from the narratives of branding and marketing may be no bad thing. But the desperate anonymity of stuff shovelled into hoppers and transferred to containers has the equivalent effect on my sense of our culture. Beneath the noise of processing there's a profound silence, which is also the immeasurable hum of daily life: a silent cacophony. The paradox is painful if you're trying to make habitable connections between things. And there's no more chastening place to experience this feeling of disconnection for a writer than the paper-recycling area:

Newsprint falls, winged, saucering down
through gloomy bays to shredders.
Fragments lag girders and motors
with lapidary text, an alphabet
papier-mâché of tragedies, brands,
obituaries, love letters rare as diamonds
among the bills. Strip the cladding
and draw the I-beams gently out:
the shroud of oblivion hangs
in rippled light for the length
of this qwerty's shadowy breath,
listening, footsteps paused in the maze
of letters before delivering terminal
orders swifts slash through into dust.⁵

Near where I'm standing to survey the sheds and wider landscape, something sighs out in the long grass growing on the old landfill cell, as though a large aquatic mammal were surfacing. I wander off in the direction of the sound and find, not the whale of waste, but a concrete inspection chamber. The sigh is the sound the 'leachate' pump makes as it draws up liquid from dark wells sunk into the sump so that it might be processed and made safe rather than find its way out

5. 'A Shadow Shed'.

into the water table. This mound is covered in monitors. We might not get to see the extent of the mess we've made, but someone is keeping a close eye on it.

*

It's health and safety gone mad. I used to buy lawnmowers from the men and fix them up to sell – it did everyone some good.

We have all the usual 'resource recovery' facilities neatly arranged around parking bays. It's here that the town comes to lighten its load, downsize, upgrade, de-clutter and generally rid itself of impediments to the new make-over. It's the point of placental exchange between us and the dump. Here, televisions are stacked on each other in a black-and-grey plastic henge. Computers, hairdryers, X-boxes, toasters, kettles and other weary electricals are tangled and wedged in metal cages. A man dumping a lawnmower tells me he's moving in with his girlfriend: she already has one, they don't need two.

Many feel guilty about dropping stuff into the skips and if asked are prepared to confess the reason they're doing it while bemoaning the lack of other options. A man on the gantry beside the waste-to-landfill skip gestures towards the white goods next to it:

I lived in Bulgaria – everything you see here they'd have repaired and reused. You could buy every part you needed for your Russian Aga. A couple of years ago I helped a man fix an old Russian fridge – it took two of us to lift it. It was six-foot tall and with a massive thing like a motorbike engine sticking out of the back.

Fridges of this description are in the Castle Museum in York. Another man, as he tosses bricks into the freshly emptied skip designated for building materials, tells me how much he enjoys throwing them in and making the scarred steel tank resound: 'it's like everything they ever told you not to do as a child'. Legitimate vandalism is one of the pleasures of the dump: it's ok to put a brick through a window if it's in a skip. People have a spring in their step as they walk back to their empty cars.

Shelled from their invisible positions in our ritual movements around our homes, gas hobs, electric grills and TV remotes become strange human artefacts worthy of wonder, especially as the rain begins to fall. Every child knows how fascinating rubbish is. They haven't learnt the good taste necessary to distinguish between treasure and trash, or lost the ability to see the play-value of rubbish. I once saw an old TV beside a road in Connemara and on the screen of which

someone had drawn a sheep in cherry-red lipstick. Here, cookers by the landfill skip stand in a row, variations on the theme of the domestic altar, things that bear the patina of our absent-minded gaze, as well as the grease of a final fry-up. Find an old Creda or Belling from your student days, your first home, your grandparent's kitchen, and a whole world may return with it:

By the skips, a row of cookers waits
for me to press and twist
as if I might turn up lark song
rising from the rubble,
find the missing spark, blue
boom of gas, cocoa-powder islands
marbling milk beside
a long ago window lost in rain.
The oven rends open
spitting emptiness, sides black-gilded
with flaking, baked-on fat,
smeared grey by final grease.
I touched and went forever,
now walk away through walls.⁶

6. 'Altar'.

A henge of televisions and PC monitors is weekly broken up and sent away to continue its life at what Val Plumwood refers to as 'shadow places' (2008). These are the remote places where the true lifespan and consequence of our consumption is visible in the black toxic smoke of melting plastic and smelted metals. Plumwood asks the question I've tried to answer through my regular visits to the dump: what would it 'mean to acknowledge and honour all the places that support you?' (Plumwood 2008). The North Yorkshire Moors and Yorkshire Wolds depend for their timelessness, cleanliness, bio-diversity and conformity to touristic expectations on the existence of this dump. Our rich tradition of nature and landscape writing needs to include the dump as a significant part of its terrain if it is truly to show us a more complete picture of the human artefact that is our landscape. There should always be a little background noise troubling our communion with nature:

Slabs of glass and weary plastic piled head-high
show the same sun differently grey.
Rain glints on the circlet of an ancient aerial,
dirt haloing push-button and sensor.

7. 'Television Henge'.

It had to go, took up too much space.
 The place was strange until I'd hoovered through
 the square of dust and hair it grew
 during the seasons while I'd gazed elsewhere,

then moved a chair and plugged the new one in.
 And while I gaze elsewhere, the boxes melt
 and stain the blood of those who poke the fires
 shadowing our bright and managed dream.⁷

At the dump, the moment of consumption is clearly not timeless, no matter what the supermarket aisles and brightly lit retail sheds may try to show us with their magically replenishing walls of products. And with this sense of an ending comes a growing awareness of what a thing is, of why we've made it and how we've used it. This sensation intensifies as it teeters on the edge of the skip before falling into rot, recycling and silence.

The edge of the skip is a threshold, an entrance to the underworld; the skip itself the place where we wake our rubbish before it undertakes its final journey. One daily occurrence that never fails to upset Dan, an 'operative' at the recycling facility, is the dumping of family albums after a death: 'It's as if they're blipped out all of a sudden, as if they've never been'. For as long as someone can put a name to a face, the face retains its afterlife in memory, in a family narrative. Without a story, without relationship to other faces in an album, the subject falls into an abyssal silence from which there is no return. Dan witnesses daily the second and final death of the body. I witnessed someone pour out a suitcase of pictures onto some old catering-sized tins of peaches already in the skip: all their desire to record significant moments standing together before a house, a caravan, a belvedere, was dislocated from their stories and then consigned to the earth forever. Dan used to go into the skips to recover these family histories like a latter-day Orpheus, in case the person dumping them had second thoughts, but now this is forbidden. And anyway, no one ever came back for them.

Talk to someone beside a skip and you'll discover just how filled things are with stories at the death. A late middle-aged man told me:

This Guinea pig cage linked me to another family and my own. My youngest was friends with a boy and their family broke up. So we said we'd take the guinea pigs. And they had babies. And when they died we got more and got the sex wrong. We ended up with 17 of them – the price of friendship. I've kept the hutch all this time. But we're finally downsizing. It has to go.

Once a skip is full, it's hauled off to the weighbridge so that the amount of landfill tax to be paid can be assessed. It's also a kind of 'psychostasia', a weighing of the soul of a people living in a place, a material reckoning of our worth: will we survive as a species, or disappear into the final phase of another extinction boundary, the dump the equivalent of a vast dinosaur's footprint pressed into the strata or scattered in a thin layer by glaciation?

Another man asked me if I could point him in the direction of someone in charge. He wanted to give them a couple of fishing rods so they might sell them and make a bit of money on the side. Dan explained that they couldn't take gifts. Items of value were kept in a lock-up and collected by the waste-management company once a week. The man was disappointed. I asked him why he was getting rid of two perfectly good rods and he explained that he and his wife were moving back south now that the children had left home. He, too, was downsizing. As we chatted, he told me:

I was out fishing with this rod when my daughter was born. Off Gravesend. Caught a cod with it that weighed exactly the same as my daughter. But you have to let go, make way for the new.

Make way for the new, make way for the void. People will wash, iron and fold clothes before putting them in the bank, 'even though no one will ever know it was them that done it', says Dan. Everything is placed in order at the brink of ultimate disorder. The shirts of the dead are folded neatly for their final journey. Beside the clothes bank, there's the lighting locker, a long square container filled end-on with fluorescent tubes, so that it resembles a giant pack of pencils. When I first saw it I wanted to draw them out and smash them up in a big sword fight. And then I imagined crawling through the locker as if it were a grave passage, the skin on my hands and knees shredded with broken glass.

Beyond the skips, and out of bounds to the public, are sheds where the mechanical sorting of waste takes place. With the notable exception of the waste-transfer shed, there is little or no smell at the dump, except for an intense after-rain aroma when the dust suppression sprinklers kick in scattering seeds of mud across the yard until the surface darkens. And then there's the 'cullet pad'. Cullet is waste glass before recycling, and here it's banked up in a three-sided concrete bay. I've had the intense pleasure of witnessing a delivery of glass collected from bottle banks:

The lorry backs away from vacancy,
tailgate open, bright ram
tilting the container until first bottles
trip and tinkle, hollowly un-

8. 'Cullet'.

bottling loose change over the bank
 of jammed silence, a hillside of slurred
 syllables giving way, lips, teeth
 tongues, breath shelled, bitten
 thirst shucked loose in pounding
 beyond the imaginable into glittering
 splinter showers on the other side
 of brightened space, all bottling up
 exploded, the silence vinegar-sharp.⁸

Counterpointing this din are the acoustically 'dead' spaces formed by long corridors of wastepaper and plastic. Men in fork-lifts whizz down them, lifting and replacing the bales. Entering these anechoic mazes you can barely register the body's acoustic interaction with its surroundings: it's a strangely disembodied experience, as if the physical body had been consumed by text. Whenever I visit the paper recycling area, I stop to read scraps of paper. I've photographed bales from all sides with the vague plan, at some future date, of transcribing all the visible words into a found poem. On my last visit I found a card-mounted photograph of an aeroplane engine and wing taken from a cabin window in the fuselage. They were silver in that futuristic 1960s style that still gleams with the promise of progress, and beyond them were timeless shapes of alto-cumulus cloud-streets. Behind the photo I found a Sunday supplement with a Saltire filling its front cover. The future, clouds and nationalism: metonymy drowns in this place of random finds and infinite combinations. This was just one moment in a maze of text that regenerates itself weekly while keeping its orderly maze-like shape in the yard; it slowly flows through itself like a standing wave of words and images, an unspeakable stream of cultural consciousness.

But there are some things that refuse to go quietly or gently into oblivion. VHS tape festoons forked shovels, hopper-lips and conveyor belts. The great body of the waste disposal process gets regularly tied-up by brown tape. All that electro-magnetic information, all the images and stories, have come to this: a haphazard web that chokes the flow of recyclables. Hands have to get involved to ease things back into motion. For there *are* hands in this place of great machines; not everything can be sorted by a magnet or the 'eddy current' that makes aluminium cans magically leap from the flow of waste. In a shed on the outskirts of Scarborough, there are people from across Europe and the world picking contaminants out of waste conveyed before them in a strange echo of an assembly line. What struck me was the dexterity and concentration with which their hands moved over the never-ending stream of rubbish, disassembling our lives and rectifying our thoughtless mixing of non-recyclable with recyclable material.

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John Wedgwood Clarke

We hide these sites away from ourselves at our cost. It's not simply that we need to face up to the politics of waste, of our exportation of the dark matter that counterbalances the visible universe of well-lit shopping, although that is essential too; no, there is a more self-interested psychological argument to be made as to the cost of hiding it away. Dumps and middens have always been psychically important to us. They are places of disturbance in our everyday reality; places of death and haunting; places of danger. The closest most of us get to the dump now is looking into a skip. I wrote the following poem making use of the structure of Ted Hughes' poem 'Amulet' to bring out this psychic sense of disturbance:

Under a bedstead a filing cabinet,
under a filing cabinet a wheelbarrow,

over a wheelbarrow a tree in the garden,
under the tree, four crosscut screws

secure the galvanised bucket,
under the bucket a solid red wheel,

around the wheel a perished tire,
down the steps, bouncing, it booms,

inside the bucket water collects,
over the water, leaf-light and jet-sunder,

suspended in water a woodlouse trembles,
above the woodlouse, the child breathes.⁹

After careful negotiation, I was granted access to the mega-dump at Rufforth. My guide for the visit, Emily from North Yorkshire County Council's 'Waste and Countryside Services', was about to go off on maternity leave and so we were driven by the landfill site's manager to the active cell. On our way up we passed a vast hole in the ground with shiny-smooth clay sides and a flat base. It might have been preparation for three or more high-quality football pitches, or a Wimbledon of lawn-tennis courts, such was the precision involved in its making. This was the new cell. Towering over it, the current cell, hemmed in on one side by high fencing to snare fly-away plastic bags, brewed up a storm of birds. There were so many circling above it that it felt like we were

9. 'Once it's in the skip they think it disappears'.

ascending towards a feeding frenzy over a shoal of sardines. I was to be allowed out onto the active cell for ten minutes, but Emily was forbidden to leave the Land Rover and set foot on this pregnant mound.

The surface was springy and soggy, like a peat bog. Despite all the opportunities available to recycle plastic bottles, they stuck up everywhere like fish heads from a revolting pie of nappies, plastic bags, carcasses and immense amounts of food packaging. It felt as strange as I imagine it must feel to walk around the edge of a volcano. Here was a profoundly alien place wholly made by us. It was thrilling and sickening to see the refuse trucks shunt out waste while the enormous bulldozers with spiked wheels, known in the waste industry as 'spikey bikes', spread it out and pinned it down. 'I want it to be a second-hand baby, if you see what I mean', Emily had said on the way up. I did see what she meant. Not just in the sense that it would have second-hand things, but that so much of what is most precious – our language, culture, family sayings, ideas, heirlooms – is second hand, and we make these hand-me-downs new for ourselves by wondering over them and by recombination. We carry them with us through our lives unlike so much other stuff that enters our wheelie bins and overflows weekly into refuse trucks, a torrent that ends up in the landfill cell's tarn of waste.

No one wants to live by a tip, but our waste is now so remote that our excesses are invisible, and as a consequence we're able to continue, as my local designer-outlet puts it, 'guilt-free' shopping. Perhaps the hoarder, his house choked with carrier bags, two-legged chairs and jam-jar lids, bears true witness to the impact of contemporary patterns of consumption. The hoarder wakes our rubbish for us, unwilling to overlook the preciousness of our discarded souvenirs and knick-knacks. Perhaps out of a fear of the weight of our own past consumption we make a TV spectacle of them: we cannot bear the shame of looking at desire past its sell-by date loaded onto their beds and crammed into their baths.

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I leave the 'crown' of the closed cell and stumble through lush grass towards a ditch at the edge of a spur of old landfill. It's filled with plastic bags forming sweaty domes of pond gas. Islands of bright green scum move over the black, nitrogen-rich water, snagging and then breaking apart in the breeze. I could spend forever describing this place, but the loneliness of the process would be overwhelming. Nothing haunts here. Herring gulls rise and eddy down to new loads of refuse entering the transfer shed. I sit down by the ditch to take in the view. At Star Carr there are flint middens left over from the Mesolithic knapping process. Through the painstaking reconstruction of fragments chipped from single stones, archaeologists have been able to plot the movement of

flint artefacts around the site, either from one flint-worker to the next, or as the maker has carried it to a new place for working (Milner et al. 2013: 21–23):

Each bone-blow alters
flights of fragments

the edge of the arrowhead
appears foreknown

the shape of its maker
in a shadow of stones.¹⁰

10. 'Debitage'.

A fly lands on my yellow trouser leg. It seems puzzled that such a yellow thing could be so worthless. Watching it pivot and pause, I feel, just for an instant, the dump open into the living spaces that have shed their contents into it. I'm falling into its heart for a microsecond and then it closes back into solid ground. A blue-bottle whips away into the late summer sunshine. I keep thinking I see someone approach from the corner of my eye but it's only a gas pump protruding to waist height from the ground, or a plastic bag trembling in a scrubby bush. On the other side of the ditch, in a heap of rubble, there's an old ceramic fire-place surround, an empty frame for a hearth: here's 'where all the ladders start,/ In the foul rag and bone shop of the heart' (Yeats 1962: 392).

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Contributor details

John Wedgwood Clarke is Lecturer in Creative Writing and Literature.

Contact: Department of English, University of Hull, 19 Westbourne Park, Scarborough, North Yorkshire, YO12 4AS, UK.

E-mail: John.clarke@hull.ac.uk

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STEVE HAWLEY

Manchester Metropolitan University

South Home Town: Film and the imaginary city

Keywords

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Abstract

In December 2014, Steve Hawley exhibited a video installation made with Tony Steyger called Stranger than Known: South Home Town. It was about Southampton's identity on the 50th anniversary of it being granted the title of a city. This article asks how the film can depict the city and uncover its resonance in the unconscious. The great port had been made a city but where did that leave the Southampton of the imagination? The beautiful medieval buildings had been largely erased by the terrible bombings of World War II; the romance and drama of the flying boats of Imperial Airways, not to mention the Mayflower and Titanic, were about transit, about departures and fugue, the flight from the familiar, and not the city's people who were left behind. If the city is not just a collection of buildings and streets and people but also a myth, then what is Southampton's myth? Drawing from the city symphonies of the 1920s, and the new modes of film depiction such as the drone camera and ultra slow motion, the article looks at how the imaginary city is shaped in the minds of transient passengers and those who remain behind.

In December 2014, Steve Hawley and Tony Steyger presented a video installation, *Stranger Than Known: South Home Town*, at the Solent Showcase Gallery in the centre of Southampton. The three projections in the gallery were films shot in ultra-slow motion while the camera moved anonymously through the streets; archive film of a Southampton soldier speaking directly to camera in 1944; and a drone shot over the edge lands of the town where the sea meets the land. These created an interlocking portrait of the city; a myth of identity and of home where no singular one existed. A single-screen film made from the installation, an experimental and dreamlike documentary, was premiered at the New York Independent Film Festival in 2015.

On the south coast of England, two similar sized cities sit on the edge of the English Channel, just 40 miles apart, but with profoundly different identities. Brighton (and Hove) looks inward, north towards the capital ('little London by the sea'), and has a strong literary and filmic presence in myth and in the imagination. Mods, Queen Anne front and Mary Anne back, Regency raffishness, a bit louche, with its actors and DJs and a streak of libertarianism run through the town like the letters in Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock* (Greene 1938). Brighton is easily summed up in film images; Pinky at the end of the Palace Pier, the malevolence beneath the good time exterior, or Sting, the ace face leading a squadron of scooters along the seafront.

Any attempt to sum up Southampton in a similar way is met by bemusement. Unlike Brighton it looks outwards, through its port to New York and the Empire; inland the city shades into Hampshire and the New Forest, its character marked more by the county and its soft accent than the brasher Brighton, isolated behind the South Downs from the Sussex countryside. Southampton stares out to distant lands, unsure of itself. There is no great enduring literary narrative to sum up its character as *Brighton Rock* does to its near neighbour, almost no films that have fixed an image of the place in the popular imagination.

Southampton became a city 50 years ago on the 7 February 1964, when it received a letter from the Home Office advising that her Majesty the Queen had been graciously pleased to raise the town to the 'title and dignity of a city'. Apart from the town's growth and the importance of its shipping, a further reason given was 'the long history of public administration and efficiency of its municipal services' (Hewins 1964).

It was not an accolade likely to quicken the blood and fire the imagination of Sotonians. The letter then asked for a cheque for £72 13s. 6d and warned that this would not confer the title of Lord Mayor 'in view of misunderstandings which have arisen in the past'.

The great port, the 'Heathrow of cruising' (Hamilton 2014), was now a city. It had a university (now two), a large population, a long history of embarkation and now a Royal Charter. But where did that leave the Southampton of the imagination? What do we dream of when the city rises from our unconscious? The beautiful medieval city had been largely erased by the terrible bombings of World War II. The romance and drama of the flying boats of Imperial Airways, not to



Figure 1: Installation view, Stranger than Known: South Home Town (2014), Hawley/Steiger.

mention the *Mayflower* and *Titanic*, were about transit, about departures and fugue, the flight from the familiar, and not the city's people who were left behind. If the city is not just a collection of buildings and streets and people but also a myth, then what is Southampton's myth?

The Southampton of the imagination is understood in reality and in its cultural depictions through traversing its streets and shorelines, through 'wayfaring' in Tim Ingold's formulation (2011: 12), the lymph systems that connect the parts of the city together. And both real and imagined places and stories exist through change and erasure, as buildings are torn down or blown up, leaving visual and historical traces in the urban fabric or in the memory. Sometimes it is possible to use technology to see the city anew, as the makers of the 'city symphonies' did in the twenties, to visualize the familiar stones and water and people in order to piece together its romance again, re-examining the familiar to render it strange and potent. This was the starting point for *Stranger than Known*, an installation that sought to question, in the fiftieth anniversary year of its 'title and dignity', the uniqueness and spirit of South Home Town.

As de Certeau notes, the city can be accessed in two ways: from outside through the map or from within as a pedestrian (2002: 21). But there is also the seaboard, the water margins, which act both as a barrier and a promise of escape and change. Southampton, as many port cities do, relies 'on its relationship with elsewhere' (Hoare 2014: 20) and inside the boundaries formed by the sea it sometimes feels hard to grasp its identity. Just what makes the myth of the city is shifting and intangible; some cities seem to have the power of inhabiting the unconscious, and others struggle to do so, and this is not always the product of mere size. London, New York and Berlin inhabit an inner space, and have a numinous presence through their appearance in history, or in literature and film. A city is always more than its buildings and streets; it is also its stories, its energies, its ideas. But some smaller cities also inhabit the space of myth, including Liverpool, which like Southampton is also a great port of departure.

There is a statue in Liverpool's Matthew Street of the great psychologist Carl Gustav Jung, despite the fact that he never once visited the city. In 1962, just as the Beatles were about to put their birthplace in the world spotlight, from the stage of the Cavern Club in a cellar in Matthew Street, Jung wrote in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* of a dream he had of Liverpool many years before. He saw 'greyish yellow raincoats, glistening with the wetness of the rain' but had also a vision of unearthly beauty, as he equated the city in his dream to 'the pool of life' (2005: 223). Jung's Liverpool was both a real city, but also a powerful marker in his unconscious.

There have been no literary dreams of Southampton. Like Liverpool, its identity is bound up with the sea, with a curious sense of the borderline; other continents, other realities, liberation and flight. The shoreline gives an internal consciousness, which is ambiguous, a place that is peripheral. It is a point not just of leaving the city but a point of shift, of transfer from Britain itself to elsewhere. In this way, Southampton is a microcosm of Britain: a small country with a winding



Figure 2: South Home Town (2014), video still, Hawley/Steiger.

coastline that is always looking out to sea to other lands. Its identity is bound up with the margin between the sea and land.

Apart from a few scenes in the iconic 1997 movie *Titanic* (Cameron, 1997) – the farewell footage before the liner leaves on its ill-fated maiden voyage, shot in the Grapes pub near the seafront – the film most associated with the city is the mild 1962 comedy *Carry On Cruising*, made partly in the western docks. Both films look away from the city to the sea; inwards from the meniscus that separates the water from the land there is a curious void. Walk the streets from the Isle of Wight Ferry (another marker of elsewhere) to the shops of the centre and there is little to distinguish the town from anywhere else in Britain, as Superdrug gives way to TK Maxx, a Polish

delicatessen to a Wetherspoon's pub. Only the short stretches of medieval wall embedded in 1960s brick give a hint of its long history, mostly now erased by German bombers straying from their pounding of the docks during World War II.

Whereas Brighton has always had a sprinkling of celebrities – Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh catching the Brighton Belle after their London curtain call, and then back to their Regency seafront mansion, or Paul McCartney and Fatboy Slim in the mini star enclave at the far end of Hove – the oxygen of fame has eluded Southampton. Apart from minor musical talent (Craig David, the Artful Dodger, 1980s' pop star Howard Jones), the personage most closely associated with the town, born in Eastleigh and basing his most famous song on his experiences of being a milkman there, is Benny Hill.

It is significant that there is a sense of bathos and absurdity about the town's chief cultural connections: the fastest milk cart in the West, and one of the least distinguished of the seaside postcard *Carry On* films. *Titanic* was a homage to disaster, and while the *Mayflower* did set sail from Southampton, it originated from Rotherhithe and had to promptly put in near Plymouth (Visit Plymouth 2015). It was Southampton's bad luck that the *Mayflower's* sister ship, the *Speedwell*, started literally coming apart at the seams, had to berth in an emergency at the next port and was then abandoned.

Benny Hill died of coronary thrombosis in his living room; his career had eroded as the tide of popular humour ebbed away from his brand of saucy innuendo. The police found him in his armchair, in front of his still flickering television set. He is buried in Southampton's Hollybrook Cemetery, where, following rumours that he had been interred with large amounts of gold, thieves made an attempt to exhume his body. Within hours, cemetery staff had refilled the grave and covered it with a two ton concrete slab. *The Daily Star* columnist Gary Bushell launched a campaign to erect a statue of Hill in the city, supported by Barbara Windsor and Brian Conley. A fundraising concert was headlined by Right Said Fred, but the statue remains unmade and unerected.

Jane Austen lived for three years in the city in the early nineteenth century, at the house of her brother Frank, but she makes almost no reference to her erstwhile home in her major novels, describing it just once in her stories, and even then only as stinking of fish (Austen n.d.). It is as if a conscious attempt has been made to erase any cultural echoes of the port from the popular consciousness, apart from in the shallows of 1970s showbiz, with the notable exception of the philosopher of the sea and of his home city, where he still resides, Philip Hoare. He has become the only serious contemporary writer on Southampton and its non-identity, and has written particularly of Netley, the military hospital on its eastern shores, which was the biggest hospital ever built, stretching for a quarter of a mile along Southampton water, and where in World War II Jeeps could be driven up and down its endless corridors. During the First World War,

shell-shocked victims of the trench warfare in France and Belgium were delivered daily from its own dedicated railway station, subtly recorded and examined in Hoare's mixture of memoir and archaeology of place, *Spike Island* (2001). As a native of Southampton and a daily swimmer in the Solent, Hoare notes that as he dawdled to school, he was conscious of the layers of history beneath the pavements, stretching down as far as the Roman occupation.

But his intriguing and tireless mythologizing of his home city is very much a solo endeavour.



Figure 3: South Home Town (2014), video still, Hawley/Steiger.

Southampton has a rich medieval history but one dogged by bad luck or poor judgement. Henry the Fifth left from Westgate in the city to fight at Agincourt, and later the wealth of the wool trade with Italy led to an influx of Italians, and even an Italian mayor (Hampshire History 2015). But sporadic wars with the French and endemic disease led to an inexorable decline. Two centuries before the devastation of the December 1940 Blitz, when Daniel Defoe visited in 1740, he was conscious of the impressive history of the town, but also wrote of its decay, and observed that it was dying with age (Vision of Britain 2015).

War was good for the town, but only in the sense that great ships came and went through its port, the troop carriers out to the Boer War or the Great War, and the hospital ships returning the maimed and wounded. The sea was a source of employment for the men and a few of the women of the port. They sailed on the great and glamorous liners of the 1920s and 1930s to New York; the Queen Mary bore stellar celebrities across the Atlantic, but they spent no time in Southampton and the people of the town knew their place on the ships as the bus boys, cooks and maids. Cole Porter's *Anything Goes* (1934) is set on such an ocean voyage, and the absurd action-packed narrative framed by exuberant song and dance numbers has as its implied endpoint a docking in Southampton. But the port is elided from the story, and when the final set piece tap dance has exploded to its climax in tickertape and balloons, the travellers, it is suggested, disembark and apparently reappear in the imagination in Mayfair, erasing Southampton completely from the journey.

The Second World War cut off the town from its past, its story. The 1940 bombings removed the buildings that were the physical evidence of its rich if chequered history, leaving only fragments of medieval wall or cellar between the brick and concrete evidence of post-war blight. These function as a palimpsest, dimly visible beneath the overwhelming impression of 1990s shopping centres and brash redevelopment. The contemporary city suffers from a kind of amnesia, and forgetting its past it also forgets its own identity. The letter from the council announcing its city status scrabbled around for the appropriate reasons for such an honour. Its status as a port, yes, but what else? Perhaps its record of public administration was a vain attempt to pin down a lack, an absence of identity.

Twenty years earlier, on 30 April 1944, there was an event at the Classic Cinema Southampton (now a Burger King at Above Bar) where a disparate group of family and friends assembled to watch a film of Southampton servicemen in the Far East theatre. This was one of the almost 400 *Calling Blighty* films made by the Directorate of Army Welfare in India to improve morale, both in the Services and on the home front. Each film featured servicemen from a particular small area, facing the camera and speaking directly to their loved ones: messages that were often banal but also very moving.

The Southampton film was set in what seems to be a service canteen, with soldiers smoking and playing darts, although in fact it was a constructed set in Bombay where the Army Kinematograph Service was based. Each man (there were no women) walks up to the camera

and speaks, sometimes confidently, but more often haltingly, and yet with understated emotion. 'Hope Dad's orchards coming up this year just fine'. 'Have you got Mary there this afternoon? If you have, give a big kiss from me, one of these' (kisses back of hand). 'When you're across the Baddesley Arms once again, have two on me not one'. 'Hope 1944 is treating you better than 1943 did'. 'Mrs Kelly, your husband wants to speak to you. You bet he do'. Mrs Kelly's husband then spoke to the camera: 'Can you see me Bobby?' According to the *Southern Echo*, Bobby was in the audience and shouted back 'Yes I can!' (*Calling Blighty*, 1944).



Figure 4: *Stranger than Known* installation (2014), video still, Hawley/Steiger.

There is something moving about these testimonies spoken in a light Hampshire burr, on the surface stilted and light, yet belied by the sometimes haunted expressions of the men, some of whom had not been home for several years. 'Hello Jean, do you recognise me? It won't be long now before we've got that home in the country we've been waiting for' (*Calling Blighty*, Southampton, 1944). Already the servicemen were looking forward to the end of the war, to a future currently clouded by separation and conflict. In their eyes, the shape, the meaning of Southampton as home is revealed, to the people and places left behind. Mothers, wives, children, pubs and friends are all wayposts to their identity and that of the city.

They had been moved halfway round the world, and now were looking back. The soldiers and airmen had left Southampton as many others had done, but in their case there was an unquenchable longing to return home. They were seeing their South Home Town in time and space, from a distance.

As a port city, Southampton has always been also an immigrant city. While a decade ago there were just a few hundred Polish immigrants, now there are more than 8000 living there, along with Polish restaurants, grocers, butchers and insurance brokers. About a fifth of the residents of the city were born outside the United Kingdom. Southampton has been absorbing immigrants ever since the Huguenots fled to the city in the seventeenth century. In the 1920s, Atlantic Park, where the airport is now, was established by the Steamship companies, and became a virtually self-contained township boasting its own school, medical centre, synagogue and even a library containing books in Polish, Russian, German and Yiddish. During the Spanish Civil War and after the bombing of Guernica in 1937 nearly 4000 Basque children were welcomed by the people of the town. These abandoned and erased sites are to the city what Ellis Island is to New York, markers of transit for people arriving or passing through. The proud history of immigration reflects again the history of Britain as a whole: the 2011 census revealed that Polish is now Britain's second language.

If Southampton's identity is shifting, how can the wanderer of the city express that through a camera lens? In the 1920s, with the rush of energy after World War I, which gave rise to modernism, the city film or 'city symphony' was the response of film-makers to headlong changes in architecture and identity in the contemporary metropolis. In films made between 1921 and 1929, such as Sheeler and Strand's *Manhatta* (1921), Ruttman's *Berlin, Symphony of a Great City* (1927), Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) and Joris Ivens' *Rain* (1929), the camera takes on the role of a *flâneur*, and acts as a mechanical eye. Images of people, vehicles, streets and industry were captured in fragments, producing a collage of impressions, which looked at the city from faraway and from very close-up.

Sometimes the people and streets were filmed from a moving car, or a tram, invoking the speed of the modern. Often, emergent filmic technologies were also used, such as time-lapse and double exposures, as in *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), which gave a picture of Odessa in the modern technological world. Depicting urban space in this new world needed new techniques

and genres, hovering often between voyeuristic documentary and fiction. The city film is still being made in different guises such as Peter Greenaway's *Intervals* (1969) shot in Venice, Bruce Baillie's *Castro Street* (1966), John Smith's *The Girl Chewing Gum* (1976) and Patrick Keeler's masterly *London* (1994).

High-definition cameras, ultra slow-motion video and camera drones are contemporary film techniques that can offer a vision of the city that can be unseen in everyday experience. They allow glimpses of buildings and people as if the wanderer could slow time itself, or fly to impossible places, to look backwards in time and notice with a start the forgotten, the unremarked. Slow motion reveals the unknown surface, as the camera's movement in a painterly arc shows both the banal and strange at the same time. The drone in its impossible view reveals images for the first time, such as the dream of flight, landscapes both close and far away, the smallest detail and the vast panorama – spectacle.

In *Stranger than Known: South Home Town*, the film becomes a kind of aimless walk, the *dérive* of the *flâneur*, despite being shot from a moving car. Seen first by the high-speed video camera shooting at 240 frames a second, around 10 times normal speed, the vision of the city emerges suddenly into a kind of clarity when the camera is slowed to walking pace, or rather loitering pace, as magic eye images seem to do when they snap into three-dimensions. The streets and people then can be examined, revealing the joy and mystery of the everyday, with a persistent undertow of melancholia. There is a sense of downbeat absurdity in many of the slow-motion images. A group walk out of the park carrying a huge red animal suit, hinting at lost narratives and forgotten bacchanalia. A pair of Council workmen cut the grass in protection suits, which make them look like spacemen from the future engaged in cleaning up some unseen nuclear spillage. A black crow slowly traverses the camera frame as it looks out over the edge of the estuary, and as a woman walks her dog on the beach and the bird lazily alights on a fence post, the screen finally goes black.

At this speed the people and the fountains slow down to a dreamlike state: small body movements achieve a kind of significance, as if they had been directed by an unseen choreographer. A girl uncrosses her legs and the action turns into performance, modern dance in the streets of the city, suffused with its melancholy and absurdity.

On the far wall of the video installation in the gallery was a screen filled with an image shot from a drone camera, which at first hovered motionless, and then slowly traversed the eastern edge of the city, where the sea meets the land. The drone shot has become what the panning shot used to be in almost every contemporary documentary on the city, but this is hardly a new thing. In 1860, 'Boston as the Eagle and the Wild Goose see it' was the first aerial photograph still in existence, the forerunner of the drone, which has become pervasive in every contemporary documentary filmed outdoors. In some ways that dream view is now available which once only



Figure 5: Stranger than Known, *installation view* (2014), *video still* Hawley/Stejger.

existed in the mind's eye. Everyone has had a dream of flying, a sense of liberation and exultant release, but now that sensation can be impersonated by the drone, joining the lexicon of urban film language that directors have been using since the city symphonies, the time-lapse shots, the telephoto shot, the track from a moving vehicle.

The city is imagined and shaped by the lens, both in terms of its buildings and the people who inhabit them. It was in 1838 that Louis Daguerre took a ten-minute exposure with his new Daguerrotype photographic process of the Boulevard du Temple, part of a fashionable area in



Figure 6: South Home Town (2014), video still Hawley/Steiger.

Paris, filled with cafes, carriages, theatres and people. The street was thronged with traffic and pedestrians, but they all moved too quickly to register on the place, except for one man and a shadow. In the foreground, a man, having his boots shined, stays long enough to appear on the photograph, isolated in the seemingly empty streets: the first ever photograph of a recognizable person, with the faintest blur of the shoeshine boy. What is depicted here is an imagined city, transformed through chemistry and the leisurely time taken to expose the plate after it had been sensitized by halogen fumes, rather than the here and now of the bustling streets. Like

the apocryphal neutron bomb, all the citizens (bar one) have been erased into invisibility during the exposure, leaving the buildings standing, a reverie of Paris as an empty, dreamlike place.

South Home Town also in some small way turns Southampton into a city at a distance, where the passers-by and the crowds are remote, and the viewer as the only spectator observes as they slowly wash by. Southampton would be on no-one's bucket list, but once the wandering passers-by are stilled by slow motion it is instead a place of small epiphanies, of yearning and nostalgia, where clues to its rich history of decline and resurrection are hidden in the antique stones of its backstreets.

In the cultural realm of psychogeography walking and traversing the city become a kind of narrative. Psychogeography provides us with:

[a] whole boxful of playful, inventive strategies for exploring cities [...] just about anything that takes pedestrians off their predictable paths and jolts them into a new awareness of the urban landscape.

(Hart 2004: 124)

The 'dérive' (aimless movement) enables the walker to see and feel the streets as if for the first time. Guy Debord in the 'Theory of the *Dérive*' argued that the subject should 'drop their usual motives for movement in action[...] and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there' (2006 [1958]: 63).

Southampton is defined as a place of fugue and departure; the history of its buildings has been razed by conflict and rebuilding, so to see it again and anew by moving slowly through its fabric is not easy. Our installation asks this question: how is the city's self image affected when so many people arrive only to leave? Southampton's Sea City Museum elegantly paints a picture of the stepping stones to the city's rich history, the signposts of the *Mayflower*, the Basque refugees and of course the *Titanic*. The unsinkable liner left from Southampton with a cross-section of British and American society, but many of the deckhands and stewards were natives of the port city, 550 of whom perished in the icy waves of the North Atlantic (Randall 2012). Sea City has a recreation of the courtroom where the enquiry into the tragedy took place, a theatrical evocation in sound and projections of the most famous voyage associated with the city, the doomed liner that left with extravagant fanfares one April day in 1912.

But when the crowds have come and then gone, and the bunting is taken down, what does the city feel? For those left behind, what is home, where is home? Drifting through its streets, the city around its 50th year presents itself as a palimpsest, where layers of meaning as well as layers of real and imagined places show through the everyday, the medieval glimpsed dimly beneath



Figure 7: South Home Town (2014), video still, Hawley/Steiger.

the skin of the twenty-first century. Voices speak to us from the past, speak of home and longing, and as if in a dream we fly over the edgelands of the South Home Town. It is in these liminal spaces of borderline and uncertainty, of shorelines and pavements, that we begin to make out the myth of our own place.

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Contributor details

Steve Hawley is an artist who has been working with film and video since 1981, and his work has been shown at video festivals and broadcast worldwide since then. His original preoccupation was with language and image, and in 1995 his experimental documentary made with Tony Steyger on artificial languages was broadcast on Channel 4. More recently, his work has looked at new forms of narrative, in such works as *Love Under Mercury*, his first film for the cinema, which won a prize at the Ann Arbor film festival, and *Amen ICA Cinema 2002*, a palindromic video (prizewinner Vancouver Videopoem festival). He has explored the impact of new technologies on narrative. *Yarn* (2011) uses the DVD medium to create a never-ending story, and *Actor* (2013) makes film without a camera by putting the performer in a motion capture suit. *Manchester Time Machine* (2012), made with the North West Film Archive, is the first ever iPhone app to combine archive film footage and GPS and is part of a project looking at the nature of the city, including *Not to Scale* (2009; filmed in a series of model towns). *South Home Town* filmed in Southampton continues this body of work, alongside a forthcoming co-edited book, *Imaging the city: Art, Creative Practices, and Media Speculations* (2016).

Contact: Manchester School of Art, Manchester Metropolitan University, Cavendish Street, Manchester, M15 6BR, UK.
E-mail: s.hawley@mmu.ac.uk

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MOVING IMAGE REVIEW & ART JOURNAL

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The *Moving Image Review & Art Journal (MIRA)* is the first international peer-reviewed scholarly publication devoted to artists' film and video, and its contexts. It offers a forum for debates surrounding all forms of artists' moving image and media artworks: films, video installations, expanded cinema, video performance, experimental documentaries, animations, and other screen-based works made by artists. *MIRAJ* aims to consolidate artists' moving image as a distinct area of study that bridges a number of disciplines, not limited to, but including art, film, and media.

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JULIAN STANNARD

The University of Winchester

Poetry inspired by Genoa

Keywords

Genoa
film
exile
soundtrack
poetry

Abstract

At the Place-based Arts conference, I showed a film poem called Sottoripa (Trupia, 2013) which was nominated in the best documentary short at the Raindance Film Festival in 2013. The film is a tribute to Genoa and contains images of the city with a reading of my work forming the soundtrack. I also read several poems that respond to the city of Genoa where I lived for many years and which I present here.

Julian Stannard

Sottoripa

1984

I wanted the meanest zone
in the city so I took a room
in the Sottoripa and lived with
a Persian for six heady months.
He fed me on pistachio nuts
the only thing mamma knew how to send
and then boasted about his muscles.

Breakfast was a trip downstairs
coffee followed by grappa followed by coffee
a room full of lined stomachs,
the small fry of the criminal class.
There was much talk about nothing
and life was full of throat-cutting gestures.

If you wanted sex you had to pay for it
or wait until the smallest hours.

My Beautiful Son Cooks Me An Octopus

by hiring a boat in the fishing village of *Camogli* and heading off
for the waters of *Zoagli*. He has his hand firmly on the tiller
and he's telling me that one day he's going to be a champion boxer.

He's taking me to *Zoagli* because he wants me to see the fish.
I don't tell him that when he was born the fish leapt clean out of the sea
nor do I tell him that when his mother was going crazy

the fish of *Zoagli* flew straight into my head and flapped.
I don't say, son if you could open my head and let the fish go free
I might take the day off and pretend that life was sweet.

Saint Anna's Funicular

When I go down to hell
 I will take Saint Anna's funicular.
 It will be waiting for me
 in the nearly dark of
 a velvet-skied Genoese evening.

I will be the only passenger
 and the doors will slide shut
 with a sublime finality.
 It will be an extraordinary occasion,
 this journey into eternity.

And in that narrow steep descent
 I will be given my last vision
 of the city against the sea
 and I will pass lighted windows
 full of comfort and chandeliers.

City of Malefic Angels

L'amour passe de là...

City of my several corpses
 City of light summery Italian waltzes
 City of rhyme, city of slime
 City of lifts, funiculars and strange particulars
 City of Caproni and all that baloney
 City of my broken knee
 City perched precariously on the curve of the sea
 City of couplets, triplets and terminations
 City of trains and city of lascivious rats sliding out of drains
 City of myopia and dystopia
 City of coffee and an interesting variant of English toffee
 City of *caserme piene di sperma*
 City of the mind gone wrong, city of song

Julian Stannard

City of revisionist historians and, increasingly, city of Ecuadorians
City of loose ends and long-toothed friends
City of Rina, I wish I'd seen her one more time
City of ubiquitous vowels, city of inefficient bowels
City of economia and a home-grown version of the Oresteia
City of Via Gramsci and my estranged wife the banshee
City of the ghetto, Jack, William and Castelletto
City of Sampdoria and permanently deferred euphoria
City of Valéry, Dickens, Montale, Melville and Hardy
City of green sauce, city of my not yet completed and expensive
divorce
City of Crema per il Corpo al Profumo di Patchouli
City of Maristella, Loredana and that Scottish girl Julie.

La Baia di Silenzio

I lay myself down
in the Bay of Silence.
The wind kicked up
and scudded across
the sea. The wind
got into the rigging
and the Bay of Silence
wasn't silent at all
with sails flapping
like scarecrows
on the threshold of
delirium. A girl
shrieked. Something
was coming off
the sea which
could only be death
or the sister of death
or the cocktail of
death or the methadone
of death or the

ecstasy of death
or the aftershave
of death or the sweet
morning feeling
of death, or the hit me,
hit me, hit me
of death, or the *la la la*
of death. Goodbye.

The Necropolis

When I walked into the necropolis
at Genoa I saw that every grave

had been allocated a panettone
and because the Council was in

broad terms a coalition of the left
every panettone was in a red box

and because every panettone
was in a red box I had a hunch

the old Maoist-Leninist-Stalinist
front were calling a meeting

with the dead and because the
dead were bored of being dead

they clapped and shouted
like nuns who have discovered

the libido and because nuns
have discovered the libido

I am going to bring the poem
to a sudden end. Sleep well!

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Contributor details

Stannard has written extensively about Genoa and his collections include *Rina's War* (Peterloo, 2001), *The Red Zone* (Peterloo, 2007), *The Parrots of Villa Gruber Discover Lapis Lazuli* (Salmon, 2011), *The Street of Perfect Love* (Worple, 2014) and *What Were You Thinking?* (CB Editions, 2016). He is a Reader in Creative Writing at the University of Winchester, where he runs the M.A. in Critical and Creative Writing as well as teaching at The Poetry School (London). He reviews for the *Times Literary Supplement* and *Poetry Review*.

Contact: The University of Winchester, Winchester, Hampshire, SO22 4NR, UK.

E-mail: Julian.Stannard@winchester.ac.uk

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KEVIN CROOKS

University of Central Lancashire

Picturing the M62: The Trans-pennine motorway: A work in progress

Keywords

motorway
M62
Anthropocene
Trans-Pennine
sociology
economy
geology
transport
mobility

Abstract

Carving out the Trans-Pennine M62 was, at the time of its construction, one of the most difficult and ambitious road-construction projects ever attempted. As motorists we travel across the Pennines within a matter of several minutes, and thus the strangeness of the M62 is easy to dismiss. Travellers can detach themselves from the landscape through which they pass, and the irreversible impact of the motorway on the environment is made invisible. The efforts of the thousands of construction workers who laboured, often in appalling conditions, to construct a road that facilitates the travel of tens of thousands of people every day disappear in the blink of an eye. This article discusses a photographic project to capture the relationship of the human to the landscape in a post-industrial context, configuring that relationship within the theoretical frame of the 'anthropocene'. What, then, is the M62 today?

Introduction

[T]he motorway [for Augé] is seen as an archetypal non-place. Yet rather than “being in the middle of nowhere”, the geographies of the motorway landscape is complex and heterogeneous.

(Merriman 2004)

Carving out the Trans-Pennine M62 was, at the time of its construction, one of the most difficult and ambitious road-construction projects ever attempted. Motorists travel across the Pennines within a matter of several minutes and the strangeness of the M62 is easy to dismiss. Travellers can detach themselves from the landscape that they pass through, and the irreversible impact that the motorway has had on the environment becomes unnoticeable. The efforts of the thousands of construction workers who laboured, often in appalling conditions, to construct a road that facilitates the travel of tens of thousands of people each and every day disappear in the blink of a driver’s eye.

Peat deposits 20ft deep, mining subsidence and changeable, severe weather conditions contributed to the difficulties in completing the project. At times during the construction there were up to 2000 operational machines, despite frequent heavy rain and snow and low cloud and fog making visibility practically impossible. At 180ft deep, the cutting that the motorway sits within is one of the deepest road cuttings in Europe; approximately, four million cubic tons of rock was removed from the landscape to facilitate it.

The construction of the motorway that cuts through Scammonden not only facilitated an easier and quicker route across the Pennines than had ever existed previously, it also provided the opportunity for building a dam that would supply Huddersfield and the surrounding population with the majority of its water supply.

Although the construction of the motorway and dam caused the direct loss of Deanhead Village – which was compulsorily purchased and subsequently flooded – a remnant of the village’s vicarage still exists and now forms part of a boathouse, which sits on the dam’s waterside. Through the management of the water company that owns the land, the surrounding manufactured landscape now provides a protected habitat in which a diverse range of species of wildlife can flourish. Sinclair gives a typically lyrical reading of the spatial aesthetics of the M62:

John Davies, Vicar and author of *Walking the M62* spoke of ‘a sense of awe, he experienced, standing on a hillside above the M62, ‘watching the traffic steadily flowing across the high Pennines like a metallic ribbon glittering in the sunshine’. There was he acknowledged, a dimension of wonder in the ritualistic process of motorway driving. Post-Ballardian

1. Anthropocene is the name given by scientists to the new era in geology caused by human intervention, primarily the burning of fossil fuels. It is only 250 years old, a mote in the eye of geological time, which can barely register the ephemeral 10,000 years of the preceding Holocene, whose unusually stable climatic conditions made human agriculture and civilization possible. (Mirzoeff 2014: 213)

sensory enhancement, deep reverie. He spoke of the Gospels as a kind of divinely inspired Highway Code. He found my attitude towards this liminal territory, as expressed in London Orbital, more critical than his own: he was undergoing, in his foot-founded exhaustion, an epiphany. The road was a metaphor, the prompt for an unwritten sermon. 'Above Asda only sky'.

(2011)

Throughout the duration of this article I will explain the methods and approaches that I considered and applied while producing a photographic project. My initial intention was to examine and frame selected observations that I had made about the M62. The images that are present throughout provide a visual commentary, which seeks to explain and communicate a range of ideas and concepts that derive from the research I conducted and used to underpin, influence and inspire the practical elements of my photographic practice.

The information provided seeks to validate and explain the choices that I made throughout the production process. As a photographic practitioner I rarely produce landscape imagery and was interested in gaining a thorough understanding of how I could communicate this space visually in a way that was engaging, evocative, interesting and aesthetically pleasing. I was keen on producing a set of images that in the first instance would entice a potential audience not only to view them but also to provoke questions that would potentially lead to contemplation and enquiry about the motorway, its place within its own environment and a number of issues and concerns that derive from it.

What, then, is the 'M62' today?

This article discusses how the 'Anthropocene'¹ could be visualized through a practice-based research project, which was in direct response to a brief that I was set as part of my MA studies. The problems arose when I considered a subject, the ways in which to visualize it and how to effectively communicate the issues and concerns that surround the concept of the Anthropocene.

Two hundred years ago, fears about what the planet's material state might be like in 1000 years would have seemed misplaced. No longer. In the face of accelerating planetary-scale change, much of it traceable to human activity, today's humans are confronted by realizations that life on earth hasn't been like 'this' nor has it looked like 'us' for very long at all. In the short 18 months that we've been working on this book, the word 'Anthropocene' has gone from an obscure, scientific term that an NPR interviewer had to ask a geologist how to pronounce, to a word that now appears in headlines and returns over half a million Google citations.

(Ellsworth and Kruse 2013: 11)



Figure 1: M62 – The view towards Windy Hill.

My original intention was to document one space, which would allow me the possibility of examining information on a more global scale, in the hope that I could provide some comprehensive and contemplative images that would provoke and provide a visual explanation of the Anthropocene and its effects.

I began to think of spaces, environments and landscapes that have witnessed clear and dramatic man-made changes over a prolonged period of time. The M62 has developed, altered and has been manipulated into the motorway it is today because of its ever-increasing need to

accommodate an ever-growing population. The environment in which the entire length of the motorway is situated will continue to change through the need and desire for it to be more economically efficient, provide more economic growth, allow for sustainable development and be more environmentally considerate.

Since the 1950s the long-term trend in road traffic has been one of growth. In 2013, the overall motor vehicle traffic volume of 303.7 billion vehicle miles was over 10 times higher than in 1949 (28.9 billion vehicle miles). However, over the last 20 years there has been a decline in the rate of traffic growth. Motor vehicle traffic grew by 50 per cent during the 1980s, by 14 per cent during the 1990s and by six per cent between 2000 and 2009. Motor vehicle traffic peaked at 314.1 billion vehicle miles in 2007 after which it fell for three consecutive years; the first consecutive annual falls since traffic records began. Since 2010 traffic levels have been broadly stable, and in 2013 traffic is similar to levels seen in 2003.

(DfT 2013)

It is clear that road traffic and specifically motorway traffic has a clear and changeable effect on the environments in which they are situated; however, visualizing these figures is more problematic. For example, the volume of traffic on a particular stretch of motorway is relatively easy to document and record; however, can increases in carbon dioxide and its effects be visually communicated?

Road transport accounts for 22% of carbon emissions in the UK. Motorways, though only 1% of the road network, account for 20% of road traffic. So, getting motorway speeds right will have a big impact on our ability to achieve our climate change targets. Vehicles are becoming more efficient but they are still subject to the laws of physics: overcoming the forces of drag becomes progressively harder as speed increases. And the increasing energy required to do this translates to escalating emissions. The amount of CO₂ emitted per km is determined by both the type of vehicle and how it is driven. But average figures suggest that increasing speed from 70mph to 80mph, a petrol car increases its CO₂ emissions per km by 14%, a diesel car by 25%.

(Carbon Emissions 2015)



Figures 2 and 3: M62, Junction 22.

The original aims for the construction of the M62 motorway were as follows:

- 1) To provide an all-weather route across the Pennines linking the conurbations of West Yorkshire and South-East Lancashire; and (2) by extensions to the West Coast at Liverpool and the East Coast at Hull, to link all three conurbations and Humberside to each other and to major West and East Coast ports.

(Dodgson 1974: 75)

Initial field studies

From my initial field studies, I was able to record some suggestion of the motorway planner's intention to accommodate the workings of rural life. I also recognized evidence of the reclaiming of the natural landscape, which enabled me to quite clearly illustrate and capture an access bridge that crossed over the M62; this bridge allows the local farmer access to his fields and farmhouse. The bridge, as is visible in the images overleaf, shows how nature is able to reclaim and utilize man-made structures in order to take advantage of the constraints of the space. There is a clear contrast to the images in that both are man-made industrial-scale constructions; however, the bridge in Figure 5, it could be argued, is more aesthetically pleasing and quite picturesque. This was something that I was instantly drawn to: both bridges were constructed by the motorway contractors, who designed and built the motorway; however, both have clear and definable differences in the way they look and sit within the landscape they are situated in. The bridge in Figure 5 had a steady, bending approach, and was shaded and covered by the surrounding trees. This allowed a small amount of light to fall on the worn surface of the tracks, which had been created by the farmer's machinery, and although this scene and location appears to be quite natural in its depiction, the fact that it is a motorway bridge is concealed and hidden. Whereas Figure 4 clearly has physical signs and indicators that contextualize and give meaning to the bridge in the image; however, one could argue that although the image is a more accurate rendition of its environment, the features within in it are less engaging or aesthetically pleasing.

One key element of the space was the consideration of the movement, rhythms and flows of traffic. I understand that the movement and flow of traffic contributed to a rhythm that, if recorded, would clearly provide information about the sociological and economical understanding of the space; however, I felt that this would have isolated my attention to the people who use the motorway at the times in which I visited. At this stage, I was more interested in focusing my attention on the space itself, not necessarily, exclusively, people using the space.

Through a visit to the North West Sound Archive (NWSA) in Clitheroe I was introduced to a recording of an interview conducted by a sound archivist at the NWSA, and in response I began to reconsider and re-assess my chosen location. The interview covered the oral, historical account of Stewart Bradbury, a man who was directly involved in the construction of the M62 between Junction 17 and 25; he talked in some detail on the scale and ambition of the project, along with a thorough explanation of his involvement throughout the course of his contract. The effects and scale of the construction of the motorway became clearly apparent; the recording allowed me to consider and reflect on the possibilities of documenting such a space. Junction 17–25, The Pennine section of the M62, is renowned for many of its engineering feats, geographical features and folkloric tales. I began to seriously consider this location as a more viable option that would



Figures 4 and 5: Access bridges under and over the M62 at Junction 10.

provide for a more detailed and multifaceted environment in which to highlight and communicate the effects of the Anthropocene.

Visual practitioners and artists are in a position to visually communicate the affects of human activity on an environment that is unable to be effectively and comprehensively appreciated through any other medium in isolation. Throughout the duration of the project, I maintained my desire to evoke an appreciation of the affects of the Anthropocene through my photographs. By showing the expansive effects of human manipulation on the planet we can enable a more comprehensive and considered appreciation of the consequences of our footprints.

Visualizing the Anthropocene

I originally initiated my research by considering how other visual practitioners had recorded and documented the same or similar subject matter.

I adapted Bryan Biggs' ideas of the picturesque to the production of my work within this project; this allowed me to consider how I could utilize methods of photographic capture in order to create images of a motorway environment that would be visually engaging. My working aim was to enable an audience to both reconsider and contemplate what a motorway means other than just congestion, road works and other uncontrollable hindrances that prevent them from travelling from A to B.

Getting from A to B, whether by motorway or deviating off the beaten track, continues to exercise the imaginations of artists working across the creative spectrum – travel writing, the road movie, the highway eulogised in popular song, from Route 66 to Kraftwerk's Autobahn. With the adoption in recent years of the original situationalist concept of psychogeography, which has witnessed the strategy of the drift being turned into a more purposeful exploration of our urban geographies and hidden sites, transport routes – by vehicle or on foot – have become the subject of intense interrogation, Iain Sinclair's circular walk around the M25's 'acoustic footprints' (another poetic Highways Agency term), *London Orbital*, being most celebrated.

(Chell in Biggs 2013: 7)

The motorway that was depicted in the 1960s, when the roads were either being constructed or opened, was rendered extremely differently. Motorways then provided people with an opportunity they had never had the fortune of experiencing before. At times I have felt it necessary to capture the motorway within the split second intervals where no traffic is visible, in order to diminish the negative, visual connotations surrounding traffic, to allow the viewer of the work to focus, without hindrance, on the space that the motorway exists within. I did, however, feel that it was necessary to provide the viewer of the images the opportunity to comprehensively contextualize the motorway, the vehicles that use it and its surroundings. Therefore, there were occasions where I felt that it was relevant that the vehicles that travelled along the motorway were included.

The consideration of the photographer's viewpoint is essential in understanding the landscape. The severity of the manipulation of the landscape can be adequately enhanced and exaggerated simply by the viewpoint that is used to frame the landscape that you wish to capture. There is, therefore, a consideration of how to visually communicate my ideas purely by my methods of framing. Biggs shows how we can apply the concept of the eighteenth-century picturesque to modern and contemporary industrialized landscapes:

The picturesque encompassed not just the design of gardens and estates, but the representation in visual terms of these engineered landscapes. While the formulation of theories around the Picturesque informed discourse about beauty and notions of the sublime, its articulation through paintings also made visible the politics that shaped our landscape: the economic power that the landowning classes enjoyed and the social control they and the process of land enclosures exerted.

(Chell in 2013: 8)

These motorways were big in terms of scale, ambitions and challenges. Every detail of the construction of the routes appeared to be holistically considered and evaluated before they were finally realized. The design and 'look' of the motorway was considered even to how the road would sit within the landscape. The roads have been engineered, but as a result, so has the land that now surrounds them. Throughout the production of my images, I sought out scenes I could capture that would demonstrate a consideration of aesthetic value. This was often achieved by what I was confronted with, visiting locations that would assist me in visualizing the effects of the Anthropocene. It is no coincidence that the stretches of the motorway that I chose often included vast spaces that included a large and expanded distance of the motorway that often undulated towards the horizon. I was interested in exploring the aesthetics of the motorway within its surrounding and how this could be effectively rendered.

The symbolism and meaning that the Picturesque brought to the landscape are echoed today in the functioning of motorways, both as conduits of consumer efficiency and representation of individual freedom and mobility. From the comfort and insulation of the driver's or passenger's seat, the politics of ownership of the surrounding landscape are largely unseen, while, as Edward (Chell) suggests, the vistas that motorway curves and reveals enable are direct descendants of Picturesque theory.

(Biggs 2013: 8)

I studied a significant amount of material, which allowed me to question and consider the potential positioning and vantage points I were to adopt while capturing my images. There were considerable considerations placed on the visual impact of the motorway and its potential effect on the motorists who were due to use it once it had been constructed. They were often quite mechanical and scientific, particularly when considering the speed in which a motorist would be confronted with particular features within the landscape and the effect that this may have on the effectiveness to judge and determine distance and perspective.

As driving speeds increase, the landscape of the road must become more expansive, coherent and free from excessive detail and distractions. A view designed to be appreciated for five seconds by a motorist travelling at 60 mph would require an opening, or frame, 418 feet larger than if some view were to be framed for a pedestrian travelling at 3 mph.

(Merriman 2007: 75)

An interesting consideration, therefore, would be how I would be able to condense and include information within my images so that it would enable the viewer to have an understanding of the space, which would no doubt be different from the visual understanding a motorist has of the same environment.

The cut, or incision in the rock, which we will not see clearly at speeds from the car, but all the more clearer in the camera's still frame, defies the extreme slowness and gravity of the rock. Thus the road cut displays an encounter between the slow geological process and a rapid perception of the material – one could say between the 19th century's fascination for geology as science and technique and our time's dependency on high speeds. They allow us access to a temporality and a materiality that our common speeds tear us away from. Ironically it is our infrastructure that allows us both.

(Ellsworth and Kruse 2013: 91)

Throughout the production of the photo shoots, I became increasingly aware of the potential impact and effectiveness of how and where I positioned myself while capturing my images. The geographical viewpoint that I adopted when framing my images would ultimately determine how the viewer(s) would consequently read my images. The impact of the motorway on its surroundings is muted and limited within the confines of a motor vehicle.

Figures 6 and 7 demonstrate the severity of the cut at Windy Hill, just west of the Pennine Way Footpath. The point in which I captured these images is accessible by foot from the footpath and was a useful vantage point in which to observe the motorway. It was clear from the views I had obtained from the Pennine section of the M62 that it would be possible for me to render images that were picturesque, possibly sublime, of an industrialized landscape which often evokes negative connotations. I intended to create a visual impact – one that was instantly engaging and that would allow and encourage the viewer to reconsider the motorway and its visual significance within the landscape in which it is situated. I was committed to producing evocative images, which would concisely and comprehensively communicate the concepts and ideas that were explored through my research.



Figures 6 and 7: *The cutting at Windy Hill.*

Edward Burtynsky's 'Manufactured Landscapes' interested me because of his methods of capture. Burtynsky often uses drones, which enable him to capture information that is normally unachievable when utilizing land-based viewpoints. The enormity and vastness of the subject matter appeared to justify the viewpoints used to capture them. Burtynsky focuses on the effects of man's influence on his environment; travelling around the world he captures landscapes that have been dramatically altered by man's consumption, destruction and exploitation of natural features and resources.

The images provide a holistic view of the surroundings that Burtynsky chose to capture, a collective summing up of the effects that the process of development has either had, is having or is going to have. I found significant inspiration from the scenes of the construction of large infrastructure projects within China, particularly when looking at 'Water', Edward Burtynsky's documentary on the construction of the Three Gorges Dam.

The comparison between the dam that I have been documenting within Scammonden and the Three Gorges Dam is obvious, although the scale of the two projects is far from similar. The displacement of 1.2 million people within 22 counties is not comparable to one farmer, his farm and his wife within one village in Yorkshire; however, the challenges that were confronted at the time of their construction are relative to the scale and size of both countries and their population.

On-site research

My visits to the Pennine section of the M62 starkly contrasted the value gained from my initial site visits at Junction 10. The experience of visiting both the Pennine Way section and Scammonden allowed me to more holistically appreciate the enormity, scale and ambition of the proposal and construction of the motorway in what was historically one of the most difficult areas to navigate and travel through, and it is because of this motorway that the passage through this particular landscape can now be traversed within ten minutes.



Figures 8 and 9: The Pennine Way Footpath and its footbridge.

This site was visually interesting and engaging. Images that I was able to capture while visiting the site were more effective in communicating the effect that the motorway has on the landscape. The enormity of the project and difficulties regarding construction were clearly visible from my visit, and the information that I was able to extract, capture and frame began to be placed firmly into context with the imagery that I had produced. The movement of traffic, rhythms and flows became more pronounced and profound.

The M62 Pennine section is not only the culmination of many years' testing and experimenting, surveying and engineering, but also opens an important trade route without creating a scar on the landscape, for much of this moor and hill scenery could not be enjoyed without the motorway. From nearby vantage points, like A672, nothing but an inch or two of lorry roofs can be seen of its progress. In the long-term the provision of tree snow barriers and specially blended grass areas can do nothing but good on the bleak moor.

(Rowlands n.d.: 58–65)

The vantage points from which I had chosen to photograph the motorway offered spatial awareness, interest and engagement. I captured one series of images on a day where it was particularly foggy and the visibility was relatively poor; however, this was surprisingly effective in containing visual data within a specific area. It is hard to ignore the space where the Pennine Way Footpath crosses as you navigate through it. Even when you are travelling along the motorway, the weather, speed of the car, noise of the engine and the vastness of the landscape, and the features within it, have an effect on your visual appreciation of the space.

Davies argues,

Many of Brian's stories alerted me to the truth that – contrary to my romantic liberal views of country life versus the urban rush of which the motorway has been catalyst and icon – folks round here have adjusted to the presence of the M62, have recognised the opportunities it has brought. Listening to Brian exploded some myths for me: for instance there's no village buried beneath Scammonden Waters – an old mill, yes.... I already knew that it's an oft-repeated untruth that Ken Wilde of Stott Hall Farm opposed the motorway; Brian reinforced the reality (that they had to split the carriageways around the farm for structural reasons) by telling me that Yorkshire Water own the land anyway so they would have had the final say, not a tenant farmer like Ken Wilde or Brian, whose cattle I had passed when ascending the heights above Stott Hall Farm. His business continues today – sheep were being herded alongside the motorway as I watched from the slopes above.... But listening to Brian, and the guy on Leeches Hill happy to be metres from the motorway, and others in

this gorgeous and largely manufactured landscape, I realise that many here have a manner of quiet acceptance and openness to change. To them not everything is bad about this great road being cut through here.

(2007: 72)

On visiting both the Pennine Way and Scammonden, you are able to feel and directly experience the impact the motorway has on the landscape, a feeling that is intensified by the sound and movement of traffic through what still remains a wholly rural space. Although the area in and around the Pennine Way was visually stimulating and possibly evocative, I did not at that stage of my studies feel that I was able to adequately explain or provoke questions regarding Anthropocene. I did, however, feel that I could achieve more effective and appropriate results from visiting Scammonden.



Figures 10 and 11: Deanhead Cutting, Scammonden.

Scammonden has similar visual qualities that are reminiscent of the section where the Pennine Way crosses; however, the bridge that crosses over the motorway is 65ft above the carriageway, whereas the Scammonden Bridge is 120ft over the carriageway. Scammonden Bridge was the longest single-span bridge in Europe, and Scammonden Dam was the largest rock-filled dam in the UK at the time of construction. Both sections cut through the landscape; however, Scammonden has the added feature of a man-made dam that dominates and differentiates the landscape from the area surrounding the Pennine Way.

The area has seen significant and lasting geological changes and developments since its conception. These geological changes have clearly impacted the environment in which both the dam and motorway are situated. Through the construction of the space, the geological history of the land has been excavated, examined, revealed and altered. Throughout the course of the research that I conducted while studying Scammonden, and other areas surrounding the M62, I found significant evidence that explained that the geology of the land has not only been significantly altered by natural causes; it has also seen significant changes that have been brought about by industrialization and commoditization of the landscape. For example, the reason that there were initially so many reservoirs and dams in this area was to supply the mills and factories of Lancashire and Yorkshire with consistent and adequate supplies of water. These reservoirs and dams were built by using stone and rock, and in some cases were not native to the environment in which they were being constructed. The introduction of new reservoirs, dams and waterways encouraged and created new environments, which allowed new species of plants and animals to establish habitats and flourish.

Prior to visiting the Scammonden site I accessed a podcast audio guide produced by Yorkshire Water, the utility company that owns most of the land surrounding both of the areas that I visited. The guide provided a brief overview of the space in which the motorway and Scammonden Dam were built.

The podcast provided factual details of the space, including comments upon the wildlife and how species of bird life have been accommodated since the construction of the dam. It also included information regarding the previous inhabitants of the space, whose existence you are prompted to contemplate when arriving at specific points around the dam. The podcast discusses the developments that Yorkshire Water has made to the dam throughout the duration of their ownership and management. New pipelines, which feed additional reservoirs, were constructed in the 1990s and praised for their efficiency and reliability, as was the fact that the location was selected for its geological and geographical importance. Further information reveals that the reservoir now supplies half of Huddersfield's water, and since 1993 the area has been a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

The recording also introduces listeners to the planting of a number of trees that are situated on the bank of the dam. An ancestor of the family who lived on a now submerged farm, which was compulsorily purchased, have since planted a memorial of trees known as 'Baker's Acre'.

On Saturday 12th November 2011, the Baker Family gathered in Scammonden to donate and plant 1000 trees, as a memorial to the Bakers on an area which was part of Deanhead Farm, which Frank Baker and his family farmed for nearly 40 years. In the centre of this area were the remains of a stonecote, built by Frank Baker in the early 1930's as a hen cote, and the Baker family have had the walls and floor strengthened and a stone built into the wall engraved BAKER STONECOTE. This will, in future, become a viewpoint overlooking the valley, the church, Scammonden Water and the M62 motorway. The trees planted were Oak, Rowan, Alder, Hawthorn, Ash, Red Oak and Scots Pine. The area planted covers 1 acre (0.40 hectares) and we have located a large stone boulder at the top of this area, engraved BAKER ACRE, and this can be seen from the junction of Sledge Gate and Kirklees Way.

(Baker Acre 2015)

The planting of Baker's Acre illustrates the legacy of the previous inhabitants of the space, how this legacy is preserved and memorialized, and how this acknowledgement of the history of the space is continuing to contribute to the ongoing manipulation and manufacture of the environment.

Figures 12 and 13 demonstrate the intensity and scale of the manipulation which took place during the construction of the motorway and the lasting visual effect it has on the landscape in which it is situated. I was keen on providing viewers of the scene with an image that would not be too dissimilar to an image of a typically, somewhat uninterrupted, possibly more natural landscape. I wanted to encourage the viewer to contemplate this landscape without the man-made features that are clearly apparent within it; these features in my opinion contribute to the aesthetic qualities of the environment in which it sits. For example, would these be interesting and engaging images if the motorway and the other man-made features within it were not present? I do not believe they would be.

He (Jellicoe) pointed to the important lessons of the 'Art of the Picturesque', before describing how the work of Humphry Repton was instructive for landscape architects, for it was he who taught us that 'a road is agreeable to drive along, [it] is also agreeable as static scenery in the surrounding landscape'.

Kevin Crooks

He goes on to explain that [...] in modern England it is the road that organizes the landscape through which it passes

(Jellicoe 1958: 276). (Merriman 2007: 76)

Scammonden not only provided me with interesting visual features, which I found to be aesthetically pleasing and engaging, it also provided me with adequate information, which could allow and explain a more comprehensive and contemplative understanding of the space in relation to the concepts and theories that surround the Anthropocene.

The construction of both the motorway and the dam has impacted the people who live or have lived within this particular environment; however, this has not always been evidently negative.



Figures 12 and 13: Scammonden Dam.

I am yet to find any substantial negative narrative that denounces the motorway or dam's existence. There is evidence of current and recent disapproval of construction within this particular area; however this is due to the proposal and introduction of new wind turbines, which are to be situated within the surrounding areas of the dam and the motorway.

Conclusion: What, then, is the M62 today?

The motorway's use has changed little over recent years; however, usage is often in line with GDP and the current price of fuel. There has over the past couple of years been a decline in the use of the motorways in general; however, since the slight growth in GDP, usage of the motorway has increased accordingly (DfT 2013).

There have been changes to governmental policy and funding, and other changes to the Strategic Road Network (SRN) that are planned, suggested or proposed, which continue to alter the M62, the section at Scammonden and the landscape surrounding it. For example, the 'Smart' motorway programme aimed at increasing the reliability of journey times whilst continuing to improve CO₂ emissions. Average figures suggest that when increasing speed from 70mph to 80mph, a petrol car increases its CO₂ emissions per km by 14 per cent, and a diesel car by 25 per cent (Carbon Emissions 2015). However, the recent identification of this area as an SSSI, and the evidence that this particular stretch of the M62 has encouraged wildlife to thrive and establish sustainable habitats, suggest that (as in Chernobyl) post-industrial landscapes provide nature with a surprisingly fertile place in which to regenerate.

Part of an ongoing body of work, Kevin Crooks is documenting the M62 and the historical, geographical, geological, social and economic effects and changes that the motorway has brought to the areas of the north of England, which it connects.

<https://twitter.com/kevincrooks>

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Contributor details

Crooks is a postgraduate student studying Photography at UCLan; his work currently explores the effects of how changes to government policy, initiatives and programmes shape the lives of people within a society. He teaches Photography at Priestley College, Warrington. Kevin works as a

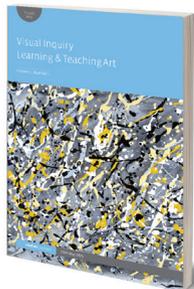
professional Photographer, producing a range of projects that tackles social and spatial mobility and the politics of community.

Contact: Priestley College, Loushers Lane, Warrington, Cheshire WA4 6RD, UK.

E-mail: contact@kevincrooks.co.uk

Web address: www.kevincrooks.co.uk

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G. James Daichendt
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DAVE JACKSON

Liverpool John Moores University

Violet City: Fantasizing Liverpool in song, story and film

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Mervyn Peake
Michael Moorcock
Cathedral Mountain

Abstract

Violet City exists as a sequence of songs, a fantasy novel and a micro-budget feature film. The film was shot entirely on green screen and is due for digital release in 2016. It uses hundreds of composited images and mattes, merging locations as disparate as the warehouses and streets of Liverpool with the canals of Venice, the Himalayas, the Liver Buildings and the Giant's Causeway to create a dark fairy tale ambience. Airships and hot air balloons soar above paddle steamers and luxury barges in the shadow of Cathedral Mountain. I adapted the screenplay from my novel, written as part of my doctorate by practice, investigating the personal and cultural mythologies that informed my imagination, growing up in Liverpool, and filtered through the work of various pre-1980s fantasy writers. Mediadrome, an independent US publisher will be publishing the book to coincide with the film release, and I have provided much of the soundtrack, using recordings by my various Liverpool-based bands from the 1980s to the present. This article discusses ways

Dave Jackson

in which these symbiotic creative works reimagine my home city through the lenses of fantasy fiction and how memories of Liverpool's past landscapes have affected my creative processes over the years.

Look where Violet City sprawls for miles
Exotic creatures on their secret tasks
What do they hide behind those distant smiles?
Oblique expressions, alabaster masks?

Cathedral Mountain penetrates the clouds
Lightning crackles at the interface
Rain slides down in sullen shrouds
Over Violet City's populace

A key turns to a padlocked attic room
Batwing shadows slice into the moon

Airships ride their moorings at the docks
Jack leans over a gondola rail
As the jagged chimes of civic clocks
Rip the constant roar and banshee wail

First taste of this haunted home of dreams
Twitches deep and dark roots of desire
Twists him towards a pulse of light that gleams
Over the rooftops from a distant spire

A sweet scent calls him down a rain-drenched street
He swaggers forth on over-eager feet

Where the torture garden in full bloom
Seduces victims with exotic musk
Exhaled into the purple evening gloom
Lures to poison thorn and cactus tusk

1. Headland Press published a book of my song lyrics entitled *Songs from Violet City* (2011).

A despot at a window in a tower
 Exults in each exquisite squeal of pain
 Indulges an unearthly will to power
 Obeys a signal from a reptile brain

And offers tribute to the lords of lies
 Infernal sparks ignite slit-pupil eyes.

(Jackson 2010)

Introduction

I have been fascinated by storytelling songs ever since I first heard ‘Ghost Riders in The Sky’ in my Grandmother’s parlour when I was 3 years old, and have written and recorded songs all of my adult life. I also write screenplays and prose fiction and live and work in close proximity to Giles Gilbert Scott’s Anglican Cathedral in Liverpool’s Georgian Quarter.

Violet City is a symbiotic multi-platform project – a series of songs, a fantasy novel, and a micro-budget feature film. While researching and writing a reflective commentary on the novel for a Ph.D. by practice, I became aware that, though set in an alternate reality, *Violet City* was striving for the feel of the fiction I read between the ages of 11 and 18, however, set in versions of the landscapes in which I originally read it. Much of its geography, architecture, inhabitants and story elements derive from my experiences of Liverpool during the 1960s, 1970s and the early 1980s, together with local and familial histories. These memories, along with personal and cultural mythologies of my youth, formed the ‘poetics’ of *Violet City*’s creative strands – refocused and adapted to the generic requirements of song, fantasy fiction and screen narrative.

Retracing influences that informed the novel enabled me to collect reference material that would prove an invaluable dramaturgical resource for the film. Shot entirely on green screen, its sets were composited and animated in Photoshop. In the street scene overleaf, the Liver Buildings overlook a canal in Venice, while the Himalayas loom in the background – almost a snapshot of the imaginative landscape of my youth.

The novel and feature film are due for publication and digital release in the autumn of 2015 and songs set in the story world or included on the soundtrack have been released on several albums, including *Cathedral Mountain* (Jackson 2010), *Twin Evil Stars* (Dead Cowboys 2005), *Indoor Fireworks* (The Room 1982) and the forthcoming *Red Fin Sunset* (2015).¹



Figure 1: Violet City street scene.

Process

The lyrics at the front of this piece represent my earliest vision of *Violet City's* story world. They strive for cinematic effect, influenced by pre-1980s writers of fantastic fiction. Michael Moorcock, H. P. Lovecraft and Mervyn Peake were major influences on me, along with early Marvel comic books, the androgynous stylings of 70s glam and punk rock, painters such as Max Ernst and De Chirico, German Expressionist films and Universal horror movies. The lyrics hint at a story set in an imaginary version of Liverpool distorted through images of 'the weird'.

The ability to immerse one's self in alternate worlds is an important part of the fantasist's art. We walk in parallel realities, intersected by dreams, memories and reflections, using recollections of real people, objects and environments as models and triggers for stories. The storyteller's task is to forge meaning out of disparate elements, finding connectivity, resonance, structure and plot.

I remember reading and swapping US comics in back alleys and waste ground dens – or traipsing behind a zip-booted grandmother through palatial and now defunct, art deco department stores to be rewarded with a visit to the Tatler Cartoon & Newsreel Cinema – while coveting a Dracula model kit glimpsed in Jack Sharpe's window. I remember performing Kafka

and J. G. Ballard-influenced songs with The Room, while supporting Pete Burns' Dead or Alive, at the Royal Court – an old music hall theatre, favoured by Ken Dodd – on the night the Toxteth riots started. In my songs and stories, the camp melodrama of old horror films and effete rock star aesthetics meet the thrill of urban rebellion against backdrops of soot-blackened Georgian splendour, World War II bombsites and rhododendron infested floral gardens.

Associative thinking helped create the supernatural creatures that haunt my story. In 1975, I saw an immaculately weird and shaven-headed young woman working as a receptionist in a trendy St John's Precinct hairdresser's. This was a time when most men had long hair, and shaved heads were associated with thugs rather than arty outsiders. The woman turned out to be Jayne Casey, who with Holly Johnson (Frankie Goes to Hollywood), Bill Drummond (KLF), Budgie (Siouxsie and the Banshees) and Ian Broudie (Lightning Seeds) formed one of Liverpool's seminal punk bands, Big in Japan. She was a protégé of Roger Eagle, a legendary local promoter, and manager of Liverpool's Eric's club, where my first two bands (051 and The Room) played debut gigs. A photograph of Jayne and Holly from that period shows them kohl-eyed, bald-headed, wearing white face powder and black lipstick.



Figure 2: A searchlight shines from the raven-topped Liver Building.

Dave Jackson

I tweaked and remodelled Jayne's look via the airbrushed centrefold of David Bowie from *Aladdin Sane* and Jack Kirby's Silver Surfer from *Fantastic Four*, but the thrill of seeing such a self-possessed and exotic creature in the 'real world' provided the main model for the androgynous race of energy parasites that glide the thermals of Cathedral Mountain – 'exotic creatures' with 'oblique expressions, alabaster masks'.

These are brief descriptions of Empusa from early in the novel:

Katherine's pale face and cloud of hair blurred in the watery shadows. Aaron struggled, lungs bursting, trying to haul her free. Then, from behind her ballooning skirts, another white face loomed and rushed upwards. Bright purple eyes stared into his, their pupils vertical slits. Luminescent fingers slashed from the murk, raking his face.

(*Violet City*: 7)



Figure 3: An Empusa visits Lord Splaine.

The shadow sloughed from its head to reveal a complexion like alabaster. With its long neck, high cheekbones and smooth white skull, the creature resembled an animated, androgynous statue.

(Violet City: 51)

The screenplay describes these two scenes in the following ways:

He makes an extra effort and grabs Katharine by the waist. Suddenly, a WHITE FACE looms from behind her billowing skirts. Purple, slit-pupil eyes blaze and a clawed hand slashes. (Scene 8: 3, original emphasis)

Dorina stands petrified, as the indistinct shape materialises on the balcony – a flickering androgynous shadow that THRUMS with electric power. GANYMEDE, an Empusa, watches the garden below and we briefly see its beautifully stylised feminine face. Eyes closed, it grins pleasure.

(Scene 65: 32, original emphasis)



Figure 4: A white face looms from behind billowing skirts.

Structures force connections, whether using melody rhythm and rhyme to shape the meaning of a song lyric, or using notions of plant and payoff to make narrative sense of a group of disparate images and vague thematic ideas.

Along with the *Cathedral Mountain* lyric, these are the other emotional and creative key triggers for *Violet City*:

- A white-faced, hairless androgyne stands in a cluttered antique shop, spinning a vase on the end of an extended finger.
- A mountain of black glass, in the shape of the Anglican Cathedral tower, looms above a fantasy version of Liverpool.
- Under a full moon, a drunk in a glass-bottomed boat dangles waterproof lamps and searches for his drowned wife – watched from shore by his violet-eyed son.
- Man-eating plants go into a feeding frenzy in a botanical garden.
- A female ‘van Helsing’ flies home aboard an airship with a precious book.

These springboard images were pieces of a puzzle for the narrative to solve by connecting them into a story with internal plausibility. I developed a short screenplay about Flynn, whose mysterious violet-eyed mother had drowned in a ferry disaster. Reaching young manhood, his eyes change colour to violet and a false friend lures him to Violet City, where the ruling houses are in thrall to the androgynous Empusa that live in Cathedral Mountain.

All the trigger images were incorporated into the story, even the antique shop, which I based on an old independent book shop called Atticus that existed in several Bohemian city centre locations during the 1970s and 1980s, and where I bought a Penguin copy of Peake’s *Gormenghast* and, later, had William Burroughs sign a copy *Cities of the Red Night* when he came to read with Adrian Henri. Zimmer Antiques is a key location, where a sought after object arrives, only to be stolen by a youth gang led by the hero’s false friend.

I wrote a song describing the short film’s opening sequence from the point of view of the drunk in the boat, recalling the day his wife appeared to drown, and decided to use the first screenplay as the basis for a novel that I developed for a Ph.D. in creative practice, extending the story, fleshing out characters and adding new plotlines. During this stage of the creative process, my colleague John Maxwell suggested turning the novel into a feature-length screenplay.

Our production involved filming costumed actors in front of a massive green screen in a derelict factory canteen. The script developed in response to the limitations of the photo-shopping process used for background scenery, our miniscule budget and SFX capabilities. For instance, I used canals and barges as the main form of transport within the city through practical considerations in terms of animation. We could not have horse-drawn carriages. But this added an extra



Figure 5: Carson and Zeb rob Zimmer's Antiques.



Figure 6: Aaron's glass-bottomed boat.

Dave Jackson

dimension, as we began to incorporate images of Venice amongst Liverpool's docklands, Georgian Quarter and Three Graces.

Liverpool past

There was a monochrome look to Liverpool city centre in the 1960s before its buildings were sandblasted. I recall great soot-blackened department stores and the eight-horned Anglican Cathedral – a Gothic structure to this day – but an ebon mountain to the infant eye. These monochrome memories seem to reflect the black and white of that era's television – blurry images of early *Dr Who* (1963) or of Winston Churchill's interminable state funeral the day I had my first hallucinatory taste of dentist's gas.

These memories became refocused through the later reading of Mervyn Peake's descriptions of *Gormenghast's* dank contiguous sprawl, Moorcock's *Evil Empires* and the nightmarish labyrinths of Kafka's *The Trial*. And, in turn, became models for Violet City and the Cathedral-shaped Mountain that looms above.



Figure 7: Cathedral Mountain penetrates the clouds.

I have lived within sight of the Anglican Cathedral for most of my adult life, but in my imagination it is still the black structure I saw as a child, one side rearing over a sunken public garden, once a quarry and then a cemetery before its headstones were cleared or used as paving. The other side overlooks the river down a slope that was once waste ground with a few crumbling terraced houses before it was built on in the 1990s. Mendlesohn and James discuss the influence of the 'cult of medievalism' that 'manifested[...] in architecture across Europe' and 'most contributed to the look and feel of the fantasy that would dominate in the bookshops of the later twentieth century' (2009: 15), specifically this very Cathedral:

The Anglican Cathedral in Liverpool, which we both independently christened 'Gormenghast' and which was designed by Giles Gilbert Scott, whose grandfather, George Gilbert Scott, designed the fantasia that is St Pancras railway station.

(2009: 20)

For ten years, I studied and worked a few hundred yards from the Cathedral and its presence seeped into my psyche.

My novel is set in an exploded and distorted Mersey estuary. If you picture a massively widened and lengthened Mersey with Liverpool relocated to the tip of the Wirral Peninsula and the Anglican Cathedral tower stretching into the clouds, you have a rough model for the location. Having stowed aboard an airship, Flynn arrives in Violet City and becomes embroiled in a confrontation between the androgynous Empusa and a darkness rising from the acid depths of Cathedral Mountain's central pool.

The greasy Pier Head gangways and landing stages of my childhood are reconfigured in my novel to service paddle steamers and airships that bring travellers to Violet City – their interiors based on the Mersey Ferries and *The Royal Iris*, a locally famous 'drinking vessel' where The Room once performed during a 1980s fresher's week. I took innumerable trips aboard ferries to Wallasey and New Brighton, and the putrid stink of the river before it was cleaned up still lingers in my memory, a sensory echo as well of the acid sting of chlorine in the various public bathing pools of my youth.

New Brighton had an enormous art deco lido with a landscaped outdoor pool that diminished to a concrete beach. This is present in my depiction of Cathedral Mountain's acid pool with its sloping glass shoreline. I recall queuing for hours for the ferry on the way back from New Brighton baths in 1970 because a yacht had collided with the incoming ferry. All but one of the yacht's passengers had drowned. Years later, a woman working in a Lark Lane wine bar told me she was the survivor. Still traumatized by the events of that day, she subsequently committed suicide.



Figure 8: A strangleroot attacks Flynn.

This became conflated for me with the image of Shelly Winters sitting in her car on the riverbed in *The Night of the Hunter* (Lawton, 1957). I originally saw that clip as a 4 year old in my grandmother's sitting room. The black-and-white image made an indelible impact, long before I ever saw the full film, and blended with the real ferry disaster to inspire the opening scene, where Katherine's paddle steamer overturns and she's snatched from her husband's grasp by an Empusa.

Living in Liverpool's Georgian Quarter provided me with a stage set I could tour daily. A popular location for films set in Victorian times, the area has retained its cobbled streets and terraces. When developing ideas, I would wander local streets, climb the cathedral tower or sit and write in its sunken garden overlooked by the mercantile mansions of Gambier Terrace.

The cobbles, terraces and faux gas lamps of Falkner, Catharine, Huskisson and Percy Streets form the basis for descriptions of Black Street and the more salubrious areas of Violet City. Since well-heeled professionals and students have moved into our area, the extensive alley systems, through which I once ran to escape a gang of would-be assailants, have been gated. In recent years, the gentrification of what was once a low rent and somewhat Bohemian area has grown

apace. In Violet City too the merchants have armed bodyguards posted on their doorsteps, warding off the disenfranchised.

The parks, gardens and Palm Houses of Liverpool's 'green belt', with their lakes and floral clocks contributed to the creation of the fictional Serenity Gardens where Lord Splaine's horticulturalists cultivate carnivorous plants. Many of the huge Victorian greenhouses and palm houses have fallen into disrepair, been dismantled or converted into venues for 'events', but the thrill of wandering in those miniature jungles a-drip with condensation lingers in my depiction of the torture garden.

I was fascinated by snapdragons – the name itself – and the disappointment that the flowers did not actually snap of their own accord. Family walks in the botanical gardens of Liverpool triggered childhood daydreams in which deadly blossoms waited to pounce on unsuspecting strollers. Rhododendron bushes held a particular allure because of their dense clusters of reptilian-looking foliage and the vivid colours of their flowers. I was especially fond of the darker and



Figure 9: The paddle steamer leaves the jetty.

bloodier hues. The *Floris Diablos* were gestating in the palm houses of Calderstones and Sefton Park. Crocodile Weed festooned New Brighton's promenade walls at low-tide.

The overgrown brickfields and derelict warehouses where we played became Dog Town in my world, where Violet City's marginalized communities huddle together in fear. Memories of riding on buses through Liverpool's soot-blackened landscapes still colour my perception of those areas in the present. There were jagged, freestanding shells of bombed buildings and rubble-strewn waste grounds in Kensington, Everton, Bootle, Parliament Street and Walton.

I recall walking along the central reservation between Prince's Avenue's great Georgian terraces with my father. I was aged 5 and seeing the multicultural community of Granby Street for the first time. Having lived in monocultural Walton in my early years, Toxteth, with its West Indian and African communities, made an exotic impression, as if I was entering a new country – a country that from my late teens I would inhabit.

My father was a merchant seaman during his teens, in the latter days of casualized labour. Ordinary seamen were often picked on the spot, meaning he could just as easily return home, unchosen, or be off on a trip across the world by tea time. This psychic memory informs my depiction of Flynn, leaving his mining village home on the spur of the moment aboard the airship he's been helping refuel.

I was the son of a man whose daydreams were nuanced by myths of his youth. He had re-enacted schoolboy battles from *Just William* in the parks of Allerton during World War II and would regularly regale me with the fist fights he never lost and tales of catapult and 0.22 rifle shootouts between his gang and others. These stories are present in *Violet City*, filtered through my own experiences of Liverpool's 1970s boot gang culture, before right-to-assembly laws were changed, when hordes of youths would battle in parks and on waste grounds.

My father had a photograph in which he stands beside the 6-foot Grey Nurse he'd caught with a butcher's hook. The image of that powerful shark, reduced to a white-bellied trophy, haunts my depiction of the dissection of a dead Empusa.

My father had a naïve John Wayne moral code that cost him the sight in one eye. In the 1970s, he confronted a gang arguing with a woman on the door of Speke Community Centre, where he taught weightlifting. He went down under the weight of numbers and an unlucky kick collapsed an eye.

Speke, a deprived and dysfunctional post-war estate, seemed dangerous territory back when each area of Liverpool had its own Dr Martens-clad gang. The gang-ruled wastelands of Dog Town in the old warehouse districts of Violet City have their roots in that period and place. My father's insistence on standing up against overwhelming odds informs the character of Nolte, Flynn's one-eyed father substitute, who eventually sacrifices himself while holding out alone against hordes of Raven guards.

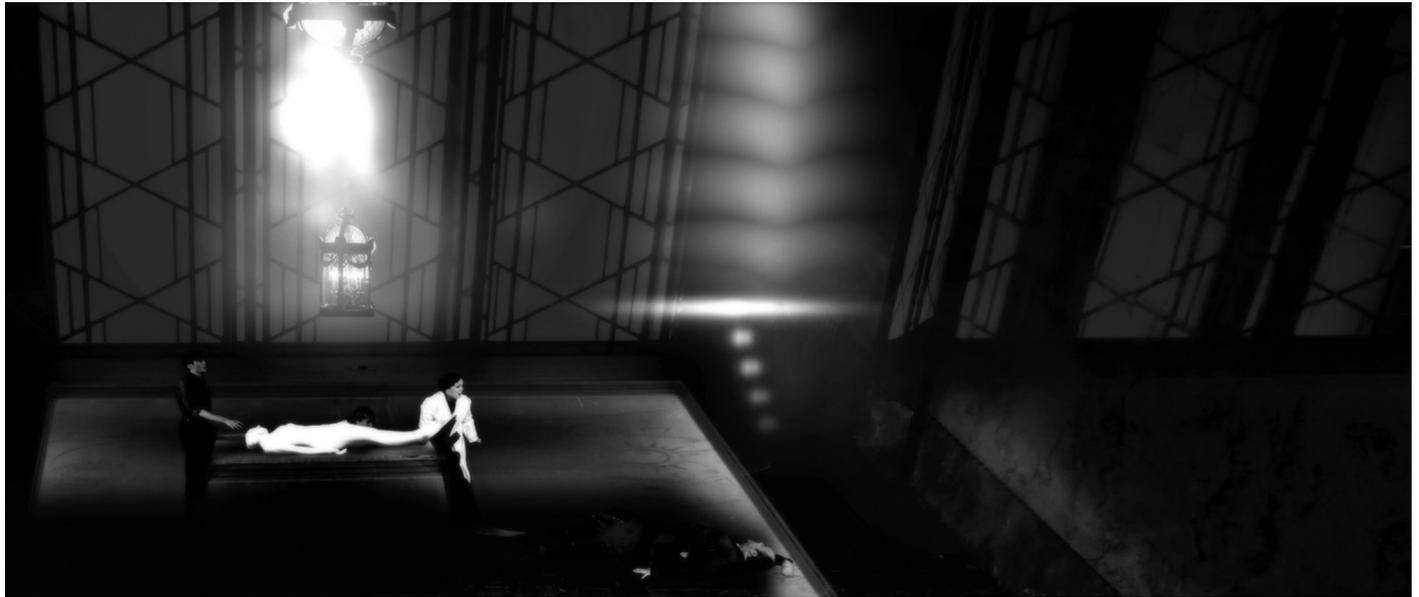


Figure 10: Post-mortem interrupted.

At 19, I rented a flat opposite Prince's Park Gates, where my bands rehearsed, and where, after playing a gig at the Royal Court supporting Pete Burns' Dead or Alive in the summer of 1981, I arrived home to find riot police gathered for the first night of the Toxteth riots. The riots, the razing of The Rialto (a former dance hall where my parents met in the 1950s) and the atmosphere of dangerous carnival abroad during those weeks informs the failed rebellion centred on Serenity Gardens in *Violet City's* later chapters. The boulevard leading to the portcullis of Serenity Gardens is a fantasy version of Prince's Avenue, leading to Prince's Park Gates.

Teenage explorations of the city included aimlessly wandering the business areas and Pier Head, amongst the Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian palaces, plateaus and arcades, daydreaming of underground cultural takeovers of St George's Hall, the Cunard, Liver and Port of Liverpool buildings. I recall fleeing from boot boy gangs, protective of their territory, through parks and golf courses or searching through the ruins of Stanley dock warehouses. I climbed with friends up onto the roof of the Albert Dock, a few years before it was converted into a tourist arcade and Tate in the north, and gazed out over our decayed home town at the Cathedral on the hill above the city.



Figure 11: Nolte faces the Ravens.

In my imagination Peake's *Gormenghast* and the cathedral became conflated with Hydra's huge domed sea base in a *Strange Tales* episode of 'Nick Fury Agent of Shield', Spectre's volcano hideout in the Bond film, *You Only Live Twice* (1967), and Tolkien's Mount Doom. The idea of a vast enclosed space with arcane purpose, hiding in plain sight, produced an especial frisson. At the centre of the vast interior of Cathedral Mountain, there is a fantasy version of New Brighton's landscaped lido, filled with acid. To my childish imagination, the notion that a liquid could dissolve a human being was incredible. Older boys had talked us through Dr No's death-slide into a vat of acid and we'd re-enacted it at various Victorian pools and art deco lidos. I was seduced by the flickering reflections on tiled walls and their echoing spaces. These too have contributed to Cathedral Mountain's interior, its glass beach, reverberating heights and fizzing depths. Even an image that appears in the film of Empusa drifting beneath the acid lake, folded up in foetal balls, is based on a childhood game we used to play, competing to see who could hold their breath longest while clutching our knees and rotating beneath the surface.



Figure 12: Ravens.

I would sneak US superhero comics into the house because my father objected to these, preferring me to read UK comics. One of the English titles was a series called *Britain in Chains*. It involved a struggle to overthrow a fascist state whose troops dressed in chainmail but carried contemporary weapons. This surreal anachronism stayed with me and emerged in the portrayal of Splaine's beak-masked Raven guards, but recombined with the riot police who gathered outside my flat in the summer of 1981.

Liverpool's Chief Constable was responsible for shutting down Liverpool's legendary punk club, Eric's (site of two of my bands' debut gigs) a year before the riots took place. His force was notorious for abusing the 'suss' laws in and around Toxteth – one of the factors that triggered the riots. This draconian behaviour morphs into the lawless Ravens in my fantasized version of Liverpool.

Liverpool's youth culture accelerated in the mid-to-late 1970s. In Matthew Street, the Cavern had been turned into a car park. But the Armadillo Tea Rooms was a Mecca for artistic types,

influenced by The Velvet Underground, David Bowie, Carl Jung and William Burroughs. Jayne Casey had a clothes shop called Aunt Twacky's beneath the original café, where Ken Campbell staged afternoon performances of his *Science Fiction Theatre*.

In 1977, I quit a Fine Art degree to write and perform songs in a New Wave band. The punk era, with its do-it-yourself aesthetic, offered the opportunity to launch a music career from scratch, and within two months of forming a band, I had played Eric's. Punk's speed-fuelled, back-to-basics approach stood in opposition to the fantasy stylings of progressive rock. It was an urban phenomenon, intrinsically opposed to the pastoral medievalism of epic fantasy and that genre's hippy culture associations. Compare Roger Dean's record sleeves for bands like Yes to the Xeroxed Dadaist collage of Buzzcocks *Spiral Scratch*.

For a long while, I drifted away from fantasy fiction, but The Fall's Mark E. Smith showed a way forward. He wrote songs, set in a grotesque alternative north of England, filtering working class social realism through the horror of H. P. Lovecraft. This inspired me to use my local environment as a starting point for 'weird tales' told in song form and to create a personal mythology in response to the Liverpool of my memory and imagination.

Flynn reads the history of the Empusa in Cathedral Mountain's-stained glass panels – gigantic, flickering comic book windows on the past. If you look up at Liverpool's old buildings you'll see scores of arcane symbols moulded into the upper storeys of buildings, mysterious glyphs hinting at secrets – the Liver Birds, themselves, mythical beasts that may one day fly away.

[...] landmarks constantly draw us toward the past. Certain *shifting* angles, certain *receding* perspectives, allow us to glimpse original conceptions of space, but this vision remains fragmentary. It must be sought in the magical locales of fairy tales and surrealist writings: castles, endless walls, little forgotten bars, mammoth caverns, casino mirrors.

(Chtcheglov 1953, original emphasis)

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Contributor details

Dave Jackson, a singer/songwriter, novelist and screenwriter, is Programme Leader on Liverpool John Moores University's MA Screenwriting and a senior lecturer on the Creative Writing undergraduate programme. He has been writing, recording and performing songs with various bands, including The Room, Benny Profane and Dead Cowboys, since the 1980s and has released two solo albums *Cathedral Mountain* and *Red Fin Sunset* in 2010 and 2015, respectively. He completed a Ph.D. by Practice in 2010 entitled 'Personal and cultural mythologies in the development of Violet City: A novel with critical commentary', and has adapted the resulting novel into a feature-length film which he co-produced with director John Maxwell. The novel *Violet City* is due for publication in 2016 and the film of the same name is due for digital release through Indie Rights.

Contact: Dr Dave Jackson, Liverpool John Moores University Screen School, Redmonds Building, Brownlow Hill, L3 5UG, UK.
E-mail: D.A.Jackson@ljmu.ac.uk

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Editor-in-Chief

Benjamin Fraser
The College of Charleston
urbanculturalstudies@gmail.com

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HELEN TOOKEY

Liverpool John Moores University

Re-placing Malcolm Lowry: From the Mersey to the world (and back again)

Keywords

Malcolm Lowry
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place
psychogeography
arts
public engagement

Abstract

This article focuses on a group project that the author has been involved with since its inception in 2009, centring on the Merseyside-born writer Malcolm Lowry (1909–1957). The article outlines the background to the project, how it developed, what it has involved and the ways in which it sits within the context of an arts centre and a university. It focuses on the importance of place, both in relation to the project's aims and in relation to Lowry's own writing. The overall aim of the project can be stated in terms of 're-placing' Lowry: raising his profile on Merseyside (and more widely) as a writer for whom Merseyside remained a significant imaginative resource, making his life and works accessible to new audiences/readerships through a wide range of activities, and establishing Merseyside as a centre for an ongoing programme of work, ideas and events related to Lowry.

Introduction

This article will focus on a group project I have been involved with since its inception in 2009, centring on the Merseyside-born writer Malcolm Lowry (1909–1957). I shall outline the background to the project, how it developed, what it has involved and the ways in which it sits within the context of an arts centre and a university. I shall also focus on the importance of *place*, both in relation to the project's aims and in relation to Lowry's own writing. The overall aim of the project can be stated in terms of 're-placing' Lowry: to raise his profile on Merseyside (and more widely) as a writer for whom Merseyside remained a significant imaginative resource; to make his life and works accessible to new audiences and readerships through a wide range of activities; and to establish Merseyside as a centre for an ongoing programme of work, ideas and events related to Lowry.

'The least-known British literary genius'

Why the need to 're-place' Lowry at all? In his excellent biography *Pursued by Furies*, Gordon Bowker writes, 'Almost certainly Lowry is the least-known British literary genius of the twentieth century' (1994: 612). There are a number of reasons why he is not a more prominent literary figure, among them the fact that *Under the Volcano* (1947) is widely thought to be his only wholly successful book, and that even this, his masterpiece, did not achieve widespread critical recognition for many years.

Lowry's status as a *British* (let alone a 'Merseyside' or 'Liverpool') writer was obscured by the circumstances of his life. Born in July 1909 in New Brighton on the Wirral Peninsula (across the Mersey from Liverpool), Lowry left England in his early 20s and did not return, even briefly, until 1955, just two years before his death. His life was one of restless voyages. Before going to Cambridge to study for his degree in English he sailed to the Far East as a deckhand, a voyage that would form the basis for his first novel *Ultramarine*, published in 1932. In 1930, he sailed from Preston to Norway and managed to meet one of his literary heroes, the Norwegian author Nordahl Grieg; this voyage would feed into his novel *In Ballast to the White Sea* (2014), which was unpublished in Lowry's lifetime. He moved to the United States in 1934 with his American wife Jan Gabriel; and in 1936 they travelled to Cuernavaca in Mexico, which became the setting for *Under the Volcano*, written over a ten-year period and published in 1947. In 1939 Lowry and Jan divorced and he married another American, novelist Margerie Bonner. They moved to Canada and in 1940 settled in a hand-built squatter's shack on Burrard Inlet near Vancouver, where they lived until 1954 and where most of the work on *Under the Volcano* was done. As Bowker notes, when the novel was first published in the United Kingdom, 'it was barely acknowledged. Most critics thought Lowry a Canadian or American' (2009: 143). Lowry's papers are archived at the University

1. For example, *The Malcolm Lowry Review* (originally the *Malcolm Lowry Newsletter*) was published from Wilfred Laurier University (1977–2002), the Malcolm Lowry Centenary Conference was held at the University of British Columbia in July 2009, and most of the high-profile Lowry scholars, such as Sherrill Grace (UBC), Miguel Mota (also UBC) and Paul Tiessen (Wilfrid Laurier University) are based in Canada.
2. 'Quauhnahuac: Die Gerade ist eine Utopie', Kunsthalle, Basel, 2006.
3. *Waterlog* was conceived and developed by Film and Video Umbrella, in collaboration with Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery; The Collection, Lincoln; and the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, University of East Anglia.

of British Columbia and academic study of his work has been dominated by Canadian scholars, institutions and presses.¹ On Merseyside, Lowry is all but invisible: no blue plaques indicate the houses he lived in, nothing is named after him; most people, if asked to name writers from Liverpool or Wirral, will not mention Lowry. The centenary of his birth in 2009 offered an opportunity to try to change that.

Getting started: The Lowry centenary, 2009

Our project of 're-placing' Malcolm Lowry began in 2009, when Bryan Biggs, artistic director at the Bluecoat, Liverpool's centre for the contemporary arts, decided to curate both a gallery exhibition and an accompanying programme of events to celebrate Lowry's centenary. Biggs knew of an exhibition related to Lowry that had been held in Switzerland,² and had seen *Waterlog* in East Anglia in 2007, referencing the work and digressive style of W. G. Sebald.³ These shows inspired him to think about how an exhibition and series of events in Liverpool around Lowry's life and work might be conceptualized. In particular, Biggs conceived the exhibition as moving backwards and forwards in time, including both new work and work created during Lowry's lifetime; and as moving geographically, mirroring Lowry's own travels.

The exhibition featured work by artists Ross Birrell and David Harding, Paul Rooney, Adrian Henri, Julian Cooper, Cian Quayle, Pete Flowers, Jorge Martínez García, Edward Burra, Cisco Jiménez, Ray Lowry and Brian O'Toole, as well as various documentary pieces (rare and previously unseen) relating to Lowry's Merseyside, collated by Wirral-based writer and artist Colin Dilnot, including a set of telegrams from American detectives employed by Lowry's father to keep an eye on him, sent to Arthur Lowry's Liverpool solicitors and now held at the Liverpool Record Office (Figure 1).

Lucid meanderings, sharp-eyed driftings: Lowry, place and psychogeography

This dual (local/international) emphasis was captured in our title for the book we edited as part of the centenary programme, *Malcolm Lowry: From the Mersey to the World* (Bryan Biggs and Helen Tookey, 2009). The book featured many of the artworks from the exhibition alongside new writing about Lowry, both critical and creative, from a range of writers based in the United Kingdom, France, Mexico, Canada and the United States, some of whom we already knew, others of whom had contacted us on discovering that we were planning a series of events around Lowry's centenary. It was structured as twelve chapters to echo the twelve-chapter, single-day structure of *Under the Volcano*. At the centre of the book, providing the key theoretical underpinning, was Mark Goodall's exploration of how psychogeography and the Situationist *dérive* related to Lowry:

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SUPERVISION CARETAKER REFUSING FUNDS WHILE DRINKING COPY
CAREYS LETTER FOLLOWING

PARKS

Charge account Benj. S. Parks.

THE QUICKEST, SUREST AND SAFEST WAY TO SEND MONEY IS BY TELEGRAPH OR CABLE.

Figure 1: Telegram from US agents to Arthur Lowry's Liverpool solicitors, 1939, courtesy Liverpool Record Office.

Why do a psychogeography of Malcolm Lowry? [...] Perhaps [...] Lowry answers the question himself in one of his early letters (to his mentor Conrad Aiken) when he orders himself: 'I must [...] identify a finer scene: I must in other words give an imaginary scene identity through an immediate sensation of actual experience'. That scene is psychogeographical.

(2009: 81–82)

Key aspects have governed our work on Lowry from the outset: the imbrication of place and subjectivity (perfectly captured in the term 'psychogeography'), and the notion of the Wirral/Liverpool setting as an 'originary' topography (Tiessen 2011: 135) that continues to resonate throughout Lowry's life and work. Many of the contributors to the book explored these themes from a variety of angles and with a focus on different locations on Lowry's 'compass' – from the Wirral of his birth, via the Isle of Man of his childhood holidays, to New York, Cuernavaca, British Columbia, and finally and poignantly to Ripe in Sussex, where Lowry died and is buried. Several of the chapters explored in detail the ways in which Tiessen's 'originary space' echoed in Lowry's writing. Michele Gemelos, writing about the novella *Lunar Caustic*, focused on the way in which the text sets Liverpool and New York in parallel as 'gateways to empires, [...], transitional or liminal places, or frontiers' (2009: 58). Annick Drösdal-Levillain's chapter demonstrates the presence of Merseyside at many levels throughout Lowry's collection of short stories *Hear Us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place* (1991): she notes that 'Liverpool is mentioned at some point in each story', and suggests that '[in] spite of Lowry's "flight" away from Liverpool and the Wirral, images and impressions followed him, so that wherever he travelled, Liverpool surfaced in his prose' (2009: 107). In 'The Forest Path to the Spring', the collection's final story, Lowry memorably describes Liverpool as 'that terrible city whose main street is the ocean' (1991: 226). Liverpool in many ways comes to stand for the squalor and horror of modernity, and the rural idyll 'across the water' as a kind of paradise, as Lowry 'transmutes the geography of Liverpool/Wirral into a symbolic structure that recurs throughout his writing' (Biggs and Tookey 2009: 12). As Drösdal-Levillain shows, the Merseyside topography was to be strikingly mirrored by that of Dollarton on the Burrard Inlet (Figure 2) – enabling Lowry to develop, especially in 'Forest Path', the symbolic structure of paradise and hell facing each other across the water. As always with Lowry, the territory was both actual and symbolic.

Public events and partnerships

Alongside the exhibition and the book, the third strand of the 2009 activities was a programme of public events, as shown in Figure 3. The programme included talks, film screenings, a poetry reading, a dance piece and a performance, with public interaction, of a specially commissioned song cycle written and performed by poet Ian McMillan, musician Luke Carver Goss and



Figure 2: Dollarton, Burrard Inlet, British Columbia, photograph by Bryan Biggs.

Liverpool-based Sense of Sound community choir. To celebrate the Mexican Day of the Dead festival (central in *Under the Volcano*), Mexican artist Javier Calderon created an altar in the Bluecoat's central foyer space (see Figures 4 and 5) to which members of the public were encouraged to contribute, and hosted a range of related activities including the making of typical Day of the Dead food. The most ambitious activity was 'The Voyage that Never Ends', a 'psycho-geographical day' visiting key Lowry-related sites on the Wirral, conceived primarily by Mark Goodall. The event drew on the combination of Goodall's theorizing of Lowry's work as inherently psychogeographical and Colin Dilnot's knowledge of the territory and Lowry's relations to it. They jointly produced sets of postcards featuring archival images together with quotations from Lowry and other sources, which were given out to participants at the various staging-points throughout

the day (Figure 6). As Goodall comments in his chapter, 'The trick [of a psychogeographical outing] is to import some aspects of the text (fragments, poetry, illustrations, lists, images) with you into the landscape' (2009: 82).

MALCOLM LOWRY CENTENARY EVENTS DIARY

OCTOBER

Tuesday 6 / 6.30 – 7.30pm the Bluecoat, FREE	Artist's talk: Bellevue: Lowry and New York with Paul Rooney
Wednesday 7 / 6.30pm FACT, Tickets £7/£5.50/£5	Film: Under the Volcano (15) <i>Dir. John Huston, 1984</i> introduced by Mark Goodall
Saturday 10 / 8 – 9.30pm the Bluecoat, Tickets £5	Dance: A Lining of Bees Angus Balbernie
Wednesday 14 / 6 – 7.15pm the Bluecoat, Tickets £3/£2	Talk: Pursued by Furies: A Life of Malcolm Lowry with Gordon Bowker (Part of Chapter & Verse literature festival)
Thursday 15 / 1 – 2.30pm the Bluecoat, FREE	Discussion: Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano led by Literature in Pubs
Saturday 17 / 12 – 1pm the Bluecoat, FREE	Exhibition tour: The Lighthouse Invites the Storm with Bryan Biggs
Tuesday 20 / 6.30 – 7.30pm the Bluecoat, FREE	Artists' talk: Lowry and Under the Volcano Ross Birrell, David Harding, Julian Cooper
Saturday 31 / 9am – 9pm Wirral/Liverpool/the Bluecoat Tickets £15/£5	Psychogeographical Day: The Voyage That Never Ends Hosted by the Firminists (ferry/bus tour, walking, films, talk, live music)

NOVEMBER

Sunday 1 / 1 – 4pm the Bluecoat, FREE	Interactive installation: Malcolm Lowry Day of the Dead Altar Javier Calderon & participants
Tuesday 3 / 6.30 – 7.30pm the Bluecoat, FREE	Artists' talk: Lowry, the Isle of Man and the Day of the Dead Cian Quayle, Pete Flowers
Tuesday 10 / 7.30 – 8.45pm the Bluecoat, FREE	Talk: Malcolm Lowry's Merseyside with Colin Dilnot
Tuesday 17 / 6.30pm FACT, Tickets £7/£5.50/£5	Film: The Cabinet of Dr Caligari (U) <i>Dir. Robert Weine, 1920</i>
Thursday 19 – Sunday 22 Please check for times the Bluecoat, FREE	Poetry reading The Poetry of Nordahl Grieg Part of NICE Nordic festival
Saturday 21 / 8 – 9.30pm the Bluecoat, Tickets £5	Song cycle: The Re-entry of Malcolm Lowry into Liverpool Ian McMillan, Luke Carver Goss, Sense of Sound
Every Saturday / 2pm the Bluecoat, FREE	Exhibition Tours: Under the Volcano

the Bluecoat, School Lane, Liverpool L1 3BX.
www.thebluecoat.org.uk Tickets and Information 0151 702 5324

at the Bluecoat.

Figure 3: Diary of events accompanying the 2009 Malcolm Lowry centenary exhibition, courtesy the Bluecoat.



Figure 4: Javier Calderon's Day of the Dead altar, the Bluecoat foyer, November 2009, photograph by Bryan Biggs.



Figure 5: Javier Calderon helping members of the public to Day of the Dead food, the Bluecoat foyer, November 2009, photograph by Bryan Biggs.

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Figure 6: Advertisement for the Liverpool Museum of Anatomy (to which Lowry refers in *Ultramarine*), used by Goodall and Dilnot for one of the postcards handed out during *The Voyage that Never Ends* event, 31 October 2009. On the back of the postcard was a quotation from Jean-Paul Richter: 'The earlier in life the first fright occurs, the more dangerous it is'.

The multimedia or multidisciplinary nature of the events programme (including film, dance, poetry, music, walks, ‘memorializing’ and even baking) was inspired or enabled to some extent by the wide range of Lowry’s own influences. He was notably influenced by film (especially German Expressionist film), and by jazz music; there are frequent references to specific films, musical compositions and jazz musicians throughout his work. He himself thought of his masterpiece *Under the Volcano* in this kind of multimedia way, writing to his publisher Jonathan Cape in 1946:

It can be regarded as a kind of symphony, or in another way as a kind of opera [...] It is hot music, a poem, a song, a comedy, a farce, and so forth. [...] It is a prophecy, a political warning, a cryptogram, a preposterous movie, and a writing on the wall.

(Lowry 1985: 66)

As the programme listing (Figure 3) shows, a number of the events were produced or hosted in association with existing Bluecoat cultural programmes or those run by other organizations: for example, the talk by Gordon Bowker was part of the Chapter & Verse Literature Festival, the reading of the poetry of Nordahl Grieg was part of the NICE (Nordic Intercultural Creative Events) festival, and the informal discussion of *Under the Volcano* was run by the Literature in Pubs group. Biggs was able to use the Lowry theme to connect a whole range of events that involved both public participation and working in partnership with other cultural organizations and programmes. The Lowry centenary events in 2009 provided a template that would feed into the Bluecoat’s more explicit formulation of its goals and methodologies. The Bluecoat’s internal evaluation of the events was positive, recording 20,474 visits to the exhibition (including many repeat visits) and total audience figures of 966 for the events programme. The evaluation report noted that visitors ‘enjoyed the range of art displayed, the way Lowry’s biography wove through the show, and the “brave” curatorial and installation decisions’, and that ““hardcore” Lowry fans were augmented by [a] much broader audience who managed to find [their] way into Lowry mainly through the exhibition’; ‘several visitors were inspired to read *Under the Volcano* and some then returned to see the show again’ (Bluecoat 2009b: n.p.).

Continuing the project: The Lowry Lounge and *The Firminist*

The exhibition, the accompanying events, and the book served to create a core group of people who would continue the Merseyside-based Lowry project after 2009: Bryan Biggs, Colin Dilnot, Mark Goodall, myself, poet Robert Sheppard and short-story writer Ailsa Cox (both lecturers in the Department of English and History at Edge Hill University). We decided to organize an annual Lowry-focused day, using the Bluecoat as a base, to be held on a Saturday as close to the Day of

the Dead as possible. After some debate we settled on the name ‘the Lowry Lounge’ for these events – chosen not only for its alliteration but also because we particularly wanted the event to sound informal (avoiding, for instance, the academic connotations of ‘symposium’ or ‘seminar’), welcoming and entertaining. ‘Lounge’ has connotations of a bar or nightclub and implies the presence of music and alcohol, both of which have indeed featured at the events. (An image frequently used on our publicity [Figure 7] shows a shirtless Lowry ‘lounging’ on a deck chair or similar outside his shack at Dollarton.) We also decided to start an annual publication, edited by Mark Goodall, titled *The Firminist* after Geoffrey Firmin, the alcoholic hero of *Under the Volcano*.⁴

4. <https://thefirminist.wordpress.com>.

The Lounge events and *The Firminist* have provided opportunities for the various members of the group both to create new work themselves and to commission new work from other people. For instance, for the 2012 Lounge I created a short performance piece based on postcards written by members of the public and deposited in a special ‘postbox’ in the Bluecoat; and for the 2014 Lounge I wrote a sequence of collage poems titled ‘Bellevue Sonnets’, derived from the text of Lowry’s *Lunar Caustic* (1991) (and published in issue 4 of *The Firminist*). The Lounge events have featured talks, readings, music and film screenings, with films ranging from the 1967 BBC documentary *Rough Passage* to Eisenstein’s *¡Que Viva México!*. The 2011, 2012 and 2014 events also featured guided walks led by Colin Dilnot, exploring Liverpool with reference to Lowry’s life and writings. As I shall show in the following sections, Dilnot’s contributions have played a particularly significant role in enabling our project, specifically through its local focus, to contribute to and become part of the wider world of Lowry studies.

Research ‘on the ground’

Dilnot began to take a particular interest in ‘the topography of [Lowry’s] life and work’ (2009: 27) following his own move to Lowry’s birthplace, New Brighton on the Wirral, in the mid-1980s. Combining observation on the ground, research using sources such as electoral registers and Ordnance Survey maps, and readings of Lowry’s published texts and unpublished manuscripts and papers, Dilnot investigated Lowry’s references to, and uses of, Wirral locations. Being physically ‘on the spot’, together with access to local records, enabled Dilnot to clarify points that previous writers on Lowry had been unable to investigate. For instance, his search for ‘Braeside’, the prep school Lowry attended between 1914 and 1916, initially led him to a street in West Kirby named Kirby Park, since that was the address for the school given in Internet sources. Unable to get any further, he resorted to more old-fashioned research methods:

I decided to knock on a few doors and see whether any local people had any knowledge of the school. I struck lucky with my first call, finding a woman who had lived in the area

THE LOWRY LOUNGE

Friday 29 October 7.30-10pm Free



Following the Bluecoat's centenary celebration of Merseyside born writer **Malcolm Lowry** last year, the 'voyage that never ends' continues with an evening of talks, discussions, films and sounds. For fans of the author of *Under the Volcano*, there will be fascinating perspectives from **The Firminists** on Lowry's use of music in his writing and mapping his Liverpool; showing of a rare documentary film; the launch of a new Lowry periodical; readings from creative writing responses to Lowry; a volcanic Lowry-themed disco, and finishing with a toast to the writer.

The Bluecoat, School Lane, Liverpool L1 3BX

www.thebluecoat.org.uk

Places limited: reserve ticket at Tickets & Information: 0151 702 5324

the Bluecoat.

Figure 7: Flyer for the first Lowry Lounge event, 2010, courtesy the Bluecoat.

for many years and who took me to the right house. At some point in the 1900s, or perhaps earlier, the road the school was in was renamed Devonshire Road, which accounted for my inability to find the school in Kirby Park.

(Dilnot 2009: 29)

His guide took him to meet the current occupant of 'Braeside', who told him that 'she had found graffiti carved into woodwork on the stairs from the building's time as a school' (Dilnot 2009: 31).

It was after reading this chapter that New Zealand-based Lowry scholar Chris Ackerley contacted Dilnot to ask whether he could help him with his own Lowry researches. Ackerley was engaged in compiling the (extremely detailed) annotations for the forthcoming scholarly edition of *In Ballast to the White Sea* (2014), set mostly in Liverpool and Preston, and recognized that Dilnot's local knowledge would be key. Dilnot worked with Ackerley over several years to help investigate the locations, sources and background knowledge that went into Lowry's text. They combined research trips 'on the ground' with the use of reference material such as maps, guidebooks and directories to garner information about the specific sites, streets and buildings described by Lowry, especially those which had been altered or lost altogether since the 1930s. What emerged from this research and from the rediscovered text of *In Ballast* itself was a fascinatingly new angle on Lowry – as a writer not only using his knowledge of Merseyside and Lancashire to provide the setting for his novel, but using that setting specifically to address the political situation of the 1930s in a much more visible way than in his previously published works.

In Ballast to the White Sea: Lowry, Liverpool and politics

The publication of *In Ballast* is of particular interest to scholars and readers of Lowry for a number of reasons. The first concerns the history of the manuscript itself. 'Who ever thought they would one day be able to read Malcolm Lowry's fabled novel of the 1930s and 40s, *In Ballast to the White Sea*? Lord knows, I didn't', writes Michael Hofmann in his *TLS* review (2015: n.p.). Lowry had been working intermittently on drafts of the book since the early 1930s, but the manuscripts were destroyed when his and Margerie's shack burned down in June 1944, leaving only a few fragments of the text: 'two small notebooks with preliminary notes [...], the first two pages of a 1936 typescript, a notebook with an earlier draft of Chapters I and II, and several small, circular pieces of charred paper from a handwritten draft and another typescript, both otherwise lost' (McCarthy 2014: xix). Lowry never subsequently attempted to rewrite the novel; 'instead', as the book's editor Patrick McCarthy puts it, 'he mourned its loss and, in time, romanticized it as a (potentially) great book, its destruction one of the central tragedies of his life' (2014: xix). In typical Lowry fashion, the book's dramatic loss is worked into another of his (autobiographical) fictions, *Dark is the Grave*

5. Their bags were full of all kinds of paraphernalia, even junk, you would never expect to make use of on a short vacation. [...] in addition to what few clothes Primrose had brought, there were fragments of manuscript, piles of it [...] even the burned remnants of the manuscript of *In Ballast to the White Sea* in there [...] four almost perfect circles of page fragments, upon each of which, in the faded typescript of the text, appeared, terrifyingly enough, the word "fire". (Lowry 1972: 51)

Wherein My Friend is Laid (published posthumously in 1969), where *In Ballast* becomes the lost work of his writer-protagonist Sigbjørn Wilderness.⁵

In fact, though, there was another copy of the manuscript, entrusted in 1936 by Lowry and his first wife Jan Gabrial to Jan's mother for safekeeping. The publication of Gabrial's memoir *Inside the Volcano* in 2000 raised hopes that an almost complete draft of *In Ballast* thus did in fact still exist. As McCarthy explains in his introduction to the scholarly edition, the textual situation turned out to be more complex and less satisfactory than that: of the 1936 draft only a few photocopied chapters remained, and Gabrial had not only retyped Lowry's text but made corrections and revisions to it at later dates (2014: xxv–xlv). The text is incomplete, with the last three projected chapters existing only as notes. Thus, the published version of *In Ballast to the White Sea* (2014) can only be viewed as a work in progress, a version of what would no doubt have become a very different novel had Lowry completed and revised it for publication.

Hofmann argues that *In Ballast* gives us...

[...] a shift of focus to things that were never central in any of Lowry's previously published books, but which he probably knew better than anything in them: England in the 1920s and 30s, Liverpool where he hailed from, Cambridge where he went to school and university.

(2015: n.p.)

He does not, however, include in this list the central political dimension.

The protagonist of *In Ballast*, Sigbjørn Hansen-Tarnmoor, is a version of Lowry himself. Here he is the son of a Liverpool shipping-line owner, a Cambridge undergraduate trying to become a writer. Sigbjørn and his twin brother, Tor, are struggling with guilt over their family's responsibility for the recent sinkings of two of the company's ships: the text implies that there may have been some deliberate attempt to cut costs and make more money for the shareholders. The first three chapters are set in Cambridge; the fourth chapter consists of a series of letters written by Sigbjørn, and leads us to the understanding that Tor has committed suicide. In Chapter V, Sigbjørn is back in Liverpool, walking with his father around the city, both tormented by guilt. This chapter depicts the economic depression in Liverpool and the consequent protests:

Suddenly, rounding a corner near Gladstone Place where the Sailors' Institute stood and out-of-work seamen and firemen hung about in little groups, [...] they found themselves held up in a crowd. A heavy smell of cloth, as warmly damp as the interior of a laundry, was penetrating their nostrils. Suddenly: shouts, the ringing of hooves, chaos. [...] For a second Sigbjørn suspected they had been recognized and some demonstration was being

made against his father. But they soon realized it was a mass workers' meeting in process of being broken up by the police.

(Lowry 2014: 64)

The walk around Liverpool confronts Sigbjørn and his father with a grim picture of working-class suffering and alienation: 'These men walked down to the sea with the faltering steps of people who had been monstrously deceived. Who had deceived them? Whither that grey emptiness in the eyes of the unemployed?' (Lowry 2014: 69). On Mount Pleasant, they drift into the 'Century Theatre, the Home of Unusual Films' (Lowry 2014: 66), which is showing Pudovkin's *The End of St Petersburg*: 'The Winter Palace was captured before their eyes. St Petersburg was declared Leningrad. The workers slowly filed into the palace, the strike leader's wife following after, carrying a pail of potatoes' (Lowry 2014: 67). Coming out of the cinema, discussing with his father whether Communism can offer a way forward, Sigbjørn sees Liverpool as a kind of Leningrad-in-waiting: 'As they moved down Lime Street down past the Washington Hotel to the isthmus of Manchester Street, a vision of Leningrad was still superimposed upon Liverpool in his mind's eye' (Lowry 2014: 69). We see here Lowry using the Liverpool setting, his own detailed knowledge of the city, and of course his own background as the son of a wealthy cotton broker who had 'gone up in the world' (from Toxteth to the far more genteel New Brighton and then affluent Caldy) to explore the fraught social and political situation of the time.⁶

The publication of *In Ballast to the White Sea* (2014) has been particularly exciting for our project in a number of ways. The text itself provides a new and much more explicit demonstration of Lowry as a Merseyside writer. *In Ballast* is unique in his writing in having large sections actually set in Liverpool and Lancashire. As described above, Colin Dilnot's local knowledge enabled him to play a crucial role in the process of investigating and annotating the edition – thus creating a strong link between our ongoing project and the wider world of Lowry studies, particularly in Canada. In turn, the combination of Lowry's text and Dilnot's researches with Ackerley have enabled us to programme a number of *In Ballast* guided walks, following the circular walk around Liverpool city centre made by Sigbjørn and his father in Lowry's text. These have included readings from Lowry's chapter alongside historical documentation. For example, the site of the Century cinema on Mount Pleasant is now occupied by a multi-storey car park, but Dilnot has been able to show participants on the walks photographs of the building (Figure 8) and to describe its history, alongside reading Lowry's evocative description – literally re-placing Lowry and his writing on the Liverpool streets he is describing.

Finally, we were extremely pleased to host, as part of the 2014 Lowry Lounge event, the only official launch event for the book, and to welcome the book's editor, Patrick McCarthy, along with Vik Doyen, who had edited *Swinging the Maelstrom* (Lowry 2013).⁷ Lara Mainville, the director of

6. Patrick McCarthy is probably right to speculate that this may be one reason why Lowry later preferred to romanticize the novel as irretrievably lost rather than attempting to revise or rewrite it, 'since *In Ballast* was shaped by the politics of mid-1930s Europe it would have required considerable rewriting to accommodate the very different world situation of the mid-1940s' (2014: xxi).



Figure 8: The Century cinema building, Mount Pleasant, Liverpool, probably 1950s. After the cinema had closed, the building was used for a variety of purposes, such as auction rooms, courtesy Colin Dilnot.

the University of Ottawa Press, claimed that '[i]t is only fitting that a novel penned in Canada by an English expat should be launched in his homeland' (Mainville 2014: n.p.). All of us who had been involved since 2009 in the project of 're-placing' Lowry on Merseyside felt that this event was genuine confirmation of the success of our project.⁸

Organizational frameworks

In December 2011 Mary Cloake, the new Chief Executive at the Bluecoat, asked Bryan Biggs to make explicit the principles that were already implicitly underpinning the curatorial and engagement activities of the Bluecoat. The 'Lines of Enquiry' for Bluecoat resulted:

Lines of Enquiry for the Bluecoat

We have identified five lines of enquiry that reflect the Bluecoat's commitment, firstly, to developing artistic and curatorial practice, and, secondly, to broadening our engagement with audiences.

1. Reflection on practice

Revisit, recontextualize and reinvigorate earlier work of our artistic alumni and other artists, as well as own curatorial practice.

2. Examining modernism

Revisit modernism as a continuing productive line of enquiry, particularly through interdisciplinary work and through the digital.

3. Arts engagement with society

Explore art in a broader cultural and social framework through the agency of the arts centre as civic space and the blurred territory between 'high' art and 'popular' culture.

4. Cultural diversity

Reflect artists' engagement with identity in the broader context of an evolving multiculturalism, and the diversity and equality environment, particularly in relation to Liverpool's population and its history.

7. A version of this novella, put together from various draft versions by Earle Birney and Margerie Bonner Lowry, was published under the title *Lumar Caustic* in 1963. The UOP scholarly edition disaggregates Lowry's different versions of the text and provides a detailed scholarly apparatus explaining the textual history.
8. Also a highlight of the 2014 Lounge was the participation of Iain Sinclair, who gave a talk about his own interest in Lowry and his presence in Sinclair's 2013 travelogue *American Smoke*. Again, the fact that we were able to attract such a high-profile literary figure to our event was not only gratifying in itself but is also something we can build on for future events. Another highlight was the presence, for the first time at any of our events, of two members of Lowry's family, descendants of his brother Wilfred.

9. However, the Lines of Enquiry extend beyond the scope of the Lowry project in at least two important aspects, those described in Line of Enquiry 1 (reflection on practice) and Line of Enquiry 4 (cultural diversity); my point is not that the Lowry project fulfils or reflects every one of the Lines of Enquiry, only that it was a key project in the process of their articulation.

5. Heritage

Interrogate and reinvigorate histories – including the Bluecoat’s and Liverpool’s – from contemporary perspectives, using multiple art forms and accessible arts and heritage pathways, including digital.

(2014: n.p.)

The Lowry project reflects a number of these lines. Most obviously, it engages with modernism (Line of Enquiry 2) both as a historical phenomenon and as a continually productive context. A key emphasis of both the exhibition and book was the richness of Lowry’s work as an ongoing source for new creative work. The post-2009 Lowry Lounge events have provided a continuing context for the generation of new work inspired by Lowry. The project’s interdisciplinary nature has encompassed recognizable artistic genres such as painting, writing and film-making, alongside activities (such as psychogeographical walks) less easily framed within a traditional genre perspective.

The project has consistently aimed to promote the engagement of arts and the broader society (Line of Enquiry 3), with a focus on participatory events such as guided walks and a deliberately informal, non-academic ‘feel’ to the Lowry Lounge days. Lowry’s work itself incorporates many references what could be seen as ‘popular culture’ or ‘low’ artforms – jazz, popular song lyrics, cinema, advertising, golf – and this has enabled us to present the author of what could be seen as a forbiddingly ‘difficult’ modernist novel in accessible and engaging ways.

Finally, the project has a clear local-historical aspect (Line of Enquiry 5). It has sought both to boost local awareness of Lowry as an important twentieth-century writer hailing from Merseyside, and to demonstrate the very deep and detailed presence of Merseyside in his writing. Alongside that, it has offered opportunities for audiences and participants to engage with local history.

The process of articulating and formulating the Lines of Enquiry involved reflecting on the principles already implicit in the Bluecoat’s projects and practices. Bryan Biggs suggested in conversation with me that the Lowry project, more than any other, had helped him and Mary Cloake to articulate the Lines of Enquiry, in many ways providing a template and an example of best practice for them to build on with other work (Biggs, July 2015, personal communication).⁹

Since January 2015, I have been employed as Lecturer/Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing at Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU), and this has provided another institutional context within which our Lowry project has ongoing relevance. LJMU promotes itself as a ‘modern civic university’:

We are a university that sits with great pride in the city and region of Liverpool, a true city of the world. Our clear aim is to be recognised globally as a modern civic university which,

Helen Tookey

whilst being outward looking, supports our students and partners in the sense of place that is our city and our region.

(2012: 2)

The term 'sense of place' echoes its use elsewhere in the university's self-conception:

LJMU is a modern civic university embedded within the cultural landscape of Liverpool and our partnerships support our vision to make learning and culture more accessible to our students and the people of Liverpool, supporting them in their sense of place in the city.

(<https://ljmu.ac.uk/about-us/cultural-partnerships>)

LJMU's cultural partners include Tate Liverpool, the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall, and the Everyman and Playhouse theatres, among others, and the further development of such partnerships and external engagement work with cultural organizations in Liverpool is an important strand of the university's strategy of positioning itself as the leading Merseyside HEI in this regard. The Lowry project represents an excellent means by which to develop partnership work with the Bluecoat and other organizations and acts as a focus for an ongoing, imaginative programme of public events.

Conclusion: Looking forward

The 2014 Lowry Lounge, with the launch of *In Ballast to the White Sea* and the presence of notable Lowry scholars, alongside Iain Sinclair and members of Lowry's family, marked a significant milestone in our project. Our aims now are to build on this success, and we have the following ideas as work-in-progress.

- A conference in 2017, hosted jointly by LJMU and the Bluecoat, to commemorate 70 years since the publication of Lowry's major work *Under the Volcano* and 60 years since his death. 2017 is also the 300th anniversary year for the Bluecoat, the building dating from 1717 as a charity school. In being co-hosted by LJMU and the Bluecoat, and involving both academic and creative/artistic aspects, this would represent a partnership activity between HEI and arts centre, to the benefit of both. We envisage the event itself forming part of a programme of public events.
- The development of a small archive or research collection, to be hosted by LJMU. This would not be a rival to the main scholarly Lowry archives at the University of British Columbia, but would provide useful resources for anyone interested in Lowry. We have accumulated various

editions of Lowry's works, books about him, documentation of events, related ephemera, and material relating to Dilnot and Ackerley's research for *In Ballast*.

- A more visible outward-facing presence for our project, such as a website. At the moment the project exists only as a series of discrete events and their documentation.

We have made considerable progress in our aim of 're-placing' Malcolm Lowry on Merseyside, and creating a 'centre of gravity' for work, ideas and events relating to him, which can balance and complement the existing 'centre' in British Columbia. The project has generated new work across a number of media and genres. It has acted as a focus for participatory public events of various kinds. It has contributed to the elucidation and formalizing of the principles governing the work of a major arts centre. It is enabling partnership work connecting various institutions. Most fundamentally, it is enabling an ongoing exploration of the many different ways in which place is central to the work of arguably 'the least-known British literary genius of the twentieth century'.

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Contributor details

Helen Tookey is a poet, writer and editor. Based in Liverpool, she teaches creative writing at Liverpool John Moores University. She has worked in editorial and production roles for publishing companies including Liverpool University Press and Carcanet Press. Her first full-length poetry collection, *Missel-Child*, was published by Carcanet in 2014 and was shortlisted for the 2015 Seamus Heaney Prize for Best First Collection. Her other publications include *Anais Nin, Fictionality and Femininity: Playing a Thousand Roles* (Oxford University Press, 2003), *Malcolm Lowry: From the Mersey to the World*, co-edited with Bryan Biggs (Liverpool University Press, 2009) and *New Poetries VI*, co-edited with Michael Schmidt (Carcanet Press, 2015). Her practice as a poet includes collaborations with visual artists and musicians. She is researching themes of 'orphaned writing', speech and communication in the work of Malcolm Lowry and the Scottish late-modernist poet W. S. Graham.

Contact: Liverpool John Moores University, Redmonds Building, Brownlow Hill, Liverpool L3 5UG, UK.
E-mail: h.j.tookey@ljmu.ac.uk

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Notes for Contributors 2015

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Index – Volume 8

- Ashmore, N. and Moriarty, J., From student to artist: Supporting students' creative development through place-based work, pp. 37–54.
- Bennett, S., From the cupboard to the boardroom and back: 100 plaster objects, pp. 29–35.
- Black, H., Place-based arts, pp. 7–10.
- Clarke, J. W., On ungrounded ground: A poet in residence at the dump, pp. 109–125.
- Crooks, K., Picturing the M62: The Trans-Pennine motorway: A work in progress, pp. 151–171.
- Dave, J., *Violet City*: Fantasizing Liverpool in song, story and film, pp. 173–191.
- Hawley, S., *South Home Town*: Film and the imaginary city, pp. 127–143.
- Overall, S., Walking against the current: Generating creative responses to place, pp. 11–28.
- Stannard, J., Poetry inspired by Genoa, pp. 145–150.
- Tookey, H., Re-placing Malcolm Lowry: From the Mersey to the world (and back again), pp. 193–215.
- Williams, J., Place, space and self: Site-responsive art in a globalized world, pp. 85–95.
- Winckler, J., Evoking 'Lureland': Site-marking the pioneer bungalows of Peacehaven, pp. 63–84.
- Worden, J., Bonneville Salt Flats: This place, pp. 55–62.