BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

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BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

Introduction

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Introduction

Sandy Balfour

One of the pleasures of editing Brief Encounters is the range of submissions from scholars across the humanities. The editorial call we put out was simple: we welcome rigorous and original articles. That covers a lot of ground, and the response, perhaps predictably, was anything but simple, and a gratifying confirmation that research in the arts and humanities across the CHASE institutions is vibrant, collegiate and relevant. Some of the research and much of the writing of these articles took place in less the ideal conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted research plans, closed archives and libraries and confined many scholars to their homes and lodgings. The editorial committee for this edition were not able at any point to meet in person; like so many we learned new ways of working, and new ways of collaborating.

When preparing the call for submissions we made two decisions: the first was not to make it about the pandemic (the scale of which we did not fully understand) and the second was not to impose a theme. Anyone who has attended one of the CHASE gatherings, whether in person or online, knows that an astonishing variety of research and thinking in the arts and humanities is being done in our universities. We wanted this issue to reflect that, and we are pleased to say it does. We are pleased also that this is not a 'pandemic issue', although two articles consider consequences of the pandemic. Jack Manzi took the opportunity to think about 'the relationship between isolation, honesty, and one of the central problems posed in Wittgenstein's later work: the problem of dogmatism', while Joseph Jones and Jon Winder, seeing how COVID was challenging our ideas of we live, took the opportunity to write with great sensitivity and insight about the philosophical and historical roots of the binary distinction between work and play.

Even though we did not set a theme, the idea of one exerts a strong pull, here and in much of academia. The temptation is to consider the articles and to try, in an introduction like this, to find what is common — and to call it a theme. We have resisted this siren call. Zhenkai Tong writes about the Chinese

'May Fourth and New Culture literary canon.' Benedetta Castagna makes specific proposals for new ways of curating the Carlo Crivelli's art in La Marche, and Georgia Haire writes with refreshing candour about the experience of vaginismus and the validity of female pain.

Questions of language and how we communicate arise in other contributions. There are three sections to Brief Encounters: articles, creative pieces and reviews, and the second of these allows for much experimentation. In this issue we include two pieces which explore how people communicate. In The Observer Observed, Elizabeth Chappell, Simon King, and Dominique Baron-Bonarjee reflect on the process of making a film about their experiences as researchers, and how we communicate our findings. Kotryna Garanasvili found new ways to use Virtual Reality technologies to think about the relationship between literature and architecture. Natasha Richards created a film script designed to aid educators working with young people and their experience of sexting. And in the review section Andrew Burton considers theatrical responses to the crisis of global warming. How can theatre reflect on 'hyperobjects' which humans are able to compute but not directly see?

The great sociologist Teodor Shanin, who died in 2020, wrote of 'revolution as a moment of truth', by which he meant that a revolution confronts its participants with the need to examine their assumptions, images and beliefs 'in the merciless light of experience'.[1] Much of public discourse today concerns what sounds, but does not yet feel, like a revolution. What unifies the articles in this edition of Brief Encounters is not their subject matter, nor their theoretical approaches, but the fact that the authors are all people who welcome that merciless light, and seek to shine it clearly and courageously on the full range of human experience, and then to share their findings in a language that is never still and is ever open to the improvisations of all its speakers.

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[1] Teodor Shanin, *Revolution as a Moment of Truth: Russia 1905-1907,* (Yale University Press, 1986), p 184.

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BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

Work and Play during Covid-19

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Work and Play during Covid-19

Joseph Jones and Jon Winder

The Covid-19 pandemic has challenged the way we experience and think about work and play, unsettling long-held assumptions about the spatial and temporal conditions of labour and leisure for adults and children in Britain. That these activities take place in separate times and spaces has long been enshrined in both academic analysis and the wider public imaginary. But while the efficacy of this distinction has been called into question in recent years, Covid-19 and its resultant lockdowns have brought the inadequacy of this simplistic binary crashing into the homes of the general public.[1] For many, the times and places where they would normally work and play have merged into one another. To make sense of these processes, we explore the historical and philosophical roots of this distinction and its component ideas, highlighting the power that they have exerted since the 19th century on the way we organise time and space, before considering what impact the Covid-19 lockdowns have had on these normative assumptions. The ongoing but mutable presence of public health restrictions continue to challenge these assumptions, and as a result there is an opportunity to rethink the temporal and spatial dimensions of these fundamental activities.

Defining Work, Leisure, and Childhood

The concepts of work, leisure, and childhood have provided an influential analytic structure for historians and philosophers since the turn of the 19th century. The expectation of education in childhood, the necessity of work in adulthood, and the differentiation from leisure are couched in separate spatial and temporal environments. Modern notions of childhood were examined by Philippe Ariès (1962) and Lloyd DeMause (1974) and their thinking continues to inform the work of scholars across a range of

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[1] For scholarly critiques of this distinction, see for example Clare Langhamer, Women's Leisure in England, 1920-1960 (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2000); Jonathon Crary, 24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep (London: Verso Books, 2014).

disciplines including history, geography, and sociology.[2] While lockdown is not fundamentally challenging notions of childhood, it is calling into sharp relief the ubiquitous role played by educational spaces in the lives of children: not only are schools places of education and learning, they are also a means of providing food, safety, socialisation, and stability for many children. Moreover, the difficulties with home schooling faced by many children and parents highlight a tension in traditional distinctions between childhood, education, and leisure based on clear spatial divides.

Similar challenges have been levelled at work and leisure. Karl Marx and Max Weber established fundamental philosophical foundations for distinguishing work and leisure in the 19th and early 20th centuries, which have more recently had their gendered foundations challenged by scholars including Luce Irigaray, Ann Ferguson, and Nancy Folbre.[3] At the same time, a general division between leisure and work pervades both academic and public imaginaries, and continues to inform the policy decisions of many governmental bodies.[4] We now face a new question: how can work and leisure properly be distinguished when they happen in the same space (i.e. the home) and with little temporal distinction? The challenge of Covid-induced lockdowns means that the binary distinctions are no longer fit-for-purpose. and urgently need to be reconsidered as public health restrictions ease.

Time for Work

However, to reconsider them requires acknowledgement that the distinctions between work and leisure, and childhood and adulthood, are historically contingent. The roots of the working day, as it is presently understood, can be traced back to the 19th century, when the temporal conditions of adult work were paradoxically founded in legislation primarily concerned with children's working time: the 1802 Factory

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[2] Notable examples include Harry Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society 1880-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); *Children's Geographies: Playing, Living, Learning,* ed. by Sarah Holloway and Gill Valentine (London: Routledge, 2000); Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005).

[3] Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Max Weber, *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Wilder Publications, 2009); Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1958); Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993); Ann Ferguson, *Sexual Democracy: Women, Oppression, and Revolution* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1991); Nancy Folbre, *Who Pays for the Kids? Gender and the Structures of Constraint* (London: Routledge, 1994).

[4] The significance of these constructs is evident in works such as Andrea Veltman, *Meaningful Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Peter Borsay, *A History of Leisure: The British Experience since 1500* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Bernard Stiegler, *Automatic Society: Volume 1: The Future of Work* (London: Polity Press, 2016); Darrell West, *The Future of Work: Robots, AI, and Automation* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institute Press, 2018).

Act began a 70-year process that would gradually see the creation of a standardised working week for adults. However, the eight-hour working day that is common to many was largely established during a period of social and economic growth following World War One; prior to this the average working week was between 55 and 70 hours.[5] Not only were working hours considerably longer, but campaigning social elites also perceived 'idleness' amongst the working classes as a problem that would inevitably breed immoral behaviour, with the only cure being more purposeful post-work leisure activities.[6]

This concern for working class leisure activities also included children, and a clear distinction between the times and spaces of work and leisure was deemed necessary as early as 1784. Dr Thomas Percival, a factory health inspector from Manchester, made this particularly clear:

We earnestly recommend that a longer recess from labour at noon and a more early dismission from it in the evening, to all those who work in the cotton mills; but we deem this indulgence essential to the present health and future capacity for labour, for those who are under the age of fourteen; for the active recreations of childhood and youth are necessary to the growth, the vigour and the right conformation of the human body.[7]

While this initial call for more time outside of work for children came from health campaigners and philanthropists, the idea also gained momentum amongst newly organising labour movements. Partially fuelled by newspaper articles like Richard Oastler's *Yorkshire Slavery* (1830) and literary works like Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1838), unions organised around the issue. Incrementally they achieved a minimum working age of ten in 1842 and a maximum working time of ten hours per day in 1874, helping to establish a separation of work and leisure and contributing to a definition of childhood as the time before a person could work.[8] Rather than working, then, children were seen to need both education and the opportunity to develop both physically and socially.

It is important to emphasise that while we might think of childhood as a universal experience, it is in fact a historically, geographically, and socially variable set of ideas and values and therefore distinct

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[5] Robert Skidelsky, 'How to Achieve Shorter Working Hours' (Progressive Economy Forum, 2019).

[6] B.L. Hutchins and A. Harrison, *A History of Factory Legislation* (London: P.S. King, 1911).

[7] Hutchins and Harrison, p. 8.

[8] Cecil Driver, *The Life of Richard Oastler* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 36–48.

from any individual child. The meaning of childhood in 19th century Britain was still relatively ambiguous because it was being apophatically defined, but by the early 20th century (for the middle classes at least) 'a recognisably modern' notion of childhood was in place: it had been legally, legislatively, socially, medically, psychologically, educationally and politically institutionalised.[9] Along with changing attitudes towards work and education, one of the key components of this institutionalisation of childhood was a focus on the places where children played.

Space for Play

Alongside campaigns for limited working time and opportunities for rest was an interest in *how* and *where* this newly established leisure time could and should be spent. Working class leisure in particular became 'an anxiety to reformers both middle and working class' in the mid-19th century.[10] Attempts were made to promote 'rational' forms of recreation as an alternative to the perceived problems of drinking, gambling and spending time in the street. The provision of public green spaces from the 1840s onwards is perhaps the most notable achievement of these reformers: a gentle perambulation around the park while observing the wonders of nature (in a curated form at least) was seen as an entirely rational way for both adults and children to spend their leisure time.

But while children's leisure was undoubtedly of keen interest to reformers, dedicated spaces for children to play were rarely a feature of early public parks. An early attempt to create dedicated play spaces was the short-lived mid-19th century Playground Society, which sought to provide 'harmless and happy' places for London children to play, 'uncontaminated by street influences.'[11] But it was not until the late 19th century that the playground campaign developed momentum as unhealthy conditions in cities, as well as the need for fresh air and interaction with 'pure' nature, became more compelling.[12]

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[9] Harry Hendrick, 'Constructions and Reconstructions of British Childhood: An Interpretative Survey, 1800 to the Present', in *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*, ed. by Allison James and Alan Prout (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 29–53 (p. 30).

[10] Hugh Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution c.1780 — c.1880* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), p. 187.

[11] Sophia Elizabeth De Morgan, *Memoir of Augustus De Morgan* (London: Longmans Green, 1882).

[12] Karen Jones, '"The Lungs of the City": Green Space, Public Health and Bodily Metaphor in the Landscape of Urban Park History', *Environment and History*, 24 (2018), 39–58.

Fig. 1
Little Dorrit's Playground', *Illustrated London News*, 8 February 1902, p. 208.

Despite this rhetoric, new play spaces were often rather bleak. Little Dorrit's Playground opened in south London in 1902 as a flat gravelled area, adorned by a single ornate lamppost (figure 1). While the form of the ideal playground evolved, the principle that children should play in playgrounds and not in the street became more widespread and firmly established. As interwar park managers grappled with increasing demand for leisure and entertainment opportunities, and society more consciously attempted to deal with the increasing number of child road deaths, playground equipment manufacturers, such as Charles Wicksteed & Co., began producing swings, slides, and roundabouts to equip children's playgrounds (figure 2).[13] At the same time, campaigning organisations such as the National Playing Fields Association promoted this vision of the equipped playground across the country.[14] Despite being challenged by post-war 'adventure playground' advocates like Marjory Allen, the image of the playground as a space comprising swings and slides, and the understanding that it was *the* place in which children should play, has been remarkably durable.[15]

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[13] Joe Moran, 'Crossing the Road in Britain, 1931-1976', *The Historical Journal*, 49 (2006), 477–96; 'Wicksteed Catalogue: Playground Equipment, Tennis Posts, Fencing and Park Seats' (Charles Wicksteed & Co. (1920) Ltd, 1926), Wicksteed Park Archive.

[14] P. Maud, 'Recreation in Public Parks and Open Spaces', *Playing Fields Journal*, 1.2 (1930), 7–13.

[15] Marjory Allen, *Adventure Playgrounds* (London: National Playing Fields Association, 1961).
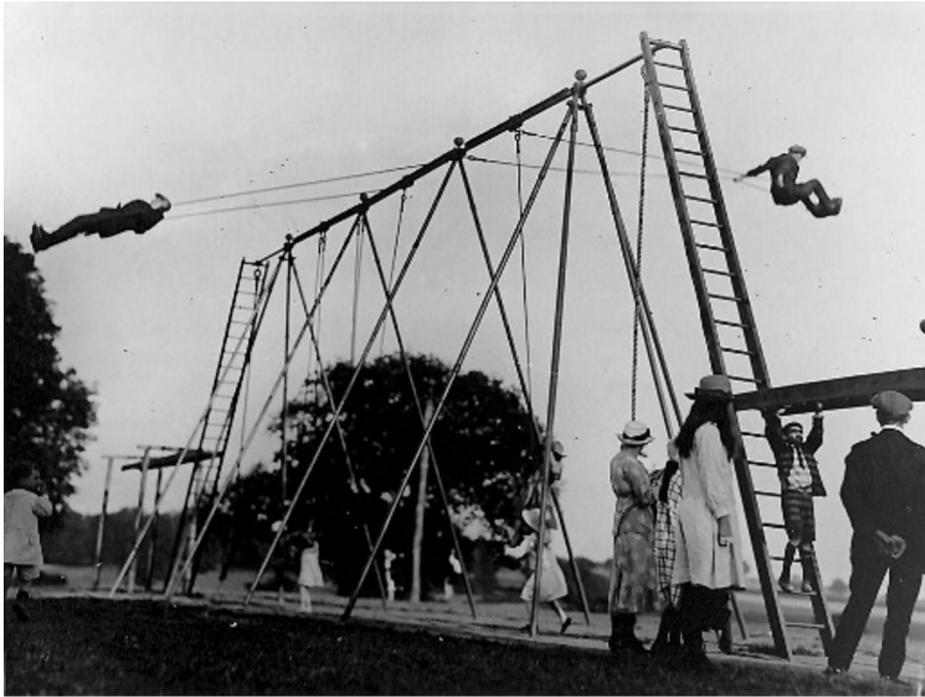
Fig. 2
'Large Swings in Wicksteed Park', 1920, Wicksteed Park Archive.

In the last 20 years, the idealisation of the playground has come under sustained attack. From a general sense that childhood freedom has been lost to campaigns to reclaim streets for play, the playground has been a focal point for scholarly debate around children's place in public space and in society more broadly.[16] The extent to which public spaces function as either a form of social control or spaces of transgression has been much debated, but the green spaces themselves have largely endured.[17] However lockdown has brought these debates into sharp focus: with children unable to play at school, and access to public parks often restricted, the importance of the spatial quality of children's leisure, and by extension leisure in general, becomes a pressing issue. That schools and playgrounds are the public places that children inhabit is often taken for granted, but the restrictions imposed by repeated lockdowns highlight the social and spatial injustice affecting many children, particularly those from low-income families. While some children have access to private gardens and playground-like

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[16] Gill Valentine, 'Children Should Be Seen And Not Heard: The Production and Transgression of Adults' Public Space', *Urban Geography*, 17 (1996), 205–20; Chris Cunningham and Margaret Jones, 'The Playground: A Confession of Failure?', *Built Environment*, 25 (1999), 11–17; Kim Rasmussen, 'Places for Children — Children's Places', *Childhood*, 11 (2004), 155–73; Matthew Thomson, *Lost Freedom: The Landscape of the Child and the British Post-War Settlement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[17] Dominick Cavallo, *Muscles and Morals: Organized Playgrounds and Urban Reform, 1880-1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981); David Lambert, 'Rituals of Transgression in Public Parks in Britain, 1846 to the Present', in *Performance and Appropriation: Profane Rituals in Gardens and Landscapes*, ed. by Michel Conan (Dumbarton Oaks: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 195–210.

equipment, many more do not, and pandemic-related dangers of close-contact socialisation continue to affect plans to fully reopen public spaces. As with much of the response to Covid-19, recent attempts by the government to limit the use of the playground to those without gardens, followed by a swift policy reversal, further highlight the ongoing uncertainty about the broader purpose of such leisure amenities and their significance to individual users and society more broadly.[18]

In the face of restrictions and uncertainty, one of the few spaces available for many children to play has been the street. The first lockdown (understood roughly as 26/03/2020 — 04/07/2020) saw far fewer motor vehicles on the road, making them attractive places for children to play and challenging dominant expectations about the use of such spaces for leisure activities.[19] But as motor vehicles returned in increasing numbers, and as second lockdown measures (understood roughly as 31/10/2020 — 02/12/2020) continued to restrict outside activity, the space available for children to play diminished once again, reinforcing the need for a reappraisal of the assumptions that shape children's place in public space.

Powerful Dichotomy

While the notion that leisure was a moral evil and that workers 'would take to bad courses if allowed any interval between work and sleep' may have largely disappeared today, spatial distinctions between leisure and work remain fundamental to British social structures.[20] As lockdown demanded the closure of spaces of labour and leisure, so too it altered fundamentally the experience of work for many: industries that remained open, and even hospitals and healthcare centres, were operating under radically different conditions, including the use of extensive personal protective equipment, social distancing, and often reduced staff levels. It would seem that traditional assumptions about work and leisure were faltering and yet the dichotomy remained. Throughout the 20th century, this binary distinction between work and play shaped gender norms, influenced government policy, structured scholarly sub-disciplines, and

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[18] Jessica Elgot, 'No.10 Says All Children Can Use Playgrounds to Exercise', *The Guardian*, 11 February 2021.

[19] Department for Transport, 'Official Statistics: Transport Use by Mode, Great Britain, since 1 March 2020' <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/transport-use-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic> [accessed 15 February 2021].

[20] Hutchins and Harrison, p. 28.

affected philosophical discourse. It continues to be a dominant distinction. Businesses and industries still use these notions of working time and leisure space to impede flexible working practices or to maintain fixed working hours, while the distinction is used to conceal work under the guise of play in the design of new business campuses, like those of Facebook and Google. Crary has posited that the breakdown of distinct work and leisure time, and flexible home-based working conditions, are gradually increasing, but the binary distinction between work and leisure remains pervasive — the notion of a 'home office', adherence to 'office hours' during the pandemic, and remote learning for many children demonstrated its influence within the public imaginary.[21]

In many ways this simple distinction obscured the complexities of everyday lived experience, particularly for those who had to participate in both external paid employment and the 'reproductive' private labour of familial or parental responsibilities within the home. Furthermore, this dichotomy failed to keep pace with changing ideas about, and experiences of, childhood. Just as others have shown for Victorian dichotomies relating to gender, sexuality, and cleanliness, we argue that the binary understanding of work and play is no longer sufficient as an organisational device for scholarly thinking, nor as an analytical framework for understanding the world, nor as a basis for developing social policy.[22] While changing employment practices have seen a gradual shift in the times and places of work, the immediate and all-encompassing impact of Covid-19 lockdowns has made this a pressing issue, one that demands that we urgently revisit the way we think about when and where we work and play.

Academic Criticism

Despite its significance in the popular imagination, the distinction between work and leisure has been problematised by both historians and philosophers, particularly because it fails to acknowledge the labour-power often exerted by women in apparent leisure activities, and more broadly speaks to a wide ignorance of reproductive labour in discussions of leisure. Clare Langhamer, for example, argues that

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[21] Jonathon Crary. *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London: Verso Books, 2014).

[22] Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Tom Crook, 'Putting Matter in Its Right Place: Dirt, Time and Regeneration in Mid-Victorian Britain', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 13.2 (2008), 200–222; James Eli Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

historical accounts of leisure in Britain have focused on 'the activities of working-class men, within a periodisation that has often ended with the onset of the First World War' which has 'led historians to actively ignore or misrepresent women's experiences.'[23] Langhamer contends that the binary distinction between spaces and times of work and leisure *'distorts* the experiences of women. Many women… do not necessarily experience a sharp distinction between work and leisure, and for many the two interact, often occurring simultaneously.'[24] She cites ironing whilst listening to the radio, cooking for pleasure and for necessity, and going on a self-catering holiday. This last example is particularly prudent for showing the ineffectiveness of a binary work-leisure distinction, as the notion of 'self-catering' denotes the continued necessity of reproductive labour. This is satirically noted in *The Simpsons,* when Homer cries 'but Marge, you deserve a vacation: it's a chance for you to clean up after us in a whole different state!'[25] This line of argument has been presented by a number of other feminist thinkers, including Andrea Veltman, Luce Irigaray, and Betsy Wearing, who all argue that historical notions of leisure-as-distinct-from-work fail to account for the labour that occurs outside of traditional spaces of paid employment such as factories, offices and other workplaces.[26]

Other scholars cite technological advancement as a further critique of the distinction between leisure and work, particularly with reference to the continuation of gender and economic inequality. Virginia Eubanks has argued that economic, gender, and cultural inequality is being enshrined in the development of newly automated technologies, while Jonathon Crary has suggested that the ubiquity and portability of smart phones is encroaching on the sleeping habits of the modern worker and breaking down the barrier between work and rest.[27] Sherry Turkle has posited that modern technologies — smart phones and social media in particular — are breaking down traditional spatial

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[23] Langhamer, p. 1.

[24] Langhamer, p. 16.

[25] Mark Kirkland, 'The Simpsons', *Fear of Flying*, 1994.

[26] Irigaray, Luce, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993); Betsy Wearing, *Leisure and Feminist Theory* (London: Sage Publishing Ltd, 1998); Andrea Veltman, 'Simone de Beauvoir and Hannah Arendt on Labor', *Hypatia*, 25.1 (2010), 55–78.

[27] Virginia Eubanks, *Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor* (New York: Picador, 2019); Jonathon Crary. 24/7: *Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London: Verso Books, 2014).

distinctions regarding socialisation, and have affected intimacy and connectivity amongst their users.[28] Marc Augé and Manuel Castells both offer important discussions of the changing spatial conditions of work and leisure, and the further disintegration of simple distinctions between places of rest and of work.[29] Despite writing before the pandemic, these thinkers have highlighted key issues with the role of technology in labour and work which are increasingly clear given the pivotal role that these technologies have played in lockdown.

These criticisms garner significant attention within academia, and to some degree beyond in mainstream media, and yet they have been largely ineffective in challenging the existence of a work-leisure distinction in the public imaginary. The importance of this discussion within the context of Covid-19 is that these issues are no longer purely academic: traditionally conceived spaces of work and leisure have fused for many people during lockdown, although to varying degrees depending on individual economic and social status; the temporality of work can now encroach on all hours of the day, seemingly without interruption, as mobile devices combine work and non-work communication at home and beyond. If the private, reproductive labour of the home fell disproportionately to women prior to the pandemic, the additional pressure of having to home-school children can only compound pre-existing gender inequality. Similarly, if children required structured spaces and times of education and leisure prior to the pandemic, then the closing of facilities, no matter how important or necessary for addressing the pandemic itself, must be matched with an effective alternative.

Social Challenges

The Covid-19 pandemic and resulting changes highlight how this distinction, and its resultant structures, do not work now, but also *did not properly work before*. The increase in part-time work and the expansion of the gig economy sets millions of workers outside of the eight-hour day forty-hour week structure, which already seldom applied to hospital, restaurant, or logistics workers. On the one hand,

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[28] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less From Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

[29] Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity* (London: Verso Books, 1995); Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society: Economy, Society and Culture*, The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture, 1, 3 vols (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), i.

the escape from a hegemonic workweek structure allows more people with familial commitments to earn a wage. On the other hand, the gig economy can be highly exploitative, as Callum Cant details in his first-hand account of being a Deliveroo driver. While he acknowledges the political organisation occurring within these industries, in general he finds that traditional notions of work no longer apply.[30] Sarah Kessler and Colin Crouch have both presented equally negative accounts of life in the gig economy.[31] All three agree that the breakdown of traditional spatial and temporal conditions of work encroach on leisure time, extend the working day far beyond an acceptable limit, and fail to provide the care and benefits that a more traditional form of work might confer.

The breakdown of the binary distinction is both clear to workers and is often analysed by media platforms.[32] However, there are also calls to reduce working time within the traditional spatial and temporal structures that exist, with many campaigns calling for four-day weeks and more flexible working arrangements. Some argue that while the binary distinction between work and leisure may itself be useful, the current formation of the activities is not conducive to a happy or healthy work-life balance, particularly surrounding the normalisation of a five-day forty-hour week.[33] The temporal conditions of work are therefore too long and excessively precarious for contractual and gig workers, and insufficiently flexible in the more standard 40-hour working week.

As the spatial and temporal conditions of work have been questioned, the same elements of leisure have been challenged in recent years. Although adults have long attempted to constrain children's play into designated sites, informal play spaces like the street have been important to children as an arena where they can create their own leisure culture — and with fewer cars during the first lockdown, the street once again became somewhere that children might play. Campaigns for the reclamation of the street as a place of play have gained momentum, while regressive attempts to create socially segregated children's playgrounds in new housing developments have been opposed by resident-led campaigns

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[30] Callum Cant, *Riding for Deliveroo: Resistance in the New Economy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019).

[31] Sarah Kessler, *Gigged: The Gig Economy, the End of the Job, and the Future of Work* (New York: Random House, 2019); Colin Crouch, *Will the Gig Economy Prevail?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019).

[32] Joe Keohane, 'In Praise of Meaningless Work', The New Statesman, 4 March 2015.

[33] Andrew Barnes, *The 4 Day Week: How the Flexible Work Revolution Can Increase Productivity, Profitability and Well-Being, and Create a Sustainable Future* (London: Piaktus, 2020).

that have attracted widespread media and government attention.[34] There has also been significant concern about the consumption of electronic media by children and its consequences for individuals and wider society.[35]

These pre-lockdown criticisms remain important today. The pandemic gives more urgency to calls to move away from this artificial distinction, and further demonstrates the need for an understanding of work and leisure that both recognises the complexity of individual life *and* promotes social and spatial justice. Some tentative steps are already being taken in this direction. New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has been a vocal political proponent of working time reduction as a response to Covid-19; technology companies like Twitter and Facebook are offering more flexibility for employees to work from home even after lockdown restrictions have eased; and movements to reclaim streets as places as play for children have been particularly active during lockdown.[36] Moreover, many of these movements seek to establish measures that will remain in place after Covid-19 has ended.[37] These movements are historically contingent, and are extensions of the same arguments presented before the emergence of Covid-19. However, lockdown has brought the unsuitability of the classic distinctions between leisure and work into sharp relief *for wider society*, not just for those in academia or the gig economy. The gendered, ageist, and economic injustices associated with the distinct spaces and times of work and play become inescapable in a state of lockdown. As a result, the public perception of this distinction is by no means as solid as it was before the pandemic. While Covid-19 is not the root cause of these movements, it is an important moment in the struggle for more equitable and representative spatial and temporal conditions of both work and leisure. Altering these conditions cannot simply be a response to Covid-19, rescinded whenever public health restrictions are relaxed. Rather, the structures as a whole need urgent reform, to make them more equitable and accountable.

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[34] Playing Out, 'Outdoor Play and Activity', 2020 <https://playingout.net/covid-19/outdoor-play-and-activity/> [accessed 23 July 2020]; Harriet Grant, 'Too Poor to Play: Children in Social Housing Blocked from Communal Playground', The Guardian, 25 March 2019.

[35] Matthew Thomson, Lost Freedom: The Landscape of the Child and the British Post-War Settlement (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)

[36] Eleanor Ainge Roy, 'Jacinda Ardern Flags Four-Day Working Week as Way to Rebuild New Zealand after Covid-19', *The Guardian*, 20 May 2020; Kate Conger, 'Facebook Starts Planning for Permanent Remote Workers', *New York Times*, 21 May 2020; Paul Kari, 'Twitter Announces Employees Will Be Allowed to Work from Home "Forever"', *The Guardian*, 12 May 2020; Playing Out.

[37] Alex Soojung-Kim Pang, 'To Safely Reopen, Make the Workweek Shorter. Then Keep It Shorter', *The Atlantic*, 30 April 2020.

Conclusion

Largely formulated in the nineteenth century, the binary distinctions of work and play had been increasingly questioned by scholars, activists, and those working in precarious employment. However, traditional ideas about where and when work and leisure should take place have been confronted by Covid-19 and the accompanying lockdown restrictions in ways and at a pace previously unimaginable. While they may have been inadequate in the past, the experience of lockdown and the associated changes to the times and places that people work, learn and play has revealed the conceptual failure of these distinctions far beyond academia and the gig economy and with far greater credence. As school closures, playground restrictions and wider lockdown measures continue to have far-reaching consequences, and as more businesses embrace working-from-home practices, the need to redress and properly define precisely what is meant by work and leisure, beyond a binary spatial or temporal distinction, becomes urgent.

We have highlighted a tension between current social expectations and the conceptual framework favoured by academics and in the lived experience of workers. Any legislation or social structures that intend effectively to manage a post-lockdown world must take this tension, and the resultant conceptual failure, into consideration, and must put forward a model of work and leisure that can better account for the changing shape of the world (both in view of Covid-19 and the experiences of many both prior to and during the pandemic). Covid-19 has not destroyed a perfect distinction but has instead revealed its inadequacy to a greater number and wider range of people, making the need for a more dynamic and reflective understanding of both work and play essential to a more productive and meaningful future for both individuals and society.

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Alone with One's Thoughts: Wittgenstein on Philosophical Thinking in Isolation

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In association with

Alone with One's Thoughts:
Wittgenstein on Philosophical Thinking in Isolation

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Jack Manzi

1.1

The COVID-19 pandemic has overseen drastic changes to the structure and organisation of our lives. The infectiousness of the virus has necessitated the implementation of social distancing and isolation measures in many countries, which in turn has forced us to reconsider how we operate within our personal and professional spheres. Academic research has been no exception. With the temporary closure of universities and research spaces, many researchers have had to re-evaluate their work and the environment within which it is conducted.[1]

How does philosophy fare when conducted in isolation? There is something of a tradition of isolation amongst some of the great philosophers. Boethius wrote _The Consolations Of Philosophy_ in isolation whilst under house arrest.[2] Martin Heidegger insisted that seclusion was the best environment for philosophical thought. More pertinently to this paper, Wittgenstein also spent long and philosophically productive periods in isolation. This pattern of great philosophers working in isolation raises the question: what is it about isolation that is (perhaps occasionally) conducive to thinking?

To answer this question, I approach this issue by examining Wittgenstein's own experiences of isolation, and how they intersect with his philosophical thought.[3] In this paper, I offer a semi-philosophical, semi-biographical overview of Wittgenstein's experiences of isolation.[4] I examine certain correlations between Wittgenstein's time in isolation and the philosophical themes found in his work and writings. In doing so, I hope to understand some of the benefits that isolation might have for thinking, in encouraging multi-perspectival approaches to intellectual problems and undermining ingrained

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[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented to the Wittgenstein's Philosophy in Times of Crisis virtual seminar group on the 3rd July 2020. I am grateful to the attendees for their comments and feedback.

[2] Boethius, S. (1962). The Consolation of Philosophy. Oxford University Press.

[3] Wittgenstein extensively chronicled his life experiences alongside his philosophical writing — to the point where they are arguably indistinguishable from one another and often published and cited alongside one another.

[4] For an argument in support of philosophical-biographical pieces (particularly on Wittgenstein) see Monk 2001. Additionally, for a general biography of Wittgenstein's life see Monk 1991.

intellectual dogmas. I conclude with some observations on how the findings of this paper might be read through the lens of what has been coined the 'liberatory' reading of Wittgenstein by Rupert Read.

1.2

Although Wittgenstein underwent various periods of isolation in his life, it was to a small hut in Skjolden, Norway, that he would most often retreat, and there that he produced some of his finest philosophical work. In 1913-1914, he wrote the notes that would form the basis of his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. In 1936 he wrote the first 188 remarks of the *Philosophical Investigations*. A year later, he would write the material that would become the first part of *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*.

Luckily, we have a good picture of what his original reasons for choosing to self-isolate in Norway were, from the writings and anecdotes of those closest to him at the time:

> To wit: that he should exile himself and live for some years right away from everybody he knows — say in Norway. That he should live entirely alone and by himself — a hermit's life — and do nothing but work in Logic. His reasons for this are very queer to me — but no doubt they are very real for him: firstly he thinks he will do infinitely more and better work in such circumstances, than at Cambridge, where, he says, his constant liability to interruption and distractions... is an awful hindrance. Secondly he feels that he has no right to live in an antipathetic world ...– a world where he perpetually finds himself feeling contempt for others, and irritating others by his nervous temperament — without some justification for that contempt etc:, such as being a really great man and having done really great work.[5]

This comment comes from Wittgenstein's companion David Pinsent toward the end of their holiday in Norway in 1913. Although the holiday had been less than pleasant for Pinsent, who had to endure the full force of Wittgenstein's mercurial moods, Wittgenstein decided it had been one of the best holidays he had been on, finding Pinsent's company immensely comforting whilst he struggled with Russell's 'beastly theory of types'. The routine of work, combined with the distraction-free environment of the isolated part of Norway that they were staying in, provided the ideal conditions for Wittgenstein, and by the end of the holiday Wittgenstein had settled on going into exile for some years, so that he might continue to work in peace.

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[5] From David Pinsent's diary. 24.9.13, to be found in G.H Wright (ed) *A Portrait of Wittgenstein as a Young Man from the Diary of David Hume Pinsent, 1912-14,* Wiley-Blackwell (1990), p. 79.

Bertrand Russell notes his reaction to Wittgenstein's plan, and Wittgenstein's response with the following:

> I said it would be dark, & he said he hated daylight. I said it would be lonely, & he said he prostituted his mind talking to intelligent people. I said he was mad & he said God preserve him from sanity. (God certainly will).[6]

The responses from Wittgenstein that both Pinsent and Russell record are telling descriptions of what Wittgenstein saw as the benefits of isolation. Most obviously, isolation provided Wittgenstein a physically distraction free space for engaging in philosophical work. But can this be it? Surely one does not need to go to the extremes of retreating to the Norwegian wilderness to find a less distracting workplace. Interestingly however, both Pinsent's and Russell's accounts of Wittgenstein's decision to go into exile make note of Wittgenstein's concerns over his relationships with people and the influence of those relationships on his work. Both reflect a concern that these relationships, in some way, impinge on his ability to do great work.

Wittgenstein would routinely return to isolation. The time spent in Norway during the 1930s made up the bulk of his experiences of isolation, within which Wittgenstein came to substantially revise his earlier philosophical work in the *Tractatus*, and form the material that would come to be known as the *Philosophical Investigations*. It is surely here then that answers to what Wittgenstein must have got from his time in isolation are to be found. In examining this passage of Wittgenstein's time in isolation, however, we must first explore one of the central problems he struggled with in the later part of his career: the problem of dogmatism.

1.3

The problem of dogmatism is introduced explicitly in PI §131 as a problem that is easy to fall into when doing philosophy. Broadly speaking, the problem of dogmatism relates to a practice in philosophy of asserting philosophical models as necessary descriptions of what reality *must* be like, independently of any future experience, as opposed to using these models as *objects of comparison* to be compared alongside reality (with both similarities and dissimilarities between the model and reality being noted).

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[6] Letter from Bertrand Russell to Lucy Donelly, 19.10.13, quoted in Monk (1991) p. 91.

Wittgenstein perceived the threat of dogmatism in philosophy as relating to 'injustice'. He writes that it is only by using our models in this comparative way that we can avoid 'injustice' in our philosophical statements, and consequently, dogmatism (PI §133). In this context, injustice can be understood as the unfair representation of the conceptual phenomena under investigation by means of simplification or misrepresentation (through the insistence of said particular model over the possibility of alternatives).[7] Philosophising dogmatically can then be seen as the practice of pursuing a philosophical model for the sake of the model itself rather than for the sake of arriving at any kind of clarity or insight around the reality which it is intended to describe. The dangers of doing so are immediately obvious. As an individual, one opens themselves up to claims of disingenuity and dishonesty when thinking, and risks discrediting themselves if they are thought to be thinking with a particular agenda or bias in mind. There is also the possibility of future philosophical work done on the back of such a philosophical model being similarly unjust or vacuous, and thus also at risk of being thrown out if the foundational philosophical model is proven to be either problematic or undesirable in some way.[8]

But how is it that we arrive at this kind of thinking, and why does Wittgenstein diagnose this as something that is 'easy to fall into', specifically when philosophising? One could speculate a number of reasons for why a particular philosophical model might be attractive for contextual reasons. Luckily, and as is observed by Gabriel Citron, we need not speculate.[9] We can look to a passage from Schopenhauer that Wittgenstein quoted multiple times. Schopenhauer describes how barriers in philosophy arise from people not wanting to admit they were wrong, or wanting to deliberately take a radical and unorthodox position, or other such contextual reasons.[10] This certainly accords with remarks that Wittgenstein makes over the course of his philosophical career: the idea that difficulty in philosophy is not just the intellectual difficulty of grappling with problems, but is also the difficulty to define struggle with one's

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[7] This is the line taken by Oskari Kuusela. For a full account of Wittgenstein's conception of dogmatism, see O. Kuusela *The Struggle Against Dogmatism: Wittgenstein and the Concept of Philosophy,* Harvard University Press (2008).

[8] Kuusela makes a similar argument relating to hierarchical arrangements in philosophy. See Kuusela (2008) p. 81.

[9] Citron, Gabriel 'Honesty, Humility, Courage, & Strength: Later Wittgenstein on the Difficulties of Philosophy and the Philosophical Virtues'. *Philosophers' Imprint* 19. (2019). In fact, this is the precise kind of criticism that Wittgenstein makes about W.E Johnson, when he quipped that '[h]is life's work has been his three volumes on logic. You can't expect him now to see that there is something fundamentally wrong with what he has written. I wouldn't try and discuss with Johnson now' (F:III:193).

[10] MS:158:34v.

will against the desire to see things in a particular way.[11] Wittgenstein illustrates this kind of difficulty thus:

> It is as if a man is standing in a room facing a wall on which are painted a number of dummy doors. Wanting to get out, he fumblingly tries to open them, vainly trying them all, one after the other, over and over again… And all the time, although he doesn't realize it, there is a real door in the wall behind his back and all he has to do is turn round and open it. To help him get out of the room all we have to do is to get him to look in a different direction. But it's hard to do this, since, wanting to get out he resists our attempts to turn him away from where he thinks the exit must be.[12]

The point Wittgenstein is trying to make is that we get so ingrained in certain patterns and rituals of thought that it can be difficult to see that, sometimes, better ways of characterising and understanding the world around us exist. In this example, thinking well does not *just* involve the cognitive task of 'finding the right door', it also involves the willingness to be able to examine one's preconceptions regarding the task at hand and to consider alternative ways of characterising the problem and its solution.

That Wittgenstein's concern with this struggle is linked to a more general concern over honesty is evidenced by a number of remarks he makes about the difficulties this kind of struggle involves, and a related question, what goes into good thinking. Despite their non-linearity, these remarks are often examined together under the loose categorisation of Wittgenstein's 'ethical remarks' as they all express a concern over character, and in this instance, the impact of character on intellectual work. One of the most oft-quoted of these so-called 'ethical' remarks, and perhaps one of the most helpful for our purposes, is the following: 'If anyone is unwilling to descend into himself…he will remain superficial in his thinking'.[13] This remark is often taken to be representative of the general feeling of the ethical remarks, in that it expresses the importance that Wittgenstein places on the role of honesty and self-examination in intellectual thinking.[14] As James Conant rightly observes, this is as much a general concern over superficiality for Wittgenstein as it is a philosophical one — insofar as it even makes sense to distinguish

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[11] For example, see the following heading from BT 86: 'Difficulty of Philosophy Not Difficulty of The Sciences, But A Difficulty Of A Change Of Attitude: Resistances Of The Will Must Be Overcome'.

[12] D.A.T. Gasking. and A.C. Jackson 'Wittgenstein as Teacher', in K.T. Fann, ed. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Man and his Philosophy*, 1967:49–55, p. 52, see also CV 42.

[13] Rush Rhees (ed.) *Recollections of Wittgenstein: Hermine Wittgenstein--Fania Pascal--F.R. Leavis--John King--M. O'c. Drury*. Oxford University Press (1984) p. 19.

[14] James Conant lists this remark amongst four others as a representative sample of these so-called ethical remarks made by Wittgenstein. See James Conant 'On Going the Bloody Hard Way in Philosophy' in J Whittaker (ed)., *The Possibilities of Sense,* New York: Macmillan (2001).

between these two categories on Wittgenstein's terms.[15] For if someone is superficial in their general character, then for Wittgenstein this will translate over to their thinking and writing, and vice versa. This is evident in the consistent appeal to character that Wittgenstein makes in both his positive and negative judgement of various philosophical figures, such as praising William James for being 'a real human being' and deriding Schopenhauer for being superficial in his thinking and 'never taking stock of himself' (CV:41).[16]

Wittgenstein understands this kind of self-honesty to be extremely difficult. He writes: 'How difficult it is to know oneself, to honestly admit what one is!' (PPO:221) and:

> It is... difficult to think, or try to think, really honestly about your life & other people's lives...thinking about these things is ... often downright nasty. And when it's nasty then it's most important (WC:370).

Despite its apparent difficulty, it is for Wittgenstein paramount to being able to engage in decent thought. It is only through being honest with oneself and coming to see clearly how one thinks that one can come to recognise the underlying preconceptions and intellectual dogmas that Wittgenstein understood as skewing the way we characterise and conceptualise the world around us.[17]

1.4

Returning to the topic of this paper, what then is it about isolation that is conducive to fostering this kind of self-honesty? And what was about his relationships with other people that Wittgenstein saw as being detrimental to this? As we've seen, intellectual dogmas aren't just manifested by the characteristics of the thinker themselves, but can also be the product of the context and the environment that the thinker is in. We've also seen that this is not just limited to the philosophical sphere for Wittgenstein but is also connected with the personal -- struggling with these dogmas is just as much a matter of one's character as it is dealing with the intellectual conditions of that dogma.

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[15] Conant (2001), p. 88.

[16] Rhees (1984) p. 106.

[17] For a full account of Wittgenstein's conception of dogmatism, see O. Kuusela *The Struggle Against Dogmatism: Wittgenstein and the Concept of Philosophy,* Harvard University Press (2008).

As such then, we can say that the contextual and environmental influences on intellectual dogmatism aren't limited to the academic sphere — but can also stem from the more immediate and personal environment of the thinker themselves that can cause us to maintain intellectual dogmas. One's living conditions and the stresses of day-to-day living can have a hand in making us adopt philosophical and intellectual positions for other reasons beyond the sake of the inquiry itself, and thus make us reluctant to change or adapt those positions when our academic inquiries suggest that we should do so.

Dealing with these issues is not then just a matter of getting one's intellectual affairs in order. For Wittgenstein, becoming an honest thinker necessitates that one first becomes an honest person, and involves the greater task of getting oneself in order more generally. As such, we should understand Wittgenstein's demands for self-examination and bringing oneself into a state of honesty as not being restricted to any one aspect of his life (such as his work), but as instead involving the monumental task of re-evaluating everything in the search of dishonesty through which dogmas can manifest.

But how? How can such a monumental task be possible? Are we not constantly immersed in a string of environmental and contextual episodes that have unseen influences on our thinking? This, I propose, is a problem that faced Wittgenstein upon forming his conception of the importance of honesty in philosophical and intellectual work. Becoming honest with oneself in an intellectual sense necessitates becoming honest with oneself in a much more general sense — that is, in how we relate to *others*. Becoming honest with oneself in this way is made easier when one is extricated (or perhaps *liberated,* as we shall come to see) from the contextual web of day-to-day obligations in which one is typically immersed.

It is no coincidence that, shortly after his second spell of self-isolation in 1936, Wittgenstein decided to embark on a series of confessions, admitting to instances where he had been both dishonest with himself and to others. These confessions took place as live recitations to two groups: one consisting of close family and friends in Vienna, and another consisting of G. E. Moore, Maurice Drury, Fania Pascal, Rowland Hutt and Francis Skinner in Cambridge. Unfortunately, an exhaustive list of the supposed 'sins' that Wittgenstein confessed to isn't available, but we can get an idea of the kinds of things that Wittgenstein owned up to from Pascal's account. Two of Wittgenstein's 'sins'

stood out to Pascal in particular: that Wittgenstein had covered up the nature of his Jewish ancestry (claiming to be three-quarters Aryan and one-quarter Jewish when, in fact, the opposite was true), and that Wittgenstein had in some way lied about a violent altercation with a student during his time as a primary school teacher in Otterthal.[18]

Reflecting on these confessions, Wittgenstein wrote: 'Last year with God's help I pulled myself together and made a confession. This brought me into more settled waters, into a better relation with people, and to a greater seriousness.'[19] Wittgenstein's use of the term 'seriousness' here is indicative that the benefit of this confession was partly philosophical, given his consistent use of the term in relation to the quality of philosophical and intellectual work.[20] As is observed by Citron, 'seriousness' appears regularly in connection with Wittgenstein's reflections on the qualities of decent philosophical work, and is identified by Citron as one of several 'intellectual virtues' that Wittgenstein purportedly espoused during his career.[21] With this in mind, the above remark becomes a comment on the positive impact that Wittgenstein felt such confessions (themselves the result of isolation) had on the quality of his philosophical thinking.

As the above remark shows these periods of self-isolation had the upside of ultimately improving Wittgenstein's relations with people and his philosophical work more generally. This is re-enforced by the earlier observation on the relationship that Wittgenstein held between superficial character and superficial thought. If confession was a means to getting honest with himself and being less superficial in his general character, then it stands to reason that, on his own terms, it would also ultimately move him into a better philosophical position. That Wittgenstein would go on to produce some of the only work of his later period that he was satisfied with is further testament to this, for it was around this period of working on himself that Wittgenstein produced the first 188 remarks of the *Philosophical Investigations*

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[18] Rhess (1984) p. 37-38.

[19] Rhees (1984) p. 173.

[20] For example: 'My work (my philosophical work) is … lacking in seriousness & love of truth' (PPO:153). See also (F:IV:116), in which Wittgenstein is reported to have described what he means by an honest thinker.

[21] Citron specifically links 'seriousness' with the willingness to endure the suffering of self-examination for a worthy purpose (i.e, the truth) and not for the sake of self-flagellation or impressing others (or any other contextual reason). Whilst I find Citron's argument for the presence of so-called 'intellectual virtues' in Wittgenstein's canon problematic with other aspects of Wittgenstein's meta-philosophy, I nevertheless find myself in agreement that Wittgenstein consistently employed terms such as 'seriousness' to describe stable aspects of honest philosophical thinking. See Citron (2019) p. 2, 13.

— the material out of the later phase of his career that came closest to being published in his lifetime.

Accordingly, we can see the philosophical precursor to this period of work in earlier remarks made by Wittgenstein, wherein he proposed that similarities between the intellectual labour of philosophical work and the emotional labour of working on oneself:

> Working in philosophy — like work in architecture in many respects — is really more work on oneself. On one's own interpretation. On how one sees things. (And what one expects of them) (Ms 112 46: 14.10.1931)

> The edifice of your pride has to be dismantled. And that is terribly hard work (Ms 157a 57r: 1937)

If, as Wittgenstein contends, philosophy involves dealing with these kinds of difficulties of the will, then it stands to reason that engaging in a period of isolation where one is extricated from certain environmental and contextual influences allows for a similar process of reflection to occur with one's intellectual and philosophical labours.

1.5

What this paper is proposing is, in effect, something akin to the 'liberatory' reading of Wittgenstein put forward by Rupert Read, in that I am suggesting Wittgenstein's experience of isolation can be considered a liberatory experience from the kind of environmental and contextual influences that can distort our thinking.[22] According to Read's view, the essential message of Wittgenstein's philosophy is a liberatory or emancipatory one, whereby the philosopher frees (or rather, *liberates*) their interlocutors from dogmatism and restrictive tendencies of thought. As Read contends, this liberation radically extends beyond the merely academic exercise of philosophy towards both political and personal forms of life.[23] However, whilst the liberatory reading understands liberation to be the end goal of Wittgenstein's philosophy, what I am suggesting in this paper is that it ought to be seen as the starting point: namely, that philosophical thinking begins from a position of honesty, which in turn is brought about by the liberatory experience of freeing oneself from the various contextual and environmental influences that

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[22] R. Read, Wittgenstein's Liberatory Philosophy: Thinking Through His Philosophical Investigations, Routledge, New York: Routledge (2021).

[23] See Read (2021), particularly chapters 2 and 4.

can distort our perceptions of ourselves and our work and ultimately inhibit such honesty. Accordingly, Wittgenstein's experiences of isolation can be seen and perhaps even understood in this light.

By examining Wittgenstein's experiences and how they intersect with philosophical remarks made at the time, this paper has suggested that a potential benefit of self-isolation is that it affords an opportunity to reflect on oneself honestly, without the distraction of being an active member in a socially performative web of obligations, expectations, and duties. As we have seen, despite the difficulty and potential unpleasantness of reflecting on how we interpret and think about ourselves, the benefits of doing so are that it can bring us into more 'settled waters' -- with ourselves, with the people around us, and with our work. But this is not to say that there is no risk involved in isolating oneself. Despite the benefits that a period of self-isolation can bring, there are also very real challenges to one's mental and emotional health and wellbeing. One must have strategies that they can turn to, if one is to make a healthy use out of isolation.

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Wittgenstein Abbreviations Reference Key

BT: *The Big Typescript*

CV: *Culture and Value*

F: *Portraits of Wittgenstein*

PI: *Philosophical Investigations*

PPO: *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Public and Private Occasions*

WC: *Wittgenstein in Cambridge: Letters and Documents 1911-1951*

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

When the Body Says No: The Experience of Vaginismus and the Validity of Female Pain

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Georgia Haire

'If you lack words for a phenomenon, an emotion, a situation, you can't talk about it, which means that you can't come together to address it, let alone change it.'
— Rebecca Solnit, *Our Words Are Our Weapons*

Vaginismus first entered medical discourse in 1861, when American gynaecologist, Dr. J Marion Sims, named and described vaginismus, linking symptoms of vaginal hypersensitivity to muscular spasms.[1] Today, vaginismus is similarly defined by the NHS, characterised as a recurrent involuntary tightening of muscles around the vagina whenever penetration is attempted.[2] Although these very precise medical descriptions do not encapsulate the entire or every experience of the condition, it is generally agreed among sufferers that this tightening of the vagina means that penetration is near impossible, and very painful. The use of tampons, penetrative intercourse, cervical examinations, and other activities become sources of guilt, shame, and fear for vaginismus sufferers. Vaginismus is an underdiagnosed condition, which sufferers often must treat themselves, away from medical support or guidance.[3] It is contested by doctors, and often partners, who do not believe that there is anything wrong with the sufferer, and that what they report about themselves is incorrect. In recent years, vaginismus has begun to be more openly discussed in the media, with women's experiences of the condition being discussed in articles on sites such as the *Guardian*, *Refinery29*[4] and *Jezebel*.[5] However, as vaginismus has a history of being a neglected condition within medicine, there is little academic literature that discusses its diagnostic history, or the reasons for such neglect within medical and public discourse. This is even more intriguing considering when the condition was first defined. Peter Cryle has

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[1] Peter Cryle, 'Vaginismus: A Franco-American Story', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 67 (2012): 71

[2] *NHS* [online], 'Vaginismus', January 2018. Available from: https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaginismus/

[3] Peter Pacik, 'Understanding and Treating Vaginismus: A Multimodal Approach', *Obstetrical & Gynecological Survey* 70 (2015): 314.

[4] Rachel Zar, 'Burning Love: What To Do When Sex Hurts', *Refinery29,* 11 June 2013, available from: https://perma.cc/2JPP-RWYD

[5] Faith Cotter, 'When Tight Becomes Too Tight: A Helpful Primer On Vaginismus', *Jezebel,* 23 January 2015, available from: https://perma.cc/X2N5-ZQQP

investigated the intellectual disputes surrounding the definition of vaginismus in the 19th century, as well as its links to frigidity at the beginning of the 20th century. Cryle's work has focused on the condition in a Franco-American context, and the definition and construction of vaginismus from the perspective of the medical establishment, not how the condition and its treatment has been experienced by sufferers. However, there exists some scholarship that discusses the condition. Vaginismus has been mentioned in the work of sociological scholars writing about female genital pain, where it is often included as part of a group of sexual pain disorders. Christine Labuski recently published a book on female genital pain, *It Hurts Down There: The Bodily Imagination of Female Genital Pain,* that analyses the largest known set of qualitive research data about vulvar pain conditions. Labuski discusses vaginismus, or myalgia (muscle pain), within her text, as the condition can arise because of genital and vulvar pain.[6] Vulvar pain has a similar history of being a condition neglected by the medical profession, centred around a part of the female body that is often not discussed. Thea Cacchioni has written several papers on the medicalisation of sex and women's sexual pain that has included a discussion of vaginismus, as well as women's experiences of the condition and its treatment. *From Midwives to Medicine: The Birth of American Gynaecology* by Deborah Kuhn McGregor provides a background to the history of the use of dilators to treat vaginismus, covering Sims' development of the treatment. Considering the limited academic literature exploring vaginismus, this research will therefore be examining a largely unexplored area and will be contributing to the formation of an academic discussion regarding the history of the condition, and the cultural and medical constructions surrounding its treatment. This article will seek to address the neglect surrounding the condition by examining the patient experience of vaginismus using online forum discussions, podcast interviews, and articles written by individuals with vaginismus, which, given the nature of the condition, offer a first-hand insight into what life is like with vaginismus. By taking the experience of vaginismus as my starting point, I will argue that the medical approach and response to vaginismus is shaped by wider cultural perceptions about the believability and validity of female pain. Female pain, in both a historical and contemporary context, is viewed not as fact, but as a misimpression or misinterpretation of bodily

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[6] Christine Labuski, *It Hurts Down There: The Bodily Imagination of Female Genital Pain,* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2015), 102

events. Vaginismus is not the only condition that has been placed in this context of neglect. Other sexual pain disorders, such as vestibulodynia, vulvodynia and dyspareunia, have also been met with doubt and disbelief. An examination of the disbelief surrounding female reportage of their own bodily events will not only be beneficial in terms of the perception of vaginismus, but also for women's health.

Vaginismus is a commonly experienced medical issue, affecting about 1-7% of the female population worldwide.[7] It is a poorly understood and underdiagnosed condition, for which many women do not gain support. This is due to the lack of knowledge on the condition, for the shame and embarrassment felt by vaginismus sufferers, which means many do not discuss the issue, and as discussed later, the conflation between 'normal' and pathological pain. Embarrassment surrounding the condition stems from an inability to engage with particular activities that are viewed as key to participating in womanhood, such as inserting a tampon or engaging in penetrative sex. As the condition relates to the vagina, an area of anatomy that is not often discussed openly, this creates another reason for sufferers to keep their issues to themselves. There is a wide range of reasons as to why a woman might develop vaginismus. A woman may have difficulty understanding sex or have feelings of guilt and shame associated with sex because of religious reasons, lack of sexual education or miseducation about desire, or the sufferer may have had an upbringing where sex was not discussed. An uncomfortable first experience of penetrative sex, an unpleasant medical examination, genital surgery, childbirth, a painful medical condition, such as thrush, or an experience of sexual assault, may also lead to vaginismus.[8] Vaginismus might also develop as a result of sexual pain from conditions such as endometriosis, a genital infection, or pelvic inflammatory disease. Sexual pain disorders, like vulvodynia, can also contribute to vaginismus. For some sufferers, it may also be that there is so discernible reason or cause of the condition, which can lead to further confusion and distress.

The pain of vaginismus is not limited to sexual contact but has largely become to be defined as a sexual pain disorder. Perhaps this is not remarkable considering Western society has defined

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[7] Peter T. Pacik, 'Vaginismus: Review of Current Concepts and Treatment Using Botox Injections, Bupivacaine Injections, and Progressive Dilation with the Patient Under Anesthesia', *Aesthetic Plastic Surgery* (2011), 1-6 (p. 6).

[8] *NHS* [online], 'Vaginismus', January 2018. Available from: https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaginismus/

penetration as the ultimate form of sexual contact for both men and women in heterosexual relationships, placing an androcentric bias on sexual experience.[9] However, difficulties in engaging in painless penetrative sex are not the only concern of women suffering with vaginismus, nor is this the dominant issue for some sufferers. For some, it may be that being able to insert their own fingers or a tampon into their vagina is the ultimate goal of treatment, or that the inability to engage in these activities is as worrisome as not being able to have penetrative sex. In online forums, where users can speak more freely about their difficulties with their peers, these issues are all flagged as concerns of sufferers, and are viewed as considerable accomplishments when achieved. One sufferer discussing her experience with the condition on *Reddit* said that she felt proud about being able to use tampons: 'The biggest benefit isn't having the sex. It's the pride I feel in myself for having accomplished this. And the happiness because I am finally in control of my body'.[10] For others, being able to manage potential childbirth is more worrying that painful penetration.

One *Mumsnet* user said: 'As I'm about to start the 3rd trimester, I've started worrying about childbirth….as sex is so painful and I always tense up, I'm terrified about having to have a forceps delivery or having a massive tear'.[11] Another user expressed her concerns about getting pregnant again, stating that her experience with her pregnancy was traumatic: 'The worst bit for me were the examinations, they were incredibly painful & felt hugely violating. I had to be pinned down by my DH (Dear Husband), it was awful. I still have nightmares about them'.[12] This is not to suggest that painful sex is not a concern to sufferers, but that it is one of a range of issues that matter to women with vaginismus. The framing of vaginismus as an issue that predominately relates to heterosexual sex can be problematic for some women in terms of diagnosis and treatment, such as queer or asexual women. One woman writing on a film documentary blog, who identifies as a queer woman, highlights how self-help sites and medical professionals have responded in frustrating ways to her condition and how it makes her feel:

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[9] Rachel P. Maines, *The Technology of Orgasm: 'Hysteria', the Vibrator and Women's Sexual Satisfaction,* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 49.

[10] *Reddit* [online]. 'Feeling alone as a Queer Woman (21F), 8 July 2016. Available from: https://perma.cc/MPL9-NZEN

[11] *Mumsnet* [online]. 'Sex is always painful…. Will I have problems during childbirth?', 2 August 2015. Available from: https://perma.cc/5AJW-QSAE

[12] *Mumsnet* [online]. 'To request a c section?', 4 April 2015. Available from: https://perma.cc/EF5M-RGSW

Women who desire sex with women don't have vaginismus. Because apparently painful penetration is only supposed to happen to heterosexual women? … I don't need penetration to have sex and even if I did I don't need a penis for penetration. But I do need regular health exams, so can we please get past narrow views on sexual mechanics and how they relate to my preferences?[13]

The distress felt by many women dealing with vaginismus is not only linked to the pain felt on the attempt of penetration, but the fact that this pain prevents them from living up to socially constructed heterosexual norms.[14] Vaginismus has been linked to frigidity, both in a contemporary and historical context. The 1920s, during what Sheila Jeffreys considers to be the first 'sexual revolution', saw a loosening of sexual taboos on marital, heterosexual activity.[15] The 'deviant' women who resisted or were unenthused about their new roles for sexual intercourse were labelled by sexologists as 'frigid', a term that could be insultingly weaponised against such women.[16] In contemporary society, women and girls who abstain from sexual activity, for whatever reason, are also negatively labelled as 'frigid', and there exists the stereotype of the 'frigid' virgin, as well as a common belief that sexual desire is an inherent aspect of the male experience, but not the female.[17] With vaginismus, this stereotype is particularly damaging if applied to a sufferer of the condition, as it dismisses their issue as a dislike of sex or a lack of desire, which is not necessarily the case. Sexual pain excludes women from what heterosexual norms deem as 'real' sex; the kind of sexual activity that many sufferers feel is essential to maintaining their romantic relationships with men.[18] Certainly, in the 1950s and 60s, Western doctors believed that mutually satisfying sexual experiences within a marriage would solidify both the emotional and legal commitment that a couple had to one another, thus sexual pleasure formed the basis of a stable relationship.[19] A 2017 episode of the podcast *The Heart,* written and produced by

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[13] *How To Lose Your Virginity* [online], 'V-Card Diaries: Distracted Dragon "I'm offended by responses to my vaginismus, when coupled with my "virginity" and queerness."', 9 July 2014. Available from: https://perma.cc/V99S-G6LV

[14] Janine Farrell and Thea Cacchioni, 'The Medicalisation of Women's Sexual Pain', *The Journal of Sex Research* 49 (2012), 328-336 (p. 329).

[15] Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930',* (Melbourne: Spinifex Press Pty Ltd, 1997), p. 165.

[16] Jeffreys, p. 169.

[17] Susan Sprecher and Pamela C. Regan, 'College Virgins: How Men and Women Perceive Their Sexual Status', *The Journal of Sex Research* 33 (1996), 3-15 (p. 11).

[18] Farrell and Cacchioni, pp. 328-336 (p. 331).

[19] Carolyn Herbst Lewis, *Prescription for Heterosexuality: Sexual Citizenship in the Cold War Era,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), p. 38.

the writer Abigail Bereola, features the voices of women discussing their experiences with vaginismus, including how their male partners have responded to their condition. One woman said her boyfriend joked about getting a concubine, another woman's partner blamed her for trying to sabotage their relationship and one woman felt she couldn't leave a relationship that made her unhappy because no one else would deal with her sexual problems or love her because of it.[20] For these women, their difficulty in being able to perform penis-in-vagina (PIV) sex threatened the stability of their relationships with their male partners, a view that is also seemingly encouraged by the attitude of some of these partners. This highlights the unacknowledged effort that heterosexual women are expected to devote to both their own and their partner's sexual desires and activities, what Thea Cacchioni defines in this context as 'sex work'.[21]

According to Cacchioni's argument, within the institution of heterosexuality, vaginismus sufferers are therefore not only responsible for 'working' on their own sexual issues and manging their feelings regarding their condition, but must attend to their partner's needs as well. An antagonistic partner can disrupt the sufferer's progress with overcoming vaginismus, as can the privileging of a partner's needs before their own health.[22] Writing about her experience of vaginismus within her marriage, Jess E. Jelsma states that when she was researching the condition she found articles about how a wife can work to 're-ignite the flame', what numbing cream to buy, and that reminded women that divorce is likely in cases of 'female sexual inadequacy'; nowhere did she find a study or article that suggested male partners might contribute to ongoing sexual pain.[23]

Vaginismus causes issues for women in their private, domestic lives, but sufferers also find it difficult to negotiate or discuss their condition in a medical context, or to have their condition taken seriously by medical professionals. Medical practitioners who have little knowledge of vaginismus may find it hard to understand the patient's issues, and consider her as hypochondrial, especially if

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[20] Abigail Bereola, 'it's not me it's you'[online], *The Heart,* podcast audio, 8 August 2017. Available from: https://perma.cc/2CTT-P5L8

[21] Thea Cacchioni, 'Heterosexuality and 'the Labour of Love': A Contribution to Recent Debates on Female Sexual Dysfunction', *Sexualities* 10 (2007), 299-320 (p. 301).

[22] Jo-Marie Kessler, 'When the Diagnosis is Vaginismus', *Women and Therapy,* 7 (1998), 175-186 (p. 182)

[23] Jess E. Jelsma, 'Frigid' [online]. *The Rumpus,* 18 March 2016. Available from: https://perma.cc/QN43-9AL5

an examination proves that everything is 'normal'.[24] It can take a lot of courage for a woman to see a

doctor about her condition, a problem that she finds embarrassing and extremely personal. To then

be told that there is no issue can be disappointing and frustrating.[25] If vaginismus is not diagnosed

during initial appointments, then practitioners may offer more general advice and reassurance on

topics such as lubrication or relaxation.[26] This too can be frustrating. One sufferer writing on *Mumsnet*

said that when she went to her doctor about her condition: 'they actually told me to "have a glass

of wine and relax" and sent me on my way with a pack of lubricant!'[27] Speaking in an article for *Mic,*

a sufferer named Marla spoke of how her doctor said that: 'sex was supposed to feel nice, and that

I should try to relax. That was it. That was all there was to it'.[28] In a qualitive study by Kat Macey and

others, three women had been repeatedly tested for STIs, a process that they saw as disrespectful and

unnecessary. One of these women felt that: 'It was like they were calling me a liar'.[29] These types of

advice or misdiagnosis can not only encourage feelings of doubt about what the sufferer is experiencing,

but also shame and a feeling that the issue is their fault for not being able to 'relax'. When seeking

treatment for vaginismus, a woman is often told that nothing is wrong, despite knowing that she feels

pain.[30] Her claims are contested, and her experiences are questioned, not only by those close to her,

but by those who could legitimise these experiences as a medical issue. To have pain is a certainty, but

to hear someone else's pain is to have doubt.[31]

Understanding the pain of someone else is difficult. Being outside of a sufferer's body, unable

to feel what they feel, produces uncertainty and doubt about such pain. This doubt can be problematic

in a medical context, where physicians may already view the voice of the patient as unreliable in

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[24] Kessler, pp. 175-186, (p. 178).

[25] Kessler, pp. 175-186 (p. 178).

[26] Kat Macey and others, 'Women's Experience of Using Vaginal Trainers (Dilators) to Treat Vaginal Penetration Difficulties Diagnosed as Vaginismus: a Qualitive Interview Study', *BMC Women's Health* 15
(2015), 1-12, p. 4

[27] *Mumsnet* [online], 'Vaginismus- Anyone out there??', 29 December 2016. Available from: https://perma.cc/GUP9-K9M6

[28] Sophie Saint Thomas, 'This Is What It's Like To Be Shamed For Having Vaginismus' [online]. *Mic,* 30 December 2015. Available from: https://perma.cc/S3SL-URTY

[29] Macey and others, pp. 1-12 (p. 5).

[30] Kessler, pp. 175-186 (p. 178).

[31] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 7.

relating their bodily events.[32] But in cases where the only external sign of pain is the patient's narrative, such as with vaginismus, then to ignore this narrative is to ignore the bodily event and ignore the pain itself.[33] Using this example, Elaine Scarry highlights how intricately the validity and belief of pain is bound up with the issue of power.[34] Considering the historical and contemporary understandings of female bodily events and pain, and perspectives of the expression of such pain, it could be said that female pain is also bound up in issues of power. Women have often been labelled as hysterical or neurotic when expressing pain or distress, particularly if there is no tangible, pathological cause for such responses. This has certainly been the case when diagnosing vaginismus, and within its diagnostic history. For Félix Roubaud, a 19th century French physician, vaginismus represented a risk of medical failure, due to it being a condition in which a women's genitals showed no signs of disease or of a physical issue.[35]

The neglect surrounding the condition of vaginismus can therefore be connected to concepts of the invalidity of female pain within medical and wider societal cultures. Female pain cannot be believed as fact, and neither can the pain of vaginismus. It could be argued that vaginismus is also seen as invalid or unbelievable because of the societal connections between pain and a women's experience of sexual intercourse, or at least with her own reproductive organs. A 2001 paper titled 'The Girl Who Cried Pain', highlights how women often experience pain as part of their biological processes, such as menstruation or childbirth, and must learn to sort 'normal' biological pain out from potentially pathological pain.[36] A woman's initial encounters with penetrative sex are often described as painful, or at least a woman is told to expect that they shall be. The late-thirteenth century text, *Women's Secrets,* suggests that a virginial vagina would be vulnerable to injury on first intercourse as it was tighter and more sensitive.[37] In more contemporary culture, tightness and pain remain the definitive characteristics of a woman's first sexual experience. Like pain associated with menstruation and other

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[32] Scarry, p. 6.

[33] Scarry, p. 6.

[34] Scarry, p. 12.

[35] Peter Cryle and Alison Moore, *Frigidity: An Intellectual History — Genders and Sexualities in History,* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 77.

[36] Diane E. Hoffmann and Anita J. Tarzian, 'The Girl Who Cried Pain: A Bias Against Women in the Treatment of Pain', *Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics* 29 (2001), 13-27, p. 16.

[37] Anke Bernau, *Virgins: A Cultural History,* (London: Granta Books, 2007), p. 7.

processes, such sexual experiences are similarly perceived to be a normal biological pain, a natural hurt that is an essential component of intercourse, or at least initial intercourse. Indeed, psychological treatment of vaginismus partly focuses on dispelling commonly held misconceptions about sex, such as that it is supposed to hurt and that women must be coaxed into intercourse.[38] Perhaps then, when a woman identifies a 'normal' pain as a pathological kind of pain, such as the symptoms identified with vaginismus, that pain cannot be seen as valid. When expressing pain, as the author Leslie Jamison states, women seemingly must defend themselves from the litany of old charges: performative, pitiful, selfpitying, pity hoarding, pity mongering.[39]

Women and their reports of pain are often discounted by Western healthcare professionals, and there is also a certain reticence that often surrounds women's health, a hushed tone that is adopted when talking about female illness and complaints.[40] Even commonly and regularly experienced female events, such as menstruation, are viewed as topics that should not be discussed, or even kept secret. Writing about the material culture of tampons and sanitary towels, Rebecca Ginsburg discusses the great lengths that women and girls go to concealing their periods, developing tactics for smuggling and purchasing menstrual products, anxious that their menstruation will be not be detected, especially by men.[41] If women feel as though they should conceal such an innocuous bodily event as menstruation, then it follows that other aspects of women's health are also cause for secrecy. As vaginismus is a condition that is inherently associated with the female, and so with women's health, perhaps this goes some way to explain why the condition has not been thoroughly discussed in academic, medical, and wider culture. The way in which female pain is framed by healthcare professionals is significant, as it is these professionals who play a fundamental role is defining femininity. Medical discourses shape how women see themselves, pointing to the crucial biological events of a woman's life as sources of

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[38] Kessler, pp. 175-186 (p. 180)

[39] Leslie Jamison, *The Empathy Exams: Essays,* (London: Granta Books, 2015), p. 204.

[40] Ludmilla Jordanova, *Sexual Visions: Images of Gender in Science and Medicine Between the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), p. 140.

[41] Rebecca Ginsburg, '"Don't Tell, Dear": The Material Culture of Tampons and Napkins', *Journal of Material Culture* 1 (1996), 365-375, (p. 371).

selfdefinition.[42] If a woman has an issue achieving these events, or engaging with them in the 'correct' way, then such an issue could be more problematic than it first appears. For a vaginismus sufferer, penetrative pain may not only indicate hurt, but an inability to engage with cultural constructions of womanhood. Tampons cannot be inserted; self-insertion and self-exploration is difficult; penetration during sexual activity is impossible, and childbirth seems unimaginable. How medical culture perceives vaginismus also has wider implications that extend beyond the hospital or the GP's office. Medical culture is a system that permeates popular culture, and so its ideas and practices are something we are all familiar with, and participate in to some degree.[43] In other words, how medical professionals view vaginismus impacts how wider society views the condition. The medicalisation of women's bodies and bodily events has sometimes proved problematic, but in the case of vaginismus, the desire for medical recognition has been patient led. For many women with vaginismus and other sexual pain disorders, distress over their condition stems not only through the pain of it, but from months or years without a diagnosis, helpful advice or medical support.[44] For such women, medical recognition represents the medical and social legitimisation of experience, without which many would feel that their pain is unreal.[45]

In conclusion, the societal and medical neglect of vaginismus is linked to wider disbelief surrounding the validity of female pain, as well as views about what constitutes 'normal' and pathological pain. Heteronormative norms, persistent stereotypes about the nature of female desire and sexuality, and the privileging of penetrative sex in heterosexual relationships further compound feelings of inadequacy on behalf of the sufferer, as well as the scepticism surrounding vaginismus. The perception of vaginismus as a purely sexual, and indeed, heterosexual, issue has made it difficult for some women to seek and progress with treatment for this condition. In recent years, however, vaginismus has become a more recognised and talked about condition, both in private and public spheres. Vaginismus has featured in plotlines on recent television series, such as Netflix's *Unorthodox*

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[42] Judith Bush, '"It's Just Part of Being a Woman": Cervical Screening, the Body and Femininity', *Social Science and Medicine* 50 (2000), 429-444, (p. 430).

[43] Emily Martin, *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction.* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001) p. 13.

[44] Farrell and Cacchioni, pp. 328-336 (p. 333).

[45] Farrell and Cacchioni, pp. 328-336 (p. 333).

and *Sex Education*, was the subject of a 2018 stage play titled *How to Skin a Cat*, and even has its own national awareness day, launched by a London sex toy shop in 2016.[46] The drive to establish vaginismus as a more recognised and better understood condition is being fronted largely by sufferers themselves. Both consciously and unconsciously, sexual pain organisations, self-help groups and internet forums have worked to create a network in which sufferers are able to feel less isolated because of their condition. Similarly, further discussion of the condition, as well as investigations into the treatment and guidance available, in both mainstream media and academic communities, can allow sufferers to identify their condition more easily, and to find support and treatment. These developing networks and recent wider cultural conversations have also benefitted medical professionals, allowing a better understanding of the symptoms and difficulties felt by their patients. More broadly, the topic of female pain is still a concept that invites doubt rather than credibility. The voices of female patients remain shrouded in a level of disbelief, despite the fact they are relating their experiences of their own bodies, their own pain, which is a major hindrance to how vaginismus and other sexual pain disorders are perceived by both the medical establishment and wider society. It is important to examine and question the power structures surrounding the articulation of female pain, lest the expression of such feelings continue to be framed as invalid.

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[46] Hot Octopuss [online]. 'Vaginismus Awareness Day — 15th September', 8 September 2016. Available from: https://perma.cc/HL8Z-MHAL

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'Modest' and 'Faithful': Centering Pseudonyms in Fiction in Early Twentieth Century Chinese Periodicals

Zhenkai Tong

Some people say that young people do not commit suicide, but rather that the old society kills young people. Yuwo can be said to be killed by the evils of society. Alas, he is dead! I am afraid he will not be the only one who will die like this![1]

Mrs. Huang is indeed a poor person who has a difficult life. But what of her knowledge and perseverance? She is not comparable to those poor women who commit suicide. She is not comparable to those who do nothing but sulk, sigh, and complain. May all the poor women of the world follow the virtues of Mrs. Huang.[2]

Introduction

The early twentieth century was a tumultuous and iconoclastic period in Chinese history. This was no less the case for Chinese literature. In this article, rather than focus on authors who were either well-known enough to form part of what scholars call the May Fourth and New Culture literary canon, or who were known to have made relevant contributions to the body of literature, I examine literary fiction produced by authors who have their identities hidden behind pseudonyms. I argue that these authors, whose identities we may not know for certain, and their literary works may further reinforce or challenge established understandings of the May Fourth and New Culture literary canon.

Scholars have written extensively on how the literary space in China was debated and reinvented, particularly in the case of the May Fourth and New Culture movements of the late 1910s and early 1920s. Chih-tsing Hsia's work provides a broad overview and critique of the minds behind May Fourth and New Culture writers. His work highlights the myriad connections between a perceived Chinese tradition, an imagined Chinese modernity and comparisons to the 'otherness' of Western literature that coalesced into a crucible called literary revolution.[3] Other works, such as an edited volume by Milena Dolezelova-Verlingerova and Oldrich Kral, challenges the notion that the May Fourth and New Culture

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[1] Xuxin, 'The Death of my Friend Yuwo', Ladies' Journal, 7.9 (1921), 144-145 (p. 144).
[2] Zhongyan, 'Sister Huang', Ladies' Journal, 13.3 (1927), 92-93 (p. 93).
[3] Chih-tsing Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 1-15.

movements were strictly a period of radical iconoclasm by reexamining these movements as an arena in which new and experimental literary discourses clashed, rather than assuming that these discourses ran in conjunction with each other as one homogenous literary group.[4]

More recent scholarship highlights the involvement of women and the role of gender. Jin Feng, centering on the 'new woman' trope that emerged during this period, examines the ways in which women were used in literature as dualistic reflections between Chinese tradition and modernity, the 'good' and 'bad' within Chinese society and hope and despair for the future of Chinese women.[5] Haiping Yan approaches this period through a feminist lens and examines the ways in which women writers navigated a literary arena that was dominated by men. Yan's analysis unpacks the different images that women were constructed into, from women warriors to wise mothers, and examines these images by placing them specifically within the discussion of women writers.[6]

While ample scholarship has been produced in the literary field of the May Fourth and New Culture movements, there is one category of literary sources that is overshadowed by works published by well-known authors. These include Lu Xun, Lu Yin, Mao Dun, Ding Ling, and Ba Jin, whose works form a literary canon of the May Fourth and New Culture movements. The themes that underpinned their works vary greatly. They range from commentaries on society and politics to absurdities of the human condition. There has been a push to utilize lesser-known authors, in an area called popular fiction, as discourse and literary analysis and to examine the ways in which these popular fiction writers contradict, reinforce, or provide different perspectives on the literary norms established by authors of the May Fourth and New Culture canon.

However, few have discussed a prevailing practice and the potential implications it may have on our understanding of May Fourth and New Culture literature: works produced by authors who used pseudonyms. Grace Fong touches upon the methodological issues associated with literary

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[4] Milena Dolezelova-Verlingerova and David Der-wei Wang, 'Introduction', in *The Appropriation of Cultural Capital: A May Fourth Project,* ed. Milena Dolezelova-Verlingerova and Oldrich Kral (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1-27 (p. 1-5).

[5] Jin Feng, *The New Woman in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Fiction* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2004), p. 1-12.

[6] Haiping Yan, *Chinese Women Writers and the Feminist Imagination* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 1-3.

works produced by these authors. In Fong's case, the 'literary cross-dressing' that authors would do to project themselves as someone who they were not significantly complicates historical analysis; there are some authors whose identities behind their pseudonyms were known, but there were many instances where authors would adopt a different gender as their name.[7] A further layer of difficulty is added when authors used names that were not proper names. Scholars may never know for certain who the authors behind these pseudonyms were. The methodological issue here is that analysis of the lives of the authors, and extrapolation of the context of their writing through biographical analysis, may not be possible. However, that does not mean that these literary works are of little consequence for a broader analysis of May Fourth and New Culture literature.

In this article, I analyse literary works that were written by authors who kept their identities hidden behind pseudonyms. We may be able to uncover their identities through further research, but there is a possibility that we may not know for certain who they were. I argue that we should focus on literary works produced by these authors and examine the ways in which their works reinforce or challenge the established scholarship surrounding May Fourth and New Culture literature. Through examining these works, we are able to expand our understanding beyond the May Fourth and New Culture canon.

I present two examples from the periodical magazine, the *Ladies' Journal*, published in Shanghai from 1915 to 1931. The early twentieth century in China had an abundance of periodicals; in many ways these periodicals served as the primary medium for which May Fourth and New Culture literature were written, and through which they were disseminated, and debated. The spatial and temporal interactions of periodicals with Chinese society during this period has been extensively discussed. Christopher Alexander Reed provides a comprehensive overview of the development of the periodical press in Shanghai from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. Reed emphasizes the significance of technological and administrative transformations that occurred to facilitate the distribution of

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[7] Grace Fong, 'Radicalising Poetics: Poetic Practice in Women's World, 1904-1907' in *Women and the Periodical Press in China's Long Twentieth Century*, ed. Michel Hockx, Joan Judge, and Barbara Mittler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 104-120 (p. 105-108).

the periodical press from within Shanghai and to other regions within China.[8] An edited volume by Michel Hockx, Joan Judge, and Barbara Mittler examines the relationship between women and the periodical press through a multifaceted approach that combines analysis from different genres; these include short stories, poetry, and artworks that were often found within periodicals. Their analysis seeks to further the understanding of periodicals as objects that were more than polemic, as is usual in describing May Fourth and New Culture literature, and instead as objects where new perceptions of people and their relationship with society were debated within the context the uncertainties surrounding the May Fourth and New Culture periods at the time. The *Ladies' Journal* was by no means the only periodical magazine in circulation. Periodical press publications operated in a dynamic environment where issues frequently overlapped, criticisms exchanged and opinions shared.[9] But the *Ladies' Journal* was distinctive for its length of publication. It lasted nearly fifteen years and bore witness to tumultuous events during this period in Chinese history.

Periodical magazines such as the *Ladies' Journal* usually contained many literary genres, though different publications would focus on different categories. The *Ladies' Journal* focused on essays and commentaries on Chinese society and on the role and condition of women. However, the *Ladies' Journal* also had categories for short stories, poems, self-help guides and visual arts showcases. Advertisements were frequently placed after each successive category. These ranged from beauty products to textbooks and various services. Indeed, one could be reading an essay that discussed the blight of arranged marriages in Chinese society and next to it see an advertisement for a skincare product.

'Modest' and 'Faithful'

The two works presented in this article are fictional short stories written by authors who hid their identities behind pseudonyms. I approach these works by first outlining a summary of the story and providing commentary before proceeding to analyze and extrapolate the themes of what the authors

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[8] Christopher Alexander Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876-1937* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2003), p. 1-5.

[9] Joan Judge, Barbara Mittler, and Michel Hockx, 'Introduction: Women's Journals as Multigeneric Artefacts' in *Women and the Periodical Press in China's Long Twentieth Century*, ed. Michel Hockx, Joan Judge, and Barbara Mittler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 1-18 (p. 1-10).

may be attempting to express. I then place these themes within the backdrop of the larger discussions within May Fourth and New Culture literature, and then examine the ways in which these works reinforce or challenge established understandings of the literary canon. In doing so, I also analyse these works comparatively with each other.

The first story was written by a particular Xuxin ('Modest'). Xuxin begins their work in an abrupt manner that establishes the story's tone: 'My friend Hu Yuwo died in the ninth year of the Republic of China. He was eighteen years old'.[10] Xuxin then proceeds through first-person narration to tell the story of Yuwo and why he died. Yuwo, the narrator begins, was not a weak person. He was smart worker. He was good at sports and he had a bright future ahead of him. So why did Yuwo die? What disease did he carry with him? Yuwo himself had aspirations. He was studious. His ambitions, however, were stifled when he received word from his family that he was to attend an arranged marriage. Yuwo protested this decision, but was scolded by his parents and ordered to return to his home village. Being the filial son that he was, Yuwo conceded and returned.[11]

As soon as the narrator received word that their friend was to marry, the narrator sent letters congratulating him. However, when the narrator received Yuwo's reply, the response was stark: 'What fun is there for Chinese families?' he writes, 'It is a living hell'.[12] Following the marriage, Yuwo continued writing letters to the narrator. With each succeeding letter, Yuwo became increasingly troubled. His sudden discussion of suicide and the reasons people committed suicide was a grave cause of concern for the narrator. 'I did not know what disease he had', the narrator observes, 'but I think his disease lies here'.[13]

The letters continued until one day, the narrator visited Yuwo's home. During their conversation, Yuwo became delirious: 'I think it is better for people not to study and have no knowledge', he abruptly told the narrator, 'the more you read, the more sad thoughts you will have in your mind. Nothing can go as you desire it. Unless you die! Chinese marriages can be said to be forced marriages. [...] They have

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[10] Xuxin, 'The Death of my Friend Yuwo', p. 144.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] *Ibid.*

never seen each other before, and they expect them to become a lifelong couple!'[14] The narrator left Yuwo, with the latter in tears, following this outburst. Sometime later, Yuwo committed suicide.

In looking back at this outburst, the narrator scolds themself for not realizing Yuwo's blight earlier. Yuwo's death, the narrator concludes, was regrettable. However, it was not suicide. The disease that compelled Yuwo to his fate was the society that surrounded him. In short, what killed Yuwo was not Yuwo, but Chinese society. For this reason, the narrator concludes, there will be many more people that will share Yuwo's fate.[15]

The use of suicide as the main driving force of the plot was nothing new. It was a common theme used by authors during this period, often using the act of suicide to symbolize the destruction of the human spirit under the weight of traditional Chinese society. In this case, Yuwo represented a collective group of people that suffered the weight of this society that the narrator identified as the 'disease'. Bryna Goodman writes extensively on how suicide was seen by the periodical press and in literature during this period; for Goodman the circumstances surrounding the suicide and how the image of the person who committed suicide was constructed by the periodical press plays an integral role in how the public consumed the news (or story) of the event.[16] The suicide of a woman who was constructed to represent the 'face' of Chinese modernity, for instance, left a different impression upon both writer and reader when compared to the suicide of a woman who was constructed to be a product of the traditional Chinese family.

However, what makes this particular piece by Xuxin distinctive was that the character who commits suicide was a man. Suicides in May Fourth and New Culture literature were largely women; the gender dynamic of this act was tied closely to perceived constructions of women and their duties to the family, or that they were portrayed as being significantly more emotional and needed another person to watch over them. As Goodman shows, a woman committing suicide was a normalized trope in May Fourth and New Culture literature and was reinforced by press coverages of suicides during

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[14] *Ibid.*, p. 144-145.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 145.

[16] Bryna Goodman, 'The New Woman Commits Suicide: The Press, Cultural Memory and the New Republic', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 64.1 (2005), 77-101 (p. 77-79) <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911805000069>.

this period.[17] In telling the story of a man who descends into madness from his arranged marriage and proceeds to take his own life, Xuxin was one of the few writers who showed the vulnerability of men in meeting the expectations of Chinese society.

Though, this is all subject to interpretation. Xuxin could also be focused more on traditional Chinese society as an evil rather than the visceral death of a person. By subjecting Yuwo to an unexceptional occurrence that was product of his own circumstances, what Xuxin effectively did was to shift the focus away from the individuality of suicide and towards suicide as social commentary. The agency of Yuwo, and that which made Yuwo an individual person, was superseded as consequence of circumstances. We do not know what the reaction of the family was, we do not know what happened to the wife; the wife, now widowed, would very likely have her life ruined. Xuxin did not comment on these issues, and it could be argued that removing the visceral consequences of Yuwo's death dehumanizes him to a degree. Indeed, Xuxin denies that Yuwo committed suicide. He was, the author argues, murdered.

The second story was written by a particular Zhongyan ('Faithful'). Zhongyan begins their story by introducing to the audience the Huang family. There was nothing particular about this family; Mr. Huang was a primary school teacher and earned a monthly salary of twenty yuan. Mrs. Huang was also a teacher and earned anywhere between six to fifteen yuan. Together, they had a frugal living.[18]

That was until one day, Mr. Huang fell grievously ill and died. He left behind Mrs. Huang, his elderly mother, and a child. Mrs. Huang, being the only person in the household with a job, could not financially support the family. She took loans of over two hundred yuan. Mrs. Huang, the narrator tells us, suffered both the grief of widowhood and mounting debts.[19]

The narrator pauses Mrs. Huang's story and asks the audience how Mrs. Huang found herself in such a situation. 'Mencius said', the narrator answers, 'everyone has compassion. But in this world, this sentence is no longer reliable. It can be changed to say: compassion is rare'.[20] The narrator then comments

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[17] *Ibid.*
[18] Zhongyan, 'Sister Huang', p. 92.
[19] *Ibid.*
[20] *Ibid.*

on Mrs. Huang's situation. She was miserable and pitiful; to add insult to injury, when Mr. Huang's coffin was being laid to rest, the debt collectors came to demand that she pay her debts immediately. When she could not, they proceeded to ransack her home and took anything of value as payment.[21]

However, Mrs. Huang did not capitulate to her dire situation. Instead, the narrator tells the audience, Mrs. Huang persevered. She provided her son with tutoring and saved on food and clothing. Her attention to her son led to the latter being admitted to prestigious schools and scoring well in examinations. Eventually, the son joined a company in Shanghai and would earn enough money to pay off the family's debts. He also raised his own family, earning more than one hundred yuan per month. Mrs. Huang, still a teacher by this point, refused to retire when requested by her son to do so. 'I am used to working and making money', Mrs. Huang replied, 'you have to remain diligent'.[22]

Mrs. Huang survived such hardships and emerged from it a successful mother. She was not like the women who choose to commit suicide after facing these harsh situations. All women, the narrator concludes, should strive to become like Mrs. Huang.[23]

Zhongyan's story contrasts that of Xuxin's. Whereas Xuxin's story was of a man descending into despair and committing suicide, Zhongyan's was one where a woman emerged from a chaotic situation and achieved success. Zhongyan had established the setting against Mrs. Huang: her husband was dead, she had a family to feed, and she was in debt. Readers coming from Xuxin's story would suspect that she would also commit suicide. Instead, there was no mention of Mrs. Huang considering this option. She continued to raise and feed her family until the son could help repay family debts.

This particular kind of despair to success story from the perspective of a woman was not uncommon among May Fourth and New Culture literature. The literary trope usually follows the order of a breadwinner in the family dying (usually the husband), the woman (usually the wife of said husband) falling into despair, until finally the woman was able to muster her will to crawl towards success. Feng writes that the construction of the woman as a strong and steadfast character was

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[21] *Ibid.*

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 92-93.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 93.

one perception of what the 'new woman' was during the May Fourth and New Culture movements.[24] Different writers would have different expectations of what this woman was capable of, but a common theme that tied these different expectations was that this particular type of woman could overcome any obstacles placed before her. The trope of the husband dying and the wife taking over was one way in which this theme was manifested. However, what this also did was it painted the woman as an almost superhuman-like character, able to confront all challenges regardless of how dire they may be. Feng's criticisms for this type of literature was that on one hand, it attempts to empower women, but on the other, it constructs women as an infallible being and creates a false expectation of what women should become.[25] Whereas on one literary extreme, authors could construct the woman as a highly emotional being who could not fend for herself, the other literary extreme constructed the woman as beings who could turn tragic situations into successes.

Zhongyan's story takes this theme a bit further, for their story was not only about Mrs. Huang. At the last paragraph of their story, Zhongyan compares Mrs. Huang to those who have chosen to commit suicide and concluded that they were incomparable to her. 'May all the poor women of the world follow the virtues of Mrs. Huang', Zhongyan concludes.[26] By including this last portion in the story, Zhongyan shifted the focus from Mrs. Huang to a significantly larger issue that was discussed in Xuxin's story: suicide. Zhongyan describes the story of Mrs. Huang as a means to criticise those who turned to suicide after experiencing hardship. In a way, their story was similar to that of Xuxin's. The experiences of the main character could be seen to play a secondary role if the intent was to use these characters as a means for social commentary. In Zhongyan's case, the story contrasts with that of Xuxin's where the fate of the main character was suicide. Such stories were not uncommon, but for Zhongyan, the conclusion of Mrs. Huang as a virtuous woman juxtaposed against women who have committed suicide offers a contrast between two extremes.

Yet it could also be argued that Zhongyan's purpose was not to portray Mrs. Huang, and by extension women, as empowered beings who could overcome obstacles. Mrs. Huang's success was

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[24] Jin Feng, The New Woman in Early Twentieth-Century Chinese Fiction, p. 6-17.
[25] *Ibid.*
[26] Zhongyan, 'Sister Huang', p. 93.

attributed to her son. While Mrs. Huang raised and educated her son, it was what the son eventually became that was the marker of success in Zhongyan's story. The son's success was achieved by means of Mrs. Huang's efforts, for it was the son who would pay off all the family's debts and ensure that the family was financially secure. In Zhongyan's story it appears that Mrs. Huang's only purpose was to live long enough to ensure that the son would be successful. When success was achieved, Mrs. Huang seemed undeveloped even after suffering through the setting that the author established. In other words, her virtue was ensuring her son's success and not the fact that she had to suffer through the process of achieving it.

Conclusion

In examining these two pieces by Xuxin and Zhongyan, I have attempted to explore the ways in which fiction as written by pseudonymous authors could reinforce or challenge our established under-standings of the May Fourth and New Culture literary canon. Further work could be done to examine how the themes of these writings changed over time and to what extent the historical contexts and circumstances have an influence on how these writings were produced. Further questions could be asked about the nature of these authors. For instance, to what extent were their writings influenced by the May Fourth and New Culture canon? Could it be possible that instead of being influenced by the canon, their collective works fed into what was understood to be the canon at their time of publication? Was there even a canon to consider during those particular periods, or was it only a product of recent perceptions of the May Fourth and New Culture movements? By examining these authors and their works further, it may be possible to create a better understanding of these issues and questions.

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Carlo Crivelli: a strategy for the Marche rebirth

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Carlo Crivelli: a strategy for the Marche rebirth

Benedetta Castagna

The Marche is a polycentric Italian region with its historic, economic and cultural peculiarities dictated by its geographical position. The works and influence of Carlo Crivelli, a Venetian painter who worked in the south of the Marche across three decades (1468-1494), spread to many cities and villages of the Marche hinterland. Since the nineteenth century, Crivelli's artworks have been housed in museums around the world; only seven cities of the Marche still preserve his works or parts of them. In this paper, I argue that these exhibitions, situated where the works were created, would benefit from a collaborative approach, which offers visitors a proposition more suited to Crivelli's work. I propose strategies that follow a place-based approach and that would increase the attractiveness of cities and villages where Crivelli's artworks are displayed.[1] I analyse two case studies that present different approaches to Crivelli's works of art: the Museum of St Francis displaying the Triptych of Montefiore dell'Aso,[2] and the Church of St. Martin Bishop exhibiting the Polyptych of Monte San Martino in the original location.[3]

In the last twenty years, the Marche has faced many challenges: reduced industrialisation, a mass movement towards big cities, the 2016 earthquakes, and the dramatic depopulation of the hinterland that followed. Small villages risk the loss of memory and cultural heritage if their inhabitants stop preserving the cultural heritage with their social and cultural impacts.[4] As in many other countries, small towns, 'due to their size and dispersed nature', struggle to address the scope and scale of these changes.[5] The development of a cultural strategy based on Crivelli's artworks in the Marche would enhance its

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[1] Kathleen McLean, 'Museum Exhibitions and the Dynamics of Dialogue' in *Daedalus,* 128, no. 3, (1999), pp. 83-107.

[2] Montefiore dell'Aso: Museum Complex of St Francis, 'Trittico di Montefiore dell'Aso' (Triptych of Montefiore dell'Aso). Original location: Church of San Francesco in Montefiore dell'Aso. Painted between 1471 and 1472.

[3] Monte San Martino: St Martin Church, 'Il Polittico di Monte San Martino' (The Polyptych of Monte San Martino). Intact and in good condition. First work painted together by Carlo and Vittore Crivelli. Painted between 1476 and 1485.

[4] Claire Colomb, 'Culture in the city, culture for the city? The political construction of the trickle-down in cultural regeneration strategies in Roubaix, France' in *The Town Planning Review*, 82, no. 1, (2011), pp. 77-98.

[5] Neil Prowe, Rhona Pringle, and Trevor Hart, 'Matching the process to the challenge within small town regeneration' in *The Town Planning Review*, 86, no. 2, (2015), pp. 177-202.

'symbolic potential, such as heritage and identity',[6] would create new attractions and would establish new forms of cooperation between municipalities linked by Crivelli's works.

Carlo Crivelli found a thriving environment to work and live in the south of the Marche at the end of the fifteenth century. In this period, frequent conflicts among the small neighbouring *comuni* accentuated the differentiation and fragmentation of the Marche territory.[7] In the north, the artistic and intellectual movement called *Rinascimento Urbinate*[8] was widely respected, but Crivelli's work in the south of the region remained largely unknown to audiences outside of the region.[9] Commentators attribute his absence from contemporary treatises to the geographic isolation of his works, and its remoteness from the cultural centres of the 15th century.[10] It was only in the 20th century that scholarship provided a full reconstruction of Crivelli's bibliography.[11]

Between 1468 and 1473, Crivelli painted at least seven polyptychs for the churches of Fermo, Ascoli Piceno and their surroundings.[12] The scholar Bovero argues that Crivelli met with success in both cities and villages of the Marche. At that time there was no workshop in the Marche comparable to his: records show he had been commissioned in as many as eighteen different *comuni*.[13] [14] Despite this, the great body of Crivelli's work was unknown until the end of the eighteenth century when the art historian Lanzi discovered several of his polyptychs and triptychs. With this discovery, most of his artworks were broken up, and their parts displayed in museums around the world.[15] This rapid dispersion of the artist's works became known as the 'Crivelli case'.[16]

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[6] Graeme Evans, 'Measure for Measure: Evaluating the Evidence of Culture's Contribution to Regeneration' in *Urban Studies*, 42, no. 5/6, (2005), pp. 959-983.

[7] Ronald W. Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2004), pp. 23-30.

[8] During Duke Frederick of Montefeltro reign (1444-1482), Urbino was defined as the 'capital of intellectual art', 'mathematical culture' and 'perspective civilisation'. In this period, Urbino hosted important figures such as Luciano Laurana, Paolo Uccello, Piero della Francesca, Francesco di Giorgio Martini and many others. Moreover, Urbino is the birthplace of Raphael and Bramante.

[9] Lorenza Mochi Onori, *Raffaello e Urbino* (Milano: Electa, 2009)

[10] Anna Bovero, *L'Opera Completa Del Crivelli, Classici Dell'Arte*, 80 vols (Milano: Rizzoli, 1974), p. 6.

[11] Martin Davies, *Carlo Crivelli, Themes and Painters in the National Gallery*, 4 vols (London: Publications Department, National Gallery, 1972), pp. 12-13.

[12] Pierluigi De Vecchi, *Itinerari Crivelleschi Nelle Marche* (Ripatransone: Maroni, 1997), pp. 17-23.

[13] Carpegna, Pergola, Ancona, Fabriano, Matelica, Camerino, Macerata, Corridonia, Massa Fermana, Fermo, Porto San Giorgio, Monte San Martino, Montefiore dell'Aso, Force, Poggio di Bretta, Castel Trosino, Ascoli Piceno, Valle Castellana.

[14] Olimpia Gobbi, 'Il Territorio Di Crivelli E Dei Crivelleschi', in *Itinerari Crivelleschi Nelle Marche*, ed. by Pierluigi De Vecchi (Ripatransone: Maroni, 1997), pp. 33-40.

[15] Bovero, p. 7.

[16] Pietro Zampetti, *Carlo Crivelli* (Firenze: Nardini Editore, 1986), pp. 19-46.

The diffusion of Crivelli's work gave him international fame. Today his works are in seventeen museums in the United States, in eight European countries, and in six Italian cities — but only seven cities and villages in the Marche still preserve them (Appendix A).[17] These seven sites have the potential to show the context where the artworks were created and to highlight what inspired the most flourishing period of the artist.

The dispersion of the artworks within the Marche has two main consequences. The first is that different organisations manage the exhibitions. This causes a lack of coordination in the promotion and in the art display quality. In Ascoli Piceno, for example, three buildings managed by three different organisations display four paintings by Carlo Crivelli. A second consequence is the inconsistencies in the conceptual framework and curation (lighting, preservation, multimedia, etc.) of the works.[18] There are, for example, misunderstandings between the works of the master and the ones of his brother Vittore and his followers. His disciples, called '*crivelleschi*', joined the activity of Carlo and his workshop and continued it in his style for more than twenty years after his death. While the master artworks are dispersed, the paintings of the '*crivelleschi*' are mostly held in the places for which they were originally intended. They correspond to relevant elements in the process of contextualisation. They demonstrate the great diffusion of Crivelli's style, but they also highlight the artistic superiority of the master. The misunderstanding in the expositions arises when there is no clear distinction between the works of Carlo, those of Vittore and those of others of the '*crivelleschi*'.

The polyptych of Monte San Martino is one of the few examples of Crivelli's work displayed in the original location: St Martin Church.[19] Carlo and Vittore Crivelli painted for the first time together for this work. The art critic Zampetti (1951) argued that the polyptych was made by both painters because it was Carlo's 'last incomplete effort'[20] and many scholars supported this theory. It can be assumed that it was preserved intact in the original location because the critic attributed it to the '*crivelleschi*' and not, until

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[17] Maria N. Croci and Gino Troli, *Le Città Di Crivelli: Viaggio Attraverso i Luoghi e Le Opere Conservate Nelle Marche* (Ripatransone: Maroni, 1996).

[18] McLean, p. 89.

[19] Only another one is preserved in the original location: the Polyptych of Ascoli Piceno, preserved in the Cathedral of Sant'Emidio. The other seven Marche artworks are in different museum sites (civic art galleries, diocesan museums, town hall).

[20] Pietro Zampetti, *Carlo Crivelli* (Firenze: Nardini, 1986).

1950, to Carlo and Vittore. The artwork represents an economic opportunity, for tourism and cultural enhancement, especially for a small village like Monte San Martino.[21] This village located in a remote area of the Marche is facing depopulation and a new curatorial strategy of significant impact seems to represent a challenge too complex to be faced by the sole local community.

Montefiore dell'Aso adopted a different exhibit approach. The Museum Complex of St Francis has on display the Triptych of Montefiore dell'Aso. This was a polyptych forcibly transformed into a triptych. Between 1859 and 1862 the missing panels were dispersed among different buyers, and three of the panels are lost. The original location was the nearby Church of St Francis. After the 1997 earthquake, the municipality of Montefiore dell'Aso obtained funds to restorean existing building, the convent of St Francis, into a civic cultural heritage museum. One room is dedicated to the Triptych while the others host items of rural heritage and exhibitions of the works of contemporary local artists.[22] The museum aims to promote local culture and Crivelli represents one of the local characters.

Both examples show strengths and weaknesses. A collaborative approach could empower the distinctive aspects of each exhibition and compensate for some weaknesses. Viewers of Crivelli's artworks would benefit if they were to be put in a network which would create an artistic itinerary across the Marche region, and which would increase the perception of Crivelli's international relevance. To develop a more complete itinerary, Professor Croci proposes a virtual placement of all polyptychs spread around the world in their original location as a possible new experience.[23] The network would join forces to reach a higher level in the coordination and promotion of Crivelli's artworks in the territory. While collaborative approaches are not the only path forward, these municipalities are more likely to gain a voice and access to external funding when arranged in a network.[24]

Crivelli's work is dispersed around the world, but significant examples remain in the Marche. The added value that comes from having such works in the place where they were created, and where their meanings are most powerfully felt, should not be underestimated. If local municipalities which host

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[21] According to the Italian National Institute of Statistics, in 2019 Monte San Martino had 712 inhabitants with a significant decline in the last ten years.

[22] Scenography Documentation of Giancarlo Basili, the Adolfo de Carolis Museum, and the Domenico Cantatore Collection.

[23] Croci.

[24] Powe, Pringle and Hart, p. 181.

and exhibit these works are to gain the greatest benefit, they will need to collaborate more effectively and openly. This collaboration should include both ongoing scholarship, and new and accessible forms of curation, display and access.

Appendix A

Institutions holding works by Crivelli

United States of America

Baltimore, MD (Walters Art Gallery)

Boston, MA (Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Museum of Fine Arts)

Cambridge, MA (Fogg Art Museum)

Chicago, IL (Art Institute)

Cleveland, OH (Museum of Art)

Denver, CO (Art Museum)

Detroit, MI (Institute of Arts)

El Paso, TX (Museum of Art)

Philadelphia, PA (John G. Johnson Collection)

Honolulu, HI (Academy of Art)

New Haven, CT (Yale University Art Gallery)

New York, NY (Brooklyn Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Portland — OR (Art Museum)

San Diego, CA (Fine Arts Gallery)

Tulsa, OK (Philbrook Art Centre)

Washington, DC (National Gallery of Art)

Williamstown, MA (Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute)

Worcester, MA (Museum of Art)

Europe

Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum)

Berlin (Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz)

Bruxelles (Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique)

Budapest (Szépművészeti Múzeum)

Esztragom (Keresztény Muzeùm)

Krakow (Muzeum Narodowe w Krakowie)

Frankfurt am Main (Städelsches Kunstinstitut)

Lugano (Collezione Thyssen Bornemisza)

Lille (Palais des des Beaux-Arts)

London (National Gallery, Victoria and Albert Museum, Wallace Collection)

Maastricht (Bonnefantenmuseum)

Oxford (Ashmolean Museum)

Paris (Musée Jacquemart-André, Musée du Louvre)

Strasbourg (Musées de la Ville)

Italy

Bergamo (Galleria dell'Accademia Carrara)

Florence (Museo Stibbert)

Milan (Castello Sforzesco, Museo Poldi Pezzoli, Pinacoteca di Brera)

Rome (Pinacoteca Vaticana, Galleria Colonna, Museo Nazionale di Castel Sant'Angelo)

Venice (Collezione Cini, Galleria dell'Accademia)

Verona (Museo di Castelvecchio)

The Marche region

Ancona (Pinacoteca Comunale Podesti)

Ascoli Piceno (Cattedrale di Sant'Emidio, Pinactoreca civica, Museo Diocesano)

Corridonia (Museo Parrocchiale)

Macerata (Pinacoteca Civica)

Massa Fermana (Municipio)

Monte San Martino (Chiesa di San Martino)

Montefiore dell'Aso (Complesso Museale di San Francesco)

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BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

Sexting can be sexy...if it's consensual: challenging victim blaming and heteronormativity in sext education

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In association with

CHASE
Consortium for the Humanities and the Arts South-East England

Arts & Humanities Research Council

Sexting can be sexy…if it's consensual: challenging victim blaming and heteronormativity in sext education

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Natasha Richards

Creative Work

Sexting Scenes — what do you think?

Character List (in order of appearance)

- Kirsty
- Lacey
- Nick
- Amy
- A'dab

The characters have a range of identity categories, including gender, race, and sexuality.

Pause the video during each question on the black screen for a critically reflective discussion.

Scene One — Setting up the relationships

S1: Different shots of Kirsty and Lacey hanging out in various places, looking happy and in love.

Kirsty Voiceover: We've been together for 3 years. Lacey is my first girlfriend. She is the person that held my hand as we both came out to the world. She has filled my days with laughter and wiped away all my tears. She's great.

S2: Shots of Nick and Amy hanging out just them, followed by a scene with a bigger group where Amy is getting along with Nick's friends.

Nick Voiceover: Amy and I have only been seeing each other a little while. She's cool. She gets on ok with the boys, which is good. Not too well though. Which is important.

S3: A'dab is sat with the girls, watching the boys play football at school. The boys kick the ball near the group of girls. A'dab kicks it back and goes over to chat with the boys.

A'dab Voiceover: We watch the boys play football every lunchtime. They like us to watch.

They always look over to see if we see them make a goal or something. It's nice to feel wanted.

Question on the black screen: Are these relationships healthy?

Scene Two — Initial messages

S1: A shot of Lacey and Kirsty's texts and Snapchats. They have been sharing memes and exchanging messages detailing how they feel about each other.

Kirsty Voiceover: Lacey and I would message each other all the time. We both love memes and would send them back and forth. I found it easier to tell her how much I liked her over messages. How sexy she was...how much I wanted her.

S2: A shot of Nick and Amy's phone messages. He is asking where she is and who she is with. When she does not answer straight away, he sends multiple question marks. Shot of Amy hanging out with her friends.

Nick Voiceover: I like to know what she's up to. Who she's with. She's my girlfriend. I'm meant to know that stuff. I don't want the boys thinking she's not mine.

S3: A'dab receives a message, from a group of boys in her class. It is a cartoon aubergine along with the words 'you want this'. A'dab responds by looking at the boys whilst laughing and shaking her head. The boys are laughing too.

A'dab Voiceover: The boys are always messing around and sending stupid messages on Snapchat. I don't care. It's just banter.

Question on the black screen: What kind of messages are the characters sending?

Scene Three — Asking for the nude

S1: Lacey in her bedroom, taking a photo of herself nude. Kirsty, in her bedroom, receives the nude and

then sends one back. They are both smiling and looking happy. They both go to start masturbating.

Kirsty Voiceover: We weren't ready for sex. But we did want to have fun. To pleasure each other. To feel sexy. We were both happy to send the photos. I know I was verrrrry happy looking at those photos in bed.

S2: Nick taking photos of Amy in his bedroom with her posing. He tries to take her clothes off, but she backs away and leaves the room.

Nick Voiceover: She's really hot. I wanted to show her off to my mates. To show them what's mine. Plus, everyone has nudes of their girlfriend. It's part of the relationship.

S3: A'dab is on her own in her room with her phone going off next to her and her staring at the screen.

A'dab Voiceover: I never asked them to send these messages. I never sent any back. But then... I'm not a guy. I reckon it's just a guy thing.

Question on the black screen: Why are the characters sending these messages?

Scene Four — Feelings after the nude

S1: Lacey and Kirsty spending a day in the park together, messing around and having fun.

Kirsty Voiceover: I felt safe. Lacey and I talked a lot about the photos before we sent them. Plus, it was only one part of our relationship. She was my girlfriend. But also, my friend.

S2: One shot of Amy looking sad on her bed and another shot of Nick messaging her to apologise. He explains that he found her so sexy that he wanted a picture, so he could see her when she wasn't there because he missed her—followed by a shot of Amy about to send a nude to Nick.

Nick Voiceover: I felt annoyed. She should want to send me the photo! I knew I had to be nice though... to get what I want. Which I did...in the end.

S3: A'dab going through her Instagram and opening the message requests and receiving dick pics.

A'dab Voiceover: I felt fine. I mean, it's not like it's only my friends that I get pictures from. I've had loads

of message requests from strangers on Instagram with titles like 'take your pants off' and then... there's a dick pic. So, it's just normal.

Question on the black screen: Were all these messages consensual?

Scene Five — What happened next

S1: Lacey and Kirsty sat on the bed, kissing and slowly lying down.

Kirsty Voiceover: We didn't have sex straight after the nudes. We had sex in stages. We talked about everything. We did what felt right for us both at the time.

S2: Shots of Nick showing the boys the photos of Amy. Most of them laugh and pass the phone around, but two of them stand staring, looking mildly disapproving.

Nick Voiceover: Of course, I had to show the boys. Had to prove the goods! Show them who is the boss. They loved it!!

S3: A'dab is sat in the canteen with a mixture of boys and girls from her friendship group. When she receives a Snapchat notification, the boys snatch her phone and all laugh. The girls try to get her phone back.

A'dab Voiceover: I got a dick pic from Simon at school, and the other boys saw it come through on my Snapchat. They all laughed and asked why he sent it. They didn't believe me when I said I didn't send any nudes to him.

Question on the black screen: Why did the characters act that way?

Scene Six — Outcome

S1: A scene with Lacey and Kirsty sat on a bench looking sad and then walking in opposite directions.

Kirsty Voiceover: After a while, Lacey and I weren't making each other happy anymore. We both changed over time. We liked different things. So...we broke up.

S2: Two of Nick's friends tell him to stop, and the other boys distance themselves from Nick.

Nick Voiceover: Well, most of them loved it. Two of the boys said it wasn't cool, and she only sent them to me, no one else, so I shouldn't be sharing them with anyone else. Then the other boys started to look awkward. Bunch of pussies.

S3: A'dab watching the boys play football, but they all turn and start shouting rude comments at her. Some of her friends try to comfort her, but some walk away, shaking their heads at her.

A'dab Voiceover: Some of my friends believed me that I hadn't sent any photos. But not all of them. Some of them even think we've had sex. The boys call me a slag. The girls are annoyed that I didn't tell them. Even though there's nothing to tell.

Question on the black screen: Would you have predicted those outcomes for the characters?

Scene Seven — How they felt about the outcome

S1: Kirsty sat at her desk with her friends in the classroom. Lacey walks in with some friends. They both smile and lift their hand slightly for a wave, and then Lacey goes and sits with her friends at the back of the class.

Kirsty Voiceover: People expected me and Lacey to hate each other afterwards. But we don't. We just needed some space to heal.

S2: Nick going through his phone and looking at all the pictures that he has been sent.

Nick Voiceover: I thought this was what boys were meant to do. I didn't know the photos had to stay just between us. Between Amy and me. I've got loads of these photos from other mates. I thought they'd like it.

S3: A'dab sat alone, pinging an elastic band on her wrist. A classmate is watching her.

A'dab Voiceover: I don't know what I should do. I just want the lies to stop. The pain to stop. I don't think it ever will.

Question on the black screen: How do you think the characters are all feeling?

Scene Eight — Other people involved

S1: Kirsty and Lacey meeting on the same bench and passing each other their phones to delete the messages.

Kirsty Voiceover: I didn't want her to have my nudes anymore though. And she felt the same. It didn't feel right. A friend suggested we could delete them all. So, we did. Together.

S2: Quick shot of each: Amy breaking up with Nick; his friend telling his brother; his parents taking his phone.

Nick Voiceover: One of my friends told Amy, and she broke up with me. My brother found out, and he told my parents. They took my phone off me. They told me it's illegal to send nudes before you turn 18. I could get into trouble with the police. I didn't know.

S3: A teacher asking A'dab to stay behind after class. The teacher indicates to A'dab's wrist, and A'dab cries and tells the teacher everything that happened.

A'dab Voiceover: Miss Tiffin asked me to stay behind after class today. A classmate had noticed I had cuts on my arms and told the teacher. They both wanted to help.

Question on the black screen: How did other characters help in these situations?

Scene Nine — Changes

S1: Kirsty and Lacey deleting the messages, and then the two of them smiling and this time hugging before they leave the bench and walk separate ways.

Kirsty Voiceover: I don't regret sending the nudes. And I definitely don't regret my relationship with Lacey. But I am happy we both can feel safe knowing the nudes no longer exist. It felt good to have that closure to our relationship.

S2: Nick walking past all his friends as he is escorted off school premises.

Nick Voiceover: I regret showing those pictures. Everyone is annoyed at me, and I upset Amy. I got suspended from school because someone reported me to the teacher.

S3: Seeing A'dab showing the messages to the headteacher.

A'dab Voiceover: I thought it was my fault, but I know now. I did nothing wrong. I only wish I had spoken to someone sooner about the messages. But it didn't seem as big of a deal at the time.

Question on the black screen: Why are the characters talking about regret?

Scene Ten — Conclusion

S1: Kirsty and Lacey spotting each other in the street, seemingly after a while, and going over to say hello.

Kirsty Voiceover: Lacey went to a different sixth form to me. I still see her around town sometimes. We're happy.

S2: Nick hanging out with some of his friends and seeing Amy and another guy looking happy together.

Nick Voiceover: I deleted all the photos and started hanging out with some new mates. Amy has another boyfriend now. They look good together. She's happy.

S3: A'dab talking to a counsellor and then leaving the room and her friends being outside waiting to look after her.

A'dab Voiceover: Miss Tiffin took me to the school nurse, and they put me in touch with a counsellor. It has been helping to talk about everything at school. I'm happy.

Question on the black screen: How do you feel about how these stories end?

Critical Commentary

Sexting involves sharing a sexually explicit text message, a naked or semi-naked image, or a video, with another person.[1] Young people's sexting is an area of concern amongst parents, policymakers, and educators.[2] Sexting is one of many topics concerning relationships and sex covered in educational workshops led by the School of Sexuality Education (formally Sexplain UK).[3] During a recent placement with the School of Sexuality Education, I created a film script intended as a resource for sext education. The term 'sext education' was playfully coined by prominent feminist scholars Amy Shields Dobson and Jessica Ringrose in their essay *Sext education: pedagogies of sex, gender and shame in the schoolyards of Tagged and Exposed*. Here, Dobson and Ringrose highlight the prevalence of victim blaming and heteronormativity in two cyber-safety campaign films, arguing the need to question and challenge these dominant narratives in future forms of sext education.[4] My sext education resource aims to answer their call and address the issues of victim blaming and heteronormativity highlighted in their essay. My previous placement at the School of Sexuality Education, my current PhD Practice-as-Research, and my experience as an applied theatre practitioner all informed the script content.

Tagged and *Exposed* are film resources depicting the consequences of sexting and were widely distributed around 2012.[5] *Tagged* was part of the 'Cybersmart' Campaign by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). *Exposed* was part of the 'Think U Know' campaign distributed by the UK's Child Exploitation Online Protection Centre (CEOP). With the advancement of and increasing access to technology, films have been used as a resource to address the digital pressures on young people. Governments have had to respond quickly to the highly publicised possibilities of

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[1] NSPCC, 'Sexting and Sending nudes', <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/sexting-sending-nudes/?gclsrc=aw.ds&&gclid=Cj0KCQiAgomBBhDXARIsAFNyUqPbUgW3njKPpJEgN_2uRoiBt3LQBXCGEkEa6CHfq_Tch6SUDqG0FvYaAiO1EALw_wcB&gclsrc=aw.ds> [accessed 10 February 2021].

[2] Clara Rübner Jørgensen, Annalise Weckesser, Jerome Turner, and Alex Wade, 'Young people's views on sexting education and support needs: findings and recommendations from a UK-based study', *Sex Education*, 19 (2018), pp. 25-40.

[3] School of Sexuality Education, 'Approach', <https://schoolofsexed.org/approach> [accessed 19 February 2021].

[4] Amy Shields Dobson and Jessica Ringrose, 'Sext education: pedagogies of sex, gender and shame in the schoolyards of Tagged and Exposed', *Sex Education*, 16 (2016), pp. 8-21.

[5] Dobson and Ringrose, 2016, p. 10.

extreme consequences for youths involved in sexting.[6] Besides film, theatre has a long and varied history of being used as an educational tool.[7] In terms of exploring sexting, Evan Placey's acclaimed play *Girls Like That,* first performed in 2013, explores the pressures on young people in the digital age. It follows the aftermath of a naked photograph of schoolgirl Scarlett going viral.[8] Though films can be distributed widely and quickly, theatre's liveness encourages active learning and dialectical thinking.[9] My sext education resource can be far-reaching, as a film, and incorporates active learning through participatory discussions between scenes.

The School of Sexuality Education takes a sex-positive approach in their workshops, as they 'actively encourage positive attitudes towards sexuality and body image, bust myths, but also expose taboos and tackle feelings of shame driven by inequalities'.[10] In contrast, in *Tagged* and *Exposed* a focus on anti-sexting — stopping the creation and sharing of images — is prioritised over a challenge to the sexist culture that makes sexting risky, particularly for girls.[11] The recently mandatory Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) UK guidance also maintains anti-sexting messages, focusing on secondary school students knowing their responsibilities and the risks online.[12] By centring anti-sexting, personal responsibility, and risk-based rhetoric, these approaches can create a culture where victim blaming thrives. Victim blaming refers to assigning fault to the victim rather than the perpetrator by assuming the victim did something to provoke the issue.[13] My script does not focus solely on anti-sexting. Instead, it provides multiple viewpoints of sexting, including sexting as a positive expression of sexuality, to tackle feelings of shame and to challenge dominate narratives of victim blaming.

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[6] Amy Hasinoff, *Sexting Panic: Rethinking Criminalization, Privacy, and Consent* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

[7] Helen Nicholson, *Theatre, Education and Performance* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 19.

[8] Evan Placey, *Girls Like That* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2013).

[9] Nicholson, 2011, p. 67.

[10] School of Sexuality Education.

[11] Dobson and Ringrose, 2016, p.9.

[12] Department for Education, 'Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education Statutory guidance for governing bodies, proprietors, head teachers, principals, senior leadership teams, teachers', <https://assets. publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/908013/Relationships_Education__ Relationships_and_Sex_Education__RSE__and_Health_Education.pdf> [accessed 19 February 2021].

[13] Harvard Law School, 'How to Avoid Victim Blaming', <https://orgs.law.harvard.edu/halt/how-to-avoid-victim-blaming/> [accessed 19 February 2021].

As well as challenging the dominant narrative of victim blaming, my script aims to challenge heteronormativity, a world view that promotes heterosexuality as the normal or preferred sexual orientation.[14] Both *Tagged* and *Exposed* focus exclusively on heterosexual intimate relationships. The UK RSE guidance has a separate LGBT section rather than these identities being integrated throughout, thereby centring heterosexuality as the norm. My sext education film script explores sexting in both heterosexual and same-sex couplings, taking a significant step away from the heteronormativity present in *Tagged* and *Exposed*. Integration of different sexualities increases their visibility and normalises them.

My Practice-as-Research PhD has explored applied theatre as a useful tool for questioning and challenging dominant narratives through creativity and discussion. Influential applied theatre practitioner Katherine Low stresses that playfulness and space to breathe are essential for exploring sexual health.[15] Questions are included after, or close to, each scene in my film script, providing a moment for self-reflection. Educators using the film as a sext education resource should pause at these questions for an extended discussion, encouraging young people to critically interrogate their position. For example, in the question following scene six, young people can expand on whether their predicted outcomes would be the same or different depending on the characters' identity categories. The reflective questions create the time for self-reflection — that desired space to breathe — and provide a sense of playfulness through interaction.

When considering identity categories, young people can interrogate how different issues impact people's lives. The School of Sexuality Education's approach is intersectional, aiming to educate and empower young people to understand and challenge inequalities dependent on intersecting identity categories such as gender, sexuality, age, disability, race, and class.[16] Low argues that explorations of sexual health concerns need to provide a space where the individual can appreciate the subject 'in a way that speaks to their experiences'.[17] Multiple storylines, diverse characters, and reflective questions provide various opportunities for connection within my film. Multiplicity allows for a greater range of

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[14] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999).

[15] Katharine Low, "It's difficult to talk about sex in a positive way': Creating a space to breath', in *Performing Health and Wellbeing*, ed. by Veronica Baxter and Katherine E. Low (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 146-161.

[16] School of Sexuality Education.

[17] Low, 2017, p. 154.

young people to see their experiences presented, while the reflective questions promote consideration of differences and similarities between others' experiences depending on identity categories.

It is valuable to consider how intersecting identities are represented and respected in discussions of relationships and sex. Heteronormativity and victim blaming can be questioned and challenged by not condemning expressions of female sexuality. *Tagged* follows the chain reaction after a group of high-school friends post an online rumour about a rival. The main character in the film, Kate, has a tattoo of a star on her hip. The tattoo is clearly visible in intimate photographs that are shared amongst school peers without Kate's consent:

> Kate's star tattoo is constructed here as a visual mark of her sexual desire. The star symbol is used as a background design on the Cybersmart government website promoting the film, both reinforcing the notion that girls are visibly and permanently 'marked' by their sexual desire, and visually linking the schoolbased harassment depicted in the film with the digital realm.[18]

In my sext education film script, Amy is not permanently marked by her sharing nudes. Amy's ability to move on after her nude goes viral, without her being represented as forever shamed by this action, questions dominant narratives surrounding the suppression of female sexuality.

As well as not shaming female sexuality, sext education resources can go further and show positive examples of female sexuality. Low argues that people 'struggle to speak about sex and relationships in a positive manner'.[19] This struggle can lead to depictions of sexting being rooted in risk and shame. *Exposed* presents a deterrent tale of a girl's distress after her nudes are circulated at school. The film dismisses and vilifies young people's sexual agency, shown when Dee says she 'thought it would be fun' to share nudes and is dismissed as 'stupid' by her alter ego. Low discusses 'pervasive moral codes...[that allow]... little space for playful experimentation, burgeoning desire or an acknowledgement of the emotional aspects of sexuality'.[20] My script includes a positive example of female sexting, which highlights how sexting can induce pleasure. It demonstrates a celebration of female desire and an acknowledgement of the emotional aspects of sexuality.

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[18] Dobson and Ringrose, 2016, p. 12.
[19] Low, 2017, p. 147.
[20] Low, 2017, p. 148.

My sext education resource includes both positive and adverse outcomes for sexting. By including multiple storylines, with different results, varied experiences of sexting can be presented and discussed. In storyline one, Kirsty and Lacey delete the photos they have shared after ending their relationship, demonstrating how consent is an ongoing negotiation; people can withdraw their consent at any point. In storyline two, the perpetrator, Nick, is punished for his actions, highlighting the potential adverse outcomes of non-consensual nude image sharing. In storyline three, the victim, A'dab, receives support once she reports the incident, suggesting that sharing experiences can mitigate the potential harm of sexting. In all the three storylines, consent and communication are the critical factors for the subsequent outcomes. By focusing on consent and communication rather than shame and blame, my creative piece aims to move away from victim blaming and heteronormativity. As stated in the title of this critical commentary: Sexting can be sexy...if it's consensual.

Sext education resources should address relevant issues and include realistic results for young people:

> Seeing another young person dealing with daily practices familiar to them, scenarios like munch screens or exposing others, or being asked for a naked photo, or for a 'blow job' by text or Facebook message, seems particularly powerful, certainly more influential than advice pages, top tips or negatively worded advice (don't do this, don't do that).[21]

My sext education resource aims to fulfil young peoples' desire for realistic scenarios. The storylines are based upon my experiences working with young people, both in my roles as a researcher and as applied theatre practitioner, and experiences detailed by other researchers and practitioners. By having multiple storylines running in parallel, young people can engage with multiple scenarios relevant to their day-to-day lives. These multiple outcomes are not exhaustive and therefore may not seem realistic for everyone. The reflective questioning allows young people to discuss why some scenarios and outcomes may be more realistic for them than others, or vice versa. Even if the outcomes do not seem plausible to one person, the space to reflect, play with, and breathe upon other potential consequences means that realistic outcomes become part of the discussion.

Within my script's multiple storylines exists a range of diverse characters. Diverse characters

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[21] Jessica Ringrose, Rosalind Gill, Sonia Livingstone, and Laura Harvey, *A qualitative study of children, young people and 'sexting': a report prepared for the NSPCC* (LSE Research Online, 2012), p. 55.

can help to challenge victim blaming and heteronormativity by showing a range of identities and experiences, thereby ensuring young people can see practices relevant to their daily lives. As mentioned earlier, *Tagged* and *Exposed* both focus on heterosexual intimacies, but I include heterosexual and same-sex intimacies to normalise different sexualities. Low argues that focusing on the intimacy of sex can create spaces where 'different experiences are equally valid and important'.[22] Showing the intimate exchanging of pictures between Kirsty and Lacey provides a questioning of and challenge to heteronormativity, as LGBTQ+ young people can see themselves as valued and consider the resource as relevant to their own lives.

Sext education resources should not only consider the identities of the characters, but also which character will be central in the narrative. In *Exposed,* the central character is Dee, with the boyfriend that she sent the nudes to only briefly seen and interrogated by her. During the limited time we see him, rather than take responsibility for his actions, he blames others for the nude being shared widely and non-consensually, including Dee herself. It is Dee's actions that are scrutinised, not the actions of those who shared the images without consent. By following Nick's journey in storyline two, my script aims to challenge heteronormativity and victim blaming by spotlighting the perpetrator rather than the victim. Additionally, A'dab is the focus of storyline three, highlighting the ways in which a victim of non-consensual image sharing can potentially be supported. Focusing on the perpetrator in one storyline, and the victim in another, emphasises how the main character can challenge and question victim blaming and heteronormativity depending on what actions and outcomes the storyline highlights.

As well as the main characters' actions, the supporting characters' actions need careful consideration when creating sext education resources. My film challenges heteronormativity and victim blaming through bystander intervention, whereby the supporting characters recognise a harmful situation and intervene safely and effectively.[23] Not all the young males in storyline two endorse the perpetrator's actions, and instead some report him to the school. The bystander intervention counters

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[22] Low, 2017, p. 158.

[23] GOV.UK, 'Bystander interventions to prevent intimate partner and sexual violence: summary', <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/interventions-to-prevent-intimate-partner-and-sexual-violence/bystander-interventions-to-prevent-intimate-partner-and-sexual-violence-summary> [accessed 19 February 2021].

an assumption of all young males supporting non-consensual sharing of nudes based upon heteronormative under-standings of masculinity. In storyline three, bystander intervention occurs when a classmate reports cuts on A'dab's arm, which challenges victim blaming narratives where classmates only see the victim as 'getting what they deserve'. The inclusion of bystander intervention highlights the collective responsibility to challenge heteronormativity and victim blaming, particularly regarding non-consensual image sharing.

The characters' personal development is also critical in sext education resources. Victim blaming and heteronormativity can be questioned and challenged by stressing the possibility of change. Kirsty's feelings regarding the nudes changed after the breakup; Nick's character changed from not caring to regretting his actions; A'dab's self-confidence changed, finally reporting the issues rather than accepting the peer pressure. In my film script, change precedes positive outcomes for the characters. Though it could be argued that having positive results in all three storylines is unrealistic, it counters the dominant narratives rooted in risk and shame discussed at the start of this essay. Low outlines that the 'fact that there is no right or wrong or a tragic moralistic ending is liberating, it demonstrates flexible choice and possibility'.[24] If the storylines only focus on negatives, particularly in outcomes, change will appear pointless. When change is presented as possible and preferable, dominant narratives of victim blaming and heteronormativity become more malleable, and young people may have more desire to question and challenge them.

In the future, I would like to film this sext education resource in partnership with a group of diverse young people, adapting the script, and the filming, according to their ideas and skills. The experiences of young people are rapidly change, particularly as technology and forms of information sharing develop. This script is an initial idea that will vary according to the context in which it is filmed, and the people that are featured in the film. By working in partnership with young people, sext education resources can be more relatable, up-to-date, and relevant. Victim blaming and heteronormativity can be questioned and challenged when researchers, educators, and applied theatre practitioners work alongside young people, valuing their contributions rather than telling them how to think, act, or feel.

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[24] Low, 2017, p. 161.

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BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

The Modernists: Translating Between Fiction and Architecture

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In association with

The Modernists: Translating Between Fiction and Architecture

Kotryna Garanasvili

There are hardly two forms of art more different than literature and architecture — different in their final expression, at least. But despite the difference in their external form, they are closely interrelated. Architecture is an integral part of the majority of literary works, its most evident function is to serve as a dwelling for the characters; as a rule, they live and act within a variety of buildings. But it does not end there — instead of remaining a passive background, architecture goes on to convey significant literary ideas.

This connection is especially compelling in creative writing. Carefully considered, development of architectural spaces makes for an extremely rich technique for constructing literary meanings. I have chosen to build them up in *The Modernists*, a novel that focuses on architects themselves, bringing my own creative work into the analysis and seeing how theoretical ideas about the link between architecture and literature can be developed in the creative process to make the work of fiction an extension of these ideas. Accompanied by a commentary, the extracts from the novel will illustrate how the architectural and literary planes intertwine to construct particular meanings.

The interaction between architecture and literature breaks down the barriers between the two artistic expressions, or at least constructs bridges between them.[1] As proposed by Aarati Kanekar, an equivalence of meaning can be found between the signs of architectural and literary expressions, which both feature a notion of logical construction.[2] Parallels can be found even in their structural arrangement. For instance, Katja Grillner and Rolf Hughes, originally trained in architecture and creative and critical writing respectively, assert that architecture and literature share an analogous composition: if, in architecture, a 'passage' is a transitory space that takes the viewer from one space (or room) to another, in literature, it is accordingly a particular section of the text.

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[1] David Spurr, *Architecture and Modern Literature* (Michigan City: University of Michigan Press, 2012), p. 3.

[2] Aarati Kanekar, *Architecture's Pretexts: Spaces of Translation* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 5.

Therefore, certain passages in a verbal text can be compared to spatial volumes.[3]

Architectural spaces can convey essential thematic aspects of literary works. They fulfil a wide range of functions in various works of fiction: from revealing the inwardness and complex feelings of the characters to serving as models to structure the society and providing an ideology. Serving as a mirror of the characters is one of the most important functions architecture performs in literary works. Building on Yuri Lotman's concept, the depiction of a built space in literature can reveal insights to the characters' identity — both their inner life and the way they present themselves to others.[4] A memorable example is the case of Jay Gatsby's manor, which Fitzgerald describes as 'a huge incoherent failure of a house'.[5] The architectural disharmony of the house represents the inadequacy of its owner and his essential failure to achieve his vision. In turn, architecture reflects the nature of human relationships — for example, the way someone's spatial arrangement is perceived by another person defines their particular connection and their understanding of each other.

Built spaces are also capable of producing intense feelings and emotional reactions in people who are experiencing them. Buildings can exert a strong psychological response, as David Spurr reveals through J.G. Ballard's presentation of the Heathrow Hilton hotel[6]: this building is revealed to hold the ability of changing people's inner state, altering their emotions and even acting as a substitute for emotions.[7] In addition, the built environment can exhibit complex human emotions and inner states — for instance, a chaotic arrangement of spaces can illustratively signify a disturbed inner turmoil.

The functions achieved in literary works through architectural codes are multiple. Above all, architecture provides a rich reservoir of semiotic signs, embodying a multidimensional reality and offering a universal model that can be applied in creative writing to discern corresponding meanings.

The possibilities that the depiction of architectural spaces offers are employed in *The Modernists*. Set in near future, the novel explores virtual reality (VR) technology — established to create a very

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[3] Katja Grillner, Rolf Hughes, *Room Within a View: A Conversation on Writing and Literature* (Amsterdam: OASE Foundation & NAi Publishers, 1999).

[4] Yuri Lotman, The Symbolism of St. Petersburg and the Problems of Urban Semiotics. In: *Cultural Semiotics* (Vilnius: Baltos Lankos, 2004), pp. 332-349.

[5] F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (Green Light, Kindle Edition, 2011), p. 179.

[6] David Spurr, *Architecture and Modern Literature* (Michigan City: University of Michigan Press, 2012), pp. 246-247.

[7] Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Interviews.* Vol. 1. (Milan: Charta, 2003), p. 60.

detailed replica of reality and used by the architects to design buildings. It revolves around a complex relationship between two different generations of architects during the time of rapid technological development that brings into question the conventional understanding of architecture and its future. The protagonist, Anthony Champneys, is an aspiring apprentice of a legendary and reclusive architect, Daniel Caswell. Anthony is a perfect craftsman of the VR technology but suffers from imposter syndrome when it comes to his own art. His main task is to transform Caswell's designs into the VR and act as a middleman between Caswell and his clients. The dynamic changes dramatically when both architects enter a contest for a building that attempts to change the very concept of architecture. In this contest, Anthony and Caswell are no longer co-workers but rivals. Architectural spaces perform a variety of functions in the novel, intensifying its themes, revealing the nature of the characters, their interactions and complex relationships, as well as their intense emotional life.

The following selected non-consecutive passages focus on the relationship between Caswell and Anthony: it is at the centre of the novel, and serves as a means to develop its main themes. Both characters use the most personal architectural arrangements of their homes as a means of expressing their way and view of life. Caswell's own home is very understated, faceless and does not reveal anything of his personality:

> Anthony remembered how surprised he was upon seeing [Caswell's] apartment for the first time — quite contrarily to any possible expectation, it was strangely simple. It was not a lack of taste or expense that this simplicity arrived from. The apartment was rather conventional, lowbrow even. For a moment Caswell seemed to him to be walking around like a wild animal, domesticated and put into a large enclosure.

However, Caswell expresses his personality through every building he designs. These buildings are even capable of revealing the parts of him that he does not display when interacting with other people:

> They were warm, now already old-fashionedly cosy, decorative in their complexity. It meant that he was, or could be, like this too. Did all his warmth go into his creations, was it the only way to express it?

Meanwhile, Anthony's small apartment betrays his status as a young professional at the start of his career, as well as his careful attention to convention and peer pressure. The apartment is exactly as

it is supposed to be — containing the kind of furniture and elements of decoration that are trendy and well-liked among people of his status and position, and therefore acceptable. He establishes himself as an immaculate part of the environment and community that surrounds him, taking careful precautions not to stand out — he dresses in the way everyone else does, engages in every activity that is considered proper or reputable, painstakingly perfects his skills and is generally cautious to fully perform his role — mainly as the executant of a greater artist's work, a member of a prestigious architectural institution. At one point, he even observes his apartment — his only truly personal space throughout the novel — considering whether it would be different if he belonged to a different kind of community and trying to decide how much of the architectural arrangement depends on his own person. Ironically, this contemplation is provoked by a surprise visit of a person who has a great influence on Anthony; he is encouraged to look at his space the way that the other person — not just a random observer — would see it, and reconsiders his own character and inner world as he carefully goes through every object in the apartment and the architectural whole that they form:

> He tried to make it as aesthetic as possible — as much as the limited space allowed him. He wondered how his space would look like if he had followed a different path, was influenced by different ideals. What if in his circle, decoration such as ivory lamp posts and thick leather was not valued or even acknowledged — different symbols would have had different meanings, and the arrangement of his living space might have been something else entirely.

These depictions of the characters' architectural spaces correspond to Lotman's concept: architecture serves as a reflection of identity and the way it is perceived by outside observers, providing additional layers of meaning to characterisation.[8]

The selected passages are connected by the same building, presenting its different expressions in the two scenes, in turn reflecting different nuances of the characters' personalities and emotions and their changing relationship. In the first scene, Anthony is walking through one of Caswell's designs, a space perfectly familiar to him, looking for possible flaws to be fixed and making sure everything is as it is supposed to be, corresponding to the Caswell's original vision. This particular architectural space

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[8] Yuri Lotman, *The Symbolism of St. Petersburg and the Problems of Urban Semiotics*. In: *Cultural Semiotics* (Vilnius: Baltos Lankos, 2004), pp. 332-349.

also reveals everything that makes Caswell's style distinctive. Caswell's personality is revealed through this building: he is an extremely reserved person, and so the architectural signs of his design and things that they might signify is the only way for Anthony to comprehend his character. As Anthony passes different rooms of the building, they add up to a picture representing Caswell and how Anthony views and understands him.

In the second scene, the same place turns into something unexpected and threatening, presenting the hostile aggression that an architectural arrangement is capable of exuding — the threat is produced by the very fact that it is no longer familiar and its limits are unclear, reflecting the emotional impact that the built environment can have on an individual experiencing it as well as the inner state it can illustrate.[9] The change in the architectural environment also depicts the changing nature of the two characters' relationship. Where the experience of the building is calm and familiar in the first scene, it changes as their rivalry makes Anthony discover Caswell's personality traits he did not suspect before. Consequently, Anthony rediscovers the person that this space represents, which alters the appearance of the space and adds to Anthony's emotional response. The shift in his emotional reaction sharpens the growing tension between the two characters and how one is perceived by the other. The reason for the deep impact this experience of architecture has on Anthony is related to his own personality. Anthony defines himself as a 'transparent glass' — he is merely a mediator between VR technology and the other person's creative ideas but never uses it to execute his own work. His renunciation of his own personality causes him to identify with the person whose works he transforms into a different medium — in this case, he becomes Caswell — while his own identity is lost somewhere in between.

As shown through the examples, architectural spaces serve as a compelling creative writing technique. They are able to perform various literary functions, such as revealing the emotional reaction it brings out in the characters, reflecting their inner life and their relations to each other. Mindful consideration and deliberate employment of these functions can be effectively adapted in creative writing to communicate the messages and intensify the main themes of the literary work. Architecture turns into an intricate part of the creative process — the architectural expression

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[9] David Spurr, *Architecture and Modern Literature* (Michigan City: University of Michigan Press, 2012), pp. 246-247

and the literary expression intertwine, influencing each other in a variety of dynamic ways. It is essentially an active exploration of the relationship between the two art forms that prove to be very closely connected.

The Modernists (excerpts)

He was walking down a long airy corridor.

It was quiet, and the only sound in the sounding space around him was that of his own steps. The walls were glaringly white. But the windows and the view that opened out — thick brown leaves and grey stems — had warmed them up, making them glisten imperceptibly like a rough crystal.

The building was almost empty, aside from a fixture here and there — a roll-top desk, a leather couch, a waxy dark green pot plant, all emphatically large and bulky. All seemed to be placed here by something other than natural purpose, as if there was a different role they were performing — to see how they'll look like, to give the impression how they'll go with the building, or to point to the function of a certain room.

He walked on, moving slowly up the copper corkscrew staircase — just as bulky against the white setting. The landing was carpeted in moss green, and from this point, colours were turning warmer still, and the emphatic clearness of the first floor was being replaced by decoration — copper and wood — that was growing, straight away, on the walls, the ceilings and the ground, as if the building was slowly pulling on a dull, warmly glistening casing.

As he crossed another open corridor stretching out into a vast common space, which was suggested by a few more leather couches and heavy leather armchairs to be a living room — without these signs of furnishing, it was just as empty, high-ceilinged and already weighty with decoration, made still solely of wood and copper — he opened a double door at the end of the room.

The place where he appeared differed from the rest of the building in a striking contrast. This difference would be enough to confound anyone, let alone the technical part. The space was composed of nothing else but glass, opening a view to the same autumnal trees. Like it was hanging in the air. The only thing to return it into reality was, standing in the corner of the room — for one

couldn't realize this as a room at once — a massive piano. And, of course, the door. What had already become domestic, earthly, even weighed down in the building, was broken here suddenly and solidified into something of an unearthly, weightless interval.

But he never slowed down and he crossed the room — or rather the tunnel — without looking around or pausing to look at the half-grey, half-fawn landscape that, in this case, was not seen through the windows of the room but was the room itself. Instead, he turned away, opening another door, proceeding to other empty, white rooms that finally led to a terrace. From the terrace, another corkscrew staircase went down to a garden. As he was coming down, his every step sounded onto the pipy copper.

The garden was cold and austere. Crunching under his feet were the pebbles of a pathway that led through the bare, flat scenery. By now, anyone would have noticed there was something strange about the place. But only now had it become so clear. Trees didn't throw shadows.

From the inside, this was not visible, or perhaps it was harder to notice, but now the openness of the garden left little room for deception. This only caught his gaze for a second, and without turning it away, he pulled out a portable screen from his pocket, on which he made some notes before going ahead.

The garden, endless at first glance, started to change slowly, like it was shrinking. With his every step the colours turned bleaker, the trees, as if affected by a strange optical illusion, looked more like smudges of spilled paint, spreading and fading and decaying into countless bits that were not massed into anything. As he kept walking away from the building, the whole space was fading and smudging still, until it turned blindingly white, with an almost imperceptible surface texture, like ridged paper or chalky paint, and completely empty, save for long lines extending farther outwards — bright and rough contours at first, and then gradually thinning pencil threads.

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That day in the lab, going through the new and almost version of Ivy building, Anthony was confronted with an unexpected obstacle.

At first, everything was going on as usual — he crossed the entrance and the hall room, checking

whether there were no small inaccuracies, then turned down the corridor towards the further spaces of the house that needed more work.

The corridor was long, gallery-like, and, in keeping with Caswell's style, filled with warm, very faintly golden light. Before he reached an archway opening at the end of the corridor, he realized suddenly that something was changed. The change was rather still awaiting — he couldn't have explained what made him feel that way. As he proceeded, the feeling that something was wrong grew stronger still.

On the outside, everything was the same, but he felt he had stepped in a different space, like temperature had dropped suddenly. Then, almost immediately, he saw that the corridor was extending too far — or perhaps his steps slowed down, as if walking had suddenly become very hard. He reached the archway finally — and here he noticed that the walls had lost their faint colour. They were more intensely, more obviously white. They were even, but not smooth — the texture was inexplicably coarse, like rough paper. You could only see the bumps of the texture from very close up. Its roughness could only be felt now.

For a moment, he reached for the touchscreen, wondering if he should make a note of this change, which seemed natural, rather, as though the software had consistently replaced the colour he had chosen with a different one. He was doubtful. This had never happened before. But this explanation was, of course, the most rational one.

The door was waiting at the end of the corridor, as always, and he turned to it quickly, caught by agitation if not concern whether the alteration of colour continued behind it as well. He opened the door, and it was there — gleaming just as intensely, everywhere. There was no sign of his colour spectrum. Everything had changed. Now he was disquieted. He increased his pace, almost running upstairs. But again he was affected by that strange, baffling difficulty of movement — the stairs seemed to drag on without end. He looked back and saw a long row of treads he had already moved past.

It was clear then that something was terribly wrong.

The stairs brought him to a large open landing, from where three corridors led to different directions. He couldn't recognize these lines anymore. They were not his. Spaces appeared in the house

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that he had never put there. He felt at a complete loss as to how much room they took, and how they were arranged — there was nothing to suggest what they were. They were utterly unfamiliar.

The only way was to go forward. He made his way across the landing in a few quick steps. He went down one of the corridors — it ran straight, then turned suddenly left, then right, broken into bends, so sharp instant that unless you slowed the pace, they could send you slamming against the wall. Then it levelled out again, and Anthony began walking faster, but the corridor was shrinking — disproportionately, in an accelerated way, until it became so narrow he could barely squeeze through. In a moment, the space expanded again to the size of a vast hall.

It was completely empty save for a single door. He didn't have another choice but to go to the door and open it quickly. A small passage showed up behind it, and another door that looked exactly like the previous one. Anxious about what he might find on the other side, he opened it. But all he saw was another passage — and another door. Then another one, and another one. He heard them shut quietly behind his back before landing up in front of a new one. He was opening them, faster and faster, with growing impatience. They were opening endlessly, leading nowhere. Passages between them were becoming narrower still. Soon, he hardly had room to hold out his hand to another handle. All doors looked the same — plain and white, handles gleaming dully in the whiteness.

He was reaching, automatically, for another handle and wobbled suddenly, almost losing his balance, finding himself at the top of a long flight of stairs. The stairs extended downward this time, wide at first, narrowing gradually, winding in a spiral. They didn't seem attached to anything — it was as though they hung down from invisible vertical strings.

He raced down the stairs — the treads made no sound, he could only just sense them under his feet, like they were evaporating into the air. He didn't hear a sound — not even his own steps. But the silence was just as scratchy as the texture of the walls — indescribably rough.

Then, without warning, the treads under his feet turned to a flat declivity, and he had to grab the rail to keep him from falling over. The declivity led him to another plain, strangely disarranged space, narrow, with an immensely high ceiling. The only way was to another long, gallery-like corridor, almost the same as the one at the beginning.

Windows started emerging on both sides of the walls — only indications of windows, schematic openings against the long lines. They kept extended forward, and he could make out something in the distance — shadowy and rectangular, resembling an entry to a yard, or a garden, or some other outer space — it was impossible to tell, but it looked like a way out. It was the only choice, and unthinkingly, he headed in that direction.

But the closer he got, the blurrier this rectangular shape was becoming. He seemed to be moving upwards, although he couldn't see how — as though he was going up the stairs on invisible treads. The lines became rugged, and even more than that — they were austere, almost confrontational. As if they wanted to get rid of him with the same vigour that he wanted to escape from them. They melted and faded as they stretched further, turning into thinning pencil traces, traces left by someone else.

He realized then that what he had taken for a garden, or a yard, or another entrance, was simply an accumulation of these lines. Only one thing could lie behind it — the extending white space. He thought suddenly that he had been expecting it secretly all this time. Now all that separated him from was this schematically formed passageway. But it was too late — he had already stepped over it.

It was then that the truth sank in, and the realizing he had appeared in that space, with no evident way out, he felt himself sent into a state of terror that he had never felt before.

He had never confronted it so bluntly, so inescapably before. He had only seen its edges, distant glimpses he'd catch on the corner of his eye before looking away, like someone trying not to look directly at the sun. He perceived it in his thoughts, not his sight. In this way, it was always implicit, to some extent, at least; although it did undeniably exist, the comprehension of its existence was theoretical, unverified by actual experience. Now he was placed in an absolute confrontation with it.

Enormous emptiness flowed from it. It was senselessly white, soundless, weightless. There was nothing to connect it with the surrounding objects — no reason for it to exist. It couldn't be registered by any sense. Yet it was there — with its persistent presence. The worst part was a lurking suspicion that it was not empty at all — that it contained something that couldn't be seen, only felt, like the rough surface of the seemingly smooth walls.

He stood beside that emptiness, in a stupor, unable to move. A few blood-curdling moments

went by. He pulled back then, reaching to grab on a jamb of the entrance, grasping nothing but air. His hand went through the thinning pencil line. He had forgotten there was a descent behind him, and the moment he started to fall uncontrollably down, he was finally able to remove the eyepiece.

...then he suddenly realized he was back, finding himself in the laboratory again, catching his breath. His heart was pounding as though he had run miles at a great speed, not naturally but driven by some external force. His brow had broken out in a sweat. He was barely gasping for air. He had to lean down and hold on to his knees with slightly shaking hands to keep his balance. Still catching breath, in long, convulsive gulps, his eyes closed, he struggled not to collapse on the floor. He stood like this for a while, until black spots stopped leaping in front of his eyes and his vision cleared up.

He slowly discerned parts of the real world around him, separate objects, parts of his own body that seemed foreign, unreal — not just to him, but in general. The space of the lab, vaguely familiar, stretched out around him, its whiteness brought back to reality by its clearly defined walls. He turned back, groping for the door handle, and stumbling out into the corridor.

He sat, or rather slumped down in one of the niches on the worn red carpet, feeling his hand with he clung to it sink into its plushy softness. He would sit there after his every visit to the lab — never in a state like this. He pressed his other hand against his throbbing temple. He could hardly hear a sound save for muffled hum of his own heartbeat.

Every external sound and distant voice were irritating, as though his mind was incapable of processing anything. By some miracle, no one walked by. He sat like this until the hum started to weaken. Only then was he able to move.

He stood, holding on to the wall beside him, then turned towards the bathroom — like many times before. He turned the tap on, watching the water run down in a brawling stream. He ran his fingers in a few quick movements through his hair, wiped his face with a handkerchief. His hands were still slightly trembling. He stood clenching the edge of the sink. Looking up, he met his own gaze in the mirror; for a minute, it seemed unrecognizable.

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The Observers Observed: Reflections on making a film, *The Day War Broke Out*, with the Mass Observation Archive

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The Observers Observed: Reflections on making a film, *The Day War Broke Out*, with the Mass Observation Archive

Elizabeth Chappell, Simon King, and Dominique Baron-Bonarjee

Introduction

Bringing to light the suppression and self-silencing of ordinary people in eras dominated by censorship and suppression; finding out what 'speaks to us' in the interstices between the official discourse of the archive and personal stories of those whose lives are contained and collected there; documenting the embodied experience of previous generations and finding its traces in our measuring of movements today: these were the pre-existing research interests that we brought to the CHASE Summer School: Making Films of Your Research with Smart/iPhones and Digital Cameras, held on 22-28 July 2019.

Elizabeth Chappell is a life historian engaged in an ongoing iterative interviewing project with survivor families in Hiroshima; Simon King is a socially engaged arts practitioner who investigates lived experience through walking, and Dominique Baron-Bonarjee is a dancer and contemporary arts practitioner reflecting on data collection and cultures of surveillance. Sharing a common heritage as children of parents who had first-hand experiences of living either through World War Two or its immediate post-war period, we were also naturally drawn to the themes that had been advertised by the Summer School ('...you will spend time at the Mass Observation Archive and the Newhaven local history museum ... as well as learning the specific skills needed to make your film'). As Derrida points out, archives can seem to hold the ultimate 'authority' for knowledge producers — they are often conceived of as the ultimate ne plus ultra in terms of source credibility. Arguably, however, that depends on how, as researchers, we engage with the contents of archives. What questions do we ask of the archive that coincide with or diverge from what was deemed valuable by previous generations? What are the gaps? When we applied to the course, we all had experience of working with the archive but we were also mindful of the 'impact' agenda of our respective institutions. Broadly speaking, this agenda emphasises widening participation and communicating research so that it can be

shared easily. We had already published in digital formats, from e-publishing to blogs, podcasts, tweets etc. Making a film would, among other things, extend our reach in terms of impact skills.

We met in a serendipitous way on the second day of the course in The Keep Archive's Special Collections room, pouring over boxes and boxes of personal recollections pre-selected and placed before us by the curators and archivists specifically for the purposes of the project. We responded to the opportunity to feature war diaries (although three other projects were on offer, which were not related to war) and as we excitedly read aloud extracts from the diaries to one another we also shared our own research stories and, in a short space of time — between the morning break and lunch time — discovered an unexpected degree of synergy in our research positions and backgrounds. This seemed a good starting point from which to engage with the efforts of the original mass observers of the 1930s.

The theme of the war diaries had been introduced to us by the Special Collections archivist, Karen Watson but Elizabeth Chappell was cognisant of some of these diaries from previous research. She was curious as to whether she could find a particular diary entry that had captured her imagination. It was by a 24-year-old female civil servant from Croydon and dated from the outbreak of war on 3rd September 1939. Finding the original in the archival box, it turned out, was an unexpected hook that helped script the film and hone its themes and focus as the week progressed.

There was also a coincidence in terms of anniversaries. The year we were working in, 2019, marked the 80th anniversary of the outbreak of World War Two. The memory culture of the last decade (2010s) has consistently brought war to our attention with major anniversaries of both World War One and Two. Thus, issues of secrecy and censorship, coercion and the way in which societies choose to remember were to the fore in our thinking as we started to work.

The heterogeneous value of narratives of everyday life — whether written, photographed or embodied — formed the basis of our own self-reflective research interests, but also formed the basis of the material placed in front of us. It was discovering the nexus between these ingredients which gave impetus to our film project. This paper asks whether our observations of the Mass Observation Archive, represented in the form of a short, scripted film, have an effect on the way we come to view the significance of everyday experience in times of crisis. Could the collaborative film we made come

to be seen as a valuable contribution to current preoccupations around communicating participation, official discourses and inclusivity, more broadly? These concerns map very well onto the focus of this article which is the result of our convivial engagement and collaboration with the aim of inspiring further creative projects.

Mass Observation: a dialogical intervention

As the title indicates, Mass Observation (hereafter M.O.) emerged out of the broader sociological and documentary impulse of the 1920s and 1930s. The aims of the founders, anthropologist Tom Harrisson, writer and future Professor of Sociology Charles Madge, and film-maker Humphrey Jennings, were, broadly speaking, to 'shock' the public out of the assumption of a homogenous experience of the everyday on the part of the largely silent but newly enfranchised majority. From its inception in 1937 until the mid-1950s, M.O. recruited hundreds of both paid and unpaid observers of 'everyday behaviour' to respond to 'directives' i.e. questions, starting with a consultation about people's opinions on the out-of- the-ordinary coronation of the George VI. The resulting Archive consists of an eclectic mix of surveys, questionnaires and autobiographical diary entries, which was active from 1945 until 1951 and then again from 1981 until now.

Three times a year, 'panel members', meaning those who have committed to being volunteer writers — are invited to respond to open-ended and discursive questionnaires (directives) about subjects ranging from international and domestic political issues to everyday personal practices and experiences. Such issues have included the Falkland and Gulf Wars, the NHS, Brexit, women's experiences of menstruation and more recently, Covid-19. Once a year, too, panellists and members of the wider public are asked to provide detailed one-day diaries, in honour of Mass Observation's 'first call' to reflect on the coronation of George VI on May 12, 1937. Millions of typed and hand-written materials have been amassed representing the contributions of over thousands of volunteer writers. The focus from the beginning was to get at the uncensored (due to anonymity) feelings of those whose thoughts, according to the founders, were not being adequately reflected in the media of the time. The founders were responding to what they saw as a gap in representation and hence the margin-

alisation of large swathes of society. Such an invitation to candid self-reflection was unprecedented.

As historian Sara Ahmed has pointed out, M.O. was an innovation in historiographic methods. Such open methods of consultation with the general public were to become especially controversial during wartime as the government tried to clamp down on M.O. in the 1940s. The directives did not just ask the diarists their views about personal matters but also their views on public issues such as the conduct of war: 'What are your personal feelings about death and dying?' (May 1942) and 'What is your feeling about the bombing of Germany?' (December 1943). In 1945, these questions were followed by 'How do you feel about the peace now?' And 'how do you feel now the war is over in Europe and how does this compare with how you expected to feel?' We might be used to such 'feelings-based' research regarding public events now — especially given the proliferation of social media — but the deliberate commissioning and collection of letters, diaries and ephemera i.e. autobiographical material, from non-elites was an unparalleled innovation in European historiography of the time.

Mass Observation asked questions very different from the questions asked by typical marketing or public opinion surveys. As M.O. archivist Dorothy Sheridan pointed out, Madge, Harrisson and Jennings invited their 'observers' to narrate their lived experience: doing so, they provided access to a reality which would have been difficult to come by via any other means.[1] Diarists were requested to 'use their diaries as cameras', zooming in on aspects of their lives that the directives chose to steer them towards — this struck us as a prescient method, especially considering the contemporary rise of the 'selfie'.[2]

The aim was to represent reality as it seemed to the mass observers rather than 'how it really was.' The protagonist of the narratives was thus not so much the 'reality' that the M.O. observers observed outside, as their own thoughts, feelings and actions. Mikhail Bakhtin averred, echoing the discussions around quantum physics of his day, that, no observation is possible without a self-awareness of the time, place and position of the researcher.[3] M.O's qualitative research method, which the founders billed as a 'new science' in their first directive, initiated one of the first mass social scientific research projects of the 20th century. As social historian David Kynaston has written, the way in which people recorded their

[1] Dorothy Sheridan, 1993, p. 28.
[2] Sheridan, 1992, pp. 36-37.
[3] Holquist, 2002, p.36.

feelings in the anonymised and uncensored space of M.O. goes against the methodology behind official narratives. It was such conventional narratives that Walter Benjamin felt should be 'overpowered' when he called for 'wrest[ing] tradition' away from 'conformism' in his essay Uber Den Begriff der Geschichte.[4] In this sense, then, the M.O. founders were ahead of their time, placing the significance of ordinary people's experience at the heart of society's concerns.

But memory cultures do not necessarily last. At certain points, societies prefer to forget and it was indeed the vast ambition of the project, the multifarious polyphony of M.O's current Archive, which came under pressure later in the 1950s and 1960s as the children of the war generation were understandably more oriented towards forgetting than remembering the restrictions, heartbreak and privations of the war years which are recorded in these diaries in such detail. It was only later propagators of the 'shared authority' view of historiographic method, who, from the 1970s onward, found sympathy with what seems to be one of the underlying concepts of M.O. If the 'camera' was as often pointed (albeit with careful curation and direction) by those who had been historically the recipients rather than the agents of history, then that would offer a different, potentially transformative perspective, one that could, potentially, help prevent 'history' from repeating itself.

Observing the Observers: Communicating our narrative

How were we to distil some of these complex questions which have preoccupied historians and archivists, especially in recent years, into a short research film? Film, as an intimate medium offers the illusion of a 'window in' to another person's soul: it is uniquely suitable for the showing and reading of personal diaries. Celebrating the fragmentary, the 'roughly hewn', the hurried, became a catalyst for the short. The stories of these imagined others could be further construed through the materiality of their writings. Some wrote handwritten diaries on airmail letter paper; others were on official-looking see-through low-quality grey typing paper — a clue as to the social differences and scarcities brought about through war. The materiality of the letters with the variation of handwriting and typed script, perhaps speak to us even more movingly now, in an age dominated by digital communications.

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[4] Quoted in Esther Leslie, *Overpowering Conformism* (London: Pluto Press, 2000) Preface, p.vii.

We had our own restrictions to deal with as we only had six days in which to finish a polished product — the seventh, would be taken up with showing our work to others at a film screening at the University of Sussex. In terms of selection therefore, we did not have the luxury of film-makers with time set aside for Research and Development. We could however find a relatively broad selection from the observers who had been preselected for us in terms of age, location and profession — to provide a glimpse of the diversity, polyphony and scope of the Archive. In addition, by 'zooming in' on short extracts of their work, we found the uniqueness and situatedness of the voice of each of the correspondents, when read aloud, would draw the audience in to the idiosyncratic richness of this historic 'archive of feeling', offering unexpected perspectives on the theme — 3rd September 1939, literally, the day war broke out. Simon King's 'remembering' of the tune 'Don't Ask Any Questions (I'll Tell You No Lies)' by Brian Lawrance and his Lansdowne House Orchestra, provided us with a soundtrack which was uncannily suited to our theme. The objects we found displayed in the Newhaven Museum, were visually complementary. We found a mass-produced glass tumbler from a discontinued set dating from 1937 showing the uncrowned King's face. The tumbler happened to be displayed alongside an official coronation cup featuring George VI. The encounters we made with one another juxtaposed with cultural objects and paraphernalia provided by CHASE, were the ingredients we used for making the film.

The Australian feminist Rosi Braidotti has argued that the self is continually reinvented through affective encounters in what she terms a practice of nomadism: crossing borders both the 'real and the conceptual', between self and other. If we were to adopt a methodology for our process, this would be it. As we walked, talked and worked through the week, we encountered more relics and records of people's lives from an age of scarcity and crisis which chimed with our own diverse narratives, constructing a film that we felt would be of intrinsic interest to our imagined audience. We chose 'observers' who resonated with our themes directly. Two of them are middle-aged and clearly self-conscious about conveying the import of their observations for future readers (as children of World War One). The male provincial schoolteacher is very antipathetic to the effects of censorship coming into force in 1939 but nevertheless questions M.O. about whether he is 'observing' correctly. G.H. Langford, a professional

and a Londoner, tells about her fear of her phone calls being monitored. By contrast, the 24-year-old female civil servant from Croydon, seems to be simply reacting to an entirely new (to her) situation. Her perspective, alongside powerful images drawn from her responses seem fresher and perhaps more 'authentic.' As curator Kirsty Pattrick explains in the film, it is in the details of the personal, local, reactions to a larger global picture, that we can find clues as to the 'reality' of wartime Britain. We thus took a small, very specific 'fragmentary' corner of the war experience in which to understand a research question related to the much larger 'whole context' of our theme — the value of lived experience in a time of crisis.

In practice, however, our experience of making the film and what we derived from the process differed according to our own particular practices. Thus, the second half of this paper will be divided into our individual reflections on the above themes as case studies. While Elizabeth Chappell and Simon King produced *The Day War Broke Out*, Dominique Baron-Bonarjee contributed to the making of that film, but also explored the related theme of data gathering and surveillance, a theme generated by the contents of the pre-selected boxes provided by the Mass Observation Archive curators, in a separate film, *The Measure of Leisure,* which she reflects on here.

Case Study 1: Disruptive narratives of disrupted times – Elizabeth Chappell

The work of the journalist, life historian and oral historian run in parallel. They are all a part of the drawing up of the first draft of history which aims to ensure that the colour is not 'drawn out' of lived experience. This Herodotean concept, our desire for descriptive immersive narratives, connects past and present and exists across cultures. However, as Walter Benjamin noted in 1920s Europe, this was something which was in short supply in the interwar years, post-World War One. 'Experience has fallen in value,' he wrote. He felt that the ability to communicate a shared life experience had been imperilled by then-new forms of technological conflict: 'Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent not richer, but poorer in communicable experience?' he asked in 1920.[5]

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[5] Walter Benjamin, 1992, p88.

The ability to narrate concretely requires us to be rooted in time and place.

The curators of M.O.'s 'scientific' project also drew on human beings' natural tendency to record at times of crisis — as circumstances change, illness strikes, or, as death draws near — moments when the world changes for us personally, when the ordinary takes on extraordinary significance. As Paul Ricoeur writes, public experience becomes personal at such times.[6]

Thus, we are not just discovering via our cognitive senses, nor is it simply personal or collective, we are engaged in a relational process. As a narrative researcher, I am concerned with the whole context in which personal lives are situated and wanted to find out what was the best way we could convey the importance of M.O. in our contemporary moment. For me, the appeal of M.O., was prima facie, the way it placed apparently peripheral voices at the centre. Also, the uniquely intimate medium of film could convey the singularity of expression which leaps out of the Archive's contents. As Benjamin also writes: 'Collections unlock themselves when a single piece is brought to voice.'[7]

The single voice which turned out to be my way in was that of diary entry number D5383, created by a 24-year-old civil servant living in Croydon, Surrey at the start of World War Two.

On Sunday 3rd September, she wrote:

The sun is shining, the garden never looked prettier, never so bright and gay; Tiger lies out there in the sun; all looks happy and peaceful, but it is not: war has broken out between Germany and England, beastly, beastly war, brought on by that devil in human shape, Hitler.[8]

I quote this short fragment, which was the fragment that first drew me to the work of Mass Observation long before I encountered its reality in the Archive, as a way of articulating something about the way the construction of narrative works to disrupt expectations, just as the moment of war upturns the expectation of the everyday. The perfect balance of the triptych of the first part of the sentence with the second part, combined with the transformation wrought by the concluding phrase, is perhaps a 'stereotype' of evil intruding on pastoral bliss. The diarist is acutely aware of the (to her) strangeness of the shared experience she was living through, that of the outbreak of war. In a later entry, the

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[6] Paul Ricoeur, 1991, p36.

[7] Marx, Ursula, et al., 2015, Preface, np

[8] Mass Observation Project diary extract, Sunday 3rd September 1939

civil servant describes looking out of the window and seeing the 'weird figure' (of an ARP warden) parading up and down as well as the frustration her mother felt being woken up by sirens. Her feelings are those of depression at the breaking up of family life. These are new experiences for her, although they are all-too familiar to our other two middle-aged observers. Their diaries are more complaining in tone: they are concerned about shortages and the restrictions on freedom of information and expression. This silencing, what we might term the 'deprived landscape of storytelling' was becoming all-too familiar.

In other circumstances, coeval with these diaries, the then invisible diarists, Anne Frank and Ettie Hillisum were also writing, knowing that this was possibly their last opportunity to record their thoughts and feelings in a candid way for the future. Thus, M.O., by providing an opportunity for narrativity, was able to gather personal data about silence and disruption. The absence of free talk is as notable as the presence of news announcements in the diaries from this period. This content, it could be argued, as we encounter our own crisis-ridden times 'anew' is invaluable as a refractive prism.

'Gentle Reader' writes Robert Burton, in the preface to what is arguably the first 'modern' work of autobiography, The Anatomy of Melancholy. The appellation implies a trustful intimacy with the unknown reader and our observers felt able to engage in similar trustful dialogue with their curators about the process of curation: 'If you wish me to "observe" in a special way or report on any points not quite cleared this time, please let me know.' [September, 1939 Schoolmaster, 32. Llandovery, South Wales].

This kind of engagement, in my view, between observer and curator, tells us something about the nature of the curatorial process itself, i.e. the contract between the gatekeepers and the volunteers. Others have read this engagement differently. Were the observers being encouraged to 'spy'? Was Mass Observation just one of the early warnings of a now-burgeoning surveillance culture? Whatever our interpretation — the Archive is validated by the long-term engagement with it by its diarists and the long-term relationships some of them built up with M.O. It is a relationship which is carefully guarded and maintained by today's curators, one of whom, Kirsty Pattrick, we interview in the film. In my interview with her therefore, I decided to focus on both the status of the volunteer

writers now, and at the Archive's inception, as well as the status of their reflections on the 'everyday' in a time of crisis.

Case Study 2: The interpellation of the personal and the public — Simon King

As a walking arts practitioner who has elsewhere used public-archival and family-biographical photographs and letter-form correspondence to construct hermeneutic narratives around civilian memories of the Home Front, I am particularly drawn to questions about the contradictory nature of everyday experience in times of crisis.[9]

Reading these accounts again in late summer 2020 affords me a resonant parallel to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic — a crisis which, perhaps through the operation of subjective 'durational' time (Henri Bergson's concept seems particularly apt here), has served to place further distance in my recall of the research, discussion and decision-making in the production of the film.[10] Over twelve months on, I endeavour to piece together the elements that informed our thinking then, particularly in relation to the form and content of the film — looking back at what we captured through our recent exchange of emails, telephone calls and meetings on Zoom.

My encounter with one particular diary entry, in this case of Gillian Langford (who can be named due to the prior publication of her diaries), afforded me a 'way in' to exploring this parallelism. Gillian Langford (in response to the directive of M.O. to keep a war-time diary) reports on a conversation about the wearing of masks:

> The female who replied to my question [...] kept saying 'I regard my gas mask as my life belt, so will you when you have one'. I did not point out that I didn't need a lifebelt any more than I wanted a gas mask. She kept saying now you don't want to be a casualty and give trouble, do you? Finally, she said, 'you can't go to the cinema without one you know'. I retorted 'if the cost of living goes up by leaps and bounds as it has already done, I shan't be able to afford a cinema entrance fee, so I still shan't want a gas mask'– and I still have none. [Gillian Langford, 3-18 September 1939]

Langford's deft and waspishly class-centred character assassination — an extract from one of the many

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[9] Simon King, 2018, pp. 249-266

[10] Bergson writes: 'Pure durée is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself live.' Bergson, 1910, p. 100

pages we researched for the film — reinforces for me the value of such historical accounts of crisis. The individualised diary and letter mode serves as an alternative mode of knowledge, an 'archive of the everyday'. This is to be read alongside and sometimes against, or in opposition to, official history. As Walter Benjamin writes, each generation is engaged in a dialogue with the tendencies toward conformity offered by society.[11] Langford's opinionated insistence on non-conformity and intolerance of officialdom continues:

> My hostess, whose faith in the National Govt. and the truth and purity of the English press was once so profound, keeps saying 'you can't believe in anything or anybody NOW.' [...] How everyone enjoys brief authority especially if it entails wearing a uniform! A.R.P. workers in those hideous steel helmets that make all wearers look ridiculous, popped up from the darkness again and again with exhortations and warnings delivered in authoritative manner, or with unsought, unasked directions for our journey. [Gillian Langford 3-18 September 1939]

Apparent here is Langford's scepticism if not downright hostility towards the directives of National Government and, as I also imagine, towards the hard-to-avoid series of Home Front propaganda posters exhorting civic responsibility and fortitude produced by the Ministry of Information in late summer 1939.[12] A picture emerges of a woman not afraid to question the government's top-down 'command and control' of its civilian population. Its uncomfortable parallel to the present is hard to avoid: for example, in the mix of rational critique, anti-vax sentiment and conspiracy theory surrounding the Conservative government's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic since March 2020.[13]

Though this parallel did not inform our thinking in the Archive, we were aware that our choices of extracts to include were necessarily selective and individual. Within the limitations of the production process of a film, however, we were liable to use timesaving methods, to make decisions that might work for the story we wanted to tell. As film-makers, we did not have time to explore alternative methodologies. Like the diary respondents we were aware of the limitations of our position and perspective on life, responding as we were to the 'directive' of the CHASE summer school.

Ben Highmore points out the hermeneutical stakes at work for the researcher of M.O.

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[11] Leslie, 2000, Preface, p. vii.

[12] For example, 'YOUR COURAGE YOUR CHEERFULNESS YOUR RESOLUTION WILL BRING US VICTORY'. See Owen Hatherley, 2016, pp. 19-20.

[13] Elsewhere in Langford's diary, for example, she writes of her suspicion that her phone is being tapped.

He posits the risk of the editorial voice submerging the polyphonic as a crucial consideration.[14] Using the medium of film, it is all-the-more likely that a certain 'representativeness' can be imputed when communicating diary-form extracts. Framing these diary extracts in their whole life context would therefore be necessary for the subjects not to appear as mere cyphers or archetypes.

As we worked against the clock to create a narrative from all the elements at our disposal, we were conscious of how adequately we could represent these three distinct voices. We were aware, too, of the audio-visual techniques available for documentary film making which lead the viewer through a recognisable narrative arc. Sometimes we took shortcuts, such as attributing long-lost middle class Southern English accents to our diarists (a presumption informed by our familiarity with the classic 'stiff upper lip' and class-based archetypes of British films of this period). The title itself, *The Day War Broke Out,* is a nod to the catch-phrase comic monologue of the music hall and radio comedian Robb Wilton (1881-1957) — calls to another archetype of region and class. As film-makers and researchers, we were necessarily needing to refine and highlight, to navigate our way through all this messiness and polyphony.

I believe we were successful in the visual representation of the diaries, highlighting their idiosyncratic nature, which lends character to the disembodied voices contained therein — whether pen-and-ink, on good paper or on less-good quality paper, single- or double-sided, typed closely or well-spaced. However, my doubts remain about how successfully we managed to avoid the sin of generalisation as we looked to amplify certain aspects for the sake of impact through audio-visual means. I am thinking about this as I plan to return to the M.O. Archive for further research and I hope to address some of these limitations in a future project.

Case Study 3: Measuring the direction of leisure
– Dominique Baron-Bonarjee

Both hands are at work: mainly thumb, index and middle finger, but the ring and pinkie fingers assist the others in the task. The papers I am looking through are precariously delicate and thin with age.

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[14] See Ben Highmore, 2008, p. 85.

They remind me of old-fashioned stationery, the gossamer sheets of airmail letter pads that preceded email communication. As I parse my way through the records, I'm nervous about my interactions with these materials, careful that my own bodily emanations don't leave sweaty fingerprints on these collections of other people's traces.

Each of these yellowing sheets tapped out in typewriter font on a typewriter, invite a meta-level of observation, revealing a person, a place, a process: I can see the faint letters where the ink was too dry, or the tap of the finger was too soft. It makes me think of the 'obs' — as the Mass Observation observers refer to themselves — reflecting back on that moment in the dance hall, counting the number of couples dancing to a particular band.

There they are at their desk, attempting to put order into these notes, by reducing them to a dense constricted column of initials and numbers — 30, 40, 45, 25, 30, etc. — that scrolls down the page; for me to pore over these abstract codes that recall the long-gone sweaty night of 31 March 1939, at the Paramount Dance Hall on Tottenham Court Road. I could sit here for days, traveling in time, by imagining the body of this enigmatically terse voyeur sitting over there in the shadows of the dance hall, attempting to bend the frenetic activity around him to a Euclidean logic:

> Obs tried to work out some system of counts, but it is very difficult. One interesting line is to get an idea of the numbers who hold their partners on different manners. Tried counts but they are impossible. But found that there were 9 positions for the man's right hand on his partner's back. ... Not so easy to classify the holds women have of men.
> [Mass Observation, 'Paramount' AH. 31 March 1939]

The number of records on the subject of leisure, including sports, dance, entertainment, is overwhelming, and temptingly immersive: I have forgotten what I was looking for, and find myself off on a research tangent (or is it really a parabolic curve and I'm still on the right track?). The deadline for completing my film, *The Measure of Leisure*, based on my visit to the Mass Observation Archive, is approaching, and I am having trouble finding a clear direction. That evening, as I retire to my room, it's time to have a break from it all with some quiet time. I don my Muse headband, a biofeedback device that helps me to track my practice of meditation: the task now is to do my best to get the 'birds' to tweet.[15]

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[15] I have recorded 250 sessions since I first began to use the Muse EEG monitor and app. All this amounts to 2558 total minutes of meditation, or 6793 birds — a bird is a sonic alert and its associated data point indicating a very calm 'meditative' state.

Conclusion

For us as writers and researchers, the autobiographical 'turn' of the Archive as well as the combined synergy of our interactions with one another and the Archive: observing the observers observing as it were, sparked our professional interest. We were, it is true, limited by the technical resources and time available. The majority of the film was recorded on Smart/iPhone, with some gadgets such as extra microphones offered to us by CHASE and with the welcome addition of a high-resolution DSLR camera, which affords a control of depth-of-field which is not available on Smart/iPhone. However, the methods taught by the course tutor Karen Boswall were remarkably non-technical and person-centred. Through simple techniques our cohort of film makers became versed in film making skills quickly.

The final film is only 8 minutes and 24 seconds long, well within the 'directive' of the CHASE Summer School to produce 7-10 minutes of film. We took the limitation as an opportunity to open up our methods to a wider audience and, in the process, advance our thinking. Mired in our own practices and interests, we were also, nevertheless, open to making a virtue of the encounter between ourselves: our diverse backgrounds (a concurrence which was mostly smooth but naturally sometimes also abrasive) as well as our trans-disciplinarity via Braidotti's concept of 'nomadism'. The film we made is thus just one aspect of what Bakhtin conceived of as an infinite layering of the dialogical process: the self in relation to the self, the self in relation to others and the self in relation to the world or the context.

Could this offer a response to Walter Benjamin's challenge to the eerie silence of post-crises worlds? The 'whole life' context is then amplified through the viewers of the film (and readers of this paper) ultimately extending beyond the moment of encounter potentially without limit.[16] The dialogical starts with the autobiographical, the engagement with the self, its 'observation', and develops through the interstices of relationality. It is only through engagements such as ours, we contend, that the M.O. Archive, can ultimately realise its objectives.

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[16] Holquist, 2002, p.39.

Acknowledgements

Film references:

Links to a selection of films made during the CHASE Summer School: Making Films of Your Research with Smart/iPhones and Digital Cameras, held on 22-28 July 2019 are available here: https://www.chasevle.org. uk/archive-of-training/archive-of-training-2019/film-summer-school/

To view the authors' joint panel discussion on the film and this paper as part of the CHASE Encounters Conference 2021, please see The Observers Observed video poster:

https://vimeo.com/564127705/864822b3ad

Individual films are available as follows:

The Day War Broke Out by Elizabeth Chappell (Open University, Department of English) and Simon King (Birkbeck University, Department of English and Humanities) https://vimeo.com/364033011

The Measure of Leisure by Dominique Baron-Bonarjee (University of Goldsmiths, School of Arts) https:// www.youtube.com/watch?v=wnuEG4FNt6k

Harry Browning by Hattie Hearn (University of East Anglia, School of Art, Media and American Studies) https://vimeo.com/365073478

Brazen Souls by Jenny Flood (University of Sussex, School of Media, Arts and Humanities, History Department) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cjgq8JFt70o

The Repository and Me by Maryam Sholevar (University of London , School of Oriental and African Studies, SOAS, Gender Studies and Economics) and Harriet Hughes (University of Sussex, School of Media, Arts and Humanities) https://vimeo.com/368624011

Martyn Edwards on Thomas Tipper by Veronique Walsh (University of London , School of Oriental and African Studies, SOAS, Music Department) https://vimeo.com/365071779

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BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

In association with

Dramatizing ecological crisis:
form, hybridity and hyperobjects

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Andrew Burton

Dramatizing ecological crisis: form, hybridity and hyperobjects

'The end of the world has already occurred.'[1]

Morton pinpoints this to April 1784, when James Watt patented the steam engine. From that point, humankind (at least, those who could afford it) became increasingly addicted to burning fossil fuels, initially to power the Industrial Revolution then, from the mid twentieth century, to drive The Great Acceleration in consumer capitalism. The resultant accumulation of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere (currently over 415 parts per million, against an assumed safe level of 350ppm) is now widely accepted as a major contributor to the phenomenon of global warming which in Morton's nomenclature is a 'hyperobject'; something massively distributed in time and space that humans can compute but are unable directly to see.[2] Morton playfully asserts that 'for something to happen it often needs to happen twice' (7), pointing out that the world also ended in July 1945 when the US tested 'The Gadget' in Trinity, New Mexico, ushering in the nuclear age and foreshadowing the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki the following month. So intense was this impact that a new mineral, Trinitite, was formed, by the fusing together of sand particles at a temperature ten thousand times hotter than the surface of the sun. The impact on the human imagination was arguably even greater.

Fossil fuels and radioactive materials are also hyperobjects in their own right, exhibiting five distinctive properties that Morton articulates as viscosity, nonlocality, temporal undulation, phasing and interobjectivity. Viscosity means that such hyberobjects are sticky; they are difficult to dispose of and there is no meaningful 'away' into which they might be deposited. With a half-life of 24,100

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[1] Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), p.7 Subsequent page references in text.

[2] Before the 18th century, when humans in the west began to burn coal, oil and gas, our atmosphere typically contained about 280 parts per million of carbon dioxide. Now, with the increased use of fossil fuels throughout the world, it is 'well over 415 parts per million'. <https://350.org/science/> (accessed 17 May 2020).

years, plutonium's longevity troubles human comprehension. Such temporal inequity makes life tricky for playwrights whose narratives tend to focus on more immediate emotions on a human scale, even if the events perturbing the characters have taken place some years in the past.

The conundrum of how to square the vast spatiotemporal dimensions of such hyperobjects with the human scale of theatre and performance is being tackled by a number of contemporary playwrights, performers and theatre makers, whose work investigates the human condition in our current age of ecological crisis. The dramatic forms they employ range from naturalism (in plays such as Steve Waters' diptych *The Contingency Plan* and Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children*); to experiments in post-dramatic theatre (such as Claire MacDonald's *Storm from Paradise*); and to reconfigured Brechtian epic (as in Ella Hickson's *Oil*) or Shakespearean epic (for example, Mike Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London*). Catharine Diamond[3] has written insightfully about the limits and possibilities of a number of dramatic genres adopted by playwrights in their quest to stage global warming. She observes that comedic plays (such as Duncan Macmillan's *Lungs* and Richard Bean's *The Heretic*) 'attempt the...restoration of normalcy' (102), especially in relation to sex and safety, whereas tragedy, according to Joseph Meeker, from whose *The Comedy of Survival* she quotes, is '...a process of ritual purification that reaffirms the moral order...' (104). She argues that the plays she examines tend either to work within a genre's conventions or formally to extend the limits of those conventions but that *Ten Billion* — a performance-lecture directed by Katie Mitchell and performed by its scientist author Stephen Emmott — stands out by having made 'the most visceral impact on the London critics' (119) in its eschewal of traditional dramatic conventions and in its graphic presentation of unadorned scientific evidence. In this essay, I attempt to extend Diamond's analysis by questioning efficacy of form rather than genre. I question how the epic form, with its intrinsically open time, open place structure (*pace* Jeffreys) affords the playwright a way of engaging with the hyperobject's ontological vastness. I further ask how naturalism — with its typically closed time, closed space structure and its focus on characters being forced to make moral or ethical decisions under intense pressure — allows the

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[3] Catherine Diamond, 'Staging Global Warming, the Genre-Bending Hyperobject', in *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 30, no. 2 (2016), pp. 101-123. Subsequent page references in text.

playwright to grapple with the hyperobject's spatiotemporal enormity. Finally, I suggest that in *Lungs* Duncan Macmillan has his dramaturgical cake and eats it by pioneering a hybridized form that offers a novel and highly affective way of tackling the hyperobject.

Oil by Ella Hickson (2016)

May, the protagonist of *Oil*, first appears as a twenty year-old farm worker, three months pregnant. It is 1889, the industrial revolution is well under way but the Singer farm in Cornwall, where she works, has not yet been illuminated by modernity. When a stranger, the American entrepreneur William Whitcomb, turns up uninvited late one dark winter's evening, he is met with suspicion and hostility by the men of the house but May allows him into the candlelit room and offers him tea. Whitcomb has come to ask permission to buy the Singers' land, for the storage and distribution of kerosene which he refers to as 'this here miracle…[which]…was made when the earth started' (18). He lights the kerosene lamp he has brought with him, a sort of magic lantern that immediately floods the farmhouse room with light like 'the clear, strong, brilliant light of day' (17). It illuminates the dark corners of the space which have hitherto been obscured. In so doing, it also reveals May's brother-in-law Samuel who is caught 'squeezing the back of his wife Anne's neck cruelly hard in the dark…she's crying' (18) and thus also sheds light on misogyny. The matriarch Ma Singer exclaims 'God Almighty' while May is 'mesmerised' by the luminescence (18). A little kerosene has spilt onto the table and May puts it on her finger, savouring its strange odour. Poignantly, Whitcomb tells the entranced May 'There are millions of years right there on the end of your finger' (18). With this intimate, multi-sensory and intensely theatrical gesture, Hickson juxtaposes the vast temporality of oil alongside human ephemerality, a dynamic tension that will resonate throughout the play.

Asked by Dan Rebellato what lay behind her decision to have a protagonist who ages more slowly than the 160 years of history she moves through, Hickson explained:

> I knew I wanted to hit certain points in history and I knew I wanted one protagonist to last for the whole play so there was a basic, pragmatic need there to fulfil. I think there was something about the fact that oil itself has a lot of time condensed inside it…a single drop of oil has billions of years in it, so it felt like that was permission for the single drop of May to have more than a lifetime inside her…I really wanted to map somehow the

arrogance and ambition of the pursuit of oil...There is a kind of petulance to mankind that you have taken a billion years of creation and you have splurted it in 250 years.[4]

The first four of the play's five parts centre around technological innovation driven by oil and its derivatives; in the final part, the innovation is powered by nuclear reaction. After Part One's rural, late nineteenth century setting, Part Two, set in 1908, shows members of the British Admiralty attempting to negotiate a deal over Persian oil production with Iran, to fuel British imperialist expansionism. Part Three's suburban 1970 Hampstead setting reveals a household replete with labour-saving devices and a proliferation of oil-derived products (in an outburst against her daughter Amy's boyfriend Nate, May spells out the ubiquity of oil, even with regard to their sex lives: 'Durex — lubricant — KY Jelly and even Vaseline if you're on a budget and — actually — now I come to think of it, the contraceptive pill...All made of oil' [59]). In this speech, even women's supposed emancipation through the use of oral contraceptives is linked to the ubiquity of oil. Part Four sees Amy and her friend Aminah in 2021 driving in the desert in Kurdistan, listening to music via apps on their smart phones, while Aminah's mother cannot afford fuel for a generator to provide light while she eats. This neatly signposts the long-term impacts of extractive capitalism and its ongoing colonial legacy. In the play's final part, the now aged May and her grown-up daughter Amy live in a modernised version of the Singer's Cornish farm in 2051. Impoverished, they are unable to heat the water for a bath because they are suffering a 'black patch', a recurring drop in the electricity supply, but are offered the opportunity to purchase a device called the Toroid, which creates almost endless supplies of heat, light and electricity by means of a cold fusion reaction. In a grotesque parody of late capitalism's opportunistic commodification, the sales rep admits that the Nangto Corporation (the Chinese company that has developed the Toroid) harvests the device's nuclear material, Helium 3, from the moon. The play's mood of apocalypticism can most keenly be felt in this unsettling final scene. The futuristic Toroid embodies what Žižek refers to as 'techno-digital-post-human' apocalypticism, one of 'at least three different versions of apocalypticism today', the others being Christian

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[4] Dan Rebellato, 'Fourth Wall: Playwrights in Lockdown — Ella Hickson', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aIsUahE9wiY> (accessed 20 May 2020).

Fundamentalist and New Age.[5]

A mood of apocalypticism pervades the very fabric of Hickson's play, enmeshed with a notion of the finitude of natural resources. It is as if, inverting Kermode's narrative urge for the sense of an ending,[6] Hickson is seeking *a* sense of *the* ending. For the exasperated Aminah in Part Four, the end of commercial extraction of oil in her country is something to look forward to: 'There was been war in my country as long as I've been alive. She lets them sell the oil — maybe it will run out quicker and at last we can have some peace' (95).

The preparation and consumption of chicken recurs as a leitmotif throughout the play. In Part One, May struggles to pluck, eviscerate and prepare a chicken that appears to be 'off'. The meagre fowl is an unappetising prospect but one of the farm workers' few sources of protein. By the time we reach suburban Hampstead in 1970, the career-driven May, riding the second wave of feminism and choosing not to cook, has brought home a microwavable chicken from the supermarket. In the Kurdistan desert in 2021, May encourages Amy to eat by offering her a chicken sandwich. In Part Five, there is some chicken in the fridge but it remains uneaten because the fridge has 'gone warm'. This progression of increasingly effortless ways to consume chicken is not accidental; the chicken symbolises not only humankind's commodification of natural resources and dominion over the animal kingdom but is also a semiotic marker of the Anthropocene: in 2016, the year *Oil* was written, the Working Group on the Anthropocene advised the International Geological Congress in Cape Town formally to adopt the term 'Anthropocene' and, according to one of its contributors Jan Zalasiewicz, cited 'the bones left by the global proliferation of the domestic chicken' as 'one of the distinctive proponents of the sedimentary strata now forming' (others being 'radioactive elements dispersed across the planet by nuclear-bomb tests' and 'plastic pollution').[7]

Plays that are dramaturgically open both in time and place tend to focus on ideas, whereas plays that are closed in both time and place, are what Jeffreys calls 'pressure cooker' plays, forcing

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[5] Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times*, (London and New York: Verso, 2011), p.336

[6] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

[7] Jan Zalasiewicz, *Rocks: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp.122-4.

characters to make moral or ethical decisions with no means of physical escape and no chance to defer the decision.[8] By empowering her protagonist to venture in a non-naturalistic way from the late nineteenth century to an imagined mid twenty-first century, via key historical loci, Hickson situates *Oil* firmly as a play of ideas. It feels Brechtian in its reach and indeed there is a sense of Brechtian epic in the 'interscenes' that punctuate each of the play's five parts. Of May's husband Joss, a stage direction even explains *'He's carrying bags full of things, there's something Mother Courage about him'* (109). Between Parts Three and Four, the interscene tells us

> *A woman flies across a desert.*
> *She flies and flies and flies and flies.*
>
> *Toddlers are shot in the back*
> *By planes with no pilots in them.*
>
> *She asks the hostess for extra ice.*
> *She flies above time.* (85)

There is an intoxicating sense of liberation in such writing, reflecting May's progress from a Victorian farm worker with limited horizons to transnational career woman later in the play. This contrasts starkly with the suspension of disbelief and emotional engagement prompted by Lucy Kirkwood's naturalistic play *The Children*.

The Children by Lucy Kirkwood (2016)

Kirkwood's play, which premiered just one month after *Oil*, in November 2016, also has a hyperobject at its heart. The characters, meeting in a small cottage on the east coast of England, are forced to deal with the effects of a disastrous accident at a nearby nuclear reprocessing plant, clearly modelled on Sizewell B in Suffolk.

Hazel, Robin and Rose, all in their sixties, used to work at the plant approximately thirty-five years earlier. The nuclear incident that has occurred has created explosions and 'a wave', devastating a large area surrounding the site and leading to the creation of an exclusion zone, reminiscent of that of Chernobyl. Rose is setting up a team of experts to help contain the damage and to prevent an even

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[8] Stephen Jeffreys, 'Time and Place Structure' in *Playwriting* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2019), pp.28-59

more devastating incident happening, relieving the team of people currently working on the problem who are mostly in their twenties and thirties. She wants to help 'These...*young people* these *children*, basically, actually with their whole lives ahead and it's not fair it's not right it seems *wrong*. Doesn't it?' (48, emphasis in original text). The play's central narrative question is whether Rose can persuade Hazel and Robin to join her in her quest. Their moral dilemma is problematised by the fact that Robin and Rose have previously had an affair and by the parental responsibility Robin and Hazel feel (although Rose has had no children, Robin and Hazel have had four).

In *The Children*, mistakes made a generation ago implicate the present day characters; Rose, Hazel and Robin could have addressed safety issues inherent in the building's design when they were working at the nuclear plant around the time Hazel and Robin's first child was born. But the difficulty is that many humans (particularly, it could be argued, those living in relative affluence in the Global North) appear hardwired to think in the shorter term. Asked by Royal Court Associate Director Lucy Morrison in a *The Children* platform discussion to react to a Native American environmental proverb — 'In every deliberation we must consider the impact of the seventh generation, even if it requires having skin as thick as bark' — Kirkwood replied

> Is that possible? I don't think I can imagine my great grandchildren...it's one of those ideas that's too enormous to hold in your head. *I* don't understand tracker mortgages!... how do you hold seven generations in your head? That's what makes it difficult because we're such short term beings and we operate on, like, 'where's our holiday next year going to be?' And that's about as far ahead as our diaries get.[9]

The events of the play unfold in real time over the course of a summer evening, which darkens to night during the action. This closed time, closed place dramaturgy enables Kirkwood to show us the characters *in extremis*, with no means of escape and under pressure to make a decision that is likely to hasten their own demise. It exemplifies what Waters calls 'The pure aim of naturalism, epitomised by Zola's aspiration for a play to be *'une tranche de vie'*,...the continuous, unbroken scene, devoid of authorial intervention, laid out like an experiment from which the audience draw their own conclusions'.[10]

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[9] Lucy Kirkwood, Royal Court Theatre platform discussion of *The Children*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68eFaUKABMc&t=773s> (accessed 17 May 2020)

[10] Steve Waters, *The Secret Life of Plays,* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2010), p.44. Subsequent page references in text.

It may be set on a summer's evening but the characters are in the autumn of their lives. Their time is running out, exacerbated by illness (Rose has undergone chemotherapy and a mastectomy while Robin coughs blood, the result of prolonged exposure to radiation from a contaminated dairy farm).

Explaining her decision to write in such a naturalistic style, Kirkwood said later in the discussion:

It's very instinctive with me...The plays tend to find the form they need to be in...In its bones...[the play is] dealing with an emergency situation...all those people in that room are dealing with decisions on lots of levels that they made thirty, forty years ago...the reason we find climate change difficult to talk about is the reason we find our own deaths hard to talk about; because it's about the end of us, about there not being any more, looking at our own extinction...

In *Underland,* Robert Macfarlane visits Olkiluoto Island in south-west Finland where a tomb is under construction which is 'intended to outlast not only the people who designed it, but also the species that designed it'.[11] Its name is Onkalo which in Finnish means 'cave' or 'hiding place' and its purpose is to house high-level nuclear waste. The storage room will have four small doors, each secured by sliding stone doors in which will be carved warnings to future, possibly post-human, species. But what semiotics can pertain when faced with the unimaginable enormity of radiological time? What signs or language could possibly warn future beings of the dangers that lie within? As Macfarlane observes, '...language seems irrelevant compared to the deep time stone-space of Onkalo and what it will hold. The half-life of uranium-235 is 4.46 billion years: such chronology decentres the human, crushing the first person to an irrelevance'. For Rose, Hazel and Robin in *The Children* the challenge is to find not linguistic but emotional articulacy. Occasional hints of the nuclear catastrophe that has engulfed their lives surface from time to time, chilling in their mundanity: Hazel advises 'Tell Maria not to fret. Two of mine went through the same thing. Hm. Cayenne pepper. Dab it around the nostrils. Helps it clot' (77) and when Hazel exclaims 'What am I supposed to feel guilty about? I've done my bit. I I I I I I I...', Robin attempts to reassure her by saying 'You helped them remove the topsoil from the playground, didn't you?' (54).

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[11] Robert Macfarlane, *Underland: a deep time journey* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2019), pp.398-420

Lungs by Duncan Macmillan (2011)

Waters asserts 'There is no absolute notion of fast or slow in the theatre; tempo is particular to the story being told.' (72) If this is true, then *Lungs* is essentially constructed as two stories. The first, occupying roughly the first 70 pages of the script, is comedic in tone and centres around the sexual and romantic tribulations of an unnamed heterosexual couple who are wracked with ethical doubt about the environmental impact of becoming parents. The second, occupying roughly the last ten pages of the script, telescopes time in an extraordinary way, harnessing a reconfigured Brechtian aesthetic to create a sort of lurching *Verfremdungseffekt* but one which emotionally engages rather than estranges. When the couple meet late in the play, having temporarily separated, the male character reveals that he is affianced, and she reveals that she is pregnant with their child. From this moment on, the play's tempo increases exponentially and within the course of a few pages, with fragmented dialogue and no scene, lighting or costume changes, we witness their child being born, growing up, moving away, the male character becoming ill then dying and the widowed female character delivering a monologue at his graveside. She is living in the dystopian future they feared when they were younger, climate devastation having become their new reality. She says

> I miss talking to you. Here I am talking to myself.
> Your forests have gone. I don't watch the news any
> More, it all just gets worse and worse.
> Everything's covered in ash...
> ...It's a nice cool
> day today, like we used to have. (97)

These final ten pages offer an affective meditation on the ephemerality of human existence in a ravaged world, putting the concerns expressed in the first part of the play into a wider ecological and biological perspective. In performance, the impact of Macmillan's audacious dramaturgical conceit is disorienting and deeply moving. The characters' acute emotional vulnerability is amplified by the play's austere performance aesthetic; the stage directions stipulate that *'There is no scenery, no furniture, no props and no mime. There are no costume changes. Light and sound should not be used to indicate a change in time or place'.*

Lungs affects us by first showing the woman and man in emotional close-up, struggling with the messy minutiae of life and love, then telescoping time to reveal the insignificance of our mundane anxieties when contrasted with the ephemerality of life and the rapid anthropogenic degradation of the natural world. By the time the curtain falls (not that there is a curtain), it feels as if the end of the world has indeed already occurred.

Generic hybridisation is well established in drama, from Polonius' bathetic 'tragical-comical-historical-pastoral' to Beckett's playful categorisation of *Waiting for Godot* as 'tragi-comedy'. The dramaturgical road less travelled is a road of hybridised form rather than hybridised genre. As the example of *Lungs* suggests, such formal hybridisation may open the doors for playwrights, theatre makers and performers to create new and experimental modes of expression that are aptly suited to grappling with the ontological vastness of the hyperobject.

Conclusion

Ella Hickson's *Oil* imaginatively stretches time to show Victorian characters from rural Cornwall appearing in Tehran, Hampstead, Baghdad and back to Cornwall, and flitting from 1889 to a projected 2051. The characters' lives are bound together by the viscosity of the play's eponymous substance and the play's epic, non-naturalistic form allows space for themes to emerge that resonate across the generations. This dramaturgy enables Hickson to align human temporality with that of the hyperobject and this coalesces around striking theatrical imagery such as when May holds a drop of kerosene oil on the tip of her finger, embodying the human and more-than-human scales simultaneously. Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children*, by contrast, exploits the conventions of naturalism to put its characters under intense pressure in their attempts to deal with the effects of a catastrophic accident at a nuclear reactor on the east coast of England. The spatiotemporal enormity of the accident is at odds with the characters' socially oriented concerns, revealing an emotional inarticulacy that speaks volumes about their devastated inner worlds. True to form, the naturalistic dramaturgy requires the focus to be on a moral issue (in this case, whether Rose can persuade her two former colleagues to join her in the clear-up operation, to relieve pressure from the younger generation, the play's titular children).

Duncan Macmillan's *Lungs* mixes dramaturgical forms: it opens in one theatrical tempo and ends in an entirely different one, flouting Ayckbourn's warning '...not to mix time speeds in a single play. It is confusing to an audience and can lead to a form of travel sickness'.[12] The final moments of *Lungs* align human and ecological time scales in a highly innovative way that contextualises the characters' emotional, romantic and sexual tribulations within a much wider perspective. *Lungs*' hybridized form thus allows Macmillan not only to exploit naturalism's inherent focus on individual moral choice but also to exploit the epic form's spatiotemporal fluidity and in so doing offers a highly affective memento mori of humankind's relative insignificance vis-à-vis ecological timeframes.

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[12] Alan Ayckbourn, *The Crafty Art of Playmaking*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), p. 22.

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