

THE KELVINGROVE REVIEW

Issue 19

Place and Space



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Issue 19:
Place and Space

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Introduction from the Editors

We are delighted to present Issue 19 of *The Kelvingrove Review*: Place and Space.

Our goal for the Issue was to explore the ways current research in the Arts and Humanities encounters the twinned concepts of Place and Space. It was our intention from the inception of the Issue to engage discourse on this subject across a wide variety of disciplines and types of media. We are thrilled to unveil the present publication, which includes sixteen reviews from researchers working across the Arts and Humanities, reviewing written media, including eight academic publications,

and two collections of poetry; and visual media, including three art exhibitions, and three film works. The variety of approaches to the subject found in this diverse range of reviews makes for a compelling and comprehensive consideration of the topic across the Issue.

We open with two reviews of recent collections of poetry. We look first at Anna-Rose Shack's review of *I failed to Swoon* (Nadia de Vries 2021) which unearths a deep interest in body

as place. Jessica Duffy then takes us through *Canto and Othured Poems* (Joelle Taylor 2020), which invokes both the canto form as place, and the historical spaces of London's queer counterculture.

We then move to a series of eight reviews of recent academic monographs and edited collections that approach the subject of place and space. We follow Maddy Robinson into *An Inventory of Losses* (Judith Schalansky 2021), a text which catalogues the residual relics of place into memorial. Laura Scott invites us to consider a rich canon of Black Scottish writing, heretofore underrepresented in academia, through her review of *Writing Black Scotland* (Joseph H. Jackson 2020). Laurence Maxwell Stuart walks us through the cultural legacy of national identity politics in his review of *Stepping Westward: Writing the West Highland Tour, c.1720-1830* (Nigel Leask 2020). Olivia Vong's review of *Performing Ruins* (Simon Murray 2020) opens up the possibility of the ruin as a fertile site for creative labour. Christina Chatzitheodorou leads us through *The Kurdish Women's Freedom Movement* (Isabel Käser 2021), bringing her

reading of this important underrepresented radical feminism to the Issue. Erin Walter's review of "*I am Jugoslavenka!*": *Feminist performance politics during and after Yugoslav Socialism* (Jasmina Tumbas 2022) also revolves around feminist activism, in this case delving deeper into the body politics of Yugoslavia's varied recent feminist art movements. We return from these thoughts around place and self further afield to consider the interaction between place and self in literary urban spaces, with Georgia Toumara's review of *The Aesthetics of Space in 19th century British Literature* (Giles Whiteley 2020). Lastly, Heather Reilly invites us to consider the edited collection *Landscape and Space: Comparative Perspectives from Chinese, Mesoamerican, Ancient Greek, and Roman Art* (Jás Elsner 2021) which takes this concern with aesthetics into visual media, looking at early understandings of landscape in art across the ancient world.

Following this broad look at place and space among recent academic publications, we look at three reviews of recent exhibitions to consider how place and space emerge from visual and tactile

media. We follow Carrie Foulkes into a deeply personal interaction with the uncanny cartographic approach of Carol Rhodes to landscape painting (*See the World*, Glasgow International 2021). We then look to Mia Kivel's reading of the interaction between place, space and bodily canvas in a recent exhibition of Japanese prints at the Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institute (*Underdogs and Antiheroes* 2022). Alana McPake's consideration of dress history, and digital exhibition spaces in relation to *Girlhood, it's complicated*, an interactive exhibition of clothing at the Smithsonian Institute (*Girlhood, it's complicated* 2022).

Our final group of reviews are a series of three reviews of recent films, which have a troubled relationship with war-torn place as their point of axis. We hear first from Matthew Seaton who presents an evocative, tightly observed review of *Quo vadis, Aida?*, (Jasmila Žbanić 2020) a recent film which examines the experience of refugees fleeing the Bosnian war. Reconsidering the impact of a different conflict on an individual's relationship with place,

Jenny Alexander reviews *Belfast* (Kenneth Branagh 2021). The final review in Issue 19 of *The Kelvingrove Review* is Kyna Morgan's exploration of the complicated concept of home as it appears in *A Broken House* (Jimmy Goldblum 2020).

Editing this Issue of *The Kelvingrove Review* has been a joyous experience: we have been amazed by the wide variety of high-quality work which considers place and space being undertaken by colleagues working both at the University of Glasgow and across the wider global community of Arts and Humanities researchers. The time, care and attention which the sixteen reviewers published here have put into these texts has been wonderful to be a part of, and we are thrilled to bring the fruits of their labour to you now in this fantastic and wide-ranging look at the impact of the twinned concepts of place and space on contemporary scholarship in the Arts and Humanities. We hope you enjoy reading Issue 19 of *The Kelvingrove Review* as much as we enjoyed working on it.

I Failed to Swoon

Nadia de Vries. 2021, Manchester: Dostoyevsky Wannabe Originals, ISBN:
9798516193279

Anna-Rose Shack

Short, sharp vignettes unleash a poetic voice as uninhibited as it is laconic: ‘I keep my options and curtains open / because I have nothing to lose.’ Someone with nothing to lose is the most dangerous person of all, so they say. But despite this implicit threat, de Vries compels us to peek inside those curtainless windows: ‘All the windows in this room / are going to betray me’.

Published by the independent, Manchester-based press, Dostoyevsky Wannabe Originals, *I Failed to Swoon* (2021) is the second English-language poetry collection by Dutch writer Nadia de Vries. Her first, *Dark Hour*, was published by the same press in 2018. De Vries also has a number of Dutch-language publications to her name and holds a PhD from the University of

Amsterdam, having completed a thesis entitled 'Digital Corpses' in 2020.

Dogs, stones, T-shirts, moths, garbage, and Natalie Portman are a handful of the bizarre images that swirl in surreal orbit through this volume. In 'I love New York', a poem composed of a single line, de Vries states, simply, 'Everyone who wears that T-shirt is a liar.' In 'Penance Dress' she discloses, confessionally, 'I wear a 'Brunettes Have More Fun' T-shirt / but I'm a blonde.' In *I Failed to Swoon*, de Vries insistently usurps trite aphorisms (and corny T-shirts) with self-consciously performative irony.

Her acerbic tone keeps her reader at arm's length: 'If you can't handle my sickness, / don't trigger my gag reflex.' Is this epigraph a challenge, a provocation, a statement of fact, a warning? It is precisely this kind of emotional and narratorial ambiguity that colours de Vries' writing. She informs her reader with characteristic nonchalance, 'I keep you at a safe distance - / a stone's throw away from harm' ('Penance Dress').

One could be forgiven for thinking that a stone's throw is not a particularly safe distance considering

that death is a figure with whom de Vries cultivates intimacy: 'There's cadaver in everything I write' ('My Sisters Are My Pallbearers'). Yet, in 'I Sucked Down Death' she seems more perturbed that Death, a curious kind of house-guest, has used her best towel than by the fact she has erotically consumed him and 'kept him inside / He stayed for breakfast'.

De Vries wryly exposes her own 'poor subjectivity', 'full of / Darkness and pain' ('Everything Goth is Perverse'). Although she declares that this subject matter is 'unwieldy and ugly / and financially unviable', it is undeniable that darkness, pain, and death are poetic currency. In 'Gag on the Dead and Call It Breathing' she empties her 'lungs on the dead' so that she can 'inhale again' and remind us that her 'existence is loud'. Her poems play with the liminal space between life and death, sleep and waking, present and past but de Vries challenges the critic to re-think this easy assessment of her work: 'Liminality sounds like a cop-out to me' ('Come to My Cremation').

For de Vries, sentimentality is equally distasteful. With her penchant for meta-poeticism, she declares 'Every

day will be garbage day / and none of my poems will be sentimental' ('In the New Year I Will Be Stone Cold'). Sentimentality, exes, garbage: de Vries chucks them out with stone cold precision. In 'I Am My Own Lapidary' we learn that 'Everything about me is stone', even her dog: 'He's cute for a stone / I'm going to take care of him / It will be so brutal'. The implications are sinister. Is the dog in for some mysteriously savage fate or is it the act of loving itself that threatens to destroy?

Shards of broken relationships pierce this volume leading to spurts of sardonic philosophising: 'I found a man capable of great tenderness / and, by association, great deceit' ('Aggression Quest'). In 'Haptic Sin' the violence of love is depicted as a contagion for 'One by one we infect each other anew'. With all this violence, it is unsurprising that the collection is suffused with broken and bruised bodies.

In 'In Each Nightmare I Survive' de Vries asks, 'Is the beach ready for my body?' Challenging a world in which women have been taught to worry whether their bodies are ready for the beach, she instead wonders whether the beach can handle 'Multiple

fleshes / Chained and whipped'. This poem disconcertingly connects abuse with love, asking: 'What are the conditions / for unconditional love'.

De Vries does not answer this question. Her *métier* is the depiction of spectacularly discomfiting failures of intimacy. In 'Puppy Season' her love-interest ignores a text message containing pictures of her breasts: that night 'there were garbage bags / hanging in the trees.' One assumes these garbage bags are the belongings of the disinterested lover, thrown out the window thanks to a combination of wounded pride, disappointment, anger and defiance. But are the garbage bags perhaps also a surrealist distortion of loose and wild breasts hanging in the trees for everyone to see? The volume is punctuated with de Vries' particular brand of feminism: elusive, irony-laden, unapologetic.

People are messy, as the rivulets of bodily fluids that seep through this volume remind us: wetting herself in public, shit turning black, eating vomit and 'Oh, the things I'd do / for a blood-stained dress' ('All These Psychoses Are Driving Me Crazy'). Despite the plethora of truly disquieting (and often

disgusting) imagery in this collection, de Vries manages to steer away from gratuitous provocation. Her competence as a poet lies in her ability to translate visceral vulnerability into compelling subject matter.

The brevity of some poems occasionally leaves de Vries' pithy observations underdeveloped. Yet, this collection will appeal to the reader who relishes succinct writing and a dose of contrariness. Perhaps most enticing of all is de Vries' own usurpation of the reader-cum-critic response. Do you find her voice refreshingly raw? 'If you leave this book feeling exfoliated, / you are wrong', she informs us in 'Forgot the Attachment'. Or did you fail to swoon? She beat you to it.

C+nto & Othered Poems

Joelle Taylor, 2021, London: The Westbourne Press, ISBN 1908906480

Jessica Duffy

Joelle Taylor's *C+nto & Othered Poems* (2021) is a fierce and potent elegy for the butch lesbian counterculture of 1980s-1990s London, but also a textual vitrine which preserves the people and places of the era. The collection takes its name from the obsolete word 'cuntare' meaning 'To narrate, tell, or recount' (Taylor 2021: p.7). It also toys with the poetic

form of the canto, most famously used by poets such as Dante, Byron and Pound. Taylor's *C+nto* is a queer, feminist reclamation of the canto form in which the body becomes inextricably intertwined with the text. This echoes a wider re-appropriation of traditionally male forms such as Dodie Bellamy's *Cunt-Ups* (2001) which re-appropriates the Burroughsian 'cut-up'. Taylor's

collection was awarded the 2021 T.S. Eliot Prize, being described by Chair of Judges Glyn Maxwell as ‘a blazing book of rage and light’ (T.S. Eliot Prize 2022).

The people and places intrinsic to the counterculture are preserved in textual vitrines for the reader to explore as they navigate their way through the text. Taylor figures Old Compton Street, a popular queer hub in the 80s and 90s, into a museum of its own past. The first poem of the collection poignantly begins:

& now that Old Compton Street
Is a museum & the old bars

are shopping arcades &
the sex cinema a gift

shop & now that
pimps have blue plaques

here come the tourists (Taylor
2021: p.23)

Taylor maps the transition of the street from a cultural gay space to a commercialised spectacle in which fragments of queer history are awkwardly nestled between postcards, bobble heads and American sweets. The text performs in a similar way to the

‘blue plaques’ which pepper the streets of London; it commemorates the people and places of the counterculture, but in their textual rendering, signifies their absence and relocation to the realm of history.

It is not just the places of the counterculture that are preserved in Taylor’s text, but the people too. The voice goes on to state:

My people, vitrine.
My people, homunculus. (Taylor
2021: p.24)

Through the figuring of the LGBTQ+ community as pathologized specimens, Taylor demonstrates how lesbians are often displayed as curiosities or spectacles on the dissection table of culture. Commenting on *C+nto*, poet Fran Lock suggests that butch lesbians are ‘visible in all the wrong ways: an obtruding target for ridicule and violence, a medical curiosity, and a sideshow spectacle. Your visibility is punitive (punished?) politicised and policed’ (2021).

Taylor constantly toys with language by teasing out the eclectic

connotations of particular words, thus gesturing to the hermeneutic possibilities, as well as the political potential, of her work. Political moments of LGBTQ+ history are repeatedly alluded to without being directly evoked, encouraging the reader to make the semantic inference and therefore connect with queer culture. In 'ROUND SEVEN' for example, the narrative voice recalls 'how we carved our / epitaphs into a stone wall no one will remember' (Taylor 2021: p.43). This somberly suggests the lives lost to homophobic violence, but also evokes the Stonewall Riots beginning in 1969 which are widely considered a watershed moment of the gay liberation movement. The voice's poignant statement 'no one will remember' perhaps alludes to the public's general failure of appreciating that Pride Month began due to the Stonewall protests. This misremembering is apparent in the popular phrase 'the first pride was a riot'. Moreover, the poem '*Black Triangle*', which reflects on lesbians in the Second World War being made to wear identificatory black triangular badges, begins:

takes your breath away / this
cunus crossed out / this
boardroom satire / real camp / the
vulva excised / sewn to a sleeve /
& called antisocial (Taylor 2021:
p.104)

The word 'camp' evokes the atrocities enacted on marginalised groups in concentration camps, but also the queer aestheticism outlined by Susan Sontag in her essay *Notes on "Camp"* (1964). Taylor here employs a lexical and thematic overlap between the Holocaust and homophobic discrimination which was also drawn upon by AIDS activists. The pink badge, which was used in concentration camps to identify gay men, has been reclaimed by the LGBTQ+ Community as a symbol of pride and protest. It was used in the ACT UP movement as activist Avram Finkelstein noticed parallels between the holocaust and the AIDS epidemic. Finkelstein recalls 'public discussion of putting gay men into concentration camps to keep the epidemic from spreading' (2018), as well as suggestions that infected men should get tattoos to alert others of their status. The symbol was hence appropriated and re-galvanised to accommodate a queer aesthetic as well as a political revolt

against the government's failure to respond effectively to the AIDS crisis. Taylor on the other hand refuses to re-appropriate the black triangle for positive means. Instead, she reveals the badge to be a process of violent dissection; the vulva severed and sewed. The body here becomes a text for people to read as lesbian, as other. These poems not only detail the butch counterculture, but gesture to the complex and sobering history of global queer oppression.

The lingering reality of homophobic hatred and violence is not sanitised or resolved by Taylor. The reader is constantly reminded of the persisting persecution queer women face. Taylor repeatedly asserts that 'There is no part of a butch lesbian that is welcome in this world. It was bad when I was a teenager. It is as bad today' (Taylor 2021: p.14), highlighting how 'it is illegal to be a lesbian in almost a quarter of the world's countries' (Taylor 2021: p.15). Taylor's use of these sobering facts in the introduction to her collection is a fitting preface for the unrelenting and hard-hitting themes she covers in her poetry. Rather than pointing to the progress made by the gay

liberation movement, Taylor chooses to focus on the work that still needs to be done, the battles yet to have been fought.

The battlefield however has shifted, moving from the streets to the screen. The fighting is no longer physical, but digital. One of the themes Taylor repeatedly touches upon is the alienating nature of the Internet and its divisive consequences for the LGBTQ+ community. She suggests that 'Our meeting places, clubs and bars have closed, and we gather in distinct flocks across social media, each flock speaking a different language [...] The internet celebrates difference. The club celebrates unity' (Taylor 2021: p.14). This idea is particularly pertinent in the era of COVID which has entailed further disunity between people through the closure of the public spaces so integral to the LGBTQ+ community. According to the speaker, we live in a world where 'women are crucified on hashtags' (Taylor 2021: p.33), where 'I will be screen shot / before I am shot' (Taylor 2021: p.110). Taylor toys with the shared lexicon of the military and the Internet in her repetition of the word

‘shot’. The action of shooting means different things in their respective vernaculars, but both involve the posing of fingers over a trigger to cause intended harm to a subject. Taylor fashions the camera in the Sontagian sense of ‘a predatory weapon—one that’s as automated as possible, ready to spring’ (Sontag 2005 [1973]: p.10). *C+nto* highlights the need for physical queer spaces that unify as opposed to digital battlegrounds that separate as fiercely as they promise to connect.

Above all else, *C+nto* is a sacred archaeology site which attempts to textually excavate and preserve the rich history of the butch counterculture. The speaker outlines how:

In this case, reliquary. the bones
of saints & inverts (Taylor 2021:
p.26)

The poems simultaneously act as glass case and mass grave, a space which houses the bones of ‘inverts’ (a medicalised name for lesbians in the twentieth-century). These bodies are given names in the poem ‘*Eulogy*’ in which the speaker lists the names of murdered lesbians:

& I carry
Roxanne Ellis
within me.
& I carry
Ashanti
Posey within
me (Taylor 2021: p.113)

The inclusion of the names of these murdered women act in the same way as an inscription on a grave. The women, similarly to a corpse in a coffin, are captured and preserved as dead specimens in the body of the text, but also in the body of the speaker. As I suggested earlier, the body and the text are intertwined in Taylor’s collection and this is a poignant example of that. The repetition of ‘within me’ highlights how Taylor’s own body, like the text, is a vessel which houses the spectral memories of the victims, as well as the resultant trauma caused by their murders.

The ghosts of these women are contained within the text, but the narrative voice frequently threatens to shatter the vitrines and release the anger, protest and struggle these women symbolise and ignite. Taylor says of her collection:

Everything in this book is preserved: salt, vinegar, alcohol, aspic, in vitrine. Whatever is within remains there.

In case of emergency, break the glass (Taylor 2021: p.16)

C+nto has an explosive potential—it is a call to arms and a queer manifesto. All the reader has to do is ‘break the glass’.

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An Inventory of Losses

Judith Schalansky (tr. Jackie Smith), London: Quercus, 2021, ISBN-13:
9781529400786

Maddy Robinson

In the quirkily titled ‘Preamble’ to Judith Schalansky’s *An Inventory of Losses*, the reader is presented with a page-long list of objects, creatures, landforms and feats of human engineering lost or destroyed over the course of her writing the book. With unsentimental efficiency, the author dryly informs us of the disappearance of

the Bramble Cay mosaic-tailed rat, the Schiaparelli Mars lander and the Dharahara Tower. Overleaf, as if to remedy these unequivocal statements of loss, we find a mirror list of discoveries and recoveries that were made during the same period, the wasp species *Deuteragenia ossarium* for example, or a previously illegible page from Anne

Frank's Diary. The dramatic juxtaposition of these two short registries makes for a curious, metatextual preface, but when listed without ceremony, one after the other, the weight and consequences of each item is barely felt. What the cool, indexical indifference of the Preamble illustrates, is that the subject of loss requires an altogether more imaginative inventory, in a form worthy of its content.

Translated from the German by Jackie Smith, *An Inventory of Losses* has made waves in the steadily expanding pool of literature translated into English, winning a string of awards including the 2021 Warwick Prize for Women in Translation. Schalansky's book, designed by the author herself, is comprised of an innovatively collated, achronological selection of twelve genre-fluid chapters, each named for something erased from existence or lost to human knowledge. Fluctuating in form and narrative voice between memoir-like reflections, personal essays and fictional reimaginings, each self-contained entry in the inventory is introduced by a black page with a scarcely visible image of the lost thing,

followed by the date, location and circumstances of its disappearance. Thereafter, the author goes beyond the presentation of bare facts to offer a creative, sometimes completely tangential response to the loss or to whatever traces remain. 'Like a hollow mould,' Schalansky writes, 'the experience of loss renders visible the contours of the thing mourned' (Schalansky 2021 p.13), and we are encouraged to participate in her exploratory rummaging through the dark spaces left behind, perhaps with the objective of discovering something new.

Schalansky proves herself to be a practiced and enthusiastic navigator of these contours. The inventory begins with a chapter entitled 'Tuanaki', named after an atoll which disappeared from the South Pacific in around 1842, probably as the result of a marine earthquake. Here we encounter the author as investigator, sitting in an unspecified National Library. Poring over ancient maps and ship's logs, she daydreams the islands back into existence by enacting imaginative flights into the perspectives of their inhabitants and their explorers, 'I suddenly found myself all alone on

deck, or rather on the shore of an island known to me only from a rough outline on a map,' (p.39). That the first chapter should be structured around the records of an island feels appropriate, given the archipelagic nature of the book itself. Skipping casually between millennia and landing upon on far-flung continents in this archive-turned-ark, the cosmopolitan voyage which Schalansky charts seems as erratic as it is limited – with three of the chapters taking place in her native Greifswald, a region formally located in East Germany. With no clue as to the organising criteria for the inventory, the sometimes dramatic shifts in narrative style serve to heighten a sense of dislocation between each of these dispatches – whether it be in a strangely whimsical, indirect soliloquy from a middle-aged Greta Garbo in 'The Boy in Blue', or a meticulously researched chronology of a seventeenth-century Roman villa.

In the case of the latter, the chapter 'Villa Sacchetti' largely follows the plight of the artist Hubert Robert, whose etchings of the building in a state of decay ensured that visual records of it, and many other contemporary works of architecture, remain to this day.

Known as 'Robert des Ruines', for his fascination with the destroyed and the decomposing, he is a disciple of the archaeologist Piranesi, and equally as obsessed with relics as the rest of society at the time. Schalansky reports, through the immediacy of the present continuous, that in 18th-century Italy, 'trade in spolia is flourishing. The ruins are pure capital: not treasures to be recovered, but semi-precious minerals to be extracted,' (p.84). Where Schalansky's presence as researcher and narrator create a certain objective distance to her musings on Tuanaki, here she allows the historical figure and the zeal with which he completes his pictures to take centre stage. As deftly as the crumbling ruins are painted and etched, Schalansky captures the decay that blights the feverish, malaria-ridden swamps of Rome, as well as the 'purposeful and purposeless' destruction of Paris during the French Revolution. In the chaotic, revolutionary atmosphere, Robert paints 'with the stoical equanimity of a chronicler', and we are informed that 'it is impossible to tell whether something is being destroyed or preserved' (p.95). Interestingly, Schalansky does not dwell

on the more ‘purposeful’, potentially constructive functions of desecration, and any possible futures which might emerge from the rubble must be imagined by the reader. As the emotive descriptions of historical plunder and preservation blur the subjective boundaries between narrator and characters, we might wonder whether the author considers herself to be an altruistic treasure hunter, or a more calculating dealer in *spolia*. Whichever it might be, in exposing the potential for relics of the past to be exploited for personal gain, we can at least detect a twinkle of self-awareness in the multifarious nature of the urge to rescue and consecrate.

As we find in the chapter entitled ‘The Love Songs of Sappho’, the kind of salvage that Schalansky practices, the art of written commentary, can be an effective method of preservation in itself – she makes a point of remarking that some of the ancient poet’s verses only survived due to the fact that they were recorded in the 1st-century work of literary criticism *On the Sublime*. Of the few pieces from Sappho’s oeuvre which are known to us now (estimated to be around only 7% of her entire body of

work), a choice selection of the fragmented yet spellbinding lines are reproduced on the page, littered with ellipses and blank spaces. These textual lacunae in the surviving scripts ‘like forms to be filled in’ (p.126), are eloquently and ironically compared to that mysterious, ‘unuttered and unutterable’ gap in human knowledge: what exactly it is that ‘women do with one another’ (p.130). Like the historical erasure and denial of lesbian relationships, especially among otherwise celebrated literary figures, the scarce evidence of the life and sexual mores of ‘The Poetess’ is defined by these gaps and inconsistencies. Yet Schalansky is nevertheless keen to recognise the usefulness of the ellipse, the silent invitation to ‘imagine what is missing, [...] the inexpressible and the hushed up,’ (p.131) that transcends articulation. When faced with the choice between the boundless possibility of conjecture or the undeniability of the complete sentence, we are assured that omission does not always represent a loss: ‘Wordless, blind understanding is as much a firm *topos* of love poetry as is the wordy evocation of unfathomable feeling.’ (p.128).

Elsewhere, the desire to pour words into the spaces created by the lost items at times has the feel of overcompensation, the verbosity of which translator Jackie Smith captures expertly in a loquacious, lilting English. On the trail of the Caspian Tiger, hunted to extinction in the mid-twentieth century, we observe the bloody spectacle of two big cats fighting to the death in front of the baying crowd of a Roman colosseum:

They are watching a cross between an execution and a theatrical performance. A crude throng with refined tastes, accustomed to the magnitude, the sheer numbers, the monstrosity. To everything the mind can imagine. Every boundary only there to be overstepped. Their delight is laced with disgust, and their disgust with delight born purely of curiosity, the urge to act on every thought. For they, though they pride themselves on having a choice, are similarly only following their instincts, like children who throw stones at frogs just for fun. (p.56)

Though *An Inventory of Losses* is replete with such maximalist descriptions, the surfeit of metaphor required to articulate this particular exploration of brutality in nature illustrates that the tendency to excess is

a uniquely human one. Indeed, if we are to learn anything from the *Inventory*, it is that there is only so much storage space for all our worldly endeavours, and preserving that which we have accumulated is not always advisable. In the final chapter, ‘Kinau’s Selenographs’, written from the perspective of 19th-century botanist-turned-astronomer Gottfried Kinau, Schalansky imagines the scientist as an unhinged archivist, whose obsessive practice and expanding catalogue eventually necessitates his relocation to the moon. Kinau’s fantastical journey and subsequent attempt to create an archive on the satellite is reminiscent of Sun Ra’s 1974 Afrofuturist film *Space is the Place*. In the film, the musician attempts to transport the black population of Earth to a new planet named ‘the Arkestra’ via the medium of jazz. However, where Sun Ra would leave behind the injustices and heavy burden of Earth’s history, Kinau’s attempt to preserve it in a sterile, apolitical collection is, tellingly, doomed to failure: ‘The moon, like every archive, was not a place of safekeeping but one of total destruction’ (p.241).

Unlike Kinau, Schalansky's efforts to house these material losses in her textual inventory should not be read as an act of safekeeping, but as a method via which the past may be explored, reasoning in the introduction that a book is 'an open time capsule [...] in which every edition of a text proves to be a utopian space not unlike a ruin in which the dead communicate,' (p.25). And yet, at times the sensation that the text's condition as a physical object which occupies space clashes somewhat with her more profound proclamations about the book's capabilities. Schalansky warns us of Kinau's doomed attempts to catalogue everything and has us recoil at the Roman spectators' desire to experience 'everything the mind can imagine' but is not forthcoming about the selective criteria that she employed in the compilation of her own inventory. Similarly, her assurance that 'Writing cannot bring anything back, but it can enable everything to be experienced'

(p.25), does not account for limitations of volume, nor the author's necessary selection of what is to be experienced in this particular text and what must be left behind. Perhaps in order to reconcile the book's materiality with its content we should not look to Schalansky's 'wordy evocations', but rather, in the spaces between chapters. The black pages which separate each item resemble the texture and appearance of the sort of dark carbon paper that a shopkeeper might use to create an analogue copy of a receipt, or an inventory. On closer inspection, we can just about make out the dimly lit trace of the lost thing about to be elaborated in text: a scrap of paper, the stripes of a tiger, the towering masts of sailing boats shimmering. Peering into the gloom, it becomes evident that despite the best efforts of preservation, there is only so much that the past and its chroniclers can hand back to the present, the rest must be dreamed up, to exist only for us.

Writing Black Scotland: Race, Nation and the Devolution of Black Britain

Joseph H. Jackson, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020, ISBN: 978 1 4744 6144 3

Laura Scott

Joseph H. Jackson's *Writing Black Scotland* (2020) is an exploration of the intersection between Blackness and Scottishness as represented in post-devolutionary Scottish literature and within a context of a Union in crisis. Perhaps best read in tandem with Scott Hames's *The Literary Politics of Scottish Devolution* (2020) and Ben Jackson's *The Case for Scottish Independence: A History of*

Nationalist Political Thought in Modern Scotland (2020), Jackson's effort to illuminate the nuances of a literary representation of a Scottish nationalism is part of a comprehensive investigation into the complexities of nationalist sentiment and how literature can act as a vehicle for such thought across these three volumes. *Writing Black Scotland* is, however, the only work of the three with an explicit

overall focus on the role of race and racial politics, making it a valuable and unique contribution to the study of Scottish literature and politics as a whole. Jackson's contention that Black Scottish literature is not merely a subclass of Black British literature, 'Just as contemporary Scottish literature has never translated cleanly into a shared 'British' literature' (Jackson 2020, p. 3), is deftly established through a measured analysis of a New Labour racial politics and the post-devolutionary Scottish nation. Jackson then shifts his analysis to three examples of contemporary Scottish novels by writers of colour - *Trumpet* (1998) by Jackie Kay, *Jelly Roll* (1998) by Luke Sutherland, and Suhayl Saadi's *Psychoraag* (2004).

Jackson's line of thought is established first through discussion of the dynamic between Englishness and Britishness, engaging with critical and theoretical conceptions of the nation and the importance of geography. Jackson achieves this by engaging critically with a field of Black British literature, established in the late 1990s to early 2000s, referring throughout to key figures such as Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy, and to landmark novels of the period such as Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000). Arguing that New Labour policy at this time adopted

multiculturalism simply as a prudent political strategy resulting in part from the threat posed by 're-emergent sub-nationalisms, with Scotland to the fore' (Jackson 2020, p. 28), Jackson paints a clear picture of a Union in decline. His focus in this first chapter proper, however, is the idea that racial difference was used as a 'rhetoric deployed as a stock defense of the Union, where the ostensibly tolerant and multicultural character of Britain' is employed to refurbish Britishness (Jackson 2020, p. 38). This initial link between a Scottish nationalism and racial tensions which constitute threats to a Union based in the success of Empire, now crumbling under the weight of its decline, is utilised effectively throughout Jackson's analysis. His treatment of New Labour makes a point reminiscent of contemporary London hip-hop/punk duo Bob Vylan, who in their recent single *We Live Here* remind their listeners of the hypocrisy of a multicultural politics which does not constitute an anti-racism. Frontman Bobby Vylan shouts in a classic punk style quintessential to the Sex Pistols, 'Remember Stephen Lawrence/He too was free to roam/Eighteen years old at the bus stop/Murdered on his way home' (Bob Vylan 2021). Jackson directly references the 1992 murder of Stephen Lawrence and the Macpherson Inquiry

‘which found that the Metropolitan Police were institutionally racist’ (Jackson 2020, p. 79), a reality which a policy of multiculturalism does little to address. The murder of Stephen Lawrence provides an important example of a violent and structural racism which Bob Vylan takes to task. Jackson's argument utilises this same example to highlight the existence of this bigotry within a pro-devolutionary, pro-multicultural policy which he characterises as lip service to marginalised communities.

When turning to focus on Scotland, Jackson contends that approaching Blackness ‘from a nationally Scottish perspective (...) disrupts the smooth operation of this “black British” disciplinary’ (2020, p. 51). Contending that so-called novels of the nation, such as Grey’s *Lanark* (1981) and Welsh’s *Filth* (1998), deal inherently with Scottish racial politics, Jackson effectively links Black writing with a Scottish body of literature. He achieves this through reference to conventions such as challenging Thatcherism, state power, and institutional authority, the cultural supremacy of Standard English, and ‘the imperial yearning at the centre of British nationhood’ (Jackson 2020, p. 57). These opening chapters deftly illustrate the complexities of the political context and of

the capacity of both Black and Scottish literature to provide cultural resistance in an increasingly politically nationalist climate. This is not to say, however, that Jackson ignores the complexities of racial discourse within Scotland itself. His consideration of racial politics and discourse in Scotland lead Jackson to conclude that:

a critical approach to blackness and Scotland is part of a process of constant re-evaluation that maintains the primacy of the civic over the ethnic in the contemporary nation, with an emphasis on the new political conditions of devolved government (Jackson 2020, p. 2).

This understanding speaks to the common contention that Scotland, unlike England, is not a racist country. Jackson lends this discourse nuance, referring to ideas of a historical culture attached to Scotland amidst a rise in nationalist sentiment which hint that Scottish nationalism is not, in fact, wholly civic. Indeed, the very idea of a continual re-imagining of the civic suggests that there is still much work to be done on establishing and maintaining a truly civic understanding of national belonging and political representation. Jackson references oft-cited Glaswegian street names, such as Jamaica Street and Tobago Street, which maintain

reference to ‘the imperial sugar trade and plantation slavery [which] underpins so much of Scotland’s contemporary wealth’ (Jackson 2020, p. 63), undermining a narrative of Scottish state anti-racism. This provides a valuable critical and political framework for interpreting the authors whom Jackson moves to discuss in detail in later chapters.

Jackson’s analysis of *Trumpet* begins with an image of the novel’s largely absent protagonist, Joss Moody, play-acting as ‘Black Jacobians’ on the beach with his son Colman (Kay 1998, p. 99) in a reference to a Black radical tradition elaborated in C.L.R. James’ *The Black Jacobins* (1938) (Jackson 2020, p. 87). This meaningful change of James’ title locates the ‘fundamental embodiment of the principles of the French Revolution’ within a framework of a Scoto-British history encapsulating ‘James Charles Stuart, the Union of the Crowns, and the seventeenth-century infancy of what would become the United Kingdom’ (Jackson 2020, p. 87-88). Jackson effectively links this with jazz, which he argues is the radical ‘core of a black politics in the novel’ (Jackson 2020, p. 87). Jazz as a form of expression has been addressed by several critics (Baraka 1967, Carles and Comolli, 1971, Gabbard 1992), and

provides Joss with a method of expression which enables him to reconsider and defy categorisation and engage with an ‘intertextual conception of identity’ (Rodríguez Gonzalez 2007, p.88).

Jackson concludes his chapter on Kay with the contention that the most significant manifestation of this radical mode of expression, can be found in

the sense of grasping structural conditions at the root, in the novel’s identification of national differentiation within the Union itself, the disruptive potential of independence implied by that differentiation, and in the tartan-clad black Jacobians striding out of the past (Jackson 2020, p. 110).

Jackson addresses the texture of Kay’s geographical and national sensitivities throughout *Trumpet*, acknowledging both Joss’s ties to Scotland and Colman’s ambivalence towards any form of national belonging in an example of ‘racial and national disaffection and disorientation’ (2020, p. 88). Ultimately contending that the radical modes of expression represented in *Trumpet* do not chime with a New Labour pro-devolutionary stance, Jackson’s treatment of Kay’s only novel to date reinforces his overall project of illuminating the

connections between race, the nation, and the Union.

Jackson's consideration of Luke Sutherland's *Jelly Roll* elaborates on his more limited concern with jazz in *Trumpet*, making an explicit link between racial commodification and jazz music. In the line of Achille Mbembe, Jackson argues that Liam, the only Black member of a Glasgow-based jazz band that embarks on a tour of the Highlands, 'is replaced by the race-representative "black man"' (2020, p. 125) in an imposed and inherently ethno-cultural interpretation of Liam's identity. Through treating jazz within a white Scottish context, Jackson is able to call attention to an ethnic element in a Scottish nationalism which, as Sutherland represents in his work, consists of 'questions posed for Scotland in the devolutionary moment' (Jackson 2020, p. 140). At its core a novel which challenges any assertion that there is 'No Problem Here' (Davidson et al. 2018), *Jelly Roll* focuses in on the insidious potential for racial abuse in Scotland. Returning his attention to ideas of civic and ethnic nationalisms, Jackson here contends that 'In the mind of the Anglicised, landed Scot, the nation is defined in ethnic rather than civic terms' (2020, p. 133). He achieves this through reference to a nationalism

based in a Celtic historical identity. His reading of Sutherland's work directly references 'the symbolic expulsion of the racist "problem" from an otherwise healthy Scotland' (Jackson 2020, p. 137) and problematises political discourses which purport to be wholly civic.

Beginning with a discussion of the term 'political blackness', Jackson delves into *Psychoraag* with the contention that

blackness remains part of the twenty-first-century 'state of Asianness' in Scotland, as a critical cultural resource, as an imposed taxonomy... (Jackson 2020, p. 144-5).

Here Jackson points to the politicisation of Blackness as a racial category, a notion reinforced throughout *Psychoraag* through Saadi's references to Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967). Monochromatic images pervade the text as 'the political and social classifications of black and white (...) are displaced back to the visual' (Jackson 2020, p. 153). This binaristic tension is ultimately articulated through 'the figure of the "Scottish-Asian" hyphenated men caught between the Gothic dichotomy of whiteness and blackness' (Jackson 2020, p. 158). Jackson also returns to the idea of multiculturalism in his consideration of Saadi, contending that '*Psychoraag* is indisputably a cultural

product coded as multicultural, while containing various strategies of resistance’ (2020, p. 145), such as a specifically Scottish framework of response to an ‘era of multicultural governmentality’ (Jackson 2020, p. 146) under New Labour and Scottish Labour. Here Jackson returns to the thread of radical thought which he has previously explored through jazz; the idea that

Without a more radical attempt to grasp racism in Scotland, the political vacuum is filled actively by a form of recognisably British multicultural governmentality, against which *Psychoraag* reacts (Jackson 2020, p. 149).

This is achieved, in part, through a reference to *Psychoraag*’s own musical element, a thread pulled skilfully through all three of Jackson’s close readings. *Psychoraag* details Zaf, Saadi’s protagonist, running the final edition of his radio show over the course of one single evening, and the inclusion of a track list which ‘taps into a rich history of black musical forms as a kind of avant-garde “radical collage”’ (Jackson 2020, p. 160). This provides a musical element common to all three of the works considered in *Writing Black Scotland*, and highlights the potential not only for musical expression,

but for hybrid forms of expression. This hybridity is, itself, mirrored in the subjects of Kay, Sutherland, and Saadi’s portraits of Black Scotland as they navigate a culture which purports to accept all based on civic understandings of belonging, but which also becomes uncomfortable with radical, political, non-binary forms of expression.

Jackson’s work constitutes a much-needed addition to Scottish literary studies as an in-depth and considered analysis of post-devolutionary Black Scottish literature. His argument, strongly set up through political and national contexts towards the beginning of the volume, is deftly applied to *Trumpet*, *Jelly Roll*, and *Psychoraag*. This volume is helpful for students of Black British literature in establishing a distinctly Scottish field of study, and for students of Scottish literature in establishing a Black post-devolutionary literary context, thus simultaneously contributing uniquely to two fields of study and making clear the intersection between these.

Jackson’s work is timely, appearing at an extended moment of popular resistance to acts of outright violent racism in Scotland — such as the 2015 murder of Sheku Bayoh in police custody and the attempted deportation of two Sikh men which led to the 2021 Kenmure Street

protests — as well as in England. That there have, so far, been no other reviews of this work that this author can find, speaks to a hopeful surge in independent and original research which, in itself, constitutes responses and extensions to Jackson's work. *Writing Black Scotland* constitutes an all-important corrective to the dangerous notion that Scotland, unlike England, is free of racism, while highlighting the radical potential of Black Scottish literature to rail against a governmental body which, unelected by a Scottish populace, continues to sanction acts of racist violence. The delicacy with which Jackson unravels this dynamic is masterful.

Jackson's upcoming work can be read in the Wiley-Blackwell *Companion to Scottish Literature*, edited by Gerard Carruthers and due to be released in 2023.

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Stepping Westward:

Writing the Highland Tour c. 1720-1830

Nigel Leask, Oxford: OUP, 2020, ISBN: 9780198850021

Laurence Maxwell Stuart

‘Yet who would stop, or fear to advance,
/ Though home or shelter he had none,
/ With such a sky to lead him on?’ is the question posed by William Wordsworth in his 1805 Highland poem, ‘Stepping Westward’. More than lifting his title from Wordsworth’s poetry for his recently published monograph *Stepping Westward: Writing the Highland Tour c. 1720-1830*, Professor Nigel Leask sets

out to address Wordsworth’s query about the phenomenal impulse for the long eighteenth-century’s traveller, and indeed, writer, to step westward to the Highlands and Hebrides of Scotland. Encompassing over a century’s worth of military diaries, tour journals, poetry, fiction, and art, Leask pieces together an impressive, vivid, and at times, troubling survey of the Highland tour

that is both politically sensitive and aesthetically interested. Leask introduces his work by way of a rich analysis of Wordsworth's eponymous poem, a technique employed throughout *Stepping Westward*, of examining the diverse and often dizzying facets of the Highland tour through the lens of the imaginative works- poetic, fictional, and visual, which sprung from it. Here, Leask considers that for Wordsworth, as for others, the 'poet's tour is a quest for truth, as much about the human and physical nature of Scotland and its people, as about himself as a man and a poet' (Leask 2020, p. 6). In doing so, Leask thoughtfully epitomises his project, one which seeks to examine the 'human and physical' aspects of the *Gàidhealtachd*, counterpoised by an attempt at an understanding of the men and women who actively sought to engage with it (or in the case of the few, merely encounter it) through the itinerant medium of a Highland tour.

In his opening chapter, Leask proposes that the 'genesis of tour writing' is found in Edmund Burt's *Letters from a Gentlemen in the North of Scotland* (1754). Written during the 'volatile climate' of the 1720s, Leask

designates it as being 'the first modern travel account of the Highlands' (pp. 25, 31). Self-professed by Burt to be a '*dreadful catalogue*', Leask objectively balances Burt's inherently antagonistic and ethnically derisive writings, which at times stray towards the 'sort more to be expected from a Caribbean planter', with the curious aesthetic observations of a time before the nascent sublimity of the dramatic Highland topography had been realised (pp. 23, 40). Such an account is fascinating in its visceral contrast with the work of the majority of the writers included (Johnson's famously insensate *Journey* aside) many of whom were drawn westward by the powerful attraction of the developing aesthetic. As Leask notes: 'In Burt's Highlands then the traveller's eye finds itself excluded, baffled, and thwarted, without the relief offered by the sublime' (p. 49). In his extensive discussion of the construction of the 'new roads' built by General Wade following the 1715 uprising, Leask's characteristic pragmatism is felt, noting that 'rather than scrutinising their next footfall, wary of stumbling into bogs, holes, and other obstructions', Wade's Highland road system 'paved the way

for the development of a new romantic interiority, allowing the tourist to cultivate an aesthetic response to the unfolding landscape, while travelling at an accelerated pace' (p. 55). This 'new romantic interiority', a place both bright and dark in the chiaroscuro of sublimity, is the powerhouse of British touristic endeavours which becomes the Highland tour.

Leask's subsequent chapter, which examines the 'conquest of Caledonia' during the mid-century by an exhausting troupe of 'Roman legions, enlightenment antiquaries, Hanoverian soldiers, and finally tourists', is in many ways the most challenging for his reader (p. 63). The antiquarian quest to reconfigure the military events of the Jacobite uprising of 1745-6 with that of the Roman conquest in 80 CE by Agricola, (what Leask's terms 'Agricolomania'), is discussed artfully through analysis of Walter Scott's favoured novel *The Antiquary* (1816). However, there is too painful a juxtaposition apparent between facile antiquarian pursuits in an idealised 'barbarous' Celtic state, and the very real and present barbarity which followed in the wake of Culloden. This

tragic moment in the history of the Highlands is handled by Leask unflinchingly, comparing English soldiers' propaganda with the accounts of Jacobite survivors. In the aftermath of the fated battle, Leask tells of the victors' rampage through the Highlands 'with orders to plunder, burn, and destroy' and of the women who were 'strip searched and raped', the experiences of which, Leask powerfully evokes through his inclusion of the Gaelic waulking song, 'Achadh nan Comhaichean' (pp. 72-3). Unlike Burt, we are afforded the 'relief offered by the sublime' in the ensuing expertise showcased in Leask's extensive enquiry into the 'Ossian phenomenon' of the 1760s. Discussing the 'reinvention of the Highland landscape', with the new interest in 'Fingalian topography' following the success of James Macpherson's *Ossian* poems, Leask's steady hand guides his readers through the complex, polarising ascent of the Ossianic (p. 86).

The chapters which follow deal with the 'two giants of the Highland tour', Thomas Pennant and Samuel Johnson (p. 170). Pennant's Highland tours of 1769 and 1772 represent for

Leask ‘a watershed in travel writing’ characterised by the prolific traveller’s ‘omnivorous style and interdisciplinary range’ (p. 97). Pennant’s bold directive in presenting ‘the true knowledge’ of a Scotland he deemed ‘hitherto misrepresented’ speaks of the heterogenous, often incohesive collection of work written of the Highlands prior to his travels (p. 101). Leask must here again be lauded for having collated them within such a structured narrative in his previous chapters. Leask’s pioneering explication of Pennant’s tours represents the core of *Stepping Westward* and provides rigour and fresh insight into the otherwise familiar and ‘celebrated’ travels which follow. The ‘most celebrated Scottish tour ever written’ is of course Dr Johnson’s *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* of 1775 (p. 136). However, whilst scrutinising the many parallels alongside the ‘small sympathies, as well as the ideological differences’ between Pennant and Johnson’s tours, Leask’s discerning fieldwork provides an original and persuasive case study which successfully uncovers the influence of

Pennant to Johnson, Boswell, and the great many who followed (p. 170).

The succeeding chapter is undoubtedly the most vibrant in its study of the rise of the newly coined aesthetic of the picturesque following its arbitrar William Gilpin’s sketching tour of the Highlands in 1776. Leask reads the picturesque as being a ‘key mediator between’ the Burkean antithesis of ‘the more established categories of the sublime and beautiful’ (p. 72). However, the deference shown by Leask to the picturesque as succeeding the sublime is not always convincing despite his claims of Gilpin: ‘enab[ling] the emergence of a new verbal and visual attention to the natural world’ (p. 205). Indeed, throughout this chapter, which covers the late and turn of the century tours of Gilpin, John Stoddart, Sarah Murray, and the Wordsworths, Leask himself continually reverts to the language of the sublime in order to make his evaluations. We are troubled to hear of the ‘sublime “solitude” introduced by sheep husbandry’, whilst later Leask notes a prevailing trope of ‘sublime inarticulacy’ in travellers’ attempt to describe the indelible Highland landscape (pp. 182, 193). One is

therefore tempted to echo the words of Stoddart, who having ascended Ben Lomond, notes ‘a scene, not indeed picturesque, for it defies the pencil; but nobly poetical, as it excites the sensations of true sublimity’ (p. 184).

In turning to the ‘Female Picturesque’, Leask’s account of Sarah Murray’s *The Beauties of Scotland* (1799) offers refreshing insight into a woman’s experiences of the Highland tour. Murray’s vivacious account of her travels through the Highlands, which for Leask ‘evokes the metaphor of a roaring Highland torrent’ (again, in terms sublime), are characterised by a ‘patrician *sprezzatura*’ tone contrasted by her energetic enterprise in aesthetic observations (p. 188). Leask contends that ‘the act of viewing scenery is for Murray a strenuous physical activity, a fully somatic experience, as much a part of the sublime as the view itself once attained’ (p. 191). In comparison to such a forceful (and at times, we gather, forced) tour narrative is Dorothy Wordsworth’s contemplative *Recollections of a Tour made in Scotland*, which Leask hails as being ‘perhaps the masterpiece of all the tours studied in this book’ (p. 197). Leask’s

discussion is illustrated brilliantly by his pairing of Dorothy’s thought-provoking ‘recollections’ with close analysis of the poetry written at the time by her husband, William. Leask surmises that if William had broken ground with his poetic tenet of ‘emotion recollected in tranquillity’, then correspondingly, Dorothy’s tour, which was written retrospectively over some twenty months; ‘employs memory and imagination to recover lived experience, in a way that no other travel writer had done before’ (p. 198).

The penultimate chapter begins with a distinct change in tone felt in a damning review by Walter Scott of Sir John Carr’s *Caledonian Sketches* (1809), from which Leask frankly informs us that by this period a ‘Scottish tour had become as commonplace as a trip to Margate or Turnbridge’, and that ‘the whole project of writing a Scottish tour now seemed futile, because the genre was exhausted’ (pp. 218-219). However, at this very moment of ‘exhausted’ interest in the Highlands, Leask offers a compelling examination of how Scott’s creative enterprise performs a ‘poetic reinvention’ of the Highlands (p. 231). Scott’s Highland

poetry and newly fashioned historical fiction are deconstructed by Leask, uncovering the influences of Pennant and others, whilst also sensitively engaging with the problematic implications of Scott's vastly popular literary fabrication of the Highlands as 'the faery ground for romance and poetry' (p. 250). Leask further observes how the 'mass tourism' generated by Scott's 'unprecedented hold on the imaginations of a mass readership in Britain and the wider world' is facilitated by the technological advances of steam (p. 229). There is a strange anachronism to Leask's account of William Daniell's *Voyages Round Great Britain* (1814-25), which contra to earlier travels and the pedestrian tour of John Keats in 1818 (which Leask reads as a form of 'bohemian "counter-tourism"'), is partly performed on a paddle steamer (p. 270). The fact that the monopolising steamboats which were 'aimed at a tourist clientele' bore such names as 'Rob Roy', 'Fingal', and 'Robert Burns', reveals the peculiar unfolding of a modernised mode of tourism which still drew power from the imaginative (p. 264).

There is a fatality to Leask's statement: 'But as the tourists poured in, hungry Gaels poured out' which allows for his interrogation of Scott's role in the expedient rise of touristic popularity in the *Gàidhealtachd*, in contrast to Scott and others' questionable silence surrounding the increasing tragedies of the 'hungry Gaels' (p. 262). Leask selects texts from Robert Jamieson, Stewart of Garth, and the ignominious John Macculloch to illustrate the backlash against Scott's idealised 'Highlandism' which was seen to romanticise and disguise the bleak reality of the accelerating Highland Clearances. It is Garth's voice we hear the loudest when he asks 'how any reader moved by Scott's tale of "fictional distress" could withhold sympathy for the suffering occasioned by the real eviction of 60,000 tenants' (p. 286). That Leask chooses to base the denouement of his text on Macculloch's *Highland and Western Isles of Scotland* (1825), which, as he admits, makes for 'disturbing reading' in its 'racialised justification for landlord policies approaching an advocacy of ethnic cleansing', is testament to the unflinching 'quest for truth' which

characterises *Stepping Westward*. Here, we arrive full circle as Burt's derisive account of the 1720s is subsumed by the 'racist dogma' of Macculloch a century later, just as the tragedy of Culloden is painfully eclipsed with that of the Clearances.

In ending on such a plangent note, Leask compels his readers to face the same mounting paradox which confronted all who undertook a Highland tour during the troubling history of its formation. A paradox of vying wonder evoked by the profound, enduring sublimity of Highland landscape and literary creation, set against the deeply unsettling knowledge of the brutal treatment of the Gaelic people. Leask's mastery of the period's contexts and of the peculiar 'generic synthesis' that accounts for the variegated writings of the Highland tour ultimately tells that beyond the Wordsworthian 'echo of the voice enwrought' in words, poetry, and song, is a 'deafening silence' which echoes far greater (p. 299). As such, *Stepping Westward* is truly monumental in nature, providing students and scholars of this tectonic period of touristic enterprise, of literary and poetic

inundation, and of insurmountable social tragedy, with invaluable insight into the history and manifold contexts of the Highland tour.

Performing Ruins

Simon Murray. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2020, ISBN 978-3-030-40642-4/ISBN 978-3-030-40643-1 (eBook), pp.328

Olivia Vong

The mention of the word ‘ruin’ usually conjures an image, often invoking the archaic grandeur that many come to find synonymous with ancient Greek and Roman ruins that stand proud and tall, as monumental markers of great civilisations that have come to pass. While this image is not altogether inaccurate, that, however, is not the book that Simon Murray has written in

Performing Ruins which is part of the *Performing Landscape* series, edited by Deidre Heddon and Sally Mackey.

The eclectic curation of ruins Murray explores in this book range from the repurposed industrial buildings of Ruhr in the form of Landschaftpark and Zollverein as art centres, to the bullet-ridden façade of the Stara Biblioteka

(Old Library) in Mostar that remains as a site for contemporary performance responding to the shadow of the war that continues to plague the city. Upon initial reading, the sheer variety of case studies and the requisite contextual information in order to understand the particularities of each location can be quite overwhelming to process especially when they are all in the space of a single chapter. In the same painstaking way that Murray encountered these places over the course of time, through his own personal relationship with the space, conversations with others who inhabit and work in the space; the reader will benefit from taking their time going over the various details of each case studies before the thematic links and resonances begin to emerge. In and amongst the variety of these spaces and ecological contexts, what remains in common is the liminal quality that these contemporary ruins seem to have been imbued with by the human activity that have coloured, shaped and affected these places. Through this, a beautiful dialogue between the human and non-human emerges from this complex web of circumstances that is best illustrated in Murray's account of how the

dramaturgy of Pearson's work (with Birth Gof in Wales) was deeply influenced by his spatial relationship to the ruined sites. He argues that a ruin is never a stable or fixed entity, but one that is constantly mutable and porous, offering a 'visceral palimpsest' through the performative interventions made by the humans who choose to inhabit it (Murray 2020, p.204). To illustrate this, he describes two performances in particular – *Tri Bywyd (Three Lives)* (1995) and *Prydain: The Impossibility of Britishness* (1996); the first staged in a derelict farmhouse in West Wales and the latter in an abandoned industrial warehouse in Cardiff. He goes through great pains to explicate the dialogic relationship between the ruins themselves and the consequent performative interventions which is something he does with great meticulousness throughout each encounter in the book.

It should be noted that Murray's book is focussed equally on the material and metaphorical aspects of as 'modern ruination' of contemporary ruins within the author's self-professed Euro-centric worldview. It is perhaps his

ethnographic approach in his encounters with these ruins that sets up the Euro-centric dynamic for the rest of his book. This is evident from his writing as he draws upon his personal anecdotes and experiences of others in framing the subject matter. At the beginning of the introduction in particular, he cites a childhood experience exploring a derelict and abandoned farmhouse while on a family holiday in rural Sussex. His recount of the sense of uncanniness he felt being in such a place as a child was as he later ruminates, a common occurrence of people encountering and interacting a ruined space. It is this intimate interaction, not dissimilar to the one in his childhood, with ruined spaces that he brings to each encounter that is included in this book.

Murray spends the first two chapters contextualising his research in the intersection between the existing field of ruin studies with the agency and ecology of performance in his curated selection of contemporary ruins scattered all through Europe. His understanding of ruin as both a concrete noun and verb together with its consequent derivative, ruination, as an

abstract noun serves as a starting point in contemplating material ruination: this serves as a gateway to consider the more complex relationships between the macro and micro perspectives, thus offering up a productive way to examine and engage with the material and social world. According to Murray, it seems that ruins are a place within a socio-cultural and economic space that has been previously designed and inhabited by humans but due to the ‘force fields of ecology and environmental catastrophe’, has fallen into a state of dereliction and disrepair (p.22). However, he is careful to draw the distinction between this and the oft romanticised photographic gaze of ruin porn which ‘induces a charge of pity sympathy, yearning, and even a kind of erotic excitement’ (p.25). He argues that such a perspective in looking at a ruin removes it from critical thinking and negates the human agency that has contributed to the dereliction and the degradation of these sites.

The subsequent chapters in the book comprise of a series of encounters in and among ruined locations through Europe, acting in concert with their human actors in both theatrical and non-

theatrical contexts. However, this is not a book driven by theory or a unifying approach towards the study of ruins, rather Murray often adopts a personable and ethnographic approach to his writing, taking great pains to outline the historical, socio-cultural and economic contexts that locate these ruined spaces and the consequent artistic/performative practice that have been developed as a response to it. As such, the chapters are organised thematically according to the overlapping ideas and concepts that emerge from his observations, interviews and reflections that he has gleaned from his extensive travels to these sites. There is a clear cohesive modern thinking that governs the chapters as they examine the ruin/ruination of a space through the lens of natural disasters, the legacies of war (both hot and cold), deindustrialisation of cities, and financial crises. The third chapter in this book however stands in contrast to the later chapters. Although he spends most of the book on what he comes to term as contemporary ruins, he devotes this chapter to discuss the classical Greek ruins of Epidaurus and Delphi and how they bear witness to the shifting

interaction within the ever-changing cultural landscape of Greece. With that being said, his his account of these two ancient sites of theatre purposefully neglects to discuss how these ‘ruins of antiquity’ lend themselves to the construction of the cultural imagination of Greece as a nation (p.42). While this is in keeping with the concept of ‘contemporary ruination’ that he outlines in the first two chapters and explores in the rest of the book, the cultural imaginary of Greek culture that these ruins that since have become monuments in themselves left me wondering if more could be excavated from them to demonstrate how they could serve the cultural imagination of Greece.

The readable style of Murray’s writing makes this an easy book to pick up even though it is a fairly lengthy read. This book makes a timely contribution to the increasingly interdisciplinary field of ruin studies by offering a wide array of lenses to encountering the performance of ruins. Ranging from the ‘intuitive to the analytical; the rational and the romantic; the affective and the cognitive and the associative and the deductive’ (p.292), these approaches

ground academic ideas of new materialism and memory studies in a variety of landscapes (urban and otherwise). Its greatest strength lies in the author's close relationships with his interviewees, that shape his writing and allow for a certain sense of familiarity despite reading about a space and place that is decidedly foreign. For the general reader, I believe that this book provides a thoughtful reflection on the complex intersectional nature of contemporary ruination albeit through a Euro-centric lens.

The Kurdish Women's Freedom Movement: Gender, Body Politics and Militant Femininities

Isabel Käser, Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021,
ISBN:9781009022194.

Christina Chatzitheodorou

Isabel Käser's book *The Kurdish Women's Freedom Movement: Gender, Body Politics and Militant Femininities* investigates how Kurdish women have filled the political and militarised spaces with their own specific organisational practices and ideological claim making (Käser 2021, p. 4). Based on ethnographic research both in

Turkish and Iraqi Kurdistan, she examines how the notions of gender and sexuality are being redefined in the pursuit of self-determination through violence. Käser (2021, p. 21) places her work among a broader tradition of literature where body, politics and space interact to provide explanations to problems related to power, sexuality, and gender (Butler

2006; Young 2005). Her research also lies between gender, war, militarism, and resistance, aiming to unfold a more complicated image of women in war; women are not seen solely as victims or as an exception to the rule when participating in violent acts (2021, p. 11).

Käser's (2021) reassessment of the linkages between gender, militarism and war challenges the idea that existing patriarchal norms are solely exacerbated by militarism and conflict and provides a more complex representation of reality through her analysis of the 'Kurdish female fighter'. Wars, revolutions, and political crises are significant because they create a political space (Hart 1996). Even though the importance of adapting to "everyday understandings" and acceptable cultural norms is necessary to mobilise the population, wars and political crises provide an opening for individuals to assume previously inconceivable roles to them (Hart 1996, p. 78). In essence, Kurdish women were provided with an opening, which allowed them to assume roles (that of the female

fighter) previously unimaginable to them and, simultaneously, challenge and redefine the sexual order and gender norms and relations (Käser, 2021).

Moreover, Käser avoids engaging in manichaeistic simplifications that understand female Kurdish fighters either as heroines fighting for the cause or as victims of yet another patriarchal system that governs their bodies. Since the Rojava Revolution, the worldwide spotlight has been on female Kurdish fighters, a focus that has often been essentialising, glossing over a more nuanced reality that includes various resistance(s) and contradictions. Toivanen and Başer (2016) have argued that the portrayal of Kurdish women combatants in Western media established a narrative that emphasised their heroism (Çağlayan and Coşar 2020, p. 2) while ignoring potentially contentious parts. The idea that women's emancipation is associated with militancy is part of a wider tradition of literature that has long identified the link between citizenship rights and military

(Yuval-Davis 2011; Yuval-Davis and Werbner 1999). Military conscription and citizenship rights became a central argument in the exclusion of women from political representation in the West since the American and French Revolutions, respectively (1775–83 and 1789–99) (Nagel 1998; Ahlbäck 2014; Yuval-Davis 1991; Caglioti 2020). Risking one's life or even dying for one's nation is the ultimate price he (or she) must pay in exchange for citizenship privileges. Consequently, any exemption from this responsibility reduces the degree to which women may obtain full citizenship rights (Yuval-Davis 1991 cited in Malešević 2010, pp. 287-288).

In the same pattern as Nilsson's article on Kurdish women's experiences (2018), Käser testimonies of former prisoners, mothers of guerrillas, and female fighters allow her to evaluate how violence and anguish of state brutality reshape the identities and memories of Kurds. Käser's (2021, p. 19) observations regarding the creation of a certain feminine

militant identity are an important contribution to the field. For example, the latter (2021, p. 134) shows how the society in Maxmur is militarised and how this militarisation of society impacts the martyr's mothers. Understanding how a mother accepts to send her child to the frontline to fight and may die for the struggle is crucial to understanding the extent of militarisation in the region. This acceptance becomes evident in the ritualisation of death in the camp by the martyr's mothers. The family is not sad but rather proud of their child for having become a martyr for Kurdistan (Käser 2021: 140, 143-144). However, Käser (2021, p. 135) also argues that resistance exists against this militarisation of every aspect of life and what is might superficially perceived as a universal acceptance is not always the case.

The interviews with guerrilla fighters in the mountains shed light on how certain events push women to join the movement as fighters and engaged members, breaking with tradition that sees women as mothers and wives in combat support roles.

These “rupture points” differ from one generation to another, but they remain equally important and trigger women to participate in the movement. For example, for the younger generation, the fight for Kobane and the fight against the Islamic State was crucial to their “initiation” to the moment, while the older one was associated with the resistance of Bêrîtan and Zîlan that motivated to them join (Käser 2021, p. 107). Despite the different beginning points from generation to generation, what unites these women despite the generation gap between them concerns their decision to join the party as an alternative; either as an escape from a violent environment or as an ideological shelter (2021, p. 108).

The Kurdistan Workers’ Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan-PKK) is not unique in its proclamations regarding women’s emancipation. Several left-wing movements, including national liberation movements (i.e., National Liberation Front in Vietnam) to terrorist organisations (i.e., Baader-Meinhof in West

Germany) throughout history, have proclaimed their willingness to emancipate women and set them free from capitalism. Yet, Käser rightly highlights the existing contradictions of women’s emancipation in the movement. The latter uses the term ‘militant femininities’ to explain the process of joining the party and becoming an engaged member. The concept of militant femininities describes how women in various fields, from the domestic milieu to the front lines and the city, contribute to the creation of a new political order in semi-autonomous organisational structures to maintain their central position within the movement (Käser 2021, p. 205).

Particularly interesting is the process of ‘subjectivation’ that articulates how a Kurdish woman becomes an engaged militant and simultaneously a free woman. This process is nothing but easy as they have to learn to control all their physical urges, including that of physical intimacy (Käser 2021, pp. 98, 126-128). This dipole (freedom and emancipation vs discipline and

restrictions on sexuality) seems incompatible at first glance. On the one hand, women are to become “disciplined soldiers” under the leadership of an ideology produced by a man (Öcalan) to dictate and shape women’s lives (Kurdish women). Women’s emancipation is not dictated from women to women but rather from a man to women. The ideal woman and the “faulty” one was articulated by Öcalan rather than by women themselves (Käser 2021, pp. 53-55). Even though Öcalan’s role on incorporation of women in leadership roles in the 1990s should not be diminished, it does not erase the contradictions that exist in the movement. Despite its obvious contradictions, Kurdish women through this process acquire a strength to resist and it gives them a noble ideal to die for. Women’s participation in a liberation movement might not initially be based on the ideals of gender equality and justice but may become a potent vehicle for women’s

emancipation as a result of the daily struggle of women themselves, who transform the movement from within (Käser 2021, p. 25). This has been the case for several social movements; women’s participation in the struggle becomes a vehicle for broader changes as it politicises them. Equally, the fact that several movements in the past did not explicitly declare their feminist loyalties does not mean they did not contribute to the progress of their women participants (i.e., National Liberation Front in Greece during the Second World War).

Käser’s analysis of the ‘abstinence contract’, which sees female Kurdish fighters strictly refraining from sexual relationships, further manifests the existing contradictions of women’s emancipation within the movement. Women, by renouncing their freedom to sexuality, become disciplined, ready to fight and die for the struggle.¹ This abstinence aims to avoid being absent-minded from

¹ Here it should be mentioned that refraining from sexual or romantic relations is not unique in the Kurdish movement. For instance, for the female and male partisans that participated in

the Greek People’s Liberation Army (*Ellinikos Laikos Apeleutherotikos Stratos -ELAS*) during the Greek resistance (1941-1944), romantic relations were also prohibited between men and

the revolutionary duties. (Käser 2021) However, this seems to contradict the notion of ‘free woman’, something that the movement fights for. Kaser (2021, p. 176) demonstrates how by handing in their right to sexuality, women acquire a set of tools for their emancipation. Despite the newly acquired skills necessary for liberation, Käser (2021, pp. 163, 194, 201) argues that this contract is a ‘party bargain,’ which allows the Party to control the fighters and sustain the resistance.

It is important to note that this ‘abstinence contract’ facilitates the acceptance of the female fighter in traditional societies (Käser 2021, p. 164). Any revolutionary movement can develop effectively under the precondition of speaking to the specific needs and realities of the people that constitute this society. It cannot survive if it does not reflect an understanding of the life experiences of those who are part of it (Ackelsberg 1985, p. 63). Despite

the fight for a more egalitarian society, the image of a woman fighter needs to be adapted to existing and acceptable cultural and social norms. In an attempt to counterbalance the uncomfortable thought of a female fighter, the movement reverted to acceptable depictions of women in battle by tracing back to goddess past (*Ishtar*) (Ibid, p. 164). Käser (2021, pp. 101, 108, 126-128) identifies these clashes between subordination and emancipation and other contradictory elements in the movement. Yet, it goes beyond the scope of her book to examine how these contradictions are pacified within the movement and maybe an impossible puzzle to solve until the actual gains from women’s *îrade* (will to resist) through this process are materialised in a post-war Kurdistan (Käser, p. 203).

Käser (2021, pp. 30-32) provides a thorough analysis of the limitations of her fieldwork research due to external events related to the

women partisans. For more: Kotzioulas, Giorgos. 2015. *Otan Imoun me ton Ari: Anamniseis kai Martyries*. Athina: Ekdoseis Dromwn; Vervenioti, Tasoula. 2013. H

Gynaika tis Antistasis: H Isodos twn Gynaikwn stin Politiki. Athens; Koukida.

civil war in Syria and the deteriorating situation between the Turkish government and *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP) that eventually led to the collapse of the Turkish-Kurdish peace process in July 2015. Limited as it may be due to the aforementioned events, Käser's engagement with fieldwork in several areas of Kurdistan provides a glance into the more nuanced reality of the Kurdish Freedom Movement and its regional particularities, especially the differences between the urban resistance and the one in the mountains. A point which can be further developed in the future concerns the reluctance of the movement to "use the F word" (Käser 2021, p. 76) and the identification of Kurdish women with feminism, while it also criticises Western feminism for its poor result in liberating women.

In sum, Käser's book provides a nuanced representation of women's participation in the

Kurdish Freedom Movement. The latter analyses the challenges women face in what is considered a predominantly male domain and the contradictions between the "free woman" and the restrictions imposed on women's bodies by the leadership. Käser manages to show that resistance is not a linear process towards progress; rather, it includes contradictory elements that might seem uncompromising at first through the lens of the manichaeistic Western tradition of dualism.² In contrast to Orientalist stereotypes of the female fighter, Käser provides us with a more thorough representation of the Kurdish female fighter. This more complex representation of the Kurdish movement is important for the debates on women's agency in social movements and political struggles in general. Avoiding simplistic generalisations that do not necessarily fit in specific cultural and social contexts help us gain a broader understanding of a topic. Her book is an undoubtedly valuable

² For more about the Western view of the world as a confrontation between 'us' vs 'the

other': Heuser, Beatrice. 2022. *War: A Genealogy of Western Ideas and Practices*. Oxford University Press. Oxford, p. 266.

contribution not only to an audience interested in the Kurdish struggle in particular, but in war and gender in general.

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"I am Jugoslovenka!": Feminist performance politics during and after Yugoslav Socialism

Jasmina Tumbas, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022
(ISBN: 978 1 5261 5647 1), pp.293

Erin Walter

It is not too often an art historical monograph achieves a comprehensive and engaging marriage of social, political, and cultural contexts. Jasmina Tumbas's book "*I am Jugoslovenka!*", achieves not only this, but also successfully incorporates the intersections of gender and the

LGBTQ community. This is accomplished by means of thorough analysis and case study spanning from the 1970s to the contemporary in the former Yugoslavia. Situated within the Manchester University Press *Rethinking Art's Histories* series, "*I am Jugoslovenka!*" realises this series's aim in

progressing past conventional retellings of art history, to advance a history beyond the limitations of era or location (Manchester University Press).

An Assistant Professor in the Department of Global Gender and Sexuality Studies, Tumbas's monograph builds on her own research and interests in feminist histories of performance, as well as gender, sexuality and contemporary art activism in Eastern Europe (University of Buffalo, NY). Tumbas's work on feminist performance and experimental art in Yugoslavia has been published in journals including *Art Monthly* and *Art in America*. Her upcoming work, *Feminists of the Yugoslav Diaspora: Art and Resistance Beyond Citizenship and Nationhood*, is highly anticipated.

"I am Jugoslovenka!" centres around the demographic and identity of the *Jugoslovenka*, or "Yugoslav woman, a term that encompasses multiple generations of women who lived under or were born during Yugoslavia socialism, a multinational and multiethnic state

based on the promotion of the unification of South Slav people." (Tumbas 2022, p.5). Tumbas's work connects these women through their emancipatory performances, which intersect heavily with politics, the avant-garde, and queer communities and practice primarily from the 1980s to contemporary activist art in the former Yugoslav. This work contributes to new historical understanding through its rereading of the body in performance and site-specific art in relation to Yugoslavian socialism. Tumbas links this to a political ideology interrogated through feminist histories, antifascism and resistance during and after World War II (Tumbas 2022). Tumbas successfully demonstrates the role of feminist performance as a brand of Yugoslavian socialism, and in doing so unveils a deeper and more intricate context for art historical feminist performance, specific to and situated in Eastern Europe.

Tumbas details this history and analysis through the five chapters of *"I am Jugoslovenka!"* which lead the reader on a journey of

social, political, cultural and gendered exploration of performance. The monograph relies on a methodology of correspondence, interviews, and case studies, accomplished through author analysis. In the first chapter, Tumbas chronologically details the avant-garde art circles within Yugoslavian major cities from the 1970s and 1980s. In doing so she selects a number of artworks which illustrate the rich feminist history of resistance and performance art, particularly performance concerning and centred around the body of the artist.

The second chapter takes a more direct approach to this history through a focus on three seminal Jugoslovenka: Lepa Brena, Esmā Redžepova, and Marina Abramović. These artists have independent relationships with the political, social, and cultural emancipation of Yugoslavia, which is explored through their personal histories and performance works.

Chapter three focuses on queer Jugoslovenka, and provides a novel reading of the intersections

and complexities of gender, sexuality, activism and performance. Tumbas furthers this exploration through a concentration on the queer and transgender resistance not only in art, but in life in urban and rural Yugoslavia.

Chapter four examines a number of collective groups of artists which emerged and were active in Yugoslavia in the 1980s. This includes Tumbas's rereading of the male-dominated *Neue Slowenische Kunst* (New Slovenian Art, NSK), through a feminist lens and critique of the collective and specific works performed (Tumbas, 2022). A subgroup of this collective, the *Gledališče Sester Scipion Nasice* (Scipion Nasice Sisters Theater), and one of its founders, Eda Čufer, also find their place in this chapter. Here, Tumbas explores the role of the women in these subgroups and provides a nuanced insight into feminine spirituality acting as a form of resistance to Yugoslavian nationalism (Tumbas 2022).

Chapter five investigates the impact of the Yugoslav wars, particularly how these events

influenced feminism and shifted political and nationalistic ideologies from the 1990s onwards. This is achieved through case studies of artists whose performance work is emblematic of the struggles and issues which were present in the post-Yugoslav. For these Jugoslovenka, the post-war shift and its associated creation of a neoliberal space were paramount to the progression of feminist performance.

Through the case studies of emancipatory performance provided, the reader is introduced to electrifying artists, collectives and performances, presented through a feminist lens. The reader, captured by the allure of this history, may find the only shortcoming of this book linked to a desire for this history, and the intoxicating performance case studies contained within this volume, to continue. The scope of this monograph has similar limitations, principally present in the constraint of the monograph's size, which places restrictions on the number of artists and movements included in the author's

investigation. With these limitations in mind, there is sure to be further interest and anticipation for Tumbas's upcoming publications and a hope for a continued link between the history of the Jugoslovenka and contemporary artists of the former Yugoslav.

"I am Jugoslovenka!" is a cohesive and original work which accomplishes a championing of Jugoslovenka feminist legacy, a legacy and a history of work which has at times been overlooked and erased. Tumbas's work is well-written and accessible to readers, chronicling the rise and fall of nationalism and its socialist impacts and ideologies in Yugoslavia. This monograph is aimed at readers interested in art historical and performance studies, as well as readers with interests in the intersections of feminist, geopolitical, sociocultural and queer studies. *"I am Jugoslovenka!"* hereby goes beyond a work solely aimed at members of the academic community. Rather, Tumbas's voice, the narratives, themes and stories explored in this work leads

readers of all backgrounds and interests through a captivating story of feminist and queer performance - ultimately calling us all to engage with and dream to be Jugoslovenka!

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The Aesthetics of Space in Nineteenth-Century British Literature, 1843-1907

Giles Whiteley, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020, ISBN: 1474443722, pp.290

Georgia Toumara

‘How did the city that later authors wrote differ from that constructed by Dickens?’, asks Giles Whiteley in his latest monograph, *The Aesthetics of Space in Nineteenth-Century British Literature, 1843-1907* (Whiteley 2020, p. 22). Whiteley makes an important contribution to spatial literary studies, as

he offers an insightful reading of the stratified space of nineteenth-century British literature. Drawing on material from male canonical authors, namely Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde and Henry James, he demonstrates how the aesthetic criteria of Charles Dickens’s formal realism and John Ruskin’s

definitions of *theoria* and *aesthesis* pervade their accounts. By providing a compelling consideration of Dickensian aesthetics and using the critical theory of Walter Benjamin and Henri Lefebvre, this volume focuses on the notion of producing images of the metropolitan city after Dickens's realism. Whiteley's idea on the representation of space is based on Julian Wolfreys's study on understanding the urban environment in a "psychic context" (1998, cited in Whiteley 2020, p. 23) and Jeremy Tambling's argument on how Dickens creates a type of "poetry of the city" in which silently [he] cites others and autocites himself' (2015, cited in Whiteley 2020, p. 42).

Early in the Prologue, 'Joris Karl Huysmans, or "After Dickens"', Whiteley (2020, p. 20) establishes the idea that, 'space is approached through its prior aesthetic representations, so that any aesthetics of space constitutes an intricate textual sensorium'. Using effectively, as an example, Joris-Karl Huysmans's novel *À Rebours* [Against Nature] (1884), Whiteley observes that the main character, des Esseintes, experiences Paris through Dickens's London. Whiteley suggests that a shared

network of aesthetic impressions in the late nineteenth century contributes to the construction of imaginary aesthetic places. Another notable observation is, that des Esseintes uses travel guidebooks to 'map the city' and 'mediat[e] his relationship with space' (Whiteley 2020, p. 10). It is surprising that there is no reference to James Buzard's influential study, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to Culture, 1800-1918* (1993), as Whiteley (2020, p. 10-11) acknowledges, travel guidebooks as *Baedeker's* and John Murray's 'Handbook's for Travellers' produce a 'specific representational space', that can be layered with a vast array of 'intertextual allusions (Romanticism, impressionism, pre-Raphaelitism, Renaissance art)'. The lack of sources on how travel guidebooks and travelogues contributed to the construction of a symbiotic ecosystem of spatial representations, puts limitations on Whiteley's analysis.

The Introduction, 'The Spatial Turn' is thematically separated from the Prologue and contains an intricate web of theoretical approaches by various critics such as Freud, Foucault,

Heidegger, to name a few, as well as Ian Watt and Nicholas Freeman. Whiteley seeks to uncover the link between Dickensian aesthetics and John Ruskin's *theoria* and *aesthesis* in the aesthetic experience. Whiteley's (2020, p. 47) choice for including only male canonical writers revolves around the Victorian polarisation of space, as he puts it, '[on gendering of space] Ruskin and James were particularly attuned to and an idea we have already seen Huysmans play on in his critique of Dickens'. For Whiteley (2020, p. 47), late nineteenth-century women authors, as Octavia Hill, Vernon Lee, and Clementina 'Kit' Anstruther-Thomson, provide great material for 'creating "aesthetic" spaces' or 'experimental aesthetics'. Whiteley's idea on female spectatorship and the aesthetics of space is an interesting topic for further publications.

Chapter One, 'John Ruskin: Towards a Theoretics of Space', and Chapter Two, 'Charles Dickens: After Realism', provide a comprehensive examination of the theory of *Modern Painters* (1843-60) and *The Stones of Venice* (1851-3), and Dickens's last novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*

(1870), respectively. Whiteley (2020, p. 60) undertakes an analysis of the crucial distinction between the definition of *theoria*, 'the intellectual lens and moral retina of true artists' and *aesthesis*, a concept closely connected with the decadence pertaining to 'the sensory effects of the beautiful'. For Whiteley (2020, p. 84), the metropolitan space of London cannot be read *theoretically* in Ruskinian terms, but *aesthetically*, through decadence and decay. A notable observation by Whiteley (2020, p. 87) is that *aesthesis* in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870) can be connected to Walter Benjamin's 'ecstatic states', namely, 'dreamer', 'madman', and 'intoxication'. This illustrates how body perceives space, leading to the deterritorialisation of space, in other words, the construction of a dream space. Whiteley's (2020, p. 92) claim is useful, as it shows that Gothic landmarks, as Cloisterham Cathedral, may construct dreamscapes, blurring the boundaries between reality and the past, leading to a fantasy, as in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), "'How can the ancient English Cathedral tower be here!'", "How can that be here!'",

“Stay!” (Dickens, as cited in Whiteley 2020, p. 92).

In Chapter Three, ‘Walter Pater: Towards an Aesthetics of Space’ and Chapter Four, ‘Oscar Wilde: Cosmopolitan Space’, the theoretical framework of *theoria* and *aesthesis* is not directly connected with previous chapters. Chapter Three explores mainly Pater’s treatment of space using Ruskin’s theory on the Gothic. The discussion is tightly centred on how Gothic architecture erodes the boundaries of realism and fiction; how death provides an ‘aesthetic experience’ (Whiteley, 2020, p.141); and how Rome in *Marius the Epicurean* (1885) becomes a metropolitan layered space. Importantly, Whiteley (2020, p. 134) suggests that the Gothic is related to *aesthesis*, and, therefore, influencing the ‘aesthetic expression’. Chapter Four, ‘Oscar Wilde: Cosmopolitan Space’, moves from the Gothic and focuses how political and social conditions intertwine in London, resulting in an aesthetic product (Whiteley 2020, p. 165). The main texts are *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) and ‘Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime’ (1887). Whiteley (2020, p. 166) suggests that, for Wilde, London

functions ‘as a city “rich in curious effects”’, containing clichéd language pertaining to Dickens’s London and Baudelaire’s Paris. Even though this chapter makes an important contribution to understanding space as ‘seen through the eyes of another’ (Whiteley 2020, p. 202), the use of Lefebvre’s arguments on how the rhythms of the city ‘invest space’ (1991, cited in Whiteley, 2020, p. 167), creating “polyrhythmia” (2013, cited in Whiteley, 2020, p. 182), makes analysis disconnected from the theoretical framework of *theoria* and *aesthesis*.

Chapter Five, ‘Henry James: Modern Space’, concentrates on James’s travel narrative, *The American Scene* (1907). Whiteley offers a detailed analysis of James’s endeavour to read the American city (for example, New York and Boston) in a European context. As he observes, James follows Ruskin’s idea on what can be considered beautiful or not, ‘the artist’s selection of objects may be conducted more “for their meaning and character, rather than their beauty”’ (Ruskin, 1903-12, cited in Whiteley, 2020, p.208). In other words, New York creates an ‘aesthetic wound’ (Whiteley 2020, p. 209) caused by

emergent modernity, in which ‘the American scene attempts to [...] to deny the past’ (Whiteley 2020, p. 212). As Whiteley (2020, p. 236, 235) puts it, ‘the space of early twentieth-century America resists both *theoria* and *aesthesis*’ because ‘American space seeks to forget the past, overwrite the history, in a capitalist orgy of limitless expenditure’. The absence of maps and illustrations, in this chapter, renders the visualisation of space difficult. For example, Whiteley’s (2020, p. 215) reference to the ‘architectural style [of] the “Cosmopolitan Era” (1865-90) [...] and the “Composite Era” (1890-1915)’ of New York and the topographical details of Park Street Church in Boston cannot be fully grasped by the reader. Also, it would be interesting to see how James’s spatial perception differs in *Italian Hours* (1909) compared to *The American Scene* (1907).

In the book’s Conclusion, ‘Unreal Cities – Towards Modernism’, Whiteley (2020, p. 244) shifts from nineteenth-century spatial aesthetics and turns to Virginia Woolf’s ‘synaesthetic aesthetics of space’, James Joyce’s Dublin and Proust’s *mémoire involontaire*, a ‘subjective experience of

space, registered in a moment of *aesthesis*’ (Whiteley 2020, p. 252). Whiteley offers a short analysis of Proust’s *Du côté de chez Swann* [The Way by Swann’s] (1913), noting how aesthetic representations are interrelated. However, it would have been more fitting in Whiteley’s narrative, if Proust’s concept of *mémoire involontaire* had been developed separately in a chapter. The Conclusion does not contain the main findings of the book, it opens a new discussion on how spatial representations can also be found in modern authors.

Using a broad array of texts and rich material, *The Aesthetics of Space in Nineteenth-Century British Literature, 1843-1907* provides a new twist to spatial interpretation, inviting us to see that, ‘after Ruskin as much after Dickens [...] the city and its pleasures could become the object of an explicitly “aesthetic” gaze’ (Whiteley 2020, p.241). Whiteley offers a starting point for further research in reading space, through the lens of other literary figures. The text is complemented with fifteen maps of London, Rome and Paris; two engravings of Gustave Doré, one

engraving of Luke Fildes and one engraving of Phil W. Smith; three photographs of Pater's rooms in Brasenose College in Oxford and two photographs of Rochester Cathedral. Whiteley's enlightening discussion opens up new avenues of thought in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century spatial studies, offering the academic reader stimuli for further research.

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Landscape and Space:

Comparative Perspectives from Chinese, Mesoamerican, Ancient Greek, and Roman Art

ed. by Jaś Elsner, Oxford: OUP, 2021, ISBN: 9780192845955

Heather Reilly

Landscape and Space: Comparative Perspectives from Chinese, Mesoamerican, Ancient Greek, and Roman Art (2021) challenges its audience to think outside the normal parameters of how modern, western society defines 'landscape'. Whilst the field of landscape archaeology is one of continued significance, when it comes

to ancient art history, landscape is often used for context rather than as the crux of any such theory or argument and has been examined far less in non-western cultures. This volume, as outlined by the volume's editor Jaś Elsner in the Introduction, aims to close the gap between an object and its inherent awareness of its own location within a

landscape. The volume aims to do this without a Eurocentric viewpoint, which is often neglected in contemporary academic consideration (Elsner 2021, p.4). Moreover, the book takes a highly multidisciplinary approach towards its subject matter, through the inclusion of paintings, objects and physical topography within its four main chapters, that each address some form of art within landscape, within a respective ancient society.

The first of these discussions, ‘Inventing Wilderness: The Birth of Landscape Representation in China’ by Wu Hung, elaborates on Elsner’s Introduction by taking a similar stance on views regarding orientalism. Hung is concerned with the way European scholars have generally disregarded Chinese landscape art before the 10th century CE (Elsner 2021, 16) and uses his chapter to argue against this by analysing the configuration of scenery within art from this period, specifically bronze objects from the Eastern Zhou period. He particularly focuses upon a ‘bipartite composition’, whereby artists juxtaposed an image of wilderness with that of human civilisation in order to define each one another (Elsner 2021,

pp.28-29). However, Hung asserts effectively against a binary comparison and states that the dynamic between these two spatial entities is far more complex (Elsner 2021, p.41), with specific topographical components representing ideological landscapes, such as mountains as untamed spaces (Elsner 2021, p.43). With Hung’s particularly compelling identification of a multitude of diverse artistic components, he makes a convincing argument for the developed presence of landscape in Chinese art before the tenth-century.

The second segment of analysis, ‘Statues, Stelai, and Turning Posts in Greece, c.565–c.465 BCE The Limits of Iconography’, sees Richard Neer decipher the numerous ways space can be determined in late Archaic and early Classical Greece. By exploring the two possible purposes of the monument mentioned in Book 23 of the *Iliad*, the race post and the commemorative mortuary pillar (Elsner 2021, p.60), Neer explains how both effectively connect to the construction of space and the conceptual meanings consequently conveyed. Neer provides the reader with special focus on the deliberately

ambiguous and overlapping vocabulary such as the various Greek semantics surrounding *sēma* (signs) and *terma* (posts) (Elsner 2021, p.61, p.63) and corresponding iconography, for example the various purposes of small Athenian pillars (Elsner 2021, pp.85-90). Neer's message in a simplistic sense is that vocabulary and the names of specific objects correlate to a spatial awareness and construction of space which is mirrored in the iconography and vice versa. Unlike Hung (and Brittenham's next chapter) this section of the book does not touch upon the messages concerning eurocentrism as mentioned in the previous chapter and Introduction, however it does follow the pattern of reconsideration of landscape components. Its inclusion instead serves to corroborate the notions of human interaction being a large part of what constitutes landscape – Neer's analysis argues effectively for the existence of multiple dimensions within the human experience of landscape. The overall discussions differ in that Hung's analysis centres upon the establishment of expression and visual representation of mythologies, within the two-dimensional cultural context of

landscape depiction, whereas Neer's chapter explores the navigation of physical space (as opposed to its representation). Both scholars put across critically evaluative work on very different subjects, hence it is difficult to compare the two in any sense other than that they both successfully persuade the reader to reconsider preconceived ideas about landscape.

Claudia Brittenham's chapter, 'Locating Landscape in Maya Painting', further analyses the western-centred view typically afforded to landscape discussion and convincingly maintains landscape was not a still vista but interactive. Brittenham explains that we are not meant to consider 'landscape' as a background or large scenic depiction in Mayan art, as topographical elements are portrayed in an animated form, which is often integral to the scenes they appear in (Elsner 2021, pp.103-105). She uses murals from the walls of a variety of Mayan sites including, the Bonampak Structure 1, a temple called Pinturas Sub- 1 from San Bartolo and scenes depicted on objects to explore this representation. Contrasting with Hung's chapter, Brittenham concludes the Maya captured landscape through a

tripartite lens, comprising of the city, agricultural lands and the forest (Elsner 2021, p.112) yet similarly to the ancient Chinese art, these elements all interact with each other. Both Hung and Brittenham's essays serve to confirm how landscape is far from static in multiple cultures. Additionally, Brittenham's chapter is especially interesting, due to conceivably larger presence of historical context and ends on a cliff-hanger, 'instead, there is territory, ripe for conquest' (Elsner 2021, p.125), thus alluding to the colonial impact mentioned previously on Mayan art. Brittenham does well to both acknowledge, and yet not concentrate on this topic, which has been substantially covered elsewhere, and thereby successfully avoids taking away from her specific analysis on landscape representation.

Finally, in Jaś Elsner's chapter, 'Space–Object–Landscape. Sacred and "Sacro-idyllic" from Dunhuang via Stonehenge to Roman Wall-painting', he discusses the textual and 'formless' pagodas from Dunhuang and then contrasts this with the 'absolutely material and instantiated set of objects in actual sites' within the British Isles

(Elsner 2021, p.150). He begins with Chinese Pagodas and explores their form and the way the viewer navigates it on the page (Elsner 2021, pp.134-149) before turning his attention to Stone Henge and the Castlerigg stone circle and the natural changes they are subjected to, due to their artificial placement within a landscape (Elsner 2021, pp.149-155). Next, he considers the Bewcastle Cross and the way we have no idea of its impact in its original, constructed environment as later man-made structures sprung up around it and how we thus lack the ability to comprehend its meaning within a landscape (Elsner 2021, pp.155-158). Then, Elsner concludes with Roman frescoes, including some from the Villa at Boscotrecase, near Pompeii and their ability to reflect a very specific place and time, even if they capture an image that is completely fictional (Elsner, 2021, pp.160-174).

This chapter is arguably the hardest to follow out of all those included in the volume, largely due to the greater need for prior background knowledge to make sense of the various art-historical elements, namely Buddhist art in conjunction with British

stone circles and monuments and then Roman paintings. However, the chapter helps to bring notions from the previous three authors together by effectively drawing on various ways landscape can be considered interactive. Elsner constructively unites the work of all the contributors together in their fundamental articulation of an abstract landscape and points to Brittenham's analysis on pictograms, Neer's discussion of epigraphic space and the conjuring of a running track, as well as the representative 'essential forms' explored by Hung (Elsner 2021, p.149) together. Likewise, by doing so under the second part of his chapter, Elsner skilfully presents his own thoughts as unique and full-standing in their own-right and does not automatically designate them as a way to summarise the other concepts expressed. Overall, he manages to explore the term 'landscape' (Elsner 2021, p.132), form and the meaning of 'emptiness' within a landscape captured on a page, specifically the arrangement of words (Elsner 2021, pp.140-142), the impact of changing topography on a particular landscape site (Elsner 2021, pp.153-155) and debates the concept of 'sacro-

idyllic' and its interpretations as decided by prior art-historians in great detail (Elsner 2021, pp.161-174). He covers these diverse topics with the upmost precision and although they appear very different at first, Elsner highlights the human interaction with landscape in these various forms, both in 2D art and regarding 3D monumental structures. Subsequently he finds that individual or societal perception is what generates the meaning, for example through the movement of the text (arrangement) and recitation (Elsner 2021, p.142).

As well as the variety of artefacts covered, within Elsner's chapter, he appears to take an almost philosophical approach towards the concept of landscape through his method of tackling the discussion from a variety of standpoints. On the contrary, Hung's focus is evidently from a strong art history perspective, a prominent feature of Neer's discussion is the linguistics and Brittenham includes larger portions of historical narrative. With topics covered in the volume being so vast in scope, close examination of specific subject matter works in the volume's favour as it would be impossible to include material on landscape and space

from every ancient civilisation. However, opposing Eurocentrism within the field of study appears to be fairly central within the Introduction and even first chapter, whilst the second chapter does not mention it. Likewise, in the Introduction, Elsner specifically establishes that some forms of Persian and Indian art are covered less than western or Chinese art (Elsner 2021, p.3), and, therefore, if the topic was revisited these areas should be given the upmost attention. It is fair to say that not every chapter needed to be dedicated to this discussion and the chapters that do cover this theme, cover it thoroughly, yet it would be nice to push for this in the future. Alternatively, the Greek and Roman coverage was original and may act as a contextual anchor for readers who are trying to branch out to areas of history less commonly taught. The familiarity of using an extract from the *Iliad* is particularly noteworthy, as many who are not directly involved in the topic of art history would likely be aware of the context.

Ultimately, all authors seem to agree to some extent that landscape should be interpreted as more of an experience, rather than a 2D method of

artistic visualisation as the modern ‘west’ would typically define it. The relationship between human settlements and the wilderness in ancient China and the animated portrayal of topographical features in Mayan art positively constitute a reevaluation of Eurocentric landscape conception and acknowledge the diverse ways societies may interpret their relationships with the landscape. While the multiple elucidations of a singular monument or marker in a Greek landscape, the interactive arrangement of Buddhist pictorial pagodas and the interplay between British standing stones and other iconographic structures with the landscape they were purposefully situated in, all work well to substantiate the notion of interplay between people and landscape. This interaction is the major implication illustrated by each chapter as much of the other information is very specific regarding the society that it came from. There are little similarities that can be identified in each and every section, for example certain features (such as mountains) within locales indicating an untamed space in Chinese (Elsner 2021, p.41) and Mayan art (Elsner 2021, p.132). However, these inconsistencies

are to be largely expected as the civilisations covered vary completely in time and location, whilst the case studies are very specific and ultimately do not take away from the conclusions reached. Overall, the contributors of this study effectively argue the case that even two-dimensional renderings of landscape

signify an interactive relationship between people and the environment. The combination of different cultures serves to express the diversity of landscape articulation and indeed the variety of ways individuals and whole societies may experience it.

Strange Cartographies: the Paintings of Carol Rhodes

See the World, Glasgow International 2021, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum

Carrie Foulkes

I first encountered the work of Scottish painter Carol Rhodes (1959 – 2018) at the London gallery, Alison Jacques in May 2021. It was a sunny afternoon, not long after the easing of the latest lockdown, and I was freely roaming the city for the first time in ages. For me, Carol Rhodes' work will be forever associated with this era, a time characterised by an ongoing global

pandemic and my gradual adjustment to a changed world after a devastating loss. The artist paints fictitious scenes, fusions of industrial and natural terrains, and her solo show at Alison Jacques moved and intrigued me. Her oil paintings often lack a horizon line, her forms veer towards abstraction and the colours of her landscapes are quite unlike those of the living world - purples

and pinks, pastels, shades of grey. They are not wholly unnatural, sometimes they are almost bodily - the roads and runways can be read metaphorically as wounds. There's no trace of those figures that made the incisions, blasted the rocky ground with dynamite, forcing entry, paving over soil and sand. There is a sense of ambiguity and disorientation in her work that chimes with my experiences of bereavement and lockdown isolation.

The news that there was an upcoming exhibition of her drawings and paintings at Glasgow International (GI) was one of the catalysts for a trip north several months later. Entitled *See the World*, this presentation at the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum was the first major survey of Rhodes' work in her native Scotland since her death from motor neurone disease at the age of 59. Rhodes' work is an apt choice for the theme of the 2021 iteration of GI - *Attention* - demonstrating as it does the painter's attention to her materials and thematic concerns, as well as the viewer's attention to the works on paper and canvas, their relatively small size an invitation to close looking.

The exhibition features early works whose focus and specificity (paintings of a tent, of an aeroplane, of

a caravan) sets them apart from Rhodes' later landscape works. We find similar voids, colour palettes and interest in place, but explored and rendered in a markedly different way. As a survey of the artist's work, the choice of paintings and drawings at the Kelvingrove offers a strong sense of her enduring interests, working methods and artistic development in the 90s and early 2000s. The inclusion of many pencil studies and sketches is a testament to the important place of drawing within her practice. In an interview published in a 1998 exhibition catalogue, Rhodes says:

I get an idea, a notion or a feeling that on the one hand is extraordinarily vague but it has got a very strong core. Then I look through a lot of different photographs in the books I've got in the studio and flesh that out, little bits from different images, it can be tiny portions from a huge array of different photographs. Then I pin down the thing that was in my mind and spend a lot of time drawing it out. (Carol Rhodes: interview with Pat Fisher).

At first glance, the artist's paintings appear to be topographical studies, aerial views, combining elements of the natural world and the built environment. But these are strange places, composite images in which human beings are absent and the colour palette is unusual.

Themes of alienation, absence and displacement are woven through Rhodes' practice. We are held in a state of uncertainty when we look at her paintings, which present familiar places made peculiar, or strange spaces made to seem familiar.

Rhodes does not paint people. She collages the real and the imaginary, drawing from a range of source materials such as photographs and sketches to create invented landscapes that bear recognisable traces of the world but make no claim to representation: they are 'densely descriptive of the world, but you would not call them naturalistic' says Merlin James in his essay 'Earth/Body/Painting' (James 2007, p.85). He continues: 'The oddness of the world is everywhere celebrated, even exaggerated' (James 2007, p.85-6). This oddness is apparent in paintings such as *Rock with Helipad* (1998) and *Breach* (2005), images that possess a distinctive, unsettling aesthetic. This is emotional, psychological cartography - a mood permeates these pictures of places: a place becomes a cipher for a state of mind or being.

There are no people in these paintings. There's evidence of humans, discernible in the straight roads and angular buildings, but a stillness pervades the scenes, which seem very remote, cut off, but suggestive of connection to other places - the roads often lead to the borders of the visible, they continue out of sight. The images are without a clear sense of perspective. As Andrew Mummery, Curator of Carol Rhodes' Estate observes: 'Rhodes was not interested in employing traditional single point perspective in her paintings but instead played with distortions of it and would use more than one viewpoint in a single painting' (Mummery 2021). This artistic method of deploying multiple perspectives contributes to the viewer's sense of having lost one's bearings. In the foreword to a monograph³ published in 2007 John Leighton insightfully remarks: 'We are not quite sure what we are seeing' (Leighton 2007, p.5).

There is a lunar paleness in *Rock with Helipad*, an apparent void in the lower half of the composition, and a 'rock' that could just as easily be the shell of an Atlantic horseshoe crab

³ This volume, published to accompany an exhibition at the Scottish National Gallery of

Modern Art, Edinburgh, contains perceptive essays by art critic Tom Lubbock and by artist and writer Merlin James.

washed up on a beach. Roads bisect the frame, travelling inwards from the edges. There are buildings attached to them, but there's a lack of depth and scale. Rhodes' pictures have their own interior coherence and harmony, the titles impart meanings and familiarity. The images speak to something preverbal, sparking memories of encountering spaces before habit hardened the mind into grooves of predictability, the expected overshadowing the actual, until what you see is what you expect to see, until there's only a rare surprise in a world that used to be so full of the new and the unknown.

As a book review published in the *British Art Journal* suggests, Rhodes' work as a committee member of Glasgow's artist-led Transmission Gallery (as well as her engagement with women's politics and nuclear disarmament campaigns) was an important focus for the artist: 'Much of her time was devoted to political and social issues, before in 1990 painting became the central activity of her life.' Rhodes' wide-ranging interest in the world is evident in her work, and the Kelvingrove exhibition offers some of the artist's source materials as documentation of this engagement.

Books with titles like 'Rocks and the Landscape', 'The Cities of the USSR' and 'Modern Architecture of Northern England' are displayed in a glass vitrine. These, alongside the many drawings, studies and sketches on view, give fascinating insight into the artist's process of composition and some of her visual and conceptual influences.

We can see the impact of aerial photography, the bird's-eye view, on her work. Tangled systems of highways and urban infrastructure are comparable to waterways and geological forms. In his essay 'Making It Up', Tom Lubbock refers to Rhodes' subjects as: 'imaginary landscapes. Maybe they're not strictly landscapes, if that word implies a grounded vantage point. Maybe they are not imaginary in the fullest sense, either. Fictional views or fictional topographies might be better terms for these scenes, seen from above, set somewhere in the middle of nowhere' (Carol Rhodes monograph, p.7). Lubbock refers to the environmental writings of Marion Shoard and her conception of *Edgelands* to situate Rhodes' landscapes as a kind of conceptual no man's land, a liminal zone.

Responding to a question in an email correspondence⁴ on how the artist's works relate to the history of landscape painting, Andrew Mummery says: 'She was interested in the social and political, as well as the artistic, history of landscape and her library contains a number of books on these subjects.' Carol Rhodes was born in Edinburgh, spent her childhood in India and returned to Britain in early adolescence. Could this biographical fact, these early displacements, have something to do with Rhodes' perceptive sensitivity and her subject matter? Indeed, the artist suggests that this is the case - according to Alison Jacques gallery, she notes: 'My early experience of India (its colours, density of detail), and then the estrangement from it, has informed my work in incalculable ways' (Carol Rhodes artist bio, Alison Jacques gallery).

When a painter chooses a small board or canvas, they know you will need to step up close to look at it. Likewise, a large work warrants distance. Your position in relation to a thing affects your perception of it. In a statement from unpublished lecture

notes, Rhodes refers to her process of composition:

I do dozens of drawings and eventually work on the size that fits the composition [...] Because I have the drawing, it gives me a freedom to intuit the colours and tones to hang on to the skeleton of the composition. Of course, the weight of the composition changes during the painting, that's part of the painting's movement. (Courtesy of the Carol Rhodes Estate).

The paintings therefore emerge from a lengthy process of sketches and revisions, comprising the creation of concise blueprints and more intuitive work with colour. Rhodes' small-scale paintings prompt you to come physically near to them. Their content also testifies to the artist's own attentiveness to the work of others: Mummery claims that Rhodes 'had a particular fondness for fourteenth century Sieneese painting and the court art of the Indian Mughal empire, but also looked closely at the work of artists such as Poussin, Corot and Stubbs'.

I'm sure I would've been struck by these paintings at any time, admiring their unique palette and blend of estrangement and serenity, but to come across them amid the grief of 2021 was

⁴ Citing email correspondence between C Foulkes and Andrew Mummery, Curator of Carol Rhodes'

Estate, with the kind facilitation of Alison Jacques gallery, June 2022.

to feel a profound sense of recognition. Rhodes' paintings remind me of the sort of dream in which you find yourself in a house that is your home in the context of the dream but not the one known to you in waking life. It may not be identifiable as the *actual* place, but emotionally you know its contours.

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Underdogs and Antiheroes: Alterity in the Edo Period and Beyond

National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institute

Mia Caroline Kivel

All too often, the feudal Japan of the western imagination is defined entirely by the mythos of the samurai: Noble warriors driven by rigid adherence to the principles of *bushidō*, devoting their limited recreational time to such lofty pursuits as zen meditation and the tea ceremony. While this picture of samurai life is hardly complete, it also belies the reality that in the most vibrant cultural

centres of the Edo Period—the ‘Three Cities’ of Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka—the most influential tastemakers were not from ruling samurai families at all. Rather, urban fashions were set by an ascendant merchant class. Unable to flaunt their wealth in the same manner as the samurai due to strict sumptuary laws intended to perpetuate the Neo-Confucian hierarchy of the Tokugawa

regime, these *nouveau-riches* rapidly developed an artistic heritage all their own, defined by clever repartee and dramatic bombast rather than by any idealised notion of samurai honour. One quintessential product of this heritage is the *ukiyo-e* (lit. 'picture[s] of the floating world') woodblock print, which became increasingly popular in the eighteenth- and nineteenth- centuries owing to a relatively low price-point and the potential for mass production. *Ukiyo-e* prints are given special attention in *Underdogs and Antiheroes: Japanese Prints from the Moskowitz Collection*, a temporary exhibition curated by the Smithsonian Institute's National Museum of Asian Art, running from March 19 2022, to January 29 2023. In *Objects and Antiheroes*, visually striking prints allow for an exploration of alterity in the Edo Period through depictions of kabuki superstars and other celebrated figures who—despite their fame—operated on the periphery of 'respectable' society. This theme is most apparent through images of tattooed ruffians and cross-dressing actors whose fame offers a compelling glimpse into the unique moral

sensibilities of the Three Cities' merchant elite.

While the rejection of societal norms is an intentional through-line in *Underdogs and Antiheroes*, it is most readily apparent in the heavily-tattooed figures of works such as *Nakamura Kanemon IV as Autumn Moon over the Musashi Moor* and *Urawa: Uoya Danshichi*. Beginning in 1720, tattooing was employed by the Tokugawa regime as a visible punishment for extortionists, swindlers, and fraudsters—a system which begat the belief within 'respectable' society that any tattooed individuals were criminals worthy of fear and derision (Samel 2004, p.965). This unintentionally brought about the flourishing of tattooing as a countercultural art form, widely embraced by kabuki actors who were themselves positioned towards the bottom of the Edo Period's rigid social order. As popular actors found their way into *ukiyo-e* prints, bolstered by their celebrity status among the consumer class of the Three Cities, so too did their tattoos. Prints of tattooed figures—mostly kabuki actors and firemen—comprise nearly a third of the works on display in *Underdogs and Antiheroes*,

allowing viewers to experience what is essentially two artworks in one: the *ukiyo-e* print and the tattoo that it depicts.

The association between tattoos and criminality in Japanese society is one that persists to this day (Samel 2004, p.967), a fact with which many westerners will likely be familiar. This simple cultural insight allows viewers to situate images of tattooed individuals within *Underdogs and Antiheroes*' overarching theme of alterity, even if they have little prior knowledge of Edo period social mores. Portraits of tattooed figures also provide an accessible medium for audiences to engage with the concept of *mitate*, an element of many *ukiyo-e* prints which is translatable roughly as 'parody' or 'analogue.' *Mitate* is a rhetorical technique in which two contrasting ideas are presented side-by-side, adding a provocative element of humour or wit to the image (Thompson 1986, p.22).

Poem by Ariwara Narihira Ason:
Lu Zhishen, the Tattooed Priest demonstrates *mitate* through its juxtaposition of the ideal of priestly holiness with the coarse, tattooed appearance of its central figure. This is

an instance of the technique that should be decipherable to most audiences of *Underdogs and Antiheroes*, allowing them to engage with the work naturally in a manner not unlike how it would have been understood by its original viewers. Beyond this single work, the exhibition offers numerous thought-provoking examples of *mitate* for audiences to puzzle over, including *Three Big Girls* and *The Nine-Dragoned Shi Jin*, to name a few.

While images of tattooed figures demonstrate the fascination of Edo Period merchants with subversive alterity in opposition to the Tokugawa regime's moralistic status quo, *Underdogs and Antiheroes* also offers an exploration of alterity in the context of gender presentation and sexuality through images of famous *onnagata* from the Edo Period to the present day. The term '*onnagata*' can be translated literally as 'female role,' and refers to male kabuki actors who specialised in portraying women onstage. From 1629 to 1877, all female roles in kabuki were performed by *onnagata*, owing to a government prohibition on women appearing on the kabuki stage brought about by moral panic over rampant

prostitution among kabuki actresses (Leiter 1999, p.495). As a result, many of the most instantly recognisable 'women' in Edo Japan were, in fact, men. While women are no longer barred from appearing in kabuki productions, *onnagata* continue to play a vast majority of female roles in 21st-century productions and are among the most celebrated performers on stage today.

Far from writing off *onnagata* as a necessary political expedient on the behalf of theatre managers, audiences celebrated the talented performers as paragons of femininity. As the saying goes, men wanted them, and women wanted to be them. It has even been asserted that 'only a male actor can suggest the essence of a woman,' and that *onnagata* were 'more feminine than women' (Brandon 2012, p.122). Regardless of the veracity of these claims, an element of *eros* was essential to any successful *onnagata* performance, reflecting an element of sexual fluidity in premodern Japanese culture that may come as a surprise to some westerners (Leiter 1999, p.512). On that point, many historical *onnagata* demonstrated a complicated relationship with gender identity, living

as women off the stage on the advice of theatrical treatises like *Ayamegusa*, which suggested that the practice would allow them to more successfully inhabit their roles in the theatre (Leiter *et al* 1966, p.392). *Underdogs and Antiheroes* offers a few tantalising glimpses at the changing face of the *onnagata*, from a 19th-century rendition in *Act Four from Shigure* Karakasa to the much more contemporary *Ichikawa Ennosuke III as Kirare Otomi and Ichikawa Danshirō IV as Komori no Yasuzō in Kirare Otomi*, dated to 1992.

The portrait of Ichikawa Ennosuke III is also unique as one of a few prints featured in *Underdogs and Antiheroes* that are surprisingly contemporary, offering a recontextualisation of the historical *ukiyo-e* medium as an ongoing element of Japan's vibrant visual culture. Other modern works featured in the exhibition include *Onoe Tatsunosuke in the role of Danshichi Kurobei* (1983), *National Sport* (1986), and *Onoe Kikugorō VII as Kirare Yosaburō in Genjidana* (1990). While the portrait of Onoe Tatsunosuke is rather conventional in style, the latter two works demonstrate the breadth of stylistic possibilities for the woodblock

print as a medium, retaining an element of the classic *ukiyo-e* aesthetic while incorporating more recent visual trends to create something entirely unexpected. The most recent work in the *Underdogs and Antiheroes* exhibition is the 2018 print *Kuniyoshi's Face of Jumbled People* by the legendary Tsuruya Kōkei—also responsible for the aforementioned portraits of Ichikawa Ennosuke III and Onoe Kikugorō VII—which synthesises traditional *ukiyo-e* subject matter with an almost post-impressionistic use of colour and line to create a shoulder-up portrait composed of writhing human figures but also seemingly sculpted from flowing water. Given that impressionism as a style was partly inspired by *ukiyo-e* prints, there is a sense in which this work brings a major Japanese influence on western aesthetics full circle, highlighting the transnational character of truly innovative art in the twenty-first century.

Of course, the images and themes detailed here are but a small sample of what *Underdogs and Antiheroes* has to offer. The full exhibition catalogue, which is available online, features 89 works from the Smithsonian's

Moskowitz collection, covering far too many subjects to discuss in a single review. The exhibition succeeds in exploring the eclectic tastes of Edo Japan's cultural tastemakers through a single medium—the woodblock print—which was and continues to be a hallmark of the country's unique visual culture. Moreover, *Underdogs and Antiheroes* celebrates subjects on the periphery of Edo society, allowing audiences to move beyond the archetypal representations of Japanese culture that all too often dominate museums' Asian collections. Overall, the exhibition is a testament to the keen curatorial eye of its organisers. All those with an eye for Japanese art, printmaking, or theatre would do well to experience it for themselves.

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Girlhood (it's complicated)

Smithsonian Collection Online Exhibition: <https://3d.si.edu/collections/girlhood>

Alana McPake

Girlhood (it's complicated) is a digital exhibition first curated by the National Museum of American History and later digitised by the Smithsonian. Adapted from a larger project of the same name, it began its life in October 2020 and will tour the United States in 2023. *Girlhood (it's complicated)*, or simply *Girlhood*, features 26 exhibits in total. Each is a garment or outfit that studies some

aspect of 'what it has meant to grow up female' in an American context. The website for the initial exhibition underlines that the meanings of 'girlhood' are not static but does not offer us any examples (National Museum of American History, no date). 'What it has meant to grow up female' is admittedly a vague definition, but a workable one; at the least, it leaves room

for visitors' own understandings of the term to take centre stage.

Girlhood celebrates a century of female suffrage by highlighting areas where girls and women have exercised agency and enacted change: politics, education, work, wellness, and fashion. The garments are access points to important experiences and histories. *Girlhood* covers from the mid-nineteenth century to present-day and includes items from leather jackets to beach coverups, aprons to Olympic uniforms. All entries are realised as an interactive 3D model; some are also photographed on staged mannequins or in storage. The exhibition considers space and place in different ways. Firstly, it examines the United States as the place where these girlhoods occurred. Secondly, it invites us into the museum space in a novel way through its digitalisation. (As such, I refer to 'visitors' and 'users', as we both visit the online museum as well as use its information and tools).

The digitisation of this project is certainly an impressive feat. Undoubtedly, the exhibition's core strength is the level of interaction on offer. Information is not presented in

just one format: you can read the accompanying panel at the side of the model, click through annotations, take an 'interactive tour'. In addition, audio and video narrations accompany some of the more recent garments like the 'Native American Prom Dress' or the 'Escaramuza 5 piece ensemble'. The annotations pick out key details of each garment, normally something about its style, materials, or context. The interactive tour then presents these annotations in a different way – as you click, the models spin around to the area in question. The models are, quite simply, fun to experiment with; the images are high quality and can sometimes offer a new perspective. For example, the 3-piece gymnasium suit seems dark when digitally rendered but light when photographed. Using this combination of display and communication methods (3D models and photographs for the former; interactive annotations, accompanying videos, and related articles for the latter) is a clever choice which creates a more immersive, multi-faceted experience.

Users can share their thoughts via email or on social media; full screen access is available; and a great deal of

effort has evidently gone into the Tools and Settings section. Visitors can change the views, materials, environment, and lighting of the models – in fact, they can even measure and slice it. Under ‘material’, you can explore what garments would like look if made in clay or put under an X-ray. ‘Measure’ allows users to pinpoint – literally using pins, a nice touch – where they would like measurements to and from. This extensive toolkit improves the user experience immensely by offering something off-limits in traditional museum settings: to go behind the glass.

The order of the exhibition is fixed, and a handful of exhibits are first hidden from view behind a ‘see more’ button. This is a slight drawback. Museumgoers may sometimes miss exhibits due to the physical layout of a room or building, but an online space could theoretically counter that by presenting everything on one page. To not do so here misses an opportunity. Moreover, a random order generation could have emphasised the significance of all exhibits and girlhoods. The online visit is rather disrupted by having to return to the main page to move from

exhibit to exhibit (more ‘effort’ than moving from one to another in a museum). This interrupts the flow of *Girlhood* and its arguments. It wants us to consider changes in ‘girlhood’ over time but our ability to do so is stunted by the website’s mechanics, as exhibits can feel quite self-contained rather than in conversation with each other. Leaving visitors to draw connections between exhibits is not necessarily a disadvantage, but neither the interface nor the order of items facilitates this. Framed more positively, however, perhaps this approach offers us more freedom. In this format, there are no other visitors to contend with – you may spend as much time as you like with one exhibit without inconveniencing them. Similarly, the digital presentation removes the pressure of pretending to absorb a whole exhibition when only a handful of items are of interest.

Girlhood champions the successes and power of girls in everyday and extraordinary levels. Famous examples occupy a fair portion of the digital exhibition space. In fact, the first exhibit is titled ‘Selena’s Leather Outfit’, a metal-and-pearl-studded jacket and brassiere which belonged to

famous Tejano artist Selena Quintanilla-Perez. Included from the sporting world is basketballer Rebecca Lobo's bright red Olympic uniform, emblazoned with the Team USA logo, and gymnast Dominique Dawes' stars-and-stripes leotard. Lastly, Minnijean Brown Trickey – one of the Little Rock Nine – donated her graduation dress of her own design, a white tea-length full-skirted dress with a sheer neckline. The exhibits celebrate individual achievement while placing contributions in a wider context. Just as Dawes' leotard represents her own success as the first African American woman to win an Olympic medal in gymnastics, so too does it embody American achievement at the 1996 Olympic Games and female athletic excellence overall.

More 'ordinary' accomplishments are also recognised. *Girlhood* praises the work of girls through the centuries, whether admiring the fine needlework on a gifted apron, the re-imagining of a feedsack bag into a fashionable dress, or the organisation of strikes to achieve better conditions for garment-workers. Indeed, enacting change stands out as another theme of *Girlhood*. Often, it comments on girls

adapting traditionally male experiences or objects. In the only explicitly religious entry, a dress tells the story of the invention of the bat mitzvah in 1920s America. The exhibit argues that by the end of the twentieth century, Jewish girls had 'claimed' the boys' ritual of the bar mitzvah 'for themselves'. Returning to Cindy Whitehead and her skater's jersey and shorts, *Girlhood* shows change in both concrete and abstract forms. Whitehead carved a place for women in professional skating in the 1970s – some two decades before the production of female skate clothing. Her achievements, therefore, were realised while competing in a modified boy's uniform. Through this entry, we understand the changes girls enact on both micro- and macro-levels, sometimes all at once: to the seams and fit of a garment, or to the history and trajectory of a sport.

Girlhood boasts several advantages. It allows insight into prominent themes and moments in American history in a grounded, accessible way. For example, Minnijean Brown-Trickey's graduation dress opens up the history of segregation and the civil rights movement, positioning

something as routine as a graduation against huge social unrest and change. A house dress from 1935 lets us consider women's historical roles in the home, as well as the context of the Great Depression. The feedsack dress explores thrift as an American moral and value – always valued in rural areas, but nationally recognised and extolled in times of hardship. These would work well as a teaching tool: a gateway to complex subjects like the racial, gender, moral, and economic histories of the United States through an 'entry-level', relatable source. We all, after all, wear clothing. *Girlhood* also does well to recognise that the United States is not a monolith but an ethnically diverse nation. Thus, it includes trousers worn by a Chinese American girl on special occasions in the 1920s; the outfit donned by a Mexican American girl to compete in an *escaramuza* competition in 2009; and the West African dashiki adopted by some Black Americans in the 1960s. Scholars by no means exclusively use documentary sources to study history today, but these nevertheless often remain the default. What *Girlhood* neatly demonstrates is that when it comes to people's lives,

memories, and experiences, material culture – the *things* of the past – taps into the experiential and embodied elements in a way that other sources simply cannot.

Occasionally (perhaps too occasionally), *Girlhood* takes care to spell out how the garments relate to its themes. Where this is done, it is done well, allowing precise and nuanced insight into the varied experiences of American 'girlhood'. The shirtwaist entry is a fully developed example of girls' experience of work, politics, and fashion. Firstly, we gain an insight into the trends of the early 1900s, when this style was popular. Secondly, we learn that the industry employed many immigrant girls and young women who later unionised to demand better working conditions, wages, and holidays. The shirtwaist is therefore a symbol of work as well as play, fleshing out these facets of 'girlhood' and the relationship between them. Where such explanations are absent, however, *Girlhood* suffers. It is possible that the exhibition wishes visitors to infer their own conclusions, but this does not always work. One sports jacket seems completely out of place: in fact, the

annotations refer to it as being worn by an unnamed 'he'. This may be just a typographical error, but the lack of other information leaves us questioning whether it is an oversight or a deeper mistake.

Inconsistency is also apparent in the exhibit's titles, which are often uninformative or even misleading, and differ from the 3D model's own label. For instance, one hoodie takes on two titles, 'El Camino Junior High School Titans Hoodie, Santa Maria, California [...] 2007' and 'farmworker hoodie'. Reading the first, we expect the high school or location to be the focal points, but they are not. By the exhibit's own admission, the experience showcased by this garment is that of a young, female farmworker – so why is this not foregrounded in its title? Confusion is further compounded by repeated labels: three exhibits share the same uninformative title of 'dress, 1-piece'; two aprons are identically billed. Ultimately, these are minor drawbacks to the one-off visitor, but could certainly become a nuisance in long-term use.

In all, the benefits of *Girlhood* (*it's complicated*) outweigh its drawbacks. While let down sometimes

by nomenclature and lack of clarity, the exhibition celebrates American girls' and women's histories through the clothing that they made, repurposed, gifted, and wore. *Girlhood* explores the United States as a place to grow up female and suggests some spheres or spaces of 'girlhood' for us to think about. It must be applauded for the unusual interactions it allows users to have with its objects, to 'touch' as the traditional museum space could never allow. The aforementioned 3D models and toolkits, in particular, provide a type of access that equals (if not surpasses, in some ways) more typical research experiences. Looking at *Girlhood*, we can not only imagine those who went before us but consider our own contributions – what garments might be selected as emblematic of our time? As ever, material culture remains evocative and provocative. It is generally a moving exhibition, but never more so than when you notice the time elapsed between production and acquisition dates of some garments. Evidently, some have not only cherished their own possessions, but those of their mothers and grandmothers before donating. Through their belongings, *Girlhood* (*it's*

complicated) is able to deliver on its name, providing multi-layered, complex histories, and surely inspiring most to pass through its virtual doors more than once.

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Quo Vadis, Aida?

Jasmila Žbanić, Angel films, 2020. 102 mins.

Matthew Seaton

On the 12th July 1995, twenty thousand Bosnians congregated outside of the UN refugee camp, Potočari, five miles from Srebrenica. They were not allowed in. There was no more space.

In the morning, the Serbian army from whom the Bosnians had fled arrived outside the camp. They piled the Bosnian men onto buses, drove them

away and shot them. Within a week, they had murdered eight thousand men.

But on the evening of the 12th, the Serbs had already slipped into the crowd and were indulging in sporadic, brutal acts of violence. Men were dragged away into the night, executed. A child's throat was slit because it would not stop crying. Women were raped in front of other refugees by Republika Srpska

soldiers. A pregnant woman's stomach was cut open. (Prosecution vs Krstic 2001, pp. 13-14; Gurdić 2007, p.101) Screams reverberated through the night air. Cries of panic as stories of atrocities spread. An atmosphere of terror descended outside the camp, and out of fear, some refugees hanged themselves, choosing a quicker, more merciful escape. (Prosecution vs Kristic 2001, pp. 13-14).

Quo Vadis, Aida? (2020) shows none of these brutal images of genocide. Jasmila Zbanic's film depicts the Srebrenica massacre—recounting the days in which Srebrenica's Bosnian-Muslim population flee their town, only to be taken by their invaders, under the noses of the UN peacekeepers, to their deaths. But images of violence are completely absent—a carefully considered facet of its storytelling; it enquires into the ethics of representing genocide, and the limits to the visual ways of representing it. By not engaging in spectacle, the film allows for fuller understanding of the event—as dynamic, complex, historical—whilst also exploring the evident denial systemic in contemporary Serbian discourse on the Bosnian War.

The film's protagonist, Aida, is a translator for the UN and a Bosnian mother whose two sons and husband stand to die at the hands of the Serbian army. Aida tirelessly flits between these two roles throughout the film. She is one moment a mouthpiece for the Dutch UN peacekeepers (who speak to her in English), passing on their often cold and bureaucratic instructions to her fellow Bosnians. In the next moment, she is a wife and mother prepared to break any rules or exploit any privilege she has to save her family's life.

This is a film about genocide, the horror of the event and the trauma of its aftermath, pulling no punches. However, there is not one moment of killing, or violence, shown on the screen. For instance, a dolly camera follows closely behind the Serbian soldier charging into Srebrenica, a faithful witness to their invasion, documentary-like, in its observation. However, when the Bosnian mayor is dragged into view, and sent away to be shot, the camera suddenly stops moving. Rather than following the soldiers dragging him around the corner, it backs away, and stares blankly at the soldiers shooting the mayor (out of shot). The

camera always seems to pull away from the spectacle of violence, unwilling to stare horror in the face. It recalls Derrida's assertion that the only true witness to genocide can be the 'absolute victim' (2005, p.87). Moments of violence seem to make 'witnessing' impossible. Instead, the film maintains the unknowability of Srebrenica's atrocities whilst still signalling their existence.

Graphic and horrifying images have often been a popular way to depict genocide-events. Some have argued that Holocaust films like Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog* (1956) confront audiences with the shocking visual facts of atrocity. They confer, as Susan Sontag has suggested, an immortality on the event it might not have otherwise (2001, p.11). However, the *image* of atrocity is contentious and offers no guarantee of conveying the event's political dynamics. Moreover, 'the visualization of suffering does not always humanize' the victims. It might instead dehumanize them further by rendering violence as an aesthetic (Chouliaraki, 2006, p.87). Perhaps the example *par excellence* is the pornographic spectacle of a room of

naked Jewish women waiting to be gassed, in *Schindler's List's* (1993). As Wood cynically puts it, 'Holocaust "memory" is always a more popular endeavour when there are "sights" (as well as sites) to be seen.' (2012, p.24)

Quo Vadis Aida?'s depiction of the Srebrenica atrocity rejects this spectacular mode, which in turn foregrounds other aspects of the atrocity. Philip E Simmons (1997) has defined spectacle 'as a kind of visual excess that threatens narrative coherence.' He continues:

To Laura Mulvey, spectacle occurs when causal or narrative logic gives way to unrestrained scopophilia. To Claudine Eizkyman, spectacle is the moment when the kung-fu movie becomes pure kinetic display, when we forget who is fighting whom or why...To Dana Polan, spectacle is the ending of the 1950 movie *Summer Stock*, in which the song-and-dance numbers of Judy Garland and Gene Kelly overwhelm the movie's narrative of pioneer conquest and replace it with 'a new dream of America as endless performance.' (p.83)

The spectacle of Srebrenica's violence *might have* cast the perpetrators as an Evil irreconcilable to culture and international politics at large, obfuscating the cause and effect

that leads to a holocaust event. Instead, *Quo Vadis, Aida?* emphasises the narrative of Srebrenica, highlighting the responsibility of Dutch UN peacekeepers (and the Western governments they answer to) for the atrocity. The film broadens the culpability for this massacre, and the film's lens scrutinises the West's involvement, actions, and premeditated failure to act.

The film opens with the Mayor of Srebrenica begging the Dutch to intervene before Srebrenica is captured. The Dutch commander, Korremans, promises airstrikes *if* Srebrenica is captured. Which he insists it shall not. 'What happens if the airstrikes do not come?' Korremans is asked. He replies, increasingly frustrated, 'they will come, they will come. They have been issued a United Nations ultimatum.' This sets the tone for the film. The peacekeepers will always put stock into official statements and bureaucratic decrees. By the film's end, in a Kafkaesque reversal, they are complying with the Republika Srpska, helping them herd refugees onto buses as efficiently as possible.

'You will be accountable if the Serbs enter the town.' The Mayor

warns. Korremans shrugs his shoulders. 'I'm just the piano player.' Later, when Srebrenica is attacked, Korremans will pick up the phone and beg for airstrikes that will not come: the political implications are too tricky. Korremans is one in a long line of Pontius Pilates absolving themselves of responsibility. These political machinations, far-off, made in the political headquarters of the US, France, and the UK, are not shown in the film. However, we sense their absence. If the Serbs are the perpetrators of the atrocity, then the West allow it by a long, steady process of passing the buck.

For anyone familiar with the Srebrenica massacre, the failures of the West are not surprising. Western media immediately lambasted the real-life Korremans for his failings in Srebrenica. What might be novel to the film's narrative is its depiction of the denial of genocide, which Pettigrew asserts is as 'utterly crucial' to 'struggle for truth and memory concerning the genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina.' (2016, p.218)

Obradovic-Wochnik's sociological research in Serbia (2009) suggests that denials and mitigations of

the Srebrenica massacre are present at all levels of society. From extremist acts of complete denial or refutation of the evidence—discrediting witnesses, characterising Bosnian Muslims as vengeful, bitter—to party political groups seeking to shift the attention to atrocities done to the people of Serbia—not insignificant, but certainly far, far smaller than those done to the Bosnians (Obradovic-Wochnik 2009, pp.64-69). An endemic belief that Srebrenica was *unfortunate but justifiable*.

Writing in 2009, Obradovic-Wochnik concludes that strategies of denial are, in fact, the first steps of Serbia's long journey towards understanding and accepting the atrocity (p.71). Her claim seems to presuppose an enlightenment sense of progression that the last thirteen years have shown to be erroneous. Denial is more, rather than less entrenched now. The current Mayor of Srebrenica, for instance, has referred to the genocide as 'the hague farce' (Mitrovic 2016). Denial has not lead, inevitably, to acceptance. Instead, Serbia is in the process of forgetting Srebrenica and ensuring it stays out of sight.

Quo Vadis, Aida? suggests the narratives of denial began at the site of the genocide itself. In the film, a Serbian cameraman records the images that Ratko Mladic instructs him to capture, editing and deleting what he deems unnecessary to the narrative he would like to present. It is the film's most conspicuously meta-cinematic element. In one scene, he steps onto a bus of Bosnian women forcibly separated from their husbands and sons and, filmed by his cameraman, gives a speech portraying himself as a benevolent patriarch, granting these women their freedom. An obvious deception. But one that is reinforced by the film's portrayal of him, too. Genocide and Mladic's charisma are never captured in the same shot. Even as his men drag the Bosnians away, Mladic stares Korremans in the face reproducing the discourse of denial seen currently in the Serbian media. An active revising of events. Proposing a counter-narrative of what is so blatantly taking place.

There is a politics to the film's elision of violence, then. On the one hand, it intensifies scrutiny on the causality of genocide whilst also recalling (whilst never espousing) its

denial. But beyond the politics of genocide, the film's absences help to convey the event's emotional loss.

Aida charges around the UN refugee camp, attempting to save her sons from the Serbs army. With clean efficiency, they are herding the Bosnians out of the camp with the help of the spineless UN peacekeepers. The women onto buses and driven into Bosnian-controlled territory. The men are to be driven to their deaths. Aida is safe. She is a woman and, as a translator, a delegate of the UN. She has no qualms in using her special privileges to try to save her family. She tries to have them put on the list of UN delegates. They are taken off. Tries to secure them in the UN staff quarters. They are thrown out. She hides them, at last, in the farthest corners of the refugee camp. Soon, they will be discovered by the UN peacekeepers, marched, following orders, into the hands of the Serbs, and although Aida will beg on her knees with the Dutch, they will insist there is nothing they can do. Her family will be loaded onto the back of a farmer's truck, driven away, then herded with a hundred other men into a school hall and shot. The audience sees the machine

guns being poked through holes in the building's walls. Close-ups of the nozzles as they begin to fire. The scene jumps to the yard outside. Calm, tranquil, still. A mountain impassive and immortal in the distance.

This technique might recall Greek Tragedy, where violence, carrying too much emotional weight to be shown, is *obscene*, or 'off-scene'. The visual and visceral horror remains in the audience's imagination. But the tragedy of genocide is different from the tragedy, say, of *Oedipus Rex*. Genocidal Tragedy is not produced by fatal flaws or moments of hubris. Moments, in other words, of *meaning*. Genocidal tragedy is politically complex but personally *meaningless*. Aida's sons are romantic, brash; hot-headed, idealistic. Her husband is world-weary, curmudgeonly. But their identity and shortcomings are insignificant to their deaths. Their narratives are merely cut short.

The film unfolds with grim inevitability. Who in the audience does not cry as the men trundle off in the truck? Overwhelmed, horrified. Though the audience knows what will happen, that genocide will take place, there is

room to hope. To wonder whether these individual lives, set against this grim panorama, might be spared. They will not. Pettigrew has observed that previous films focusing on the Bosnian War— like *Welcome to Sarajevo*, *Shot through the Heart*, and Žbanić's *Grbavica*—explore the war's ramifications from singular perspectives, and struggle to explore the macro-level dynamics of the event. Here, Aida's personal tragedy and the larger-scale tragedy of the Bosnian genocide slide into one. The deaths of Aida's family are as anonymous and impersonal as the deaths of every other Bosnian in that room.

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Belfast

Kenneth Branagh, United Kingdom, Universal Pictures, 2021

Jenny Alexander

Belfast is a 2021 film written and directed by multiple award-winning actor, director and writer Kenneth Branagh. It is a deeply personal coming of age story, based on his own experience of growing up in the sectarian filled and violent streets of Belfast during the 1960s. Branagh's family left Belfast for England in 1969 to escape the violence of The Troubles,

and he did not visit the city again until 2011. He reflected in an interview with NME ahead of the film's release that in returning to Ireland he felt he had an "identity crisis that was unresolved".

He continues:

"Ireland and the Irish define so much of themselves in relation to home – it needs to be settled in some way. And I think making this film is a chance for me to go

home in a sort of more honest way.” (Bradshaw, 2022).

Branagh’s intention was to make a film which explores the influence home has on your identity, and he has done so with immense success.

Belfast follows the life of nine-year-old Buddy, played by newcomer Jude Hill, documenting his fledgling experiences and relationships and the way they are shaped by a hometown rapidly engulfed in conflict. Buddy’s dedicated and hard-working parents (played by Jamie Dornan and Caitriona Balfe) grapple with financial hardship and whether they should move their family away from the only home they have ever known in order to escape The Troubles. Charmingly, Buddy is more concerned with acing his long division so he can sit next to the girl he wants to marry in class and trying to remember which road the shouty Minster said was good and which was bad. Buddy’s inability to distinguish which road is good and which is bad is emblematic of the film as a whole - that sometimes the distinction between “good” and “bad” can be difficult to make. It is a ubiquitous dilemma throughout the film, especially present in the narrative

of Buddy’s parents’ decision about whether or not to leave, and is the beating heart of what Branagh intends to say about Belfast during The Troubles or indeed anywhere which is both a site of conflict and somewhere people call home. A home can be both good and bad, full of joy and of sadness, somewhere to celebrate and to mourn. *Belfast* demonstrates that all of these vibrant, pulsing things are what shape our lives, and our character.

Centring the film from a child’s perspective, Branagh positions *Belfast* as a reflective and explorational text. If this was not clear enough from the film’s description and trailer, there is no room for doubt just a few moments in. The film opens with a series of establishing shots which track and reveal a path through the peaceful streets of modern-day Belfast. Aerial shots briefly tour the City’s landmarks before the camera weaves its way through residential areas. All the while the screen transitions from full technicolour to black and white, connoting a narrative shift from the modern day to the late 1960s and the early days of The Troubles in Northern Ireland. The Troubles was a 30-year

period of conflict which lasted until the signing of The Good Friday Agreement in 1998. Although The Troubles officially escalated in the late 1960s, the roots lay in hundreds of years' worth of nationalistic, sectarian, and political tensions. *Belfast's* focus on the child's perspective of The Troubles provides the audience with an insight into the conflict in a new way. To further present Buddy's view of Belfast, Branagh keeps the camera low and utilises more unconventional camera angles to represent a perspective of events from the eyeline of a child. There are even a few examples of 360° point-of-view shots which allow the audience to be fully immersed in the action alongside Buddy, and witness them directly from Buddy's perspective. Throughout these scenes the audio is cleverly blurred together, and the unnerving sounds of alarms, traffic, and shouting evoke the same feelings of disorientation and fear that Buddy faces.

Furthermore, *Belfast* uses its own narrative structure as another means of exploring and evoking the sense of reflection. Despite following a linear narrative of the escalating violence, Buddy's parents' dilemma around

whether or not to stay, and Pop's failing health, the structure of *Belfast* is not necessarily based on these events. Instead, it centres around Buddy's experiences and/or reflection of snippets of his life during this formative period. In doing so, Branagh has created a film and a story about Belfast's violent legacy, and the fear and turmoil which engulfs anyone within the path of such violence. However, it is also a film which demonstrates how negative experiences within a place are only some of many memories which influence your sense of identity in relation to your home. For Buddy, the joy of watching your grandparents and parents lovingly dancing to the latest record, and waking up to the gift of a Thunderbirds costume on Christmas Day are just as influential as getting caught in the middle of mass riots.

A major part of the success of *Belfast* in balancing these two conflicting experiences lies within the dedicated performances from the cast. Newcomer Jude Hill is charming and charismatic in his role as Buddy. From beginning to end he is utterly captivating, presenting a wide-eyed and inquisitive view of the world. It is hard

not to fall in love with a genuine and kind-hearted character, who in one memorable moment steals a box of washing-powder for his mum in the middle of a mass looting because “it’s biological”.

Caitríona Balfe and Jamie Dornan give a beautifully balanced and convincing portrayal of a couple whose marriage is constantly tested; both by their financial situation, and trying to do right by their sons, but they do it with grace and conviction. They manage to make a performance, which includes transitioning between scenes of screaming matches and smashing plates to genuine moments of deep affection, seem natural. However, for me the stand-out performances of the film come from Judi Dench and Ciarán Hinds as Buddy’s Granny and Pop. The chemistry between the on-screen couple, and their grandson, was beautifully evocative. With loving and yet brutally honest grandparents like them, it is no wonder Buddy frequently seeks out their advice. There is something particularly special about watching their understated and yet powerful gestures of love and moments of affection, especially whilst they

contemplate their lives together as Pop’s health declines throughout the film. Overall, the cast bands together, and delivers a performance where you could be forgiven for forgetting that they are performing rather than living their characters' lives.

My only criticism of the film comes in the form of the alternative ending. In these scenes we see Branagh playing an adult Buddy (or indeed himself) arriving back in Belfast for the first time since 1969. After asking his confused tour guide to take a detour from pointing out the cities most famous landmarks to turn down his old street, he meets his old neighbour who reassures him that Belfast has and always will be his home. With his reassured knowledge he walks down his old street with the memory of his loved ones, represented by the film’s cast. Personally, I prefer the film’s original ending, which sees Granny seeing her family off and telling them not to look back with the end dedication “For the ones who stayed. For the ones who left. And for all the ones who were lost.” In this original ending, I feel that the subtlety of the message that you do not have to physically belong to a place for it to be

considered your home is more befitting. This message is so intrinsic to the core of the film, and Branagh's ambition to use the film as a way to explore his own sense of identity in relation to the city of Belfast. But that is the joy of an alternate ending; you have a choice in whether you can watch it and consider it the end of the story.

Admittedly I had been anticipating the release of *Belfast* since the first trailer hit the screens, so I was unsurprised by how much I enjoyed it. Whilst I had anticipated the film to be reflective, I had not anticipated it to have the potential to generate such a strong sense of nostalgia, even for those who have not personally experienced a similar situation to Buddy and Branagh. By evoking a sense of reflection and remembered moments to explore ideas of identity and belonging, and doing so in such a personal way specifically in his hometown of Belfast, Branagh has created a film which anyone can relate to. Whether you relate to the full story, or just small elements of it, it is nearly impossible to watch *Belfast* and not consider how the place you grew up and the small everyday moments with those

you consider your family have shaped you.

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A Broken House

Jimmy Goldblum, The New Yorker, 2020

Kyna Morgan

Hiraeth (Welsh, no direct translation):
‘[...] a state of extreme homesickness to a homeland that is no longer existent or has never, ever existed’ (A Broken House, 2020).

What is home? This is the question at the heart of the documentary short film *A Broken House* (Goldblum 2020) that

carries the viewer through the story of a life that exists in both the ‘here’ and the ‘there’. The film was one of a dozen or so documentary short films shortlisted for the 94th Academy Awards® and recipient of nominations and awards such as the International Documentary Association (IDA) ‘best short’ in 2022. Now available to watch on YouTube on

The New Yorker channel, the film is described in the video title as ‘Re-creating the Syria of His Memories, Through Miniatures’. However, *A Broken House* seems less a film about an artist re-creating home, than an artist in an ongoing process of remembrance and memorialisation that lends itself to the creation of a new understanding and reality of home. The film’s subject, U.S.-based Syrian architect, Mohamed Hafez’s, politico-legal status and lived experience is tied to a temporal context of war, but he seems to live almost a kind of atemporal experience with his art, as we see in the film, as he attempts to capture what he remembers of his native Syria and what is happening to it now, bringing it all together in the single space of an architectural model.

When Mohamed first arrived to the U.S. from Syria, there was a post-9/11 travel ban, so with a ‘single-entry’ visa he could not leave the country for fear of being prohibited from entering upon return. Although his profound homesickness drove him to start planning an eventual return to his family, his parents discouraged him from sacrificing his professional work. After war broke out in Syria in 2011, as

a result of watching news coverage and worrying about his family, he lost his appetite, stopped creating art for an extended period, and tried to maintain a demeanour of normality at work. In the wake of these emotional and psychological difficulties, he asked himself, ‘If you can’t get home, why don’t you make home?’ He then began to construct his memories of Syria with foam, paint, styrene, bits of wood, miniatures, and other materials he collected.

Director Jimmy Goldblum manages to avoid some traps, and tropes, in the representation and interpretation of the life of a refugee or displaced person who has no choice but to stay in his new home, through narrative choices that show the deep connections between Mohamed and his family. This is not a ‘tragic refugee’ story, nor a life in limbo per se, but one that, even throughout Mohamed’s experience of displacement and longing, is universal in its specificity. Goldblum employs a lyrical direction that carries the viewer through waves of emotion and contemplative gazes upon Mohamed’s creations, a striking vision of Syria composed of a mixture of the

present and the absent. Slow reverse zooms show models of bombed-out buildings, awash in creams and shades of blue, some with façades torn off, revealing abandoned and extinguished lives, the artefacts of Syrian – of our – human existence. Yet not all is destruction; Mohamed’s models are also homages rooted in memory and appreciation, displaying the beauty of his home(land). Set against a black background as if they are floating within the void, they convey a sense of mystery about this lost reality, and a sense of awe at the horrors of war. We are looking at memories.

Mohamed’s story is accompanied by a stillness that belies an unsettledness. Silence is commonly used in stories about immigrant lives, often seen in narrative fiction, and routinely told through a White Western lens (e.g. *Limbo*, 2020; *Lion*, 2016; *Brick Lane*, 2007), and this film is part of that perspective; however, Goldblum deftly employs a *sense* of silence in this film without allowing for much actual silence within the soundtrack. The film’s soundtrack contains a sustained hum of strings, and strings with piano, often lilting and melodic, but

throughout quite melancholy, even urgent, at points. The score by the band From the Mouth of the Sun (duo of Dag Rosenqvist and Aaron Martin) complements the emotionality of Goldblum’s storytelling without veering into manipulative sound work to specifically prompt reactions. Rather, the music evokes a tender feeling and a sense of yearning that draws on the idea of *hiraeth*, the homesickness for home and homeland.

Goldblum incorporates sweeping, slow tilts, and pans of Mohamed’s art, with a voiceover by Mohamed about the destruction of culture, history, and heritage through war. While aided by the soundtrack, Mohamed’s voiceover remains the dominant diegetic sound throughout the film, allowing him to frame his own world and articulate his experience and memories. His words call to mind the need to document sites of cultural importance, to preserve the memory of such places, and to appreciate their beauty and magnitude. The film’s title, *A Broken House*, may have innumerable interpretations, moving from the specificity of Mohamed’s experience and his ‘broken home’ and broken homeland, to a

representation of universal experience of family and loss. In the sense of cultural memory, a broken house might be the result of destruction of that with immeasurable significance to human culture.

Home movie footage is interspersed throughout, showing Mohamed and his family when he was still a young, growing boy, dancing with them, laughing, and playing. Goldblum follows Mohamed through his artistic process as well as his journey to Lebanon where he visits a refugee camp and reunites with his mother who has traveled from Syria to see him. (Although Mohamed's parents had joined him in the U.S. after they decided to flee from the war in Syria, his mother's profound homesickness drove her to decide to return to Syria, but her husband stayed in the U.S. with Mohamed.) In a particularly poignant scene in which she is preparing to return to Syria from their visit in Lebanon, Mohamed implores her to come to the U.S. to be with him and his father again, the only other member of Mohamed's family who is geographically close to him. It is in this sequence that their exchanges of 'I'll miss you' and his

kissing and embracing his mother, turn to an emotional, desperate entreaty from a son to his mother for them to be together again as a family. Perhaps the most affective sequence in the film, Mohamed beseeching his mother to be physically present in his life, illustrates that home is not simply a place, but also people and family. Without them, you are left with a broken house and a loss of a sense of home. In the final line of the film, as Mohamed speaks about his family being separated and not having been under a single roof in many years, he laments, 'I miss home', evoking a deep sense of *hiraeth* in a desire for home and family.

A Broken House rests on a question of home and explores the ontological realities of Mohamed's experience and his quest to recreate home through art that is informed, and powered, by his memories. It may be an endlessly complicated challenge to answer concisely 'what is home?' Mohamed centers the experiences of those who are refugees and have been separated from their homes by saying 'We come from established lives. We had a life. You can't explain millions of people with one stab, "refugee", full stop'. It is

through his focus on refugees and recreating the Syria of his memories in material form that Mohamed mounts a resistance to the psychologically colonising effects of war that arise through various means, including separation from family, but also media coverage, sensationalism around conflict, and simultaneous hyper-vilification and invisibilisation of refugees. There is most certainly a past, and a present, lived and experienced by those with 'refugee' as a politico-legal descriptor, but what is the future in the sense of finding home, or recreating it when you cannot physically return to the source of your memories or bring together those you love who are part of those memories?

The writer and theorist Mark Fisher explored the concept of hauntology (a term uniting 'ontology' with a sense of 'haunting' and coined by Jacques Derrida), specifying one direction as 'that which is (in actuality is) *no longer*, but which *remains* effective as a virtuality' (2013, p.19). A Syria ravaged by war has become an absence to some degree; this is the 'agency of the virtual' (p. 18), a Syria that continues to affect lives as it lives

on in memory. Syria may now represent a future haunted by impossibility for Mohamed, a future he can only grasp through memory.

If we take Jamie Ann Rogers's concept of (African) 'diasporic communion' (2020, p.132) as a hermeneutic for how meaning might be related across time and space between diasporic subjects, we can see how these textual depictions of Syria created by Mohamed are part of a broader, atemporal cultural memory that is also part of the imagined, rather than simply the material. His art becomes part of the experience, memory, story, history, culture, and meaning of Syria within the diaspora. In fact, the art that Mohamed creates is part of his voice, an immigrant voice that often goes unacknowledged, a voice that Myria Georgiou calls a 'storytelling praxis of agentive self within conditions of unequally distributed freedoms' (2021).

Is Mohamed's 'house' – his family, his homeland – a broken house? This word, 'house', can be interpreted as 'home', a spirit of belonging, place, and experience of family and established life, or as a literal house in which he grew up, the house of his family, the

place and space that was lost to war. The Hafez house has been broken through war, through displacement, and through reluctant separation. The evocation of brokenness is also striking in that there is actual, tangible brokenness present in the form of the artistic architectural models created by Mohamed; the models require materials that are snapped and cut, reshaped to fit together in these manifestations of his memories. However, it is also through this manifestation – the process of recollection – that Mohamed may create new memories of his life in Syria without being present in Syria. This recollection represents the merging of different timelines and simultaneous experiences: the ‘here’ of now and the ‘there’ of memory.

In the film, Mohamed states, ‘There was this fire inside me to just start humanizing refugees and to tell their stories’. In dealing with this trauma and motivation to act, he focuses on his art, but with a process that entails creating a ‘nostalgic and sad emotional state’ (Khan 2018), including looking at images of destruction. ‘[W]e were so unmoored it was hard to fathom a next step’ (2019, p.3) is how Dina Nayeri

describes her experience of becoming a refugee, and in Mohamed’s case, his distance from Syria and his family is a process of unmooring. The art he creates of places and spaces in his memory tether him to Syria as his home, although that home as he knew it and as he remembers it no longer exists in material terms. With continued separation and loss, this being outside of time and between places fuses the ‘here and there’ (the present and memory) with the *hiraeth* he feels for Syria and all it represents, perhaps both loss and hope.

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Place and Space

