FINDING OUR PLACE - PEOPLE AND THINGS IN URBAN CITIZEN BELONGING

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INTRODUCTION

This paper concerns the ways we each find our selves in our cities, how we find selfhood and community in the changing fluid spaces of cultural ebb and flow that constitute contemporary urban landscapes. Technologically infused infrastructures of buildings, transport and communication together with time based obligations of work and recreation intertwines with the physical spaces of built environment and human coexistence to create complex layers of 'being' in place. Continuously reconstituting our expectations, adapting to the fluctuating rules of changing roles, language, hidden meanings and socio-cultural historical inference, identity becomes an adventure of performative camouflage. Who do I need to be today? Who and what do I trust? Is it safe? This maze of physical, digital and cultural urban existences has variously been described as a happenstance of metaphors[1], an unknowable labyrinth[2], a memory machine[3] and a drama in time[4].

We have begun to explore being and belonging in place through the exploration of self through literature in the context of a student-tutor research partnership entitled Reading and Writing the City, based in a final year undergraduate study module. This study module poses the question 'what does it mean to belong to a place' and we supplement this question for our research project with 'what might being and belonging mean in a digitally augmented urban lifeworld' that further contributes to the research area for digital lifeworld being and belonging in place and the city. Though space is limited in this short paper, we attempt to outline key concepts and terrain related to 'Reading and Writing the City'. Discussion takes in the idea of research partnerships in a speculative university of knowledge for its own sake, what it might mean to belong to places, future cities based in a sustainable ecology of care, the nature and role of 'things' in belonging, and how digital augmentation of self, objects and environment impact identity and belonging.

READING AND WRITING THE CITY

To investigate citizen belonging in the complexity of a digitally augmented urban lifeworld we have undertaken a creative study project in the context of a student-tutor research partnership, entitled Reading and Writing the City. 'Reading and writing' to re-imagine, own and interpret the city are established in philosophical reflection[5;6], and urban, 'smart city' discourses concerning citizenship, rights and belonging[7]. Our title is directly inspired by the work of Taylor, Jordan and Jeremiah[8], with further relevant work (e.g.[9]) informing how we think about and approach the learning, teaching and development of our topic and research scope. By working in an equal participatory research role together with students we attempt to re-imagine ownership of our urban territories through exploration of past and current literature, contextualised in our own reflections and critical awareness of space and place. Research will further explore our experience of the digitally augmented lifeworld in which we each co-exist and how this may mitigate our lived reality of urban being and belonging. Our explorations are positioned within the changing idea of university, that research-learning-teaching may help bring about an intrinsic motivation and engagement for development of transversal skills in a context of knowledge for its own sake, and is 'a way of making the future'[10]. For the purposes of

this short paper, 'knowledge for its own sake' is contextualised as discovery of the objects of vital interest[11] for learner-researchers, through exploration of past and current literature pertaining to place, enmeshed within individual and shared memories and daily life experientialities. Forming meaning and sense making through our structures of awareness and their perceptual boundaries, we co-construct a shared reality of being and belonging within a digitally augmented shared lifeworld.

Research partnerships and creative pedagogies

Neary based his 'Student as Producer' work on the early University of Berlin, now Humboldt University of Berlin,[12] who promoted a vision of 'higher education as the collaboration between academics and students for the production of knowledge and meaning''. This 'speculative university' "...reconcile(s) the contradiction between knowledge for its own sake and training professional citizens..."[13], a tension that persists in the fluid transversal skillsets required by society today. Interpretation of these skills for the purposes of this paper might be the adopting of a critical curiosity, the need to foster a 'learning-to-learn' mindset, in a culture of well-being and self realisation[14]. In order to develop an atmosphere of intrinsic learning based in learner experience of value, engagement and motivation[15], student-researchers are encouraged to develop their own ideas and areas of particular interest within the scope of this learning-research study module (in other words, their objects of vital interest[16]).

'Reading and Writing the City' builds on previous work involving the authors, where another place-based undergraduate study module 'Literary London' was designed as an informal learning experience with an augmented reality enhanced walking journey, encouraging students to explore place in relation to assigned literature and the cultural heritage of the city of London[17]. Reading and Writing the City takes place-based literature exploration further, with a research led creative pedagogical student-directed emphasis[18]. Through exploring the creative student-directed approach to learning and teaching in this study module/project we may gain better understanding of how both our students as well as us as tutors might benefit from the speculative university approach to building knowledge for its own sake, to assist in ways 'of making the future'[19]. Learning-as-research additionally applies to us as tutors, as two academics from separate subject domains. We aim to act in constructive interdisciplinarity, being 'more committed to solving the problem than to being academically correct', and go 'into learning mode, being 'willing to admit ignorance and … to be taught, by each other and by the system'[20]. In our case, our system is the system of belonging in space and place, and our problem is being and belonging in it.

Methodological approach

Our chosen methodologies and approach are both empirical and reflective. *Non-empirical research* is situated in the debates surrounding the literature and thinking that form the topics of research hinterland. This aims to explore our different intellectual discipline perspectives in interdisciplinary ways: 'humanities philosophical' and 'educational technological'. *Empirical research* will explore developing descriptive emerging themes through 'contextualist' Thematic Analysis[21]. First, from a socially constructed experiential perspective, then re-evaluating from philosophical and theoretical perspectives, moving from manifest to latent data interpretations. Additionally we will carry out semi-structured interviews[22] employing the methodological approach of Phenomenography[23]. Through collective transcript 'second-order' analysis[24] we aim to discover categories of a range of experience variation for citizen belonging within a digitally augmented urban lifeworld. *Research questions* are not specified at the start of our project, being defined through the building of dialogue between staff and students working in partnership. Questions are anticipated to be informed by the question posed by the study module: 'What does it mean to belong to a place', and the further interest of how this might be impacted by our individual and shared digital lifeworld.

Exploration and Literary Imaginaries

Exploring selfhood through literature is not a new idea, perhaps becoming influential with Rosenblatt's seminal work, "Literature as Exploration", now in its fifth edition[25]. Quoting from the original 1938[26] work: *"Through books, the reader may explore his own nature, become aware of potentialities for thought and feeling within himself, acquire clearer perspective, develop aims and a sense of direction. He may explore the outer world, other personalities, other ways of life. Liberated from the insularity of time and space, he may range through the wide gamut of social and temperamental alternatives that men have created or imagined…"[27]*. Exploration of assigned literature and reading act as a medium by which we might experience other ways of seeing and being as individuals situated in places in varying cultural and historical contexts. In turn this assists in interpreting and reinterpreting our sense-making of being, within our 'own' territories of space and place, and within ourselves. Additional source texts or other media content discovered and researched through intrinsic interest and motivation help to piece together our sense of meaning in places. Through individual and group research and dialogue we find other perspective voices, contributing to our individual and co-constituted lifeworld, the shared reality of being and belonging in place.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BELONG TO A PLACE?

The texts that students are studying are with the aim of enquiring about how we make sense of place and feel we belong. The correlation between reading and research is in how students might take the insights of the novels and books about place and apply them to sense-making in the city. This might be in relation to similarities, differences, freedoms, limitations, challenges, problems and so forth. There are not many cities in the books being studied, in fact, in many of them the characters or narrators are in flight from cities. There are islands, agricultural landscapes, and migration. In this sense, 'place' supersedes 'city', expanding the notion of being and belonging in places.

People, things and belonging

Belonging in or to a place can perhaps create long term relationships, existing outside of physical space or time, for example thinking of some places might evoke memories of past times, homesickness or feelings of threat. The nature of belonging and place is also a fluid constant, in the way one may pass through a place and 'read it' (in the way of de Certeau[28]) to see if it is safe. The infamous scene from the film Marathon Man[29], *Is it safe* depicts the protagonist of the film, Babe, under extreme pressure to prove legitimacy in some unspecified way. Swift[30] offers a film buff's reflection on the scene, describing this often unspoken process as a performative coded membership of social group, place or identity, and is 'all about the fear of rejection': *"Whatever he (Babe) says, he is in trouble. This is similar to the sudden question "United Or City?" from a large gentleman and his mates (in a bar). Whatever you say, he can choose his response. You were in trouble as soon as they picked you out"* (Swift[31], *fourth section, authors bracketed explanations.*) Readers will recognise similar encounters in daily life: at work, in an interview, a club or bar, on public transport, in the street. Tests of belonging are arguably a part of identity construction and might be demonstrated in various contexts, including the role that non-human objects play. Youkhana[32] cites Gell[33], that "objects merge with human beings through the existence of social relations between humans and things …", that "(o)bjects / artefacts or material cultural productions, forms, and images … categorize people socially and carry forward ideologies of social boundary marking"[34]. Concurring with Swift's comments about football (e.g. the tribal 'strip' that many fans wear on match day), humans legitimize power over other humans through sacralized objects, that "serve as bearers of agency and represent signification procedures"[35]. Leach[36] tells us that technology "lends us our identity", that "(w)e live our lives so much through technology that we begin to see them in terms of technology… (u)ltimately we

even begin to constitute our identity through technology – through our cars, computers and electronic gadgetry"[37].

Sustainable ecologies of care

In light of the democratic sustainable smart city, Vinod Kumar's[38] examination of multi-faith and cultural factors for smart people and environment reflect a caring culture of environment as self and self as environment, and the Bodhisattva vow to reduce harm by practicing kindness and acting with restraint and awareness of others. Self as a process rather than an object and seeing ourselves in others for self-realization are further reflected by Meadows[39]. She declares: "(l)iving successfully in a world of complex systems means expanding not only time horizons and thought horizons; above all, it means expanding the horizons of caring", going on to describe the normalisation of "the process by which modern industrial culture has eroded the goal of morality"[40]. This remains pertinent in the new complexity of global interconnected knowledge, social media, personal data and platform monopolies, manifesting as a decontruction of trust in a postdigital world[41].

Yet neighbourhood and community build trust and care, perhaps acting as moral cornerstone of shared identity and democratic systems[42]. Santi et al.[43] propose to define "a new and different vision of democracy", sustained by a cosmopolitan, inclusive view of society, recognising diverse cultural and existential backgrounds and a need for a sustainable approach to resources. They argue that cosmopolitanism, inclusion and sustainability are not neutral concepts, needing a 'complex mediation' to "animate the practices of human co-existence", inflected in critical, creative and caring dimensions. Caring thinking is essential, and need pedagogical 'mediators' "that operationalize, in the actual lived experience of youth, the discourses *about* democracy". This can turn into a 'factor of conversion' available in communities to nurture the 'well-being' and 'well-becoming' of the life projects of each and every one[44].

PEOPLE AND THINGS IN THE DIGITALLY AUGMENTED CITY

Writing in 2018, Bross reflects on the remoulding of urban surroundings into digitised 'public sphere billboards', and as a result building types becoming increasingly irrelevant as the built environment has transformed buildings into scaffolding for 'mediatic surfaces for fluid media'. Mediatic surfaces are defined as 'physical surfaces capable of emitting media', and fluid media as 'a constant, usually graphic and/or acoustic flow of uninterrupted information'[45]. At time of writing, a central London location has been recently transformed from a cultural historical place of musical heritage significance known as Tin Pan Alley into a vast scale digital immersive display experience with interactive smartphone functionality known as Outernet[46]. Outernet has subsumed the previous area of Denmark Street[47] into its digitised experience, and provides a current example of mediatic surface fluid media replacing an authentic citizen-led historic site.

By exploring being and belonging in place-orientated contexts found in past and current literature and further focusing on place in the present/future city, the concept of place as media interface becomes a physical manifestation of digital lifeworld augmentation[48]. McKenna[49] notes the rise of the Ambient, citing McCulloch's[50] descriptions of ambient as "that which surrounds but does not distract"; "a continuum of awareness and an awareness of continuum"; and "rampant availability of opportunities to shift attention". This 'attention economy' "consumes the attention of its recipients" yet "information overload can be overcome by attending to it less, making room for peripheral awareness to increased locatedness[51]. This compounded increase in the Ambient variable focal awareness is what we may refer to as being present in a hybridity of place, sometimes also referred to as Context Collapse[52].

Yet, a smart city offers the possibility to enmesh the citizen into a people-and-things ad hoc relationship of interpreted meaning making, content creation and digital community. The nature of the

smart city is that it is by virtue of definition infused within an integrated technological framing, and whilst questions remain around who has claim to that framing, "computing is no longer solely in the hands of big companies and governments", as "the smartphone becomes a platform for reinventing cities from the bottom up" and a 'motley assortment of activists, entrepreneurs, and civic hackers are tinkering their ways toward a different kind of utopia'[53]. Leach might refer to this as levels/layers of technology being open to "poetic appropriation". He goes on to describe, via Heidegger's counter-position, an initial alienation towards a technological (or dwelling) environment, steadily becoming familiar over time and therefore appropriated through agent interpretation. Even 'unpleasant factors' only mitigate against what seems "an underlying drive … to become familiar and eventually identify with our environment… as though there is a constant chameleon-like urge to assimilate that governs human nature"[54]. Even Rosenblatt comments about non-human thing empathy: *"… works of art and particularly of literature have revealed how pervasive is our tendency to identify with something outside ourselves. This has been found to be true even of non-human subjects. We tend to feel ourselves into the tree that is swaying in the wind, until the successful artist will have somehow made us that very tree itself"*[55]. This may help to explain how ubiquitous technological infusion meshes into the digital lifeworld of citizen being and belonging as a drip-drip normalisation of the non-human agency of the city. Or conversely, as Heidegger[56] declares, is the citizen merely reduced to being a 'standing reserve' of technology? Williamson probably thinks the latter, describing the governing of the city at a distance "through monitoring and manipulating young people as data objects, while also schooling them to act as active computational citizens with the responsibility to compute the future of the city"[57]. 'Computational urbanism' therefore is the standing reserve of resources to datafy the city for the benefit of those who own the technical infrastructure[58].

CONCLUSIONS

We have attempted to provide a glimpse into the complexities of being and belonging, acknowledging the range of literary work relevant to contexts of place and belonging, personal and cultural identity, and some of the continuing challenges of how we construct our citizen life in urban communities and digital urban lifeworlds. How we conceptualise our future urban landscape so that we reflect a caring culture of environment as self and self as environment forms an integral part of our belonging in place, and may depend on whether we choose to 'build knowledge for its own sake, to assist in ways of making the future' or foster 'active computational citizens … to compute the future of the city'. But perhaps these two apparently disparate approaches might in some ways be different aspects of the same thing. Our learning-research partnership in student-directed creative pedagogical contexts hopes to explore the many relational layers of being and belonging in place, through literature, our own critical reflections, and how we may experience urbanised digital life.

NOTES

[1] MacFarlane, 'A Road of One's Own'.

[2] Coverley, *Psychogeography*.

[3] Sheringham, 'Archiving'.

[4] Geddes, 'Civics as Applied Sociology. Project Gutenberg'.

[5] de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

[6] Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*.

[7] Jordan, 'Writing the Smart City: "Relational Space" and the Concept of "Belonging"'; Bauder, 'Possibilities of urban belonging'; Kitchin, Cardullo, and Feliciantonio, 'Citizenship, Justice, and the Right to the Smart City'.

[8] Taylor, 'Learning Along Lines: Locative Literacies for Reading and Writing the City'; Jordan, 'Writing the Smart City: "Relational Space" and the Concept of "Belonging"'; Jeremiah, 'The Use of Place in Writing and Literature'.

[9] Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration*, 1938; Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration*, 1995; Pinder, 'Arts of Urban Exploration'; Sacré and De Visscher, 'A Cultural Perspective on the City'; Sheringham, 'Archiving'; Hetherington, 'Rhythm and Noise: The City, Memory and the Archive'.

[10] Neary, 'Student as Producer: The Struggle for the Idea of the University.'

[11] Greeno and Engeström, 'Learning in Activity'.

[12] Humboldt University of Berlin https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humboldt_University_of_Berlin

[13] Neary, 'Student as Producer: The Struggle for the Idea of the University.'

[14] Jubas, Ofori-Atta, and Ross, 'Building a Pedagogy of Critical Curiosity in Professional Education: The Power of Popular Culture in the Classroom'; Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology*; Engeström., 'Learning By Expanding: An Activity-Theoretical Approach To Developmental Research', 147; Liu, Huang, and Wosinski, 'Future Trends in Smart Learning: Chinese Perspective', 209; Vinod Kumar, 'Smart Environment for Smart Cities', 43.

[15] Ryan and Deci, 'Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being'; Lister, 'What Are We Supposed to Be Learning? Motivation and Autonomy in Smart Learning Environments'.

[16] Greeno and Engeström, 'Learning in Activity'.

[17] Lister, 'The Pedagogy of Experience Complexity for Smart Learning: Considerations for Designing Urban Digital Citizen Learning Activities'; Lister, 'Applying the PECSL: Using Case Studies to Demonstrate the Pedagogy of Experience Complexity for Smart Learning'.

[18] Cremin, 'Editorial: Perspectives on Creative Pedagogy: Exploring Challenges, Possibilities and Potential.'; Breunig, 'Experientially Learning and Teaching in a Student-Directed Classroom.'

[19] Neary, 'Student as Producer: The Struggle for the Idea of the University.'

[20] Meadows, *Thinking in Systems*, 183.

[21] Braun and Clarke, 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology.'

[22] Marton and Booth, *Learning and Awareness*; Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing, The Art of Hearing Data*.

[23] Marton, 'Cognoso Ergo Sum – Reflections on Reflections'.

[24] Marton, 'Phenomenography—Describing Conceptions of the World around Us'.

[25] Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration*, 1995.

[26] Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration*, 1938.

[27] Rosenblatt preface.

[28] de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*.

[29] Marathon Man https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marathon_Man_(film)

[30] Swift, 'Is It Safe?" Marathon Man's Interrogation Scene'.

[31] Swift.

[32] Youkhana, 'A Conceptual Shift in Studies of Belonging and the Politics of Belonging'.

[33] Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*.

[34] Youkhana, 'A Conceptual Shift in Studies of Belonging and the Politics of Belonging', 14,16.

[35] Youkhana, 17,20.

[36] Leach, 'Forget Heidegger'.

[37] Leach, 129.

[38] Vinod Kumar, 'Smart Environment for Smart Cities'.

[39] Meadows, *Thinking in Systems*.

[40] Meadows, 184.

[41] van Dijck, 'Datafication, Dataism and Dataveillance: Big Data between Scientific Paradigm and Ideology'.

[42] Flynn and Mathias, 'I Would Say It's Alive": Understanding the Social Construction of Place, Identity, and Neighborhood Effects through the Lived Experience of Urban Young Adults'.

[43] Santi, Striano, and Oliverio, 'Philosophical Inquiry and Education "through" Democracy: Promoting Cosmopolitan and Inclusive Societies'.

[44] Santi, Striano, and Oliverio, 74.

[45] Bross, 'Mediatic Surfaces: Shaping Urban Environments'.

[46] Outernet https://www.outernetglobal.com/

[47] Denmark St https://www.outernetglobal.com/denmark-street

48 Bross, 'Mediatic Surfaces: Shaping Urban Environments'; de Lange and de Waal, 'Owning the City: New Media and Citizen Engagement in Urban Design'; de Waal, *The City as Interface: How New Media Are Changing the City.*
49 McKenna, 'Urbanizing the Ambient: Why People Matter So Much in Smart Cities'.
50 McCullough, *Ambient Commons: Attention in the Age of Embodied Information.*
51 Simon, 'Designing Organizations for an Information-Rich World'; Weiser and Seely Brown, 'Designing Calm Technology'; in McKenna, 'Urbanizing the Ambient: Why People Matter So Much in Smart Cities'.
52 Calzada and Cobo, 'Unplugging: Deconstructing the Smart City'.
53 Townsend, *Smart Cities: Big Data, Civic Hackers, and the Quest for a New Utopia.*
54 Leach, 'Forget Heidegger', 128, 123.
55 Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration*, 1938, 46.
56 Heidegger, *Basic Writings,* 322.
57 Williamson, 'Educating the Smart City: Schooling Smart Citizens through Computational Urbanism', 2.
58 Kitchin and Dodge, *Code/Space: Software and Everyday Life*; Townsend, *Smart Cities: Big Data, Civic Hackers and the Quest for a New Utopia*; Calzada and Cobo, 'Unplugging: Deconstructing the Smart City'.

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