



PhD thesis

**Navigating Netherne: correlating feelings with place**

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# **Navigating Netherne: Correlating Feelings with Place**

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M00552325

A thesis submitted to Middlesex University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Arts and Creative Industries

Middlesex University London

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores personal interactions with an extensive, village-like Edwardian psychiatric hospital complex, its environs, its history, and its stories. Designed by the age's preeminent asylum architect, George Thomas Hine (1842-1916), Netherne Hospital (formerly 'The Surrey County Asylum at Netherne'), was opened in 1909. But as social attitudes and budgets allocated for treating mental illness altered, the hospital was closed, and the site redeveloped for modern housing. This thesis focuses on Netherne to examine how our reactions to, and dialogue with, place may be productively undermined through 'narrativizing' aspects of it (reinventing, allegorising, mythologising, its figurative / historical and non-figurative, architectural aspects). In connection with this, I both consider and critique psychogeography (which draws attention to the potential elasticity of a place's meaning), resistant reading, and debates concerning affect, emotion, and atmosphere.

The feelings we constantly involuntarily attribute to place may be subtle, hard to name, describe, or remember, and when noticed are often only too readily dismissed as unworthy of our attention; 'background noise', insignificant creases in the texture of consciousness. Yet such feelings, however evanescent, offer us invaluable clues to the complex relationship we have with place. I argue that this relationship is determined by the dynamic existing between feeling, place, and narrative (I here understand 'narrative' to include stories, description, and what usually passes for 'explanation').



While every building has its own particular story (i.e. its history, whether prosaic or dramatic) a building may itself also be construed as a story— its architectural features ‘protagonists’, acting with or against each other. Such unhabitual narratives can sway perceptions, galvanise our apprehension of place and even reveal ‘new’ aspects.

Much of the literature discussing the emotional valency of place sets out to show how design is instrumentalised to orchestrate the subject’s responses to place (e.g. by encouraging acquisitiveness in shopping centres, ‘well-being’ in hospitals, etc.) This thesis explores the value of using narrative open-endedly to resist, augment, and transform habitual awareness of place.

## Acknowledgements

*This thesis is dedicated to my wife Myriam, our children and grandchildren, and to the memory of Derek Farndell (1923 – 2003).*

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## Introduction

### Why an Asylum?

This project has grown, in part, out of my longstanding perplexity: what is madness, and what is the strange resonance we associate with buildings that house it? While *attitudes* to insanity alter dramatically, we still struggle to agree on how best to identify, define, or treat it.

Mainstream cultures are bafflingly reticent about it (there are very few explicit biblical references to madness). Do we define, imagine – and behave towards – madness in ways that best suit us, that flatter our own ‘saner’ selves? ‘Madness’ – defying (and defiling) our understanding, and scorning our therapies – humiliates us. We herd those hopelessly adrift in their inscrutable mental worlds, into stringent, sometimes punitive institutions. And Netherne? My introduction to Netherne Hospital came through an interest in the pioneering art therapist, Edward Adamson. Netherne granted Adamson his opportunity to explore the psychotherapeutic potential of art. This led me to ponder symmetries between our own interpretations of place (based on what we know about a place, and what we feel about it) and psychiatrists’ and psychotherapists’ interpretations of patients’ artworks to determine what is influencing their idiosyncratic interpretation of reality.

Buildings have long haunted me, but not necessarily on account of their histories. Their design, bulk, and sheer presence play on my mind and mood. I would look at them, at their shapes and details, and be drawn to give these meanings (and tend to think of such buildings as ‘stories’). From childhood, I recall a skyline punctuated by the four colossal columnar chimneys of Battersea Power Station, their black silhouettes standing sombrely against deliciously messy purple-and-gold sunsets. I didn’t know why there were four – rather than three or five – chimneys, but the simple image of them was more compelling (and

perplexing) than any rational explanation could have been. I now know that experiments have shown that the tendency to attribute personality and motives to abstract entities is far from uncommon.

I went searching for material that explored, and ventured to explain, this quasi-synaesthetic experience of buildings but found texts that did little more than roughly approximate my own experiences (e.g. by Michel Leiris (1901-1990), Georges Perec 1936-1982). I was still left with a question: why did buildings strike me so forcibly as images, as personifications, and why my quasi-narrative accounts of them (my ‘almost-explanations’) teased out a building’s affective quality: as if a building were potentially a story. This apparent lacuna blew open the doors for potential interpretation, allowing me to explore such ideas, using feeling and wildly (dubiously) extrapolated interpretations to arrive at conceptually implausible but emotionally cogent explanations of places, buildings, and even architectural details. All seemed capable of some sort of interpretation. Or was I searching for a personal artistic methodology – a pseudo-rational framework which enabled me to express creative insights freely?

### **The Remoter Background of this Thesis**

Aspects of this enquiry extend to previous pieces of my own work. In one of these, I experimented with subverting the historical background to the Arena Chapel fresco cycle in Padua (completed c 1305) painted by Italian artist Giotto (1267-1337). I was prompted to try this because I was angry at how proselytising art historians, committed to popularising art and making it more ‘accessible’, exploited the more sensational aspects of artists’ biographies to whip up audience interest in the artist’s output (Van Gogh’s ear, Rembrandt’s ‘poverty’, etc.). Seeing how juicy ‘human’ stories were used to seduce audience interest in works of art that it wouldn’t otherwise have cared less about, I began to wonder how such stories infect, but also inflect, works of art when ‘read’ through the lens of meretricious biography. I was

attracted to test out how novel, improbable contexts might dramatically alter the reception of works of art. I therefore chose to decontextualise (perversely) the famous *Arena* fresco cycle by anachronistically ‘transporting’ it to nineteenth-century London. I described Giotto’s invented patron as a wealthy English industrialist, a nouveau riche arriviste wishing to impress the prevailing elite, whose company he craved and whose ranks he aspired to join. This fictitious patron chose to commission work from, of course, the artist *du jour* hoping through this to establish his cultural credentials and help realise his social aspirations – but also to express gratitude to God for his remarkable business success.

The frescos were created, so I hypothesised my narrative to adorn warehouses situated between Greenwich and Woolwich on the south bank of the Thames (an area which I had become fascinated with at that time). A weird and surprising chemistry between pictures and their imagined new location emerged. Imagining Giotto’s frescos in an improbable context gave them curious new meanings and resonances (which also affected my feelings about the locations I chose). My fiction (although referring to real places and a specific well-documented period in British history) enabled me to make plausible if bizarre reinterpretations of the frescos, picking out details from them that seemed strangely relevant to the Industrial Revolution and my account of nineteenth-century patronage; meanings and subjects emerged that were never intended by the artist of these thirteenth-century masterworks. I concluded that untruths, whether emanating from consciously formulated fictions or inadvertent falsehoods, could newly produce ‘truths’ (i.e. genuine insights), and possibly the more fanciful the fiction, the more startling the results. Changing how these frescos were seen gave rise to new insights and new understandings.

I wrote this piece as a pseudo-scholarly biography, deploying an ‘objective’, dispassionate tone to mimic conventional art-historical accounts. I did so partly because I scorned the exploitation of spurious narratives just to get people interested in art. I felt that works of art could speak for themselves and that biographies and gossip-mongering (posing as ‘history’) devalued paintings by making them do little more than illustrate an art historian’s silly explanations. The paintings just weren’t about such things. I took aim at art history at its most patronising, and popularising. Considering it blameworthy, I parodied its excessively stuffy, sterile language, its soppy speculations (hypothesising the artist’s ‘reasons’), its generalised rationalisations, and its excessive, even fantastical, overinterpretations. I thought that there was an academic ‘discipline’ that had lost its marbles and whose sad example warned of the perils of excessive, arid scholastic intellectualisation.

My ‘Giotto’ gambit was further inspired by news of a dissertation a friend had just written for an M. Phil. at the Bartlett School of Architecture arguing for a relationship between science fiction and urban planning. As I had not read his dissertation, I fruitfully misconstrued its purpose, thinking he’d set out to explore how fiction could ‘transform’ reality. In a sense, it was, but, finally reading it years later, I realised his priority was to show that utopian and dystopian Science Fiction literature and film may have genuinely influenced urban planning – how both fields, at times, shared a common vision for the future.

Additional inspiration for this project came from my attitude to interpretation as game. I had long mistrusted excessive academic intellectualisation and was well accustomed to attacking with irony and parody. I secreted clues in pseudo-documentary film work I was doing at the time. The ‘narrator’ deciphered such clues, ‘revealing’ their unexpected, absurd meanings, explaining that clues and symbols that had, in fact, been placed in situ by authors or architects

either occurred naturally (nature herself had ‘spoken’ through them) or were of supernatural origin.

I hinted that deeper messages – usually symbolic expressions of moral codes and foundational myths, but auguries, too – could be found scattered within the built environment. It was enough, I suggested, to know how to decode them. This was the basis for what would now be called ‘psycho-geographic’ rambling<sup>1</sup> along that Greenwich-Woolwich bankside already mentioned and which I chose because this stretch was back then so elegiac – disused factories, dead and forgotten industries, empty decaying buildings. It was compellingly melancholy and probably very ‘Mark Fisher’.

Many works of art have been produced exploiting (and parodying) a similar obsession with esoteric signs pointing to the existence of hidden worlds or concealed systems, e.g.: *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) by US novelist Thomas Pynchon, *Celine and Julie Go Boating*, a 1974 film by French New Wave film director, Jacques Rivette, and some early films by British director Peter Greenaway. In retrospect however, these works seem to reflect the then prevailing influence of semiotics on the artistic avantgarde – an interest that passed me by. My own interest in cavalier, creative interpretation was prompted rather by poorly informed ideas I had derived from a superficial awareness of Talmudic exegesis and what seemed like biblical ‘overinterpretation’. I was drawn to the veiled ‘messaging’ of Kafka’s *America*; to numerology, gematria, and biblical hermeneutics (significances attached to seemingly redundant re-occurrences of words; meanings teased out from the calligraphic crowns in the Torah Scroll; to astrology, portents (Shakespeare and the Romantic Fallacy). In other words, many instances which treat phenomena as interpretable signs that can perhaps be deciphered, their (hidden) meanings / their messages from some notional ‘beyond’ decrypted.

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<sup>1</sup> At that time, I was unaware of anything called ‘psychogeography’

## Signposting

This long and digressive thesis explores not only the connection of mood to place but also endeavours to evoke moods specifically associated with Netherne Psychiatric Hospital, I examine elements contributing to such moods: the interaction of architecture and narrative (mental hospitals were designed both to control and calm moods) and the potentially transformative power of interpretation and misinterpretation. I then explore ‘psychogeography’ – a practice dedicated to identifying mood. Psychogeography also reacts to – and *challenges* – histories of place. I therefore explore the site, surroundings, and historical background of Netherne via changing attitudes to mental illness and how these also shaped the architecture of Netherne. While contemporary psychogeography typically analyses place to illustrate and verify ideological notions, I utilise the moods specific to Netherne to interpret and subvert the site.

*A brief introductory text, placed at the beginning of each chapter, is intended to assist the reader in approaching this work.*



## Chapter One: Navigating Netherne

### 1.1 Prelude: A Perpetual Present

*In which I examine personal emotional reactions to shed light on why Netherne, a mental asylum – a place of ‘intense affective history’ – exerts so strong a fascination. I suggest that ‘feelings’ – emotion, affect, ‘somatic identification’ – influence our interpretations of place; the ‘meanings’ we choose to give it. I suggest that psychogeography may help us unpack the complex relationship architecture has to narrative. I summarise the aims of this thesis, its research methods, the particular challenges such research presents, and the contribution to the knowledge I seek to make.*

*‘... these places of memory call for a work of memory, in the sense in which Freud opposes such a work to the obsessional repetition that he calls repetitive compulsion, where the plural reading of the past is annihilated, and the spatial equivalent of intertextuality is rendered impossible.’*

Paul Ricoeur (2017:40)

After completing his medical training, Rudolph Freudenberg (1908-1993) left Freiburg for Vienna to assist Manfred Sakel, one of the pioneers of ‘insulin shock’ therapy. The rise of Nazism saw Freudenberg and his wife, both Jews, summarily dismissed from their respective medical posts in Germany in 1935. Invited in 1936 by a private psychiatric hospital near London to initiate insulin coma treatment for schizophrenia, Freudenberg left for England definitively in 1937, his wife and son joining him a year later. Netherne Asylum recruited Freudenberg in 1947 and promoted him to Physician Superintendent in 1951 amid lengthy enquiries into the conduct of a ‘senior member’ of its medical staff and a ‘sadly disgraceful’ unit for ‘deteriorated male patients’. Freudenberg immediately set about addressing these

problems. Believing that patients deserved to be treated with dignity and realising that improving hospital conditions would likely contribute more effectively to patient recovery than the novel 'physical treatments' he had previously engaged in, Freudenberg reduced overcrowding, ensured that patients be provided with better clothing and a greater range of activities, and campaigned continuously for the 'liberation of both staff and patients' from the 'petty tyrannies and outmoded routines' (Becker and Bennett, 2000) so typical of the mental hospital regime (James 1992:235). Freudenberg, fond of art and music and with expertise in violinmaking (DHB1983), also had a passion for filmmaking, which led him to capture his insulin experiments on film. The footage is interrupted by mysterious riverbank views.

Freudenberg's monochromatic film<sup>2</sup> is grainy and mute: A frenzied macaque throws itself wildly around a hopelessly small wire cage. An unclothed man in bed, agitated, unaware of an exemplary doctor busy 'calming' him, looks aghast. A second macaque, its tiny head meticulously bandaged and its large eyes lethargic, ignores the fleshy human fingers that rap its cage. Several middle-aged women in fusty Diane Arbus party dresses sit in comfy lounge sofas that have been dragged onto Netherne's extensive lawn. They sip their tea in slow motion from delicate china cups, eyes twinkling mischievously to the camera. The nurses have rather overdressed the old dears, and it's a scorcher. Island-like, each sits alone, smiling demurely to the camera like minor royalty. One woman frowns angrily and avoids the camera to stare rigidly at who-knows-what. At a crowded hospital Xmas dance, several quite mystified patients are hurriedly 'rescued' by jolly staff corralling them towards the fun. We can't miss out on this, can we? Gently shoved, they shuffle listlessly. A nurse leads a man into a room and guides him slowly towards a table-height operating bed of sharply pressed, icy white sheets. He climbs onto it and, as if scripted, passively lies down. The nurse efficiently buckles a black-leather strap around the man's torso, securing him firmly to the

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<sup>2</sup> Film held by the Wellcome Collection, London

bed. She deftly clips a headphone-like device on his head, and on cue, the man opens his mouth, readying it to receive, host-like, the black-rubber bit that the nurse places gently. The man bites softly down on it. The nurse and a white-coated technician exchange glances and nod briefly. The technician turns a dial on a black box wired to the man's head. The film cuts.

Monkeys and chimpanzees are more restless and distractable following extirpation of the prefrontal cortex; they exhibit a fatuous equanimity of spirit, their capacity for recall is impaired, and they attach more importance to immediate sensory experiences. The animal lives in a *perpetual present* [...] Leucotomies in different planes and lobotomies have recently been carried out in the macaque monkey by Freudenberg, Glees, Obrador, Foss and Williams (1947). The decrease in aggressiveness was most pronounced after complete lobotomy in the vertical plane. Motor activity was increased by lower orbital cuts in the vertical and horizontal planes' (Dax 1948).

Netherne Hospital, formerly 'The Surrey County Asylum at Netherne', was opened (curiously) on All Fools' Day, 1909. It was designed to accommodate up to 1,360 patients by its architect, George Thomas Hine (1842-1916), celebrated doyen of asylum architecture but by 1990 only 150 patients remained. Divested of its remaining patients, the hospital was closed in 1994 and the entire estate sold off to developers by the Department of Health the following year<sup>3</sup>. Redeveloped, cleansed of its history, the estate was renamed 'Netherne-on-the-Hill'. An amalgam of 'ready-made-picturesque' apartments (i.e., ex-ward blocks), was slyly integrated with upscale, unexceptional new housing. Both the Edwardian 'village' parts of Netherne, and the newer dwellings surrounding it, seem as if parachuted in, lock stock and barrel, albeit at different times, alien invaders colonising small patches of uncomplaining, gentle Surrey countryside. Netherne-on-the-Hill, bland and well-mannered, has neither truck

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<sup>3</sup> It is estimated that by 2011 the population of 'Netherne-on-the-Hill' more or less equalled Hine's 1,360 target.

nor commerce with the fields and woodlands encircling it but, like any comfortably nourished baby, remains stolidly concerned with only itself, oblivious to anything beyond its domain, beyond its vaguely gelatinous edges. Like its now forgotten patients, Netherne is also only tenuously attached to ‘reality’; a slim road, a frail and winding umbilical<sup>4</sup>, connects to a nearby busy arterial (paralleling the Southern Rail lines), carrying folk rushing lemming-like from South London to the sea. Fields and woods conceal Netherne from view (you can only find Netherne if you search for it). Concealed, it is invisible from the main road, where traffic roars incessantly and trains screech to Brighton. But in Netherne, these aren’t audible, despite their proximity.

I knew that by visiting the remnants of Netherne asylum, I was also revisiting childhood, searching for something without knowing what, but feeling that that place held some special ‘meaning’ for me. Even the *idea* of Netherne was enough to bring back vivid infant memories of a monstrous convalescence home for children our local doctor packed me off too. Frequent spells of childhood illness and our dark, damp flat in smoky Victoria (sandwiched between pretty St James’s Park and quiet streets of posh Georgian pads, and Rowton House, Vauxhall’s premier dosshouse), made up our doctor’s mind that I’d be better off elsewhere, if only for a bit. That rural convalescence home really wasn’t much of a ‘home’. Massive and intimidating, its ‘institutional’ Victorian architecture not dissimilar to Netherne’s. Everything was big. Too big. A massive communal bath parodied an echoey indoor swimming pool (with all the noise but none of the fun). Its scratchy chocolate brown-tiled parapets held a mere two feet of soup-warm grey water where efficient nurses vigorously soaped, scrubbed, and doused dozens of naked infant bodies, mine included. Like Netherne, the place was severe and unwelcoming, and like Netherne, self-contained, remote, and cut-off (it smelled horribly astringent and very medical). No sooner had I arrived there than I got sicker. I was

<sup>4</sup> A winding road, softening a severe incline, enabled horse-drawn loads to reach Netherne Asylum.

unceremoniously deported to an ‘isolation hospital’, decanted into a massive ward, its wall lined with a seemingly endless rank of uniformly spaced white beds in which lay children suffering from scarlet fever (or worse) and dreamt of a dark horse sleeping in a massive box stowed beneath my bed.

Asylums also figure in connection with Bill. Bill was a kind man with a rugged profile and a deeply seamed brow, always smiling and whistling; he could never do enough. No task was too much for Bill. He’d help with all the household chores and do a spot of gardening. My sister and I adored him. He cycled everywhere, wearing faded corduroy trousers and clapped-out sleeveless V-necks. Bill couldn’t read. This amused us. Preposterously, we tried teaching him. But Bill would vanish without notice. He went missing for weeks, even longer. Later, he’d emerge, and we’d learn that he’d spend time (again and again) in nearby Springfield<sup>5</sup>. We were told he ‘drank’ and got ‘unwell’, but without really understanding what these meant.

Although not an asylum (but very asylum-like), just yards from where we lived stood the mysterious, intimidating ‘Magdalen House’. An old 1916 map of the area labels it ‘Magdalen Hospital’ and a ‘female penitentiary’. Like Springfield, Magdalen was a place of seclusion and strangeness, imposingly proportioned, very private, and architecturally scary. Its doors and windows were always shut, and I never saw anyone entering or leaving the place. You couldn’t – and wouldn’t dare – peek inside Springfield or Magdalen. It was forbidden. And even if you had no clear idea what went on there, you just knew it was something either unpleasant or unhappy, something needing hiding. Neither institution was really talked about at home, although once, because I’d asked her too often, my grandmother snapped scornfully that Magdalen was for ‘bad’ girls. How were they bad? Did they misbehave? Was crime

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<sup>5</sup> A South-London mental hospital

involved? Sexual impropriety? All of these?<sup>6</sup> I didn't feel bold enough to question further my grandmother. She kept her house strictly clean, removing anything with even a hint of dirt, and Magdalen meant 'dirty'. From what was said and unsaid, I twigged that Springfield and Magdalen were grubby, improper, and taboo. In my child's imagination, both places became fused with an equally weird otherworld, the taboo 'adult' world of sex; sex and madness, best of friends, always present, but we didn't acknowledge them – they're secret and forbidden; they represented an unwelcome unwanted world of mayhem<sup>7</sup>.

When I discovered Netherne, my persistent childhood curiosity about such places drew me to it. I continue to dream of mysterious, closed institutions that conjure a whole other kind of life run along alien lines, where there are no families, just lonely individuals, strict rules, furtive friendships, and an overwhelming atmosphere of fear. These places existed beyond anything I was familiar with. While I can now explain - rationalise, even historically 'contextualise' - the asylum and the reformatory, I remain perplexed that these places, built to care for people, *felt* as if they did anything but that. I was pulled towards the madness and wildness they emblemised, were built to contain, and contributed to<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Possibly this is precisely what my grandmother was hinting at, because the first Magdalen Hospital (established in 1758), was known as 'The Magdalen Hospital for the Reception of Penitent Prostitutes' and was intended to reclaim young women who, because of a 'moral lapse', had been driven into prostitution, but who were 'penitent and prepared to enter upon a new way of life'. Although by the time she spoke about it, Magdalen House had become a Classifying School, tasked with accommodating and assessing the character, and mental and physical health of entrants to the Approved School system. Source:

<http://www.childrenshomes.org.uk/LondonMagdalen/>

<sup>7</sup> E.R. Dodds (Dodds 2020:68-69), criticising Rohde for being overinfluenced by Nietzsche's Apollonian-Dionysian typology, points out that Dionysian collective ecstasy also aimed at mental healing via wine, dance, and mayhem.

<sup>8</sup> People have taken the place of asylums and now are the 'houses' of their own medicated madness

## 1.2 Why Do We Feel this Way?

I have wondered why some places seem able to arouse such distinct feelings. I look at places intrigued by how they ‘make’ us feel and how they become ‘meaningful’ to us (what we describe as ‘meaningful’ should perhaps be ‘feeling’). I wondered how I might focus more keenly on the kinds of ‘emotional reverberations’ associated with buildings and even ‘capture’<sup>9</sup> them, to see what they’re ‘made of’. I have explored feelings like these and looked at ways of ‘collecting’ them. I’ve focussed particularly on the emotional reverberations of Netherne Asylum and have tried out ways of making these ‘speak’. After all, our feelings about places, even if vague and often difficult to define, form part - may be the most important part - of what we ‘know’ about them<sup>10</sup> (feelings, too, are a variety of knowledge).

Large parts of this project were already written up when I was fortunate to stumble across a graphically written piece by literature academic Clair Wills. In her ‘Life Pushed Aside’ (Wills 2021), Wills searches (unsuccessfully) for the identity of someone known only as ‘J. J. Beegan.’ This man’s few remaining mysterious burnt-matchstick drawings on toilet paper and a title page have made him arguably Netherne’s most highly esteemed ‘outsider’ artist. Wills uses her search for Beegan’s identity, which she fails to establish, to write about Netherne and her family’s experiences with it from several perspectives. She explores Netherne *experientially*; her mother was a psychiatric nurse at Netherne, and Wills’ childhood memories are consequently imbued with vivid images of the place, its dismal corridors, its smells, and her terror: ‘the stench of urine that hit you at some of the front doors; the tottery bodies and displaced-looking faces; the abandoned kitchens, ancient bottles of orange squash and stale rich tea biscuits; the fear of being spoken to and not knowing what to say’ (Wills 2021:16) Wills looks at Netherne *historically*; she details a range of medical and

<sup>9</sup> “If I could catch the feeling, I would...” (Woolf 1980) (cited by Laing 2017:4)

<sup>10</sup> Where the cognitive and narrative meet... see, for example, Ryan 2010, and Herman 2009

surgical treatments that patients received (including a friend of her mother's, a fellow nurse, who both requests and is unbelievably *granted* a lobotomy). Wills also explores the changes that occurred to attitudes towards mental illness, mainly as reflected in informational films broadcast to allay fears people had about the 'new' psychiatric treatments (especially ECT)<sup>11</sup>; the influence of the anti-psychiatry movement, the dismantlement of the asylums and the so-called move of patients to 'community care' (a transition facilitated by increasingly available and 'effective' psychotropic medication). Lastly, Wills discusses Netherne *theoretically* regarding some of the disastrous effects of institutionalised existence and the *de facto* incarceration they were complicit in (Wills refers especially to Irving Goffman's critique of institutionalisation). Wills also makes uncomfortable comparisons between the asylums and the hideous 'Magdalen Laundries'<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Wills' own mother appeared in *Out of True* (1951) about a woman's mental breakdown, produced by the Crown Film Unit. A five-part mental health series of films, *The Hurt Mind* (1957) produced by and broadcast on the BBC, were introduced by Labour MP Christopher Mayhew (who also championed the closure of asylums) and were, according to documentation identified by Tim Snelson in his paper, "...intended to advocate for 'physical treatments including the new method of ECT', presenting it with an 'un-alarming look' that would have 'a reassuring effect on the public' A doctor in mid shot introduces the procedure – edited to show a few close-ups of the equipment being used – and begins by administering a muscle relaxant, foregrounded as the 'most important advance that has been made in this treatment', which 'has in fact taken the convulsion out of convulsive treatment'. He then simulates sending a 'carefully measured dose' of current through the patient twice, doing this a second time so viewers can 'watch his toes', stressing this subtle reaction is 'as much as you'll see'. (Snelson 2021:58)

<sup>12</sup> Although the Magdalene Laundries purported to care for and morally re-educate 'fallen women', discoveries over recent decades have revealed not only the harshness of life in these effectively carceral penal institutions but also the large numbers of fatalities among both women and babies and whose bodies were covertly buried.



Coincidentally, but inevitably, I touch on several of the themes Wills raises, but from a different perspective and without the ‘benefit’ of having so personally experienced the place. Her piece helped me question anew what I have been trying to do here. I have, as mentioned, focused on the *experience* of visiting Netherne, walking towards it, and through it - its grounds, its cemetery - and picking through the ‘Village’ for the remains of its original buildings. I have been so mindful that the feelings Netherne can arouse will have something to do with me, but also with its buildings, not only their histories (although that too) but also their architectural forms and their ‘presence’. This has led me to look at how I can narrate them effectively.

### **1.3 Architecture and Narrativity**

Swiss literary critic and narratologist, Marie-Laure Ryan (b. 1946) blames the failure of ‘architectural discourse’ to account for what she believes is architecture’s ‘potential narrativity’<sup>13</sup> partly on architecture itself being an art form ‘deprived of semantic content’. In other words, what might architecture and architectural discourse say or recount? Ryan has found only limited instances of architectural loquacity and gives, as her example, those ‘stations of the cross’ where Baroque churches (Ryan 2004:15 & 27)) use architectural devices to simulate stages of The Passion. In contrast, arguing wholeheartedly for architecture’s intrinsic narrativity, Sophie Psarra (Psarra 2009) explores the relationship between the Parthenon and the Erechtheion on the Acropolis, pointing out not only an almost stage-managed<sup>14</sup> narrativity of their proximity (Psarra 2009:19-40) but also elaborating on the different cultural, historical, political and religious dimensions of each of these buildings and the complex dialogue their juxtaposition implies. Although I do not want to simplify Psarra’s

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<sup>13</sup> There is further discussion of this in Jameson 2017:46

<sup>14</sup> Sergei Eisenstein based his formulation of film montage also on drawings made by Auguste Choisy of the route between the Parthenon and the Erechtheion (Psarra 2009:26).

argument, I would suggest that. In contrast, Ryan refers to the figurative *content* buildings may represent, and Psarra dwells on the broader narratives they might imply. However, would following Ryan signify that generally (or intrinsically) buildings are essentially *tabula rasa* when imputing content to them? Can we tell whatever stories we fancy about buildings without fear of their architecture contradicting us? My attempt to respond to Ryan's question has made my project experimental. I rely on my *feelings* to try to access and unlock what I believe may be at least narrativity intrinsic to architecture, where buildings and other structures 'represent' not solely the tales of their histories but contain, potentially, the stories of their shapes, their strange and alien structures; architecture's 'voices', as it were.

Unlocking and accessing architecture's narrativity – its stories – has proved complex and challenging to undertake and describe. Although this project is referred to as 'Navigating Netherne', it is unavoidably also a form of *self*-navigation (and *self-narration*). That there is an 'autobiographical' dimension to this will be already apparent from my having mentioned 'feelings' several times – my feelings. I have given myself licence to do this because, as already mentioned, it seems indisputable that 'knowing' a building or buildings is also to know how they (seem to) make us 'feel'; this way of experiencing architecture is a primary concern of this project. Feelings do not come out of nowhere and result from accumulated experience, determined personally and culturally (and much more). Even though *our personal histories* lead us to link our feelings to different quiet memories, I believe our feelings, as such, are much the same. However readily we use it, the term 'feeling' is nonetheless problematic and vague. What *are* feelings? In his *captatio* to book 11 of his 'Confessions', Augustine observes, 'If no one asks me, I know; If I want to explain it to an interrogator, I do not know'. Here, Augustine is addressing the riddle of time, but Griffero (2014:1) suggests this is similarly true of atmosphere (and I would claim of feelings too).

I looked to psychogeography to help me out both to explore emotional resonances and in some way to convey them, for, from its inception, psychogeography presupposed that moods are intrinsic, or ‘belong’, to (or in) specific places. This is why ‘psychogeography’ (whose origins, trajectory, and significance are addressed subsequently) is one of this project’s key methods. Mindful of the difficulty of articulating feeling and ‘therefore’ of treating seriously my emotional awareness of place, I was drawn to psychogeography as a practice which seemed unequivocally to value *emotional receptivity* and ‘legitimise’ exploring the interlocking of place with transient emotion. It appeared that psychogeography might enable me to explore the ‘emotions’ and the places they ‘belonged’ to (both, after all, seem in cahoots). In this quest where intangible feelings and places interrelate, Olivia Laing’s work provided an encouraging exemplar of *emotionally* led research. In ‘The Lonely City’, Laing explores loneliness as a specific emotion and an experiential category of interacting with the self and the world. Frank talks about her struggles with loneliness. Laing examines her subject not only autobiographically but also how loneliness has affected the lives and output of several well-known artists. In asking, what does it mean to be lonely? Laing describes herself as assembling a ‘map of loneliness’ built out of ‘needs and interests’ pieced together from her own experiences and those of others (Laing 2017:5). There is something profound and moving in the way she writes about loneliness, about emotional self-examination, and how people live (and create) in the face of their loneliness. The difference was that I was mining my feelings of alienation and empathy to tease out meaning from places and buildings.

#### **1.4 Feeling Netherne: Emotion and Affect**

*Rather than describing journeys, I was interested in the effects of place on myself.*

I acknowledged that experiencing Netherne exclusively through the lens of my own emotions was potentially messy. I risked accumulating little more than a ragbag of idiosyncratic (and to others, uninteresting) personal feelings, anecdotes, obscure memories, and associations. I recognised that I needed to find ways to interrogate the places and the ‘feelings’ that attach to or inhere in them and also to distinguish between different kinds of feelings or experiences.

#### **1.4.1 Emotion and Affect**

Much has been written about ‘emotion’ and ‘affect’, but this is a distinction I have found difficult to make. I looked at how others have tackled this but remained mystified. I am not alone in this. Geographer Steve Pile writes that ‘[t]he notion of affect can be found scattered through the work on emotions in geography - and, as a consequence, its meaning remains elusive’ (Pile 2010:8). From consulting literature tackling this topic, it is evident that simply defining ‘affect’ continues to be something contested by those aligned differently to politics, culture, and feminism (and feelings too!). When Deborah Thien points out (Thien 2005:452) that ‘emotion’ is too often part of a ‘binary trope’ where emotion is ‘negatively positioned in opposition to reason, as objectionably soft and implicitly feminized’, she had me eating out of her hand. Of course, wanted to see emotion being valued, not marginalised and disparaged. But her comment didn’t help me understand why emotion wasn’t ‘affect’. However, Thien reassuringly points out that even in the standard English translation of Freud’s works, Freud uses ‘affect’ ambiguously. She writes (Thien 2005:451) that ‘‘affect’ [is] used, at times loosely, in relationship to instincts, drives and emotions’ and that ‘in his early work on the unconscious, Freud speaks of ‘an affective or emotional impulse’ (Freud 1915, 1991:180). In other words, Freud seems to treat these terms as synonymous.

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<sup>15</sup> October 14, 2022, Times Literary Supplement (p7).

At least I could take heart that the affective (including the emotional) dimensions of experience are now taken seriously; its relevance to academic discourse (now held by many to be beyond dispute) is championed, especially by human geographers. Nigel Thrift (Thrift 2004:57), whose paper dedicated to the subject is a riposte to Doreen Massey's request, explains the political value of 'affect,' and argues that prioritising affect challenges that 'residual cultural Cartesianism' which is what 'keeps emotion out of place within academic research and practice' (Thien 2005:450) (I think probably the same Cartesianism Merleau-Ponty ( 2013: vii) rails against). Anderson and Smith (Anderson 2009) acknowledge the crucial importance of emotion to research 'as [it is] a fundamental aspect of human experience'. In politically instrumentalising affect theory and using it to engage positively with the world - a 'politics of hope' rather than 'make private bargains with misery' (Thrift 2004:68) - Thrift trenchantly differentiates affect from the 'nice and cuddly', (Thrift 2004:58) in order, I guess, to avoid 'touchy-feely' versions of emotion, and any 'absurd', 'silly' or 'wrongheaded' ideas (Thrift 2004:58). In endeavouring to politicise affect, Thrift, aligned with the 'post-human'<sup>16</sup> (or inhuman, or transhuman), proposes that 'individuals are generally understood as effects of the events to which their body parts (broadly understood) respond and in which they participate' (Thrift 2004:60). But I am uncomfortable with taking 'feeling' in so resolutely dehumanised a direction<sup>17</sup>, preferring to treat 'feeling' as a far more *inclusive* category of experience, which is why I willingly go along with Thien's critique of Thrift's (and others') 'technocratic' frameworks, where she argues that so radically separating affect

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<sup>16</sup> Referencing Brian Massumi's ideas on the 'virtual'

<sup>17</sup> Thrift (2004:58) polemicalises: "...affect is [now] more and more likely to be actively engineered with the result that it is becoming something more akin to the networks of pipes and cables that are of such importance in providing the basic mechanics and root textures of urban life"

from feeling, risks moving us past ‘the emotional landscapes of daily life’ (Thien 2005:451).<sup>18</sup> I particularly like her expression ‘emotional landscapes’, which has more to do with my project than she intended.

### 1.5 Using Feeling to Unlock Architecture’s Narrativity

I believed I could ‘feel’ my way through the emotional labyrinth Netherne presented, provided I could distinguish between *different categories* of feeling, categorising how feelings may work to ‘access and unlock’ architecture’s *intrinsic* narrativity (where buildings tell their histories, but *also* enact the stories of their forms). Therefore, I needed to be able to break down my ‘psycho-geographic’ readings of Netherne to understand which criteria (affective, sentiment, narrative, symbolic, etc.) are at work in them. These criteria are touched on in the specific ‘psycho-geographic’ accounts (chapter six) to ‘make sense’ of what I am doing and to give at least some sense of method to my psychogeography (although ‘psychogeography’ - frequently alluded to in theoretical and historical terms - is taciturn about its methodologies; even a modest box of analgesics tells you how to use them!).

Regarding ‘feeling’, the most straightforward distinction I have identified in my psycho-geographic explorations of Netherne is whether an observation is based either on ‘emotion’ or on ‘affect’. In making just such a distinction, and because of the ambiguities already referred to, I apply my criteria. I use ‘emotion’ to refer to psycho-geographic readings of Netherne influenced by *sentiment* (sad, happy, nostalgic, tranquil, uneasy, etc.). Where ‘affect’ predominates, the experience is unemotional and leads me to observe a building’s effect – its form, configuration, colour, etc. Often, some ‘somatic identification’ (Merleau-

<sup>18</sup>Thien (2005:453) continues that for her Thrift et al give inadequate attention to the ‘relationality [...] embedded in our everyday emotional lives’. Thien however prefers to understand emotion as an intersubjective acknowledging - that the ‘distances between ‘us’ are always relational, and indeed that we are intimately subjected by emotion’.

Ponty, 2012) occurs, where body consciousness - identification of the object *with* our bodies - can help us to 'feel' the object's form, its dimensions, shape, bulk, angularity, etc. But I also use 'affect' to point to 'feeling' but rather in the sense that, say, 'presentiment' is a feeling, as opposed to 'emotion-as-sentiment'. 'Affect' has also been used to describe '(in both the communicative and literal sense) the motion of emotion' (Thien 2005:451). The kind of experiences I call 'affective' are those where the 'other' (building or whatever) has moved towards me at least as much as I've moved towards it. I arrive, therefore, at a working definition of emotional responses to buildings and two types of affective responses: somatic identification and the presentiment-like. Emotional responses towards buildings and places are often precipitated by personal associations and memories or even emotionally resonant information concerning them. Emotional responses can be further augmented by how we express them, often resorting to familiar literary tropes, especially metaphor, personification and clichés relating to certain places.

## **1.6 Why Netherne?**

I have been drawn to Netherne because reviving poignant memories of other institutions reawakens childhood perplexity, that mysterious and often inexplicable sense of loss and alienation, of feeling not at home. Like those intimidating places remembered from childhood, Netherne is another custodial place, 'caring' for inmates and their confusion (although in Netherne, those judged too ill to fend for themselves were more likely to be 'contained' than 'cared' for). Today, 'Netherne', the remains of a whole series of buildings,

continues reverberating<sup>19</sup> with *intense affective history*. I identify deeply with the madness of this history because it resonates with my own darkest feelings: desperation, longing, alienation, loss, powerlessness, and incomprehension (feelings we all experience to some degree). I explore how experiencing Netherne influences my interpretations of its material aspects: its buildings, both old and new, its fortuitous details, street furniture, detritus, its open and forsaken spaces, and even my journeys to Netherne. The ‘contagion’ that Netherne once contained now seems spreads like toxic dust over all that is in its vicinity. Conscious of what pushes me to remark on all of these aspects of Netherne psycho-geographically, I meld places with ‘reverberation, resonances, sentimental repercussions, and reminders of my past’ (Bachelard 2010: xii) and look simultaneously at what psychogeography was, is, and could be.

Netherne was built to accomplish several objectives. In common with other Victorian and Edwardian asylums, it was designed to help manage madness and the mad but also to *influence* patients’ emotions (in a sense, Netherne was ‘psycho-geographic’ before psychogeography). Its ‘therapeutic’ architecture, balmy fresh air, and rural views were intended to work together to soothe and smooth its patients’ mental turbulence. Yet, notwithstanding its lofty therapeutic (and possibly benign) objective, encounters with Netherne are disturbing. It was, after all, also a loony bin, a place to dump refuse, a vast *physical recipient* for intense emotional upheaval (psychiatrist Anthony Stevens calls the asylum ‘a repository for human misery’ (Adamson 1985:1)). This is why for those uninitiated into madness, Netherne can still conjure a vivid spectre of what madness might be, readily

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<sup>19</sup> Interestingly Bachelard (2010: xxiii) evokes the idea of ‘reverberation’ to describe the profound effects of a poetic image where ‘the [poetic] image has touched the depths before it stirs the surface’ and, only after the ‘reverberation’, he writes, are we able to experience ‘resonances, sentimental repercussions, reminders of our past’.



prompting uncomfortable, imagined ‘othered’ version of the self, where the pains of everyday existence have become finally unbearable.

I want to differentiate my interest in Netherne from ‘dark tourism’ which is a fashionable fascination for the weird, grotesque and macabre, where ‘teddy bears are sold in straitjackets on Valentine's Day with the tag line "crazy for you"’; ‘excursions are conducted around both derelict and repurposed sites’; and a haunted house, billed as ‘family entertainment’, is designed to evoke a seventeenth-century mental asylum, peopled with ‘actors pretending to be somnambulist inmates’ (Margaret and Brien, 2016). But even putting aside the thrill of the weird, the *idea* of the asylum continues undeniably to obsess. This is because the people it was built to contain – dramatically damaged, their minds beleaguered, disorientated, lost – give us back versions of our possible selves. This is a dimension of human ‘being’ we can relate to even if we cannot understand or fully recognise it, the grotesque distortion of our quotidian fears. Despite the closure of the asylums, we continue to draw on these distortions to envision those ‘other’ strange mental states which, while we are (for now) spared of, we use to define (and reassure ourselves of) our own ‘sanity’.

Historian Barbara Taylor has personal experience of Friern Barnet Hospital (1851-1993) She helps us imagine the searing emotional ‘meanings’ the ward blocks of the asylum must have had for those abandoned there, deprived of ordinary life, often against their will. Of Friern Barnet’s notorious ‘back’ wards – remote from the centre of asylum because the hopeless cases assigned there could be ‘safely’ neglected – Taylor writes: ‘elderly people with dementia, and others deemed chronically ill, sometimes languished [there] for decades’ where life could be ‘truly horrible’. To make her point, Taylor tells of someone who, recalling his experience of one backwards, declares, ‘[there were people there who hadn’t had a conversation in thirty years’ (Taylor 2015:128). No wonder people talked literally to the

bloody walls. Even Edward Adamson (1911-1996), Netherne's benign, mild-mannered pioneering art therapist, was forced to acknowledge that 'We are no strangers to unquiet feelings' (Adamson 1985:1) and wrote vividly of his visit to Netherne's own 'back' wards: 'Having passed through long corridors and many locked and relocked doors, I was ushered into a large hall containing about a hundred people ... Many of the inhabitants underwent major brain operations, and consequently many were shaven-headed. Others were swathed in bandages and were disfigured by post-operative bruises and black eyes' (Wills 2021).

Netherne was a hotbed of interpretation and misinterpretation. Doctors working at Netherne were constantly challenged to read (you might almost say 'narrate' or 'skry') feelings, to find names that fit 'conditions' they'd guessed at or invented from patient behaviours, to propose solutions from an outmoded and dubious box of tricks, an armoury of 'remedies' which included enforced seclusion and sedation, electric-shock treatment, cut 'n' slice psychosurgery, involuntary artificially induced coma (one of my schoolfriends had a six-week sleep), or Largactil,<sup>20</sup> (as well as other more sophisticated medications, as they become available). As attitudes to treating the mentally ill caught up with the noise being made by the anti-psychiatry movement (which has its origins in the 1960s<sup>21</sup>), so-called 'talking cures'

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<sup>20</sup> Chlorpromazine (UK brand name 'Largactil') was a pioneering 'first-generation' (or 'conventional') antipsychotic medication, almost universally used to treat anxiety, mania, psychosis and schizophrenia as no alternatives were available. Baker (1954:175-176) writes that 'one patient with a recent acute psychosis had severe inflammation around injections in the thigh yet made no spontaneous complaint although when coming to the clinic she walked with both hips and knees flexed, presumably because of reflex spasm. She admitted, when questioned, that in fact her legs were painful, but then at the end of the interview again hobbled back to bed and seemed indifferent to her disability. When this patient was taken off Largactil she then said that she remembered her leg had been very painful and hoped she would not need any more injections'.

<sup>21</sup> Key names associated with this disparate movement include Timothy Leary, Giorgio Antonucci, R.D. Laing, David Cooper, Franco Basaglia, Michel Foucault, Giles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Erving Goffman.

began also seeping into the hospitals, sadly, often not long before their closures. There was art therapy, too. Many of the patients attending Edward Adamson's regular art studio sessions were described as 'long-term sufferers of schizophrenia' but Adamson drew solace from knowing that 'his' patients were at least accorded the dignity of helping to cure themselves' (Adamson 1984:2). Netherne had indeed a reputation for the 'civilised and humane treatment of its patients' (according to Wills, Netherne was 'proud of its reputation for cultivating a benign and enlightened environment in which to be ill' (Wills 2021). While Wills acknowledges 'the locked wards, straitjackets and padded cells', she contrasts this horror-film paraphernalia with the 'higher grade' patients who were granted all the freedom they could handle, recounting how impressed Eleanor Roosevelt was by her 1948 visit to Netherne. But Netherne, possibly better than some other asylums, did not specialise in human dignity.

I have already established that this project involves me interpreting feelings about and of place. At Netherne, there were plenty of feelings being interpreted too; in fact, interpretation at Netherne was a messy free-for-all, overlapping and colliding: patients were perplexed and terrified by their won uncontrollable, alien, unnameable feelings; tendentious psychotherapeutic interpretation confused and misdirected those patients encouraged to engage in self-navigation; squabbles brewed over whether patient art held diagnostic value, and how to interpret it, etc.

That Netherne, the asylum, is no longer - its history denied and erased<sup>22</sup> (Weiner 2004:190) - makes its remaining buildings yet more poignant (now supplemented and animated by 'only' memory and imagination). The developers' omission to memorialise Netherne Asylum

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<sup>22</sup> 'Erasure' is the term used by Deborah Weiner (2004:190) to critique the developers transformation of Colney

Hatch asylum into modern luxury housing.

significantly redoubles the mistreatment of its patients who are callously ‘anonymised’ not merely once (as patients) but now twice (as forgotten); an ‘erasure of lived experience.’<sup>23</sup> where developers ‘[rob] people of their history’ (Weiner 2004:204). Netherne: a place of many intense near-un navigable feelings.

### 1.7 Correlating Feeling with Place; Health with Design

In exploring how architecture, history, and an entire locale influence and ‘speak through’ the feelings colouring visits to Netherne, I also explore how others use ‘psychogeography’ to *correlate feelings with place* and what might make psychogeography compelling, even necessary; how it is deployed, and why (on earth) psychogeography, which attracts academic interest (and its fair share of eccentrics)<sup>24</sup>, should have emerged from 20<sup>th</sup> century politicised *art movements*<sup>25</sup> (Surrealism and Situationism) rather than from psychology or social science.

There is, of course, nothing new about associating feelings with place,<sup>26</sup> which is how we most commonly ‘know’ a place. But *systematically articulating* such ‘knowing’ has proved persistently problematic. Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan schematises different ways of ‘knowing’ a place, including sensual dimensions like touch, taste, smell, etc. (which he acknowledges are tricky to articulate). Still, also by analysing spatial awareness (from babyhood onwards), sacred spaces, mythical spaces, how architecture can heighten awareness of space, etc. (Tuan

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Popularist nostalgia and folkish anti-modernism combine in what Alastair Bonnett (2009:60) describes as ‘Magico-Marxism and its kindred re-enchantments’ which he alleges combine ‘communist militancy with a romanticization of landscape and memory’ in his exploration of modern British psychogeography.

<sup>25</sup> Moreover, from an art movement whose adherents, in de-commodifying art, dematerialised it to the extent that they transformed art from practice into ‘attitude’.

<sup>26</sup> Psalm 48: ‘encircle her towers, mark well your hearts [Jerusalem’s] ramparts, raise up her palaces, that you may recount it to succeeding generations’.

2001:6-7),<sup>27</sup> but, for Tuan, less amenable to analysis are the ‘Intimate Experiences of Place’ where ‘not only do we lack the words to give them form, but often we are not even aware of them’ (Tuan 2001:136). He refers to how we unconsciously develop emotional attachments (‘the seeds of lasting sentiment’) ((Tuan 2001:143) and the enchantments that memory weaves (Tuan 2001:144)<sup>28</sup>, but recognises that ‘personal and deeply felt [...] intimate experiences’ (while ‘not necessarily solipsistic or eccentric’) are difficult (not ‘impossible’) to express (Tuan 2001:148). For Tuan, these *can* be expressed only through ‘thoughtful reflection’<sup>29</sup>, pictorial art, and the ‘imagination of perceptive writers’, which is barely ‘systematic’. Philosopher of atmospheres, Gernot Böhme (1937-2022), coming from a more philosophically-attuned position than Tuan, opts to cite (2020:25) Hirschfield’s ‘Theorie der Gartenkunst’ (1779-1785) to give an example of an ordered exploration – in this case, of the affective influence of the English landscape garden. However, the most concerted and *purportedly* ‘systematic’ approach to how place relates to affect and how feelings can be correlated with place is ‘psychogeography.’

In addition to being associated with *feelings*, *moods*, and *atmospheres*, places have also long been associated with *states of health*. Hippocrates, grandfather of medicine, has left us his treatise linking well-being to the environment (‘On Airs, Waters, and Places, 5<sup>th</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE). This notion, while antique, continued to inform medical and architectural attitudes to hospital and asylum design. Netherne's ‘therapeutic’ architecture was intended to make people feel better, which makes Netherne an intriguing counterpoint to psychogeography.

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<sup>27</sup> Tuan (2001:6-7) claims that the upshot of this is that ‘very few works attempt to understand how people feel about space and place’ an understanding transformed by the geographers referenced previously.

<sup>28</sup> Tuan quotes novelist, Freya Stark.

<sup>29</sup> Tuan (2001:148) acknowledges that such experiences (and presumably the ability to articulate them) are influenced by cultural and linguistic factors.

Netherne, to *orchestrate* feelings, and psychogeography, to *detect and register* them. And yet, there is a disparity since the feelings intended are not the feelings experienced.

## **1.8 Aims and Methods**

### **1.8.1 Aims**

Michel Foucault writes: ‘I can't help but dream about a kind of criticism that would not try to judge, but bring an oeuvre, a book, a sentence, an idea to life; it would light fires, watch the grass grow, listen to the wind, and catch the seafoam in the breeze and scatter it. It would multiply, not judgments, but signs of existence; it would summon them, drag them from their sleep. Perhaps it would invent them sometimes - all the better. All the better. Criticism that hands down sentences sends me to sleep: I'd like a criticism of scintillating leaps of the imagination. It would not be a sovereign or dressed in red. It would bear the lightning of possible storms’ (Frichot and Stead, 2022:16).

Foucault exuberantly reframes criticism as an *imaginative and creative* act, and this project, in refusing to take places for granted, responds to and reinterprets them through correlating *feelings* with place; an imaginative a creative act. The same authors who cite Foucault (Frichot and Stead, 2022:13) also mention Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) and the *essay form* he introduces, which, according to the authors, is where social observation, self-reflection, critical analysis, and auto-biography are all ‘entwined as a kind of test-site to disrupt both expectations and assumptions...’ This effectively describes the goal of this project, which is to explore reading a place emotionally and effectively and the disruptive effects of doing so (this project assumes that places are not only semantically but also emotionally and effectively, intrinsically unstable, and equivocal). Chapter six, in exploring Netherne psycho-geographically, is, therefore, a culminating chapter of this project and illustrates how feelings, by correlating them with places, can be spatialised (as opposed to

being left within, unexpressed), implying that we may potentially be able to read our feelings ‘geographically’ through reading those very places they seem most bound up with.

This project also explores the emotive and affective role that history, in common with other kinds of narrative, plays in reading place (challenging the presumption that history is totally unlike other literary and rhetorical artifice and eschews emotion<sup>30</sup>); the different uses and definitions of psychogeography exploring *buildings* that accumulate such highly personal, emotively rich meanings. It also seeks to understand what ‘intrinsic narrativity’ in architecture may signify.

### 1.8.2 Means

Correlating feelings with a place to pursue emotionally- and affectively-led psycho-geographic explorations of Netherne presupposes emotional and affective *openness* to place. This is why, in this project, I understand psychogeography ideally as a way of privileging the creative discovery (or ‘un-cover’) of the emotional valences of place rather than as a means of confirming solely what was already known about a place. Methods associated with the inception of *Psychogeography* are deployed: the *dérive* (drift or wandering) and the *détournement* (a subversive repurposing of a pre-existing work). These methods are used here to treat not solely the *resonances* of place but also *bodies of knowledge* relating to the place, viz. (a) the history of asylums, (b) the specific history of Netherne, its location and the asylum, and later (c) local geology and history of the vicinity of Netherne. Consequently, this project ‘wanders’ (the *dérive*) through both histories and information, cognisant not only of their value as providing factual ‘contextualisation’ but as a material with its *emotional valences*. These valences, used and subverted, inform affective and emotional responses to Netherne and ultimately contribute to the psycho-geographic reimagining of Netherne.

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<sup>30</sup> See Hayden White (White 2019)

As the later chapter devoted to psychogeography discusses, psychogeography was, from its inception, a deliberately and provocatively ambiguous term (its ‘methodology’ remains ambiguous). However, this project takes psychogeography to mean *reading place emotionally and affectively* (circumventing questions of ‘fact’, ‘objectivity’, or whether there is an ‘inherent emotionality’ to place). In exploring what a place ‘feels like’, this project is aware that there is an intrinsic *metaphorical* dimension (*feels like*) to ‘seizing’ or identifying feelings about the place. It exploits the *tension* between what a place ‘feels like’ (‘provisional knowledge’) and what a place ‘is’ (what we ‘know’ *about* it: ‘definitive knowledge’). Feeling a way through place here also signifies addressing place in a dialogic manner Martin Buber suggests (see opening ‘prelude’), i.e., as a ‘you’ and not solely as an ‘it’. To feel one’s way through a place is to put aside where possible ideas we bring to the place (and that habitually replaces feeling and that ‘get in the way’ of feeling). Pertinent also is Bachelard’s phenomenologically-led aim to encounter the world afresh, as if suddenly ‘unknown’ (Bachelard 2010: xxxi), where ‘[n]on-knowing is not a form of ignorance but a difficult transcendence of knowledge’ (ibid: xxxiii), a perspective Merleau-Ponty also alludes to.<sup>31</sup>

*The narrativized description* is used not only to articulate emotionally- and affectively loaded readings of place but also to explore how ‘narratives’ (drawing on sources that also include historical and architectural information) can challenge established meanings of place by

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<sup>31</sup> ‘We live in the midst of man-made objects, among tools, in houses, streets, cities, and most of the time we see them only through the human actions which put them to use. We become used to thinking that all of this exists necessarily and unshakably. Cezanne’s painting suspends these habits of thought and reveals the base of inhuman nature upon which man has installed himself. This is why Cezanne’s people are strange, as if viewed by a creature of another species. Nature itself is stripped of the attributes which make it ready for animistic communions: there is no wind in the landscape, no movement on the Lac d’Annecy; the frozen objects hesitate as at the beginning of the world.’ (Merleau-Ponty: 1945)



reconfiguring them (i.e. transforming what is *seen*, *experienced*, and *felt*, about the place). The resulting *psycho-geographic accounts*<sup>32</sup> (in chapter six) inevitably make use of literary tropes (analogy, hyperbole, irony, metaphor, allegory, metonymy, synecdoche, allusion, personification, and ekphrasis, as well as stylised linguistic tonalities) and emotional ‘lenses’ (these include: alienation and confusion, loss, pain, longing, confiscation, victimisation and bullying).

My approach to psychogeography is complemented by so-called ‘fictocriticism’ (Flavell 2009; Frichot and Stead, 2022), which Frichot and Stead (ibid 14-18) describe as ‘deliberately non-completist’ and ‘diffident, allusive, touching upon ideas and opening them up’ and then leaving them that way. Fictocriticism embraces ‘projection, speculation and imagination’ and responds to ‘vibrant matter’ (unlike the lack of attention to material detail typically associated with theory and philosophy). Above all, this project challenges what we have *felt* with what we can *potentially learn* (thus drawing attention to the ‘arbitrary nature’ of objective knowledge and therefore reflecting on and contributing to a ‘re-evaluation of academic writing as a way of representing the world’).

Strangely enough, the psycho-geographic encounters of my penultimate chapter have unwittingly involved me deploying a tone of voice I hadn’t anticipated: a cold tone, drained of emotion, and pseudo-objective (or ‘academic’). It is as if the very surfeit of feeling characterising my encounters with Netherne has sought expression via a tonality more idiosyncratic and ‘deranged’ than emotional. It has been observed that the studiously restrained documentary-like ‘voice’ emerging in some of these accounts shares an affinity with the ‘unique facticity’<sup>33</sup> of writings by German academic and writer W.G. Sebald (1944-

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<sup>32</sup> Responding to sad, deranged spell of Netherne

<sup>33</sup> Stead (2015:46) cites McCulloch, 2003: xvii

2001) in whose work, architecture becomes the hinge between the actual and fictional worlds – the events described may or may not be ‘real’, but the buildings certainly are, and thus the fiction is anchored by a sort of architectural verisimilitude’ (Stead 2015:46) (although Stead refers to Sebald her comments could equally refer to André Breton’s use of places in ‘Nadja’). Stead (2015:43). points out that not only does history live on in architecture, but for Sebald, certain edifices like Breendonk<sup>34</sup> (and arguably like Netherne) that are so strongly associated with the ‘rational procedures of the Enlightenment thought’ hold within them (again, like 19th-century asylums) also the ‘very seed of inhuman domination’.

### 1.8.3 Methods

To explore Netherne, I have frequently visited it, voice-recorded thoughts and observations interviewed ex-employees, kept notes of my visits, made sketches in situ, and taken photographs. I have done these to (a) focus on the look and feel of the place in general and to note even incidental, seemingly unimportant details, (b) accumulate raw material to reflect on and to help me write about my visits, and (c) help ‘capture’ the ‘emotional’ reverberations of Netherne (during my visits I have remained attentive to empathetic emotional and embodied<sup>35</sup> feelings the place prompts). I have also used Buber’s dialogic approach (Buber 1970) to ‘address’ (in the ‘vocative’ sense) the places I encounter and their histories.

### 1.8.4 Challenge

While this exploratory, multidisciplinary thesis (*what Netherne feels like*) has involved pursuing and reconciling several routes:

- *Experiential* (correlating feelings with places)

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<sup>34</sup> Part of Antwerp’s outer defensive ring.

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- *Theoretical* (feelings as one of several possible interpretative modes)
- *Historical* (asylums and Netherne)
- *Conceptual/methodological* (psychogeography)

A notable challenge arises from *using* psychogeography while simultaneously *interrogating* *it* as a cultural phenomenon.

## 1.9 Contribution to Knowledge

I argue that creative narrativization and subversive interpretation (e.g. ‘resistant reading’) of place can (re-)sensitise us to our environment (especially the built environment), thereby helping us become conscious of our deep, mostly subliminal interactions with it. I advocate that we free ourselves from conventional or received ideas in responding to – ‘reading’ – our surroundings. My approach echoes a self-reinvention technique advanced by Freud: where the analysand revises their personal narrative to enable them to transcend trauma. En route, I explore and critique psychogeography's uses (and abuses), parenthetically questioning its status as ‘methodology’ or, perhaps more usefully, ‘anti-methodology’. Mindful that the words we use to describe feelings are, at best, imprecise, I look at ways of differentiating emotion from affect – particularly concerning a place’s ‘mood’ – and the potential experiences of place that somatic identification opens up. I also ask whether attributing feelings to a place in an age that privileges ‘feeling’ may help us navigate and differentiate between feelings.

## 1.10 Contents

CHAPTER ONE introduces this project’s concerns and how they have evolved and summarises research questions and methods. CHAPTER TWO asks what buildings ‘mean’ and locates emotional and affective responses within the context of interpretative approaches

to architecture. CHAPTER THREE traces psychogeography's origins, development, and objectives and juxtaposes these with contemporary studies using or referencing psychogeography. CHAPTER FOUR charts the development of mental asylum and where Netherne sits on a trajectory that proceeds from compassion and charity via 'humane' reason and then to state custodianship. CHAPTER FIVE considers the emergence of the Victorian asylum, 'therapeutic' architecture and its relationship to the practice of G. T. Hine (architect of Netherne), and how therapeutic architecture may relate to psychogeography.<sup>36</sup> While CHAPTER SIX briefly invokes the 'genius loci' – the spirit of place (of interest to phenomenologists and psycho-geographers alike) – by including poignant information relating to Netherne and its environs (seeming to affirm the emotional complexion attributed to Netherne), the majority of CHAPTER SIX consists of psycho-geographical readings of Netherne. These freely incorporate meanings, emotions, associations, details drawn from histories, and information relating directly or tangentially to Netherne. CHAPTER SEVEN evaluates how research questions have been answered, areas for potential future research in this field, why exploring affect in relation to architecture is worthwhile, and general observations concerning psychogeography<sup>37</sup> and interpretation. An appendix recounts how my previous projects have led me to this thesis.

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<sup>36</sup> In both 'historical chapters' I bear in mind that identity of buildings is 'the story we tell' of them

<sup>37</sup> Psychogeography grew out of an art movement, but its approach has implications also for the history of ideas.

## Chapter Two: Interpreting

*Feeling is a response to place but also an interpretation of it, Feeling - or mood - therefore inevitably inform how we 'talk about' (narrate, recount, describe, interpret, and explain) a place This chapter surveys literature exploring narrative's connection with architecture. Referencing ideas drawn from psychology, I explore the narrative's role in establishing a place's and a person's 'meaning' and 'identity'. I also examine how a Buberian 'dialogic' approach might challenge conventional narratives of place encouraging us to attend to a place's affective resonances. Lastly, I acknowledge how 'free association' may be a legitimate way to interpret place (this references Jane Rendell's psychoanalytically-influenced work on architecture). I unpack ways to interpret or 'read' a building and how radically 'reading against the grain' ('resistant reading') may be fruitfully applied to our interpretation and experience of place – i.e. helping us to 'step out of meaning's way'.*

*This he ordained in Joseph for a testimony, when he went out through the land of Egypt: where I heard a language that I understood not.*

Psalm 81:5, King James Version

### Noddy and Big Ears

Beginnings are so easy. It's what follows that hurts. A single, arguably naïve, fantasy kicked off this whole project: that buildings could be understood (also) as stories, that buildings, like children's author Enid Blyton, might have something to 'tell'. Even back then, while the idea seemed absurd, it struck me peculiarly, if perplexingly thrilling. There was something that promised to open a door onto a whole new world of meanings, where streets of buildings could translate into tales. By 'tales,' I didn't mean torrid tabloid exposés. No, I meant rather the kinds of story capable of somehow *expressing* or *articulating* a building's shape, configuration, and imagery; not flat technical descriptions, but some narratives equating to

their *physical* qualities. If a building were given a voice, I wondered, what kind of voice might this be; what story could it tell – or even *be*? Could its composition and design be ‘story-like’; its parts protagonists in a hitherto undiscovered, hypothetical account? Might a building embody even *multiple* stories or storylines, each able, in different ways, to challenge and refresh our understanding and perception of it and how we use and interact with it? Were narratives hidden in buildings there, simply waiting to be unveiled and recounted; was architecture, covertly, a form of storytelling after all?

Although excitement over such chimerical possibilities persisted, it felt impossible to work with or through, do anything with, develop, or take somewhere. I was stuck. I went looking for materials that could help me shed light on this core idea or, perhaps (as I feared), ‘fantasy’.

In his ‘Narrative Architecture’, Nigel Coates (2015) expresses several opinions that resonate with me. He believes (as did I) that ‘narrative and architecture may not at first seem to be natural bedfellows’ – which is precisely one of the reasons why his formulation – ‘narrative architecture’ – is exciting. Recent cultural history has frequently embraced and exploited the shock value of semantic collision; a favourite of the Surrealists was Lautréamont’s<sup>38</sup> oft-quoted ‘sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table’ (Lautréamont [1868] 2018). But there is more to Coates’ position than a desire to shock. He believes that treating architectural *as* narrative could shake up the way buildings were interpreted, transform both architectural creativity and architectural education, and lead to the creation of life-enhancing, celebratory environments which would indeed ‘speak’ to people<sup>39</sup> – to be achieved by infusing architecture with the ‘sensations, immersion, and narrativity’ (Jamieson, Roberts-

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<sup>38</sup> Comte de Lautréamont (1846 – 1870) was the nom de plume of Isidore Lucien Ducasse whose sole book, ‘Les Chants de Maldoror’ (1868-9) significantly influenced the surrealists and situationists.

Hughes 2015) associated with literature. In writing enthusiastically of Coates' narrative-inspired creative approach, Neil Spiller paraphrases what British architect Will Alsop (1947-2018) once happened to tell him: 'Listen, son, if you have to make up stories of Noddy and Big Ears<sup>40</sup> to make an architecture that I like then that's fine' (Spiller 2010).

Klaske Havik's book 'Urban Literacy: Reading and Writing Architecture', explores the interface of architecture and narrative. She makes an 'active use of the literary gaze' to help architects develop sensitivity to 'perceptual and poetic aspects of space' (Havik 2014:27). She has devised a teaching programme to nurture this sensitivity in her architectural students. Havik explores the ideas of several contemporary architectural theorists, including Coates' teacher, Swiss architect Bernard Tschumi (b. 1944), in her book.<sup>41</sup>

Tschumi, impatient with an architecture that was barren, devoid of meaning, anodyne, and failing to challenge, became curious about the architectural potential of fiction. Tschumi envisioned a transgressive architecture with the audacity to address somehow 'big themes' – like intensity, violation, eroticism, life, death (Havik 2014:128); claimed he might be able to achieve this by pillaging stories and film and using what he found in them to inspire the design process<sup>42</sup>, privileging ideas and their story-like content over form (in an interview Tschumi said, 'for me, architecture is never about form, but about ideas and what it can do' (Belogovoski 2004)). On one occasion, Tschumi challenged his Princeton students by giving them Poe's 'Mask of the Red Death' as the brief for their next architectural project. For

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<sup>39</sup> In part a reaction against the austere abstract formalism associated with tight-lipped modernist architecture.

As Neil Spiller argues, 'Modernism put an end to storytelling unless it complied with the global meta-narrative, that of 'machine production is moral, clean, democratic and civilised' – the worst type of myth' (Spiller 2010)

<sup>40</sup> Iconic figures from a series of children's books by author Enid Blyton (1897-1968)

<sup>41</sup> Tschumi was Coates' teacher, and later, a colleague at the AA School in London

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Tschumi's 'Manhattan Transcripts' (1976-1981)

Frederic Jameson, Tschumi 'saw the literary text as a resource to select narrative sequences that could be projected onto a physical site as the basis for architectural space design' (Jamieson, Roberts-Hughes 2015:120).

Sophia Psarra, in 'Architecture and Narrative' (Psarra 2009), while referencing Tschumi<sup>43</sup> (and citing his account of his Parc de La Villette),<sup>44</sup> compares architecture's narrative-like organisation of space to literary narrative ordering. To illustrate her comparison, Psarra looks for fiction writers who are excited about architecture. In passing, Psarra mentions works by Italo Calvino and Umberto Eco but is most interested in works by Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) in his architectural subject matter, especially in the compositional architectonics structuring his literary work. Psarra argues that such 'narrative-like' ordering makes architecture meaningful and its meaning 'available' to others. It is as if, for Psarra, such ordering enables the architect to stage-manage user experience (she instances Le Corbusier's 'promenade architecturale' and Libeskind's Berlin 'Jewish Museum'). Her enquiry – also referencing scenography and film montage – is especially illuminating in her treatment of the narrative aspects of exhibition and museum design.

French philosopher and hermeneuticist Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), in 'Architecture and Narrativity' explores several parallels that can be drawn between the two, e. g., architecture is to space what narrative is to time; the construction of a building in space is compared to recounting or 'emplotment' in time (or, as Ricoeur further clarifies: 'an entanglement between the architectural configuring of space and the narrative configuring of time' (Ricoeur

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<sup>43</sup> Psarra credits him with framing the conceptual and perceptual aspects of space as a 'dominant opposition' – Havik (2014:129) contests this idea is Tschumi's, arguing that he would have picked it up from his reading of Lefebvre

<sup>44</sup> In collaboration with Colin Fournier, Tschumi undertook the massive Parc de la Villette (1984-1987): a regenerative project (on the site of the Paris slaughterhouses and the national wholesale meat market)



2017:31) and so on. But Ricoeur's essay primarily applies his dense theorisation of narrativity, time, and memory (explored in his 'Time and Narrative') to architecture, concentrating especially on architecture's 'mnemonic' function. In addition to consulting texts concerned with architecture's 'narrativity', I explored some of narrativity's 'psychological dimensions. I was particularly excited by an idea that emerges in the work of both Jerome Bruner (Bruner 1986 and Bruner 1990) and Dan McAdams (McAdams 1997) that we 'are the stories we tell', i.e., that stories define who we think we are. I thought this insight might be useful for further research on how we experience architecture. I assumed (perhaps recklessly) that as we experience buildings as entities imbued with their personalities, the right 'stories' (if we could but find them) could somehow be deployed to extricate and articulate the 'essence' of those personalities.

As informative and stimulating as these texts were, I became muddled. Was I exploring architecture in relation to narrativity, meaning, or psychology? I no longer knew how to separate these elements. I'd start developing arguments about one but soon found myself confusing it with arguments about another. I tried focusing on the idea that buildings were 'entities', mute beings trapped in their own silence. In connection with this I realised (but only far later) that, importantly, the narrative may, at best, be a possible interface between buildings and our inchoate, affective experience of them. Moreover, most of the relevant texts I had explored seemed primarily concerned with working out how narrativizing architecture could be used to decipher and stimulate *architectural creativity* rather than to read how we, architects and non-architects alike, *experience* buildings, cities, and places<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> Although a case could be made that the two are interchangeable, many people have written persuasively that the mentality and aesthetics involved in producing artefacts are a very different matter from those in using them (see Gombrich (1960), and (1985) et al)

In his ‘Poetics of Space,’ Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962), although a little too rooted in poetry for my taste (but then I read his book in translation!), showed that phenomenology, and phenomenological accounts, were deeply interested in the ‘how’ of ‘how things speak to us’ (Bachelard 1994:xxviii)), but not in the manner of, say, psychology (‘experiments rather than experience’ (ibid:xxviii)), or of Kantian philosophy (which posits that our inbuilt ‘perceptual-conceptual’ epistemological apparatus orders ‘our’ world via categories of time, space, number, etc.). Eugen Fink (assistant to Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), founder of phenomenology) writes of Kantian philosophy that instead of speaking of ‘*wonder* in the face of the world’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: xiii), it regrettably ‘withdraws from the world [we live in and experience] towards the *unity of consciousness* as the world’s basis’<sup>46</sup> (i.e. Kant’s focuses on reconciling aspects of our epistemological apparatus). Bachelard values the ability of the imagination to seize how we apprehend the world but absolves us of needing to explain imagination’s products ‘psychologically’, treating the ‘imagination as a major power of human nature’ (Bachelard 1994: xxvi) rather than something to rummage for hidden motives. He is also interested in how we may encounter the world afresh, as if suddenly unknown (ibid: xxxi), enthusing that ‘[n]on-knowing is not a form of ignorance but a difficult transcendence of knowledge’ (ibid: xxxiii), a perspective flagged up also by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) in his 1945 essay on Paul Cézanne (‘Cezanne’s Doubt’).

These phenomenological accounts of the world as we live it augmented my interest in the ‘encounter’, how we conduct our encounters, and how this might apply to architecture. I looked at the theological work of German philosopher Martin Buber (1878-1965), whose ‘I and Thou’ (Buber 1970) explores different ways to address the world: as an ‘it’ (or object)

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<sup>46</sup>

and as a ‘you’ (privileging personal address, appeal, dialogue). Buber is described as ‘turning to language, or more precisely the speech act as the fulcrum liberating thought from its solipsistic subject-centeredness’ (Mendes-Flohr 2014:11). I thought (perhaps fancifully) that buildings (as entities) and their respective histories could in some way be ‘addressed’ as ‘you’ (as in ‘what are *you* saying to me?’ and ‘how does what you are saying *feel*?’). The following passage by Buber not only gives a flavour of his ‘dialogic’ approach but also provides a segue to the next stage in my project’s trajectory.

Buber describes a psychotherapist deploying ‘analysis’ to help their patient make modest, incremental advances, and even ‘some repairs’, but that “[a]t best, [the psychoanalyst] may help a diffuse soul [...] poor in structure to achieve at least some concentration and order.” However, such ‘repair work’ does not absolve the psychotherapist of his ‘true task’ (i.e. the ‘regeneration of a stunted centre’), which, according to Buber (1970:179, emphasis added), can *only* be accomplished by the therapist grasping ‘with the profound eye of a physician the buried, latent unity of the suffering soul which can be done only if he enters as a *partner into a person-to-person relationship*, but never through the observation and investigation of an object [...] Again the specific "healing" relationship would end as soon as the patient decided to practice the art of embracing and succeeded in experiencing events also from the doctor's point of view.

In other words, Buber posits a dynamic dialogic ‘person-to-person’ (or ‘person-to-entity’) paradigm featuring sincere mutual reciprocity and openness. Having already read much besides Buber and the texts referenced above, I became utterly dejected. I felt I had lost all sense of how I was to weave initially exciting ideas into any coherent argument or narrative. However, at least momentarily, Buber’s text spoke to me because it introduced a (for me) novel way of addressing feelings and places. Moreover, it mentioned dialogue and healing –

topics of both personal interest and germane to Netherne, my case study. Yet I continued feeling puzzled to the point of being miserable. I wondered whether I shouldn't try approaching this project from somewhere more 'authentic', less remote and theoretical.

What about feelings, my feelings? I thought. Mining, as it were, was my sadness. I still felt completely unable to incorporate ideas in a way that captured my experience of buildings – entities which, when I strip away their familiarity, become such alien, strange and haunting presences. Yet, I still couldn't move forward or backwards. Even in trying to navigate my reaction to buildings, I was also having to deal with frustration, confusion, and depression, i.e., my reaction to my reaction to buildings! I was advised to concentrate my energies by focusing on a specific place rather than lose myself in a bunch of ideas I didn't even have the intellectual or emotional bandwidth to deal with. So, apprehensive of the risks I took, I decided to make a fresh start by using feelings of sadness, alienation, and powerlessness as starting points as portals to a specific appreciation of place. In retrospect, I would have been helped by having a working idea of what I meant by 'feelings', but by then, I was too awash with them to start making fine distinctions. However, Buber's prioritisation of the dialogic remained important. It suggested that knowing a place was not enough to know about it, but it required an extraordinary level of personal engagement, of 'address'.

Architectural historian and cultural critic Jane Rendell (b. 1967) suggests re-examining Freudian free association as a potential model for not only design but also for architectural criticism, history, and theory; that 'working through' the material (embracing free association) could become part of a design and writing process. Rendell describes this as the 'inventive aspect of interpretation'.<sup>47</sup> Without exploring the psychoanalytic theory

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<sup>47</sup> Byatt, Sodr  (1996), cited by Rendell (2019).

underpinning her suggestions, Rendell would also seem to legitimise the inclusion of self-examination in writing about places.<sup>48</sup>

While interpretation can make banal acceptable, inventive interpretation can also liberate and refresh our relationship with the potential meanings buildings and places can hold for us. But as meaning is fragile and unstable, how might we keep our ideas about the world around us alive? Assuming no ‘true’ interpretations of place exist, we can interpret them as we wish. But if this is so, we need ways to challenge our ossified vision and sensibility. Architectural formal innovation may do this, up to a point, but – as Tschumi effectively acknowledges –

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<sup>48</sup> Contemporary geographers and anthropologists take interest in ‘place-writing’ as a way to articulate the character / quality of a place – as giving place a voice in which it may tell its own story. “Recently, geographers and others have attempted to write accounts of place that have some of the syncretic and descriptive characteristics of early regional geographies but are informed by phenomenology, and assemblage theory (among other approaches). They are also marked by an increased willingness to engage in creative writing practices.” (Cresswell, T. 2014). Cresswell instances the place-writing in Patricia Price’s ‘Dry Place’ (Price, P. 2004) where he emphasises that Price, rather than describing in great detail a place that exists “out there, just waiting to be found” instead “insists on the power of narratives [...] in bringing a place into being through story-telling”. To clarify, Cresswell quotes Price herself: “...narratives about people’s places in places continuously materialize the entity we call place. In its materializations, however, there are conflicts, silences, exclusions. Tales are retold and their means wobble and shift over time, Multiple claims are made. Some stories are deemed heretical. The resulting dislocations, discontinuities, and disjunctures work to continually destabilize that which appears to be stable: a unitary, univocal place. And although Price here refers to place, not architecture, I entirely share her concerns: the inherent instability (and unreliability) of narratives and their power to destabilize ‘readings’ and ‘meanings’.

If the Situationists’ suggested that certain buildings and locations were possessed of an intrinsic atmospheric power, ignored or suppressed by convention, subsequent psychogeographers, as well as some academic geographers, have followed this lead, albeit, the geographers have augmented the theory with an emerging analytical framework.

stories that we talk about place can introduce a dynamic relationship between ourselves and our surroundings. Interpretation can be scholarly – disquisitions on stylistic paradigms – but it can also potentially affect us emotionally. For Bachelard, feelings about places come from some Jungian quasi-literary psychic hinterland. Still, there are other ways to prompt us to *feel* places and thereby regenerate the places themselves. This can be achieved through the creative subversive application of narrative<sup>49</sup> to explore, not avoid (or ‘transcend’), the scintillating complexities of material experience.

When we stop ‘understanding’ a language, we open ourselves to hearing its ‘other’ dimensions – its puzzling assembly of sometimes strange and unfamiliar sounds, rhythms, cadences, shapes, and gaps. This project explores Netherne not so much through ‘understanding’ as feelings. It reflects on our natural readiness to ‘interpret’ buildings and places via how they feel without necessarily understanding why or what these buildings and places ‘are’. When we speak of a place that has become important to us, we tend to say it has become meaningful. I believe we do this because the *personal* significance of a place is the significance closest and most intimate to us. But our feelings are also in dialogue (and even vie) with the many other meanings we may give, receive, or learn to give to places. And not infrequently, these ‘other’ meanings take the place of, or blind / deafen us to, those feelings we spontaneously experience about places; psychogeography (as I understand it) is both interpretative and a way to undermine less feeling-driven interpretative modes.

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<sup>49</sup> The value of learning to reconfigure our reality through feelings, understanding, reason, and creativity is echoed by Naomi Stead (2015:47).who writes of an affective understanding of architecture in the writings of Sebald. She refers to ‘buildings acting within the register of human emotions, whether loved or hated, feared or exalted, haunted by ghosts both friendly and malign. This is an understanding of architecture that stands outside the techno-rational framework of modernism, but yet avoids some of the nostalgia and essentialism that attend the dominant alternative, metaphysical, mythopoetic strand of architectural thought.

All buildings embody interpretations of ideas about the world (house design, how we live, schools, how we educate, etc.). Interpreting a building is identifying the interpretations it embodies, its ‘meanings.’ As what a place ‘means’ will influence how we ‘feel towards it (connects meaning to feeling), what Netherne cause me to feel is undoubtedly also related to what Netherne ‘means.’ But before embarking on this exploration of meaning and interpretation, it is worth bearing in mind that psychogeography, my chosen ‘methodology’, may not fit the paradigms of meaning and interpretation discussed here. It may even be that psychogeography, like the very feelings it looks for and (al)locates to/in specific places, is not concerned with ‘meanings’ at all and that *feelings are their own ‘meanings’*. I, however, believe that any discussion of psychogeography, so rooted in the experiential, needs to affront the ‘search for meaning’ that typifies most kinds of reading, especially to help clarify where psychogeography stands regarding the hermeneutics of reading; reading as a ‘meaning orientated’ activity. Certainly, as will become evident in the chapter devoted to psychogeography, in the hands of the Situationists, mood generated by place could subvert meaning (and the relationship between the Situationists’ subversion of meaning and ‘resistant reading’ will become evident later in this chapter). However, even while exploring assigning meanings to place, I will bear in mind the possibility that psychogeography is fundamentally concerned with rejecting meaning and replacing meaning with feeling.

## **2.1 Interpretation**

Interpreting what has been said means understanding it. Interpretation is seldom a supplementary act or prelude to understanding; it is *itself* the act of understanding. I interpret your smile; you are pleased to see me. When you indicate that the salt is ‘over there’, I can’t find it because I *misinterpreted* your instruction. Interpreters translate texts or speech to make their meanings intelligible to those who don’t know the language of the original. The

interpretation I allude to here – instructions and translations – is about grasping *intended* meanings. But meaning can be obscure or hidden. To understand something, I may need to rely on a remembered experience. If you invite me to a ‘wild rumpus,’ I’d recognise your reference to the “Where Wild Things Are” illustration. Unfamiliar with your frame of reference, I wouldn’t know what you meant.

Interpretation is even more complicated when deciphering the meanings of works of architecture. Buildings fulfil many purposes and incorporate many meanings.

Communicating messages or meanings may be just one of their purposes; only exceptionally does a building communicate a single meaning<sup>50</sup>. A building’s ‘messages’ are both complex and clouded (although some buildings bear inscriptions instructing how they are to be used!).

There are many ways to ‘understand’ a building – via beauty, stylistic uniqueness, monumentality, purpose, ‘meaning’<sup>51</sup>, socio-political significance, symbolism, religious or ritual use, design, history, the way it was funded, its transformations, neglect, versatility/adaptability, functionality, design or practical shortcomings, energy efficiency, urban context, whether its façade expresses its internal subdivisions, etc.

## 2.2 The Textuality of Buildings

Each list above offers an interpretational portal, a point of entry for determining what a building ‘means’, treating it as text. The long history of debating whether buildings may be

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<sup>50</sup> Even the ‘classic’ Georgian phone-box carries a plurality of meanings, inspired as it was by John Soane’s Dulwich Picture Gallery mausoleum.

<sup>51</sup> Don Paterson (2011), Scottish poet, dubious about critics and scholars searching for the *unequivocal meaning* of artefacts (and, in his case, of poems), insists “...nobody knows what anything means. *We just make this stuff up...* least of all in a poem of course, where meaning just isn’t ‘in residence’ anywhere! All we have is context and consensus. So, we shouldn’t talk about what poems and images mean us much as *what meanings they*

*generate.*”



‘legible’ has been dated by Wilkinson (2019) back to Pope Gregory I (540-604), who first suggested that visual material is ‘readable’ by describing the church as ‘the bible of the illiterate’. French architect Germain Boffrand (1667 –1754) postulated in 1745 that through their composition, edifices could ‘announce their purpose to the spectator’, but he went further in suggesting that the parts making up a building (even its mouldings) ‘are to architecture what words are to speech’ (Whyte 2006). Vitruvius’s accounts of the architectural orders were gendered. Nazi buildings by architect, Albert Speer, are read as ‘statements’ of fascist power but while described as ‘gigantic and overwhelming, expressing in their size and scale the repressive and terrorist nature of a totalitarian regime’<sup>52</sup> others<sup>53</sup> choose to ‘re-read’ them, as aligning with the German neoclassical tradition (traceable back to Schinkel, via the influence of Speer’s mentor, Heinrich Tessenow). Such differences of opinion show that an architect’s intentions (stated or implied) are an unreliable guide to reading the meaning of a building-as-text and how such meanings are so frequently contested. While I would normally expect to be able to understand what another person is saying to me, I would not necessarily expect to understand the ‘message’ an architect has encoded their building with.

## **2.3 Postmodernism**

From the mid-1960s, the question of architecture’s ‘textuality’ was reheated under the influence of ‘linguistic turn.’<sup>54</sup> which came to architectural debate via semiotics, poststructuralism and the conflation of philosophical trends with architecture. Postmodernist architecture, sceptical of Modernism, was ascendant in the 1960s. Postmodernist architects

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<sup>52</sup> Lehmann-Haupt (1954) cited by Lane (1997).

<sup>53</sup> E.g. architect Leon Krier (b. Luxemburg, 1946)

<sup>54</sup> A term first popularised by American philosopher, Richard Rorty (1931-2002)

moved to challenge Modernism's ascetic, terse formalism, exuberantly loaded, even *larded*, their buildings with stylistic allusions, meanings, and signs. While making their buildings more 'communicative' than their Modernist forebears, incorporating such extravagant and often overtly ludic concoction of signs also made the meanings of their buildings equivocal or contradictory, even neutralising and nullifying these meanings.

So-called 'Deconstructivist' architects, appearing in the 1980s, were very much the cultural progeny of postmodernism, took their theoretical cues from Derrida's deconstructionist mode of criticism, as well as additionally referencing Russian avant-garde constructivism – from which they take their name. French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004)<sup>55</sup> argued that a work of art must be assumed to have multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings (rather than a single 'truth'<sup>56</sup>) but that unearthing these requires becoming aware of its 'underlying,

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<sup>55</sup> Although not broadly relevant to this enquiry, it is noted that the importance to Derrida's thought and its influence on Deconstructivism of the 'metaphysics of presence' which, although traced to Heidegger (2010), seems very much a key feature of the experiential emphasis of phenomenology that originated with Husserl.

<sup>56</sup> Chowdhury writes (2016b) 'More nuanced expositions do not restrict themselves to Derrida, i.e. [for] Gadamer, hermeneutics (attempting to emulate the natural sciences) sought to determine the truth of texts with reference to a meaning that was always the same at all places and. However, Gadamer recognised that our necessary situatedness meant, not just that such a transcendental meaning was beyond us, but it did not ask the correct question—*what were the conditions of interpretation?*'

See also Ross (1994:4): 'The literature on criticism and interpretation of works of art turns almost entirely on this question. There are those who believe that interpretive questions are scientific and descriptive questions, that we should be able, taking the human context into account, looking to both artist and audience, to resolve all interpretive questions satisfactorily in principle. Others are more impressed by the diversity of incompatible interpretations of works of art. At the extreme, we find the plurality of interpretations inherent in art paradigmatic for all understanding, leading both to Gadamer's general hermeneutic epistemological theory, in which all knowledge is treated as analogous to the interpretation of texts, striving among divergent perspectives for an authoritative interpretation, and to Derrida's far more extreme position, in which no standards and norms

unspoken and implicit assumptions'<sup>57</sup> (and of the accretions of critical viewpoints conflated with them). Where earlier, post-modernist architects were concerned with exploring and exploiting the dialectic of function and ornament and drawn to enriching hedonistically their buildings with a surfeit of signs, the Deconstructivists opted instead to subvert Modernist architecture's apparent *structural simplification* by overtly exposing it, eschewing disguise and ornamentation. Deconstructivists prioritised the *process* by showing the architect's overt organisation of chaos. Sabotaging the architectural conventions of harmony and symmetry, the Deconstructivists challenged still further conventional architectural 'legibility'.

Such concept-heavy innovation serves a polemical purpose but may also help architects determine how their building is read and received. By making its design—and therefore its 'meanings'—increasingly challenging, an architect increases its impact and enduring presence by ensuring that jaded, tired, kneejerk simplified 'readings' of their work become impossible.<sup>58</sup> Standard avant-garde provocation, you might say!

## 2.4 Architectural Historical Interpretation

Architectural historian Paulette Singley (2019:9-10) warns that, despite even an architect's best efforts, the 'heroic voice' of the architect is inescapably destined to be undermined and transformed by subsequent readings of their work; that ways of reading buildings alter over time, and that a 'meaning' attributed to a building is inevitably unstable and therefore may not be considered intrinsic. Give a building time enough, and the architect's intentions, where

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can be considered authoritative. Derrida's writing manifests great suspicion of every authority, demanding an unrelenting critical alertness in interpretation and understanding. Such a view of understanding and criticism requires all the resources we can muster and invent and demands endless reinterpretation'.

<sup>57</sup> *deconstruction*: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2019/entries/derrida/>

<sup>58</sup> See work and research by US architects Robert Venturi (1925-2018) and Denise Scott Brown (b. 1931).

discernible, fall silent (this will prove, I think, equally true of our own ‘hero’ of asylum design, and Netherne, George Thomas Hine).

In cataloguing ways to read architecture, Singley defines architecture’s *primary* role as a ‘cultural communicator’ and that we need, therefore, to learn better how to identify and decipher architecture’s ‘theoretical underpinnings with greater precision’. This, she seems to argue (Singley 2019:9), enables us to purge ourselves of ideologically determined perceptions and will thus empower us to (re-)appropriate the very space we share, which, by right, belongs to us all. While most sympathetic to her *revolutionary* call for a popular reappropriation of space, the idea that we can liberate ourselves through learning architecture’s ‘theoretical underpinnings’ does not quite coincide with my focus here, which is to explore more actively idiosyncratic, even perverse, interpretations of buildings to prompt (and better understand) their affective power. For this reason, I ironically explore the ‘theoretical underpinning’ Hine lavished on his asylums – so that this could eventually be subverted and feelings denied at the time be restored – at least to the *memory* of his work.

Although Singley acknowledges that because meaning is culturally constructed, it is mutable, she paradoxically floats the notion that a building may have an intrinsic or more profound meaning and that *this* is enduring meaning, regardless of the vagaries of culture<sup>59</sup>. To illustrate her point, Singley cites Paul MacKendrick’s suggestion (MacKendrick, 1983) that “the key to unlocking architecture’s communicative value [...] remains *embedded in the work itself*, waiting for an interpreter to reveal its *intrinsic mysteries* [my emphases]”. This point of view is suited to deciphering ancient artefacts where advances in *knowledge* are

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<sup>59</sup> Singley cites Paul MacKendrick’s *The Mute Stones Speak: The Story of Archaeology in Italy*, which suggests that the key to unlocking architecture’s communicative value [...] remains embedded in the work itself, waiting for an interpreter to reveal its *intrinsic mysteries*!

indispensable to unlocking the semantic meanings produced by historically remote cultures. Still, I am sceptical of such 'essentialist' claims (that diligence unlocks a building's 'true' meaning) for more contemporary buildings. William Whyte (2006) disputes not only this 'essentialist' claim but, indeed, the general application of the *textual model* to architecture, arguing that if buildings *are* texts, they constitute a *special* kind of text which *cannot* be read in the way that literature, archaeological site, or indeed art is read.

To interpret a building's *raison d'être*, architectural historians frequently ask why it is the way it is, why this style, this form, subdivided in this way, which functions was it intended to serve, exist in this location, or even at all. Like many architectural historians, Andrew Ballantyne seeks to *correct* how a building has been previously interpreted. He argues that the style and meaning of Downton Castle (built 1772-1778) have been *stylistically misconstrued* and that 'the house is often misunderstood as a prophetic anticipation of [a Sir Walter Scott inspired] nineteenth-century Medievalism'. Ballantyne (1989) exhaustively analyses Downton's style, function, and imagery to prove that such a reading is erroneous. He identifies the possible sources of stylistic influence on its designer-owner, Richard Payne Knight, and details the house's stylistic anomalies. He cites Pevsner that Knight's was the first important country house erected in Europe since the Renaissance, which had been designed *from the outset* to have an irregular plan. Despite its anomalous irregularity (which predecessors have attributed to Knight's supposed taste for the Gothic), Ballantyne shows that for Knight, the house's internal asymmetry did not conflict at all with Knight's paradoxical aspiration that Downton be both 'modern *and* classical'. Ballantyne, examining the interior division of the rooms - the axial relationship they have to each other, ease of access between them, ceiling heights, and so on - finds that this defies the 'failed Gothic' verdict often bestowed on Downton. On the contrary, Ballantyne finds that '[t]he planning

derives from organizing conventional rooms in such a way as to ensure their convenient disposition' and was undertaken 'without any obvious adjustment for the sake of the building's external appearance. The plan's originality is not mere wilfulness, but an attempt to follow the principles of Classical architecture as Knight understood them' (Ballantyne 1989). Moreover, the house is not 'merely a jumble of rooms: its exterior [also] has coherence. Knight's real achievement was the establishment of a new ordering principle in architecture, an ordering principle which allowed an irregularity of plan'. Having established Downton's 'classical credentials', Ballantyne confronts the symbolism Payne may have intended via his design for Downton, which Ballantyne thinks is Downton's 'meaning'. Ballantyne deftly references Knight's significant philosophical and classical knowledge, his proclivity for Epicurean philosophy, and his fondness for Lucretius. Ballantyne persuasively reads the castellated walls and other architectural features as *probable* expressions of Knight's erudite philosophical views. Ballantyne's *coup de grace* suggests that in designing Downton, Knight's predilection for prioritising parts over the regularity of the whole is Knight's conscientious translation of a philosophical principle<sup>60</sup> into architectural organisation. Ballantyne's clarity and scholarship make this study an exemplar of a certain kind of historical and philological detective work.<sup>61 62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ballantyne (1989) cites Francis Bacon's Natural Philosophy which holds that if "facts were found which did not agree with the generalisation, then the generalisation would have to be revised". This is contrasted starkly with religious dogma, where if "observed facts conflicted with established teaching, then the observer's senses were deluded, faith being necessary to overcome them."

<sup>61</sup> Found similarly in art history.

<sup>62</sup> Cf *Studies in Iconology* (Panofsky {1939} 2009), proposing three levels of analysis, the third involving interpretation from a historical point of view, looking for social and cultural interrelations that might broaden the meaning. This level sees the art not only as isolated act, but as the product of historical, social and cultural conditions conducive to its creation in answering of the work of art: Why? What does it mean?

## 2.5 Conventional Analysis vs Reading Against the Grain

Persuasively accounting not only for the form and style of Downton but also for what Knight may have intended as the ‘meaning’ of the totality of Downton’s architectural language provides us with the kind of information and insight that enhances our appreciation and understanding of Downton Castle, and intensify encounters with Downton, but leaves the nagging question of whether such analysis closes the door on *other possible meanings* and even other *affective responses* to Downton. What, for instance, might my *experience* of encountering Downton consist of if this building were read contrarily – against *the grain*?

What I am driving here (and with specific reference to Netherne) is that interpreting a building need not be restricted exclusively to philology or *intellectual archaeology*.

Reading ‘against the grain’ is where the reader refuses to be persuaded by a text to ‘go along’ with it, and instead of being lulled into non-reflective compliance, the alert reader staunchly maintains a sceptical critical distance, resisting the text’s spell, its magic, its seduction. I explore reading ‘against the grain’ in connection with architecture<sup>63</sup> because (1) even if a building is not, like, for instance, Downton Castle, a semantically coherent expression, *experiencing* it calls for a meaning of some sort to be articulated, and (2) experiencing a building can be so influenced by its status and design that we are effectively ‘deafened’ to other less explicable, ‘reasonable’, and inchoate affective responses. ‘Philological’ analyses (like Ballantyne’s) are framed within an academic tradition concerned with determining the ‘truth’ of why a building is designed in such a way and, therefore, rightly disregarding the more *peculiar resonances* individual buildings can provoke. But even if difficult, these resonances deserve to be navigated. They show how a sharpened consciousness of them may help us (to adapt Singley’s words) ‘take ownership of the spaces we inhabit.’<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Notwithstanding the problems implicit in treating buildings literally as texts,

<sup>64</sup> Evoking the *détournement* and the *dérive* of the Situationist programme.

## 2.6 Against the Grain

Multidisciplinary theoretician Michel de Certeau SJ (1925-1986) uses quasi-biblical imagery to evoke the revolutionary act of reading against the grain – reading a text *against* the way it had been intended to be read. For Certeau, this is a ‘wayward act’<sup>65</sup>, one which refuses to follow the prescriptive protocols of others and where readers “move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves” (Certeau 2011)<sup>66</sup>. As Roger Chartier points out, Certeau’s text contrasts ‘writing (conservative, durable, and fixed) with reading(s) (always on the order of the ephemeral) [...] [that] purposely frees itself from all the constraints seeking to subdue it’ (Chartier & Gonzalez, 1992:50). And even if the rapacious ‘resistant reading’ to which Certeau alludes is ideologically and well-suited to resist the dominant culture, ‘resistant reading’ may also reframe reading/interpretation as an unshackled, creative, rather than ‘academic’, act. Certeau acknowledges this additional sense in the possibility of ‘articulating a second, poetic geography on top of the geography of the literal, forbidden or permitted meaning’. Unsurprisingly, this resembles ‘psychogeography’, which Certeau was aware of and is subsequently discussed at length in this thesis.

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. Situationist, Guy Debord had his *Mémoires* covered in sandpaper.

<sup>66</sup> The passage is well worth quoting in its entirety: ‘Far from being writers-founders of their own place, heirs to the peasants of earlier ages now working on the soil of language, diggers of wells and builders of houses - readers are voyagers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves. Writing accumulates, stocks up, resists time by the establishment of a place and multiplies its production through the expansionism of reproduction. Reading takes no measures against the erosion of time (one forgets oneself and forgets), reading does not keep what it acquires, or it does so poorly, and each of the places through which it passes is a repetition of the lost paradise’.



In his 'Crusoe's Books: Readers in the Empire of Print, 1800-1918' Bell (2021) explores responses to the challenge of reading 'correctly'. He looks at how books – both as repositories and generators of meaning – can empower, *irrespective* of whether read, misread, abused, or even left unread! Bell shows that texts are traditionally vested with power by pointing out that Mediaeval and Renaissance representations of Saint Jerome (342 / 347 – 420), author of the Vulgate and of many theological and polemical works, show him isolated, surrounded by books, thus making of his cell a locus for *the production of new kinds of knowledge*. Bell observes how, for philosopher and cultural theorist Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), books possessed a *talismanic* power, transcending their authors' intentions. Bell illustrates this by citing from Benjamin's 'Unpacking My Library' (Benjamin 1968/1999:60). Describing the sensation of unpacking his crates, Benjamin writes that 'Everything remembered and thought, everything conscious, becomes the pedestal, the frame, the base, the lock of his property'. Continuing, '[o]ther thoughts fill me than the ones I am talking about – not thoughts but images, memories. Memories of the cities in which I have found so many things: Riga, Naples, Munich, Danzig, Moscow, Florence, Basel, Paris; memories of Rosenthal's sumptuous rooms in Munich ... memories of the rooms where these books had been housed, of my student's den in Munich, of my room in Bern, of the solitude of Iseltwald on the Lake of Brienz, and finally of my boyhood room, the former location of only four or five of the several thousand volumes that are piled up around me. Although Benjamin lists the rich associations his books have for him, he does so *without naming* either their authors or content, crediting their sheer presence with the power to evoke personal memories. This is of great interest to me because, in navigating Netherne emotionally (and psychogeographically), I take liberties with places, reckless with, or heedless of, their established meanings, or those given by others.

An example of resistant hermeneutic strategy Bell discusses<sup>67</sup> is a paradigmatic episode drawn from Daniel Defoe's 'Robinson Crusoe' (1719)<sup>68</sup>, which illustrates not only a text's potential polyvalence but also how *different states of mind, body, and affect* influence the way a text impacts the reader. Again, this is relevant to my project, where emotion and affect are used to interpret and devise meanings of place. Not until one-third of the way through 'Robinson Crusoe' do readers discover Crusoe reading, desperately seeking tobacco to alleviate his distress. Crusoe chances across a Bible, one of the volumes saved from drowning, and starts reading it – an activity for which, Crusoe says, he had neither 'prior leisure' nor 'inclination'. That the experience does not seem to have been entirely satisfying for him he blames on smoking, that his '[h]ead was too much disturb'd with the Tobacco to bear reading'. Crusoe notes that 'only having open'd the Book casually, the first words that occur'd to me were these, Call on me in the Day of Trouble and I will deliver, and thou shalt glorify me' (Defoe [1719] 2021:110). While acknowledging that this passage (drawn from the Psalms) was 'although 'very apt' to his case, it had, at this stage, no profound effect: 'the word had no sound, as I may say, to me; the thing was so remote so impossible in my apprehension of things'. As we would put it, it didn't 'speak' to him. Opening the same Bible, a week later, Crusoe resolves to read it seriously, systematically, and 'impos'd upon myself to read a while every Morning and every Night, not tying myself to the Number of Chapters, but as long as my Thoughts shou'd engage me'. This self-imposed regime leads him to marvel that he can begin 'to construe the Words mentioned above, Call on me, and I will deliver you, in a different Sense from what I had ever done before' (ibid:113). Bell

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<sup>67</sup>In his book, Bell describes a range of *resistant hermeneutic strategies* across nineteenth-century communities, including from emigrants and convicts to polar explorers and troops in the First World War

<sup>68</sup> Crusoe figures repeatedly as a figure, trope, or name of psychogeographical significance (in writers as diverse as Kafka and Patrick Keiller) - a recurrence discussed by Merlin Coverley (2012).

describes Crusoe's *awakening* as an 'exemplary hermeneutic [that] involves a move from the 'casual' and uncomprehending towards a *deeper understanding* and systematic and *submissive internalization* of the text' [my italics]. Bell reminds us that Crusoe, suffering a further bout of depression a year later, turns once again to the Bible 'for a solution to his existential crisis' and this time 'comes routinely to frame his experience in the world in terms of biblical precedent, having learned to submit to the Hand of Providence', indicating, suggests Bell, that Crusoe is in effect teaching *us* how to read.

This episode prompts the following observations: The experience of reading (texts) is *mutable*, contingent on mood, state of mind, etc. Books, material objects with fixed numbers of words, may lead to the erroneous assumption that their influence and meanings are finite. That successive readings are merely stages on the way to approaching/excavating '*authentic truth*.' <sup>69</sup> (Bell's 'submissive internalization': Crusoe teaches us to read through his example of becoming 'submissive' to the text – stepping out of its meaning's way).

That texts, or meaningful objects, have *augural power*; Crusoe seems to believe this in marvelling at how strangely apt the phrase is that he 'randomly' encounters. Certain texts may strike the reader as ambiguous, sometimes capable of being only partially understood (perhaps due to the reader's state of mind or other factors). At such times, the reader forms an *idiosyncratic idea* of what the text is saying, only tenuously connected to the text itself – in other words, *an epistemological free-for-all*.

The reading itself is chaotic and sometimes serendipitous. As Roger Chartier argues, reading 'only rarely leaves traces'<sup>70</sup>; that it is scattered in an infinity of singular acts [...] that easily shakes off all constraints' and that texts are typically apprehended in a fragmentary manner,

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<sup>69</sup> This recalls Paul MacKendrick's notion of an artefact awaiting an interpreter capable of "[revealing] its intrinsic mysteries" *The Mute Stones Speak: The Story of Archaeology in Italy*.

where stories (or narratives stimulated by the material) are pieced together in ways that match the reader's state of mind and remembered experiences (including other experiences of reading) *far more than they match the text* (or indeed the author's intentions!). Reading leaves its traces with strange inconsistencies, which are absorbed for reasons that may often have little bearing on the narrative's relevance or the author's intentions.

'Resistant' readings enable readers to 'scrutinize the beliefs and attitudes that typically go unexamined in a text, drawing attention to the gaps, silences and contradictions.'<sup>71</sup> they *also* enable the reader to embrace a text's intrinsic ambiguity and, in so doing, draw from that text the *rewards* of aberrant readings and fruitful misinterpretation (wilful or otherwise).

## 2.7 Reading Architecture Against the Grain

Such lessons, the lessons of 'reading against the grain', apply to interpreting architecture. Where archival- and evidence-based interpretative strategies aim to establish a building's identity (in terms of the patron or architect's intentions, as well as those other historical factors driving its creation), they by no means exhaust the possibilities for interpretation, reinforcing rather the assumption that [only] *historic meanings endure*<sup>72</sup> On the other hand, such types of reading are, as mentioned, reticent or plain silent about how readings can

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<sup>70</sup> Singley (2019:8) reminds us that Walter Benjamin wrote 'To live is to leave traces' and that [therefore] reading a building necessitates attention to the way 'use-patterns imprint themselves upon spaces and surfaces' (Walter Benjamin, Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Peter Demetz, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich (1978:156)).

<sup>71</sup> Resistant reading: see <https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/teaching-strategies/responding-to-the-readaloud-text/>

<sup>72</sup> As opposed to 'intrinsic meanings' (scepticism associated with Hayden White and like-minded historiographers).

restore a building's quintessential strangeness and how it can be profoundly experienced as an *existential entity*.

Are there a bunch of instructions telling us the best way to interpret (and experience) a building? Instructions regarding interpretation - hermeneutics - started as studying the *rules* applicable to interpreting *biblical* material. The importance of such rules is based on the fact that *laws* (as well as truths) are derived from authoritative texts<sup>73</sup>. Since the Renaissance, interpretative methodologies have also been used to detect textual authenticity, but then broadened to include interpretative techniques in general and then broadened further<sup>74</sup> to put all human texts and modes of communication within the purview of hermeneutics. Although hermeneutics directed ways *religiously sanctionable* meanings can be *reliably derived* from texts of divine origin, buildings are generally not considered of 'divine origin.'<sup>75</sup> Whatever else a building may 'communicate', buildings are not typically sources from which laws are derived<sup>76</sup>. So, how is hermeneutics relevant to architecture? As hermeneutics expanded its

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<sup>73</sup>This is clearly a pressing matter in a world where the Divine provenance (and hence the authority) of religious texts was unquestioned, yet where their *meanings* were ambiguous. Were there reliable methods for determining scripture's intended meaning (i.e., God's intended meaning as captured by a scriptural text: people wanted to know what God wanted of them). In the Jewish tradition hermeneutical rules (*general principles* of biblical interpretation) were formulated which, when applied to scripture, enabled the exegete to steer his (these are typically men) thinking towards a 'correct' interpretative outcome. The usefulness of this is obvious. Jewish religious observance and its legal system depend on correct, unequivocal interpretations of divinely ordained rules and laws (thereby categorising moral and ritual behaviour as right / correct or wrong / incorrect). Additionally, as exegetical rules themselves needed a consensus to hold them valid, they had also to show they too were of scriptural provenance, i.e., divinely ordained.

<sup>74</sup> By Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), theologian and philosopher

<sup>75</sup> Although there exist (rare) exceptions, like the first Temple in Jerusalem.

<sup>76</sup> But are the outcome of societies that are regulated by complex behavioural rules.

remit, a fundamental shift occurred, from understanding not merely the exact words and their objective meaning to an understanding of the writer's distinctive character and point of view' (Ramberg and Gjesdal, 2005). K. M. Newton (Newton 1989:125) quotes French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1913 – 2005) to clarify contemporary hermeneutical polarities: 'According to the one pole, hermeneutics is understood as the manifestation and *restoration of a meaning* addressed to me in the manner of a message, a proclamation, or as is sometimes said a *kerygma*; according to the other pole, it is understood as a *demystification*, as a *reduction of illusion*'. In place of 'interpretation as restoration of meaning', Ricoeur opposes 'interpretation according to what I call collectively the school of suspicion', which is concerned with the 'reduction of the lies and illusions of consciousness' (Ricoeur, 1970:27 & 35). The founding fathers of the hermeneutics of suspicion are (Ricoeur claims) Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. While Gadamer sets out to discover 'truth' in a text, the hermeneutics of suspicion seeks to reveal 'truth as lying'. What links Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud as advocates of a hermeneutics of suspicion, Ricoeur argues, is that they 'present the most radically contrary stance to the phenomenology of the sacred and to any hermeneutics understood as the *recollection of meaning* and as the *reminiscence of being*.' (Ricoeur 1970:35)<sup>77</sup> [my italics]

Ricoeur's fascinating formulation pits two different hermeneutics against each other: one, the former, *discloses* an essential (or intrinsic) underlying meaning, the other, ever-suspicious of surface, uncovers the truth which a statement intended to conceal, i.e., that X meant Y.

Freud's analyses of his patients' behaviour is replete with discoveries of 'real' (hidden) meanings – hidden perhaps even to the patient. A hermeneutic of suspicion, which reveals that which was not supposed to be apparent, which was suppressed or repressed, has clear,

<sup>77</sup> For the sake of completeness, Habermas's critique of the apoliticality of the hermeneutic debate should be

subversive and *revolutionary potential*, and although all hermeneutics has an epistemological dimension (how we know what we know), its negative form was central to Freud's methodology and leaks, via Freud, into psychogeography, and thence to the emotional reading of place.

Architectural historian William Whyte (b. 1975) argues that architecture should be studied *not* for its meaning but for its *meanings*, deploying a Bakhtian<sup>78</sup> model to argue for architecture-as-process where 'buildings evolve from concept to construction to interpretation' (Whyte 2006:173) through multiple transpositions; and second, because this (Bakhtian) model helps clarify 'the relationship among the architect, the architecture, and their interpreters.' (ibid:173) To clarify further what he means by 'transpositions', Whyte's associate Mitrovic (Mitrovic 1993) invokes the idea of 'translation', where an initial architectural concept is *translated* from 'idea to plan, from plan to drawing, from drawing to building, from building to use, and from use to interpretation by users and viewers.' (Whyte 2006:172)

Like Whyte, it is by now clear that I am sceptical (or at least agnostic) about buildings being able to embody single unequivocal 'truths.'<sup>79</sup> but I am also worried that Whyte seeks to locate

<sup>78</sup> Literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975) denied the transparency of language and explored texts as natural polyphonic, in dialogue with the languages they incorporate: 'word is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it; the word is shaped in dialogic interaction with an alien word that is already in the object. A word forms a concept of its own object in a dialogic way' (Mambrol 2018).

<sup>79</sup> Chartier's statement (1992:50) is characteristic of this approach: Whether it is a newspaper or Proust, the text has a meaning only through its readers; it changes along with them; it is ordered in accordance with codes of perception that it does not control. It becomes a text only in its relation to the exteriority of the reader, by an interplay of implication and ruses between two sorts of "expectation" in combination: the expectation that organizes a readable space (a literality), and one that organizes a procedure necessary for the actualization of the work (a reading). [Practice 170-71]' – On the reading-writing duo in this book see the article by Anne-Marie

a building's 'true' meanings, which I am equally sceptical about. He writes (2006:17, emphasis added), for instance, that 'historians need to go beyond the study of individual buildings and parts of individual buildings. If their meaning is *truly* to be *uncovered*, we need to explore the evolution of the building, from concept to construction and beyond. This will be done by exploiting every possible piece of evidence: written, pictorial, and material.' (ibid:174) Adding, '[it] seems [...] reasonable to acknowledge this variety of meanings. A *true interpretation* of the building will take all these different versions and translations into account.' (ibid:177)

My unease with Whyte's comments is because they negate the value of a deliberately *disruptive* interpretative stance (based on abundant/excess of the meaning) and why I explore how subversive, aberrant, ambiguous (and even *mistaken*) readings<sup>80</sup>, (including those that infuse their object of understanding with fiction) may help reveal or capture emotive dimensions of Netherne<sup>81</sup> or indeed of other places (rather than some demonstrable but ultimately experientially redundant 'truth'). In a sense, subversive readings can annul persuasive interpretations that prevent a more authentically felt response towards (and interpretation of) Netherne. This brings us back to Certeau's formulation of 'articulating a second, *poetic* geography' and the history, intentions, and benefits of such an approach.

## 2.8 Reading the 'Not There'

To read against the grain is understood as reading in ways sensitized to the unspoken social, political, and cultural codes concealed within the background of a text's construction, but does it have other uses? What else might be derived from reading buildings *subversively*, Chartier and Jean Hlbrard, "L'invention du quotidien, une lecture, des usages," Le Debat49 (March-April 1988: 97-108).

<sup>80</sup> Perhaps like madness itself?

<sup>81</sup> Caldwell-Harris, C. L. (2019)



*aberrantly, ambiguously, or mistakenly?* In other words, by applying to an object or building a narrative essentially foreign, and not in any way pretending to be intrinsic, to it. In the following passage from his ‘Possible Castles’, Gordon Mills (2014) cites an account by Werner Heisenberg<sup>82</sup> of what Niels Bohr<sup>83</sup> said to him when together these two eminent physicists visited Kronborg Castle<sup>84</sup>. According to tourist literature, Kronborg is an enticing site of ‘magnificent parties, dramatic events, tragedies, intrigues, trade, war and love, ever since the Danish king Frederick II let [sic] the castle [be] built in the late 1500s [the tourist is invited to] explore the castle with its tall towers, nooks and crannies and – more than anything – feel the blast from past parties and the decadent dramas that took place here.’<sup>85</sup>

Heisenberg recalls Bohr, remarking, ‘Isn’t it strange how this castle changes *as soon as one imagines* that Hamlet lived here? As scientists, we believe that a castle consists only of stones and admire how the architect put them together. The stone, the green roof with its patina, and the wood carvings in the church constitute the whole castle. None of this should be changed

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<sup>82</sup> German theoretical physicist (1901-1976), pioneer of quantum mechanics

<sup>83</sup> Danish physicist (1885-1962), Nobel laureate for foundational work on quantum physics

<sup>84</sup> This much-debated meeting between Bohr, a Dane of Jewish extraction, and Heisenberg, a German working with the Nazis, concerned Germany’s future development of an atomic weapon.

(Huxen 2011): ‘It is fitting that historians have not been able to reconstruct with complete precision the events, discussion, and human elements of the Bohr-Heisenberg meeting in September 1941. This confused conversation shaped and impacted the thinking of scientists regarding an atomic bomb on both sides. The meeting may be a parable of our efforts to know ourselves and our universe, our exterior and interior worlds, as we grasp towards the nature of truth. Two men who were masters at understanding the outside, physical world, and who knew each other extremely well, were unable to communicate their inner motives and desires in the political world of men. As men, the meeting was the ultimate lynchpin of their relationship and ideas’.

<sup>85</sup> *Kronborg Castle* (no date) *kongeligeslotte.dk*. Available at: <https://kongeligeslotte.dk/en/palaces-and-gardens/kronborg-castle.html> (Accessed: October 17, 2023).

by the fact that Hamlet lived here, yet it is completely changed. Suddenly, the walls and the ramparts speak a different language. The courtyard becomes an entire world; *a dark corner reminds us of the darkness of the human soul*, and we hear Hamlet's 'To be or not to be.' Yet all we know about Hamlet is that his name appears in a thirteenth-century chronicle. No one can prove that he lived here. But everyone knows the questions Shakespeare had him ask, the human depths he was made to reveal, and so he had to find a place on earth, here in Kronborg.'

Bohr acknowledges the castle's banal materiality (its stone, the green roof with its patina, the wood carvings) but remarks, enraptured, how *wholly and strangely* the castle is *transformed*. He attributed its 'radical transformation' to *imagining*<sup>86</sup> Kronborg as Hamlet's residence, even though there is no proof this was so. Bohr feels that as this transformation – where 'walls and the ramparts speak a different language,' and a dark corner reminds us of the darkness of the human soul' is based on a mere fiction, it should not 'by rights' occur – yet it does. In other words, Bohr, the scientist, marvels at the irrational yet transformative power of *imagination to undermine and dramatize factual materiality* (an important psychogeographical lesson).

Concerning this same passage, cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner (1915-2016) remarks how 'we create products of the mind, how we come to experience them as real, and how we manage to build them into the corpus of a culture' (Bruner and Seymour, 1986:45) and stresses that it is more important to 'understand the ways human beings construct their worlds [...] than to establish the *ontological status* of the products of these processes' (my emphasis; Bruner, Seymour 1986:46). As a psychologist, Bruner is inevitably more interested in such

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<sup>86</sup> This references Foucault who looks forward to a wholly 'creatively imaginative' criticism (Frichot and Stead, 2022:16).

ideas and the mechanics of how they come about than in assessing their relative or objective ‘reality’. Regarding the identical passage, geographer Yi-Fu Tan (1930-2022) asks, ‘What gives a place its identity, its aura?’ and ‘How can *mere legend* haunt Kronborg Castle and impart a mood that infiltrates the minds of two famous scientists?’ (Tuan 1977:4-5 emphasis added) For different reasons, both Bruner and Tuan are interested in the connection between identity and narrative. For Bruner, the sense of self, and for Tuan, the sense of place. Psychogeographic accounts, from the Surrealists onwards, heavily rely on narrative to convey meaning, including emotional meaning, and link them to such ideas.

Now, while Bohr’s exchange with Heisenberg has a familiar sitcom-like absurdity of eavesdropping on two genius-level males scratching their heads over the inscrutable workings of the down-to-earth guy living next door, their encounter is also redolent of common touristic encounters where experiencing a place is ‘enhanced’ by fattening the tourist’s imagination with myths, legends, and rumours. While this phenomenon may seem a far cry from ‘resistant’ readers stripping texts bare to reveal their hidden, manipulative agendas, I don’t believe it is. ‘Resistant’ readers will approach a text often from a pre-formulated ideological position – i.e., a ‘narrative’ – and seek to adduce proof from textual evidence to support an ideologically-informed misreading of the text. In other words, they, like tourists, seek confirmation of cherished pre-formed narratives from an object (text, place). Their intentions differ, of course: the tourist wants to enhance enjoyment, effectively intensifying the encounter by ‘reading’ into the site the (imagined) glorious or bloody resonances generated by travel guidebook ‘history’; the ideologue scours the text for what he or she is convinced is its underlying and possibly sinister ‘truth’, to validate a political worldview. In both cases, their respective narratives focus the mind, order the ‘evidence’, and skew the ‘experience’.

Whether relating to buildings, places, or texts, narratives<sup>87</sup> transform how these objects are read. Conservative narratives may enrich experience but usually affirm what is expected, consistent with the ‘given’ history attached to the place of experience. Subversive narratives clash with the history or myths attached to the object of experience to undermine them. They are reconfiguring ‘underlying reality’ to conform to an ‘ideological’ perspective. In both cases, narratives are not only interpretative tools or lenses, but they also force the experience of place to line up with assumptions – they skew the way place is experienced. Accepting this is so, it may be that some narratives, inflecting experience in unforeseen ways, reframe the object of experience (the place) so radically that the experience of it is liberated from ‘territorialised’ ideas (Arnold and Ballantyne, 2004:29) and bring to light quite unexpected or novel insights<sup>88</sup>.

To summarise, encountering a building may stir feelings and personal memories, as Netherne does for me. Philological analyses seek to unravel the truths an architectural ‘text’ was *intended* to embody rather than address the peculiar resonances that are part of *experiencing* it. Resistant reading hunts out a text’s contradictions and omissions, often to uncover evidence supporting an ideological agenda. While discussions concerning ‘resistant reading’ have shown the *usefulness* of reading subversively, they have been less concerned with assessing the potential value of aberrant, ambiguous, and even *mistaken* readings (which particularly interest me and I think are of value to psychogeography). Resistant reading

<sup>87</sup> As can irony and humour...

<sup>88</sup> (I mention ‘territorialised’ ideas because I am wary of ideas that, having become familiar to the point of invisibility, thereby covertly refract or distort experience). In explaining the application of Deleuzian ideas of territorialisation and deterritorialization to architectural history, Andrew Ballantyne helpfully instances the idea of ‘home’ which, taken and isolated from personal experiences of ‘home’, is abstracted (deterritorialised) and then erroneously reapplied as a category – perhaps ‘rehoused’ we might say! – in, for example, “the homes of sub-Saharan chiefs, or ancient Greeks” (Ballantyne’s examples)).

shares common ground with psychoanalysis in that both searches to reveal and name what exists but is concealed (whether through repression or suppression). This, however, is not the case with more open-ended experiential encounters where I ask what a place means to me, and how does it make me feel? However, although resistant reading does not set out to interrogate the intensely personal emotions and affect that encounters with place may provoke, it may open a portal for them by challenging dominant conventionalised readings.

There is a potentially liberating effect in not applying an evidential paradigm to encounters and being more open to what arises (Tuan). Developing a sharper sensitivity may help us learn how to read architecture and urban space resistantly and thereby make room for, as Singley puts it, to take more thorough emotional and effective ownership of the spaces (and their meanings) that we 'inhabit'. The sole method purporting to favour an 'open interpretation' of places – incorporating emotional, affective, atmospheric, and narrative responses – is psychogeography. The question arises whether or how psychogeography can really do what it claims, whether it has a method for doing so, and whether it is intrinsic to, or even necessary for, psychogeography.

## Chapter Three: Psychogeography: Jeopardising Meaning

*I examine 'resistant reading' – not of texts but of the built environment (referred to in the preceding chapter). I explore the origins, history, and current uses of psychogeography – effectively, resistant reading – tracing its beginnings with the surrealists via a more cynical iteration, as practised by their successors, the Situationist International. Psychogeography, a subversive practice, was intended from its inception to challenge the conventional meanings of place. The originators of psychogeography, influenced by their Freudian sympathies, sought to identify urban space's supposedly hidden, repressed meanings (to reveal a place's culturally and politically repressed 'unconscious'). Although the Situationists dropped psychogeography from their revolutionary programme, the practice lingered, finding traction as politicised avant-garde art practice, academic methodology, and a quasi-mystic ritual. This chapter critiques the work of several current or recent practitioners of psychogeography.*

Is philosophy's role not to bring about a fuller perception of reality by a certain reorientation (détournement) of our attention? This would involve directing attention away from (détourner) the practical interests of the world and returning to what, in practical terms, has no function. The conversion of attention would be philosophy itself.<sup>89</sup>

### 3.1 What is Psychogeography?

In this project, in pursuing an emotionally- and affectively-led navigation of Netherne, I may have to subordinate what I *know* about a place to become more keenly conscious of what I *feel* about it. As exploring feelings which places 'have' or arouse qualifies my enquiry as 'psychogeographic,' I, therefore, situate my project within a 'psychogeographic tradition' as

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<sup>89</sup> Translated by Sheringham (2009:83) from Fernando Gil, *Traité de l'évidence* (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 1983) p84: "Le rôle de la philosophie ne serait-il pas ici de nous amener à une perception plus complète de la réalité par un certain détournement de notre attention? Il s'agirait de détourner cette attention du côté pratiquement intéressant de l'univers et de la retourner vers ce qui pratiquement, ne sert à rien. Cette conversion de l'attention était la philosophie même" Henri Bergson *La perception du changement*, in *La pensée et le mouvant*, Bergson, *Œuvres*, pp. 1374-1374, soulignés de Bergson.

psychogeography has, from its inception, been open to treating the moods and atmospheres which would seem to inhere in places.

Its surrealist roots make psychogeography at least a century-old practice. Coverley (2010: 15) argues (unconvincingly, in my opinion<sup>90</sup>) for an essential *Englishness* of psychogeography, finds its origins in works by Daniel Defoe (c. 1660-1731), notably his ‘Journal of the Plague Year’ (1722) and the already-mentioned ‘Robinson Crusoe’ (1719). Yet notwithstanding claims for its vintage, psychogeography and methodology remain vague and cry out to be better defined or understood. In this chapter, I trace its historical and conceptual origins, its connections with psychotherapy, explore some of its implications and several current examples of its use, and explore why my interest in an emotional and affective experience of Netherne, reading and writing it, may be described as ‘psychogeographic’.

Does psychogeography consist solely in *acknowledging* a place’s particular emotional plenitude? Would this rely on just one person *acknowledging* it, or does it require a validating critical mass of opinion? Is psychogeography a broader ‘interpretative’ methodology exploring feelings associated with jobs, communities, neighbours, etc.? Or does psychogeography mean reading precisely *place* – perhaps subversively and upsetting its established meanings? Does ‘psychogeography’ justify playing fast and loose with customary meanings of a place (as to some extent I do with Netherne in chapter six) – and if so, how, and with what justification? Is psychogeography a way of de-familiarising a place to help us see it ‘for real’, with fresh eyes, unblinded by habit? Or does psychogeography concede that to understand?<sup>91</sup> Does a place require familiarity with it? Is psychogeography concerned with

<sup>90</sup> Although beyond the scope of this project, to explore, Psychogeography sometimes seems to inherit the ‘Romantic Fallacy’.

<sup>91</sup> Wittgenstein argues that meaning is inextricably connected with use and that, in effect, we derive meaning from words, places, things, or actions through being exposed to how they are used, i.e. our knowledge (or

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wilfully *misreading* a place or reading it *more deeply*? When an already familiar place is wilfully misread or re-read, its meaning seems to change; was this ‘new’ meaning there all along, just waiting to be discovered? And does transforming a place’s meaning (as happens in dreams) disturb or excite, and attract?

### 3.2 Surrealism

The surrealists believed it did. For them, any interpretation of the world that overlooks all that is unexpected, strange and inexplicable betrays an impaired perspective, a blindness imposed by bourgeois repressiveness that puts us all out of touch with desire, a denial of human desire and human nature, *per se*. The surrealists felt that seeing things habitually, slavishly, occludes<sup>92</sup> that more profound reality, *la vie réelle* (Breton 1988:311; Sheringham 2009:68), where we embrace and celebrate our dreams, re-charge consciousness, reconnecting it to our repressed desires. The surrealist project intended to liberate humanity from a dismally attenuated existence (‘waiting rooms where your turn never comes’ (Sheringham 2009:67)). Even from this brief introduction, it is possible to detect psychogeography’s bias towards the *transformative*.

#### 3.2.1 André Breton’s Manifesto

In his first *Surrealist Manifesto* (1924), poet André Breton (1896-1966), leader and chief ideologue of the Surrealists, bleakly evokes existence’s frustrated potential and diminished understanding) of them is context- and use-dependent. Wittgenstein (2014:43) explains that the meaning of a word ‘is its use in the language’ the use of the word is, in practice, its meaning. This is connected with the emphasis on ‘description alone’, for the use of a word is available for description; it is not an entity or process that is hidden from us, as were the ‘meanings’ (i.e., objects) of the *Tractatus*. It may seem obvious that in describing how a word is used, we describe its meaning; and that knowing what it means is the same as knowing how to use it.

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<sup>92</sup> Cf. the Kabbalistic theory of *netzitzot* (sparks) and shells (*k’lipot*).



vitality. He describes imagination, ‘which [in childhood] knew no bounds [but which] is henceforth allowed to be exercised only in strict accordance with the laws of an arbitrary utility; it is incapable of assuming this inferior role for very long and, in the vicinity of his twentieth year, generally prefers to abandon man to his lustreless fate [...] Though he may later try to pull himself together on occasion, having felt that he is losing by slow degrees all reason for living, incapable as he has become of being able to rise to some exceptional situation such as love, he will hardly succeed. This is because he henceforth belongs body and soul to an imperative practical necessity which demands his constant attention” and that even the exceptional will “on no account” be seen or seized as an opportunity for “salvation.”’ (Breton 1992:87-88) Opposing the servitude to ‘imperative practical necessity’, Surrealism<sup>93</sup>, dating from around 1920, is arguably the most influential of all twentieth-century avant-garde art movements. Surrealism sought to revolutionise not only art but life itself (by ‘collapsing’ the gulf between them). The surrealists looked forward to freeing us from the psychic shackles imposed on us by capital. They sought to incorporate the ‘power of the unconscious’ into a revolutionary artistic programme involving novel approaches to the visual arts and literature via juxtaposition, decontextualization, automatism and through linking *subjective reality* to *external reality*. Surrealism shared with Marxism the preoccupation with, and ambition for, totality – the total person (‘l’homme total’ Sheringham 2009:72). Surrealism believed that life had been artificially divided, leaving us estranged, cut off, alienated from our psychic realities.

Breton writes, ‘Everything leads us to believe that there exists a certain point in the spirit at which life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, the high and the low, cease to be perceived as contradictory. Now it

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<sup>93</sup> ‘Surrealism’ – *beyond reality* – is a neologism coined in 1917 by French poet, Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-

is vain to search for any other motive in surrealist activity than the hope of discovering that point.’ (Breton 1972:123-124 (cited Plant 2002:48)) Once again, ‘l’homme total’ of Marx and the advocacy of an all-inclusive existence that outlaws nothing.

### 3.2.2 A Surrealist ‘Aesthetic’

Influenced by Freud’s views on dreams and their repression, Breton and the Surrealists were drawn to an aesthetic of the uncanny (Freud 2007), the strange, the haunted, and the ‘random,’<sup>94</sup> believing that these are all the hallmarks of the unconscious and that pursuing this *aesthetic in art and in life* granted access to an uncensored world of dreams and desire.

Provocative, irrational, and enigmatic, the surrealist aesthetic was intended to elude formal, rational, or academic interpretations, which they disparaged as belonging to a ‘cult of reason’ that privileged ‘utilitarianism, positivism, habit and routine, maturity, self-improvement, getting-on-in-life’ (Sheringham 2009:68) and which represented those forces of societal control and domination occluding ‘real life’ (‘la vie réelle’). The power of consciousness and culture by ‘reason’ (‘the reign of logic’<sup>95</sup>) denies humanity the liberty it could only dream of, a ‘lost’ reality generally accessible only to children and the insane (Frederick 1973:127-34).

Breton, appropriating Freud’s theories and even briefly corresponding with him (ibid:127-34), argues that dream errors and slips of the tongue in everyday speech were unexploited resources granted to us by the unconscious. It has been argued that Psychoanalysis itself was

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<sup>94</sup> An important technique for subsequent psychogeography, and which has philosophical implications.

<sup>95</sup> Manifesto: We are still living under the reign of logic: this, of course, is what I have been driving at. But currently logical methods are applicable only to solving problems of secondary interest. The absolute rationalism that is still in vogue allows us to consider only facts relating directly to our experience. Logical ends, on the contrary, escape us. It is pointless to add that experience itself has found itself increasingly circumscribed. It paces back and forth in a cage from which it is more and more difficult to make it emerge.

a reaction against the prioritisation of reason, a reaction against Cartesianism (Spence 1988:3). This belief seems to be manifest in Freud's statement that 'the psychic world of human beings extended beyond consciousness, and indeed that much of what concerns us is unconscious' (Thomas 2009:52).

To challenge waking life's subjugation of sleeping life (i.e., the 'unconscious'), Plant (2002:49) argues that the Surrealists championed 'hysteria, dreams, the irrational, chance, 'amour fou', 'humour noir', revolution, and convulsive beauty [the final line of Breton's novel, 'Nadja']. Plant claims that surrealism's early experiments in automatism in writing and painting mimicked Freud's use of free association and were based on the idea that an induced spontaneity could resist control - including self-control and self-censorship - and overcome the barriers to new forms of expression and of an otherwise obstructed reality. Such experiments were not entirely unconnected with Surrealism's inspirational predecessors, Dada and Futurism, for whom, as Plant (2002:40-41). suggests, 'the products of imagination [served] as propaganda of the possible.' Plant points out that Dada's Tristan Tzara recommended (Tzara 2013:39, cited Plant 2002:43) that aspiring poets cut up newspapers, shake out decontextualised words from a bag, and work with random results.

Although typically identified as an *art* movement, Michel Foucault credits Breton with far more, helping to break down the borders separating ethnography, linguistics, psychoanalysis, myth, religion, and aesthetics. It could be added that Surrealism sets out to deliver an epistemological wager<sup>96</sup> via its focus on deliberately destabilising meaning, which it does to recover the experiential sphere ('la domaine de l'expérience'<sup>97</sup>) facilitating access to the

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<sup>96</sup> Michel Foucault's transcription of the 'logic' informing René Magritte's famous 'Pipe' image makes for interesting reading in this context (see, Foucault 1976).

<sup>97</sup> Foucault's assessment of Breton – Foucault's *dicts et écrits* I, 557 (Sheringham 2009:68)

‘ontologically productive’ (Sheringham 2009:81). Sheringham (ibid:78) shrewdly observes that ‘resisting the meaning of the everyday is predicated on a belief that *mystery* is central to our understanding of lived reality.’<sup>98 99</sup>

Surrealism subverted our mundane grasp of meaning to mirror that disturbing irruption of the ‘unconscious’ into everyday life. Indeed, Breton’s ‘L’Esprit Nouveau’ and visit to Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre constitute experiments to test what remains when ‘conventional meaning and purpose are stripped away’ (Sheringham 2009:66), and ‘meaning’ is reconciled with the subconscious. In subverting the conventional meanings of familiar everyday objects and places, the surrealists were, in effect, upsetting their context - familiarity is dependent on seeing things in their habitual places, in context. Undoing this constitutes Surrealism’s epistemological challenge.

### **3.2.3 Context and Meaning**

US philosopher Kent Bach (Garcia-Carpintero and Kolbel, 2014:153), reminding us of the role ‘context’ has in our ability to comprehend, argues that ‘[a]ll sorts of things are dependent on context in one way or another. What is appropriate to wear, give or reveal depends on the context. Whether or not it is all right to lie, harm, or even kill depends on the context [...] It is commonly observed that the same sentence can be used to convey different things in different contexts. That is why people complain when something they say is ‘taken out of context’ and insist that it be ‘put into context’, because ‘context makes it clear’ what they meant. Indeed, it is practically a platitude that what a speaker means in uttering a certain

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<sup>98</sup> Sheringham (2009:78) refers to Breton and Benjamin opposing Aragon’s mystery for mystery’s sake / an aestheticized magic (‘le magie quotidienne’).

<sup>99</sup> Benjamin (1999:227) argues that: ‘histrionic or fanatical stress on the mysterious side of the mysterious takes us no further; we penetrate the mystery only to the degree that we recognise it in the everyday world, by virtue of a dialectical optic that perceives the everyday as impenetrable, the impenetrable as everyday’.

sentence and how her audience understands her, ‘depends on the context’. But what does that amount to, and to what extent is it true? Philosophers and linguists often say that certain words (and sentences containing them) are context-sensitive, that what they express is context-dependent, as if it is perfectly obvious what context-dependence is. But it is not’.

That meaning is context- (and therefore, use-) dependent explains why even when something is moved, we may have trouble recognising it, and being unexpectedly confronted by it in its new place may make us uncomfortable. Certain views of language suggest similar context-dependence and these views explain that we ‘learn’ the world, its things, its language, and its behaviours, etc., by being attentive to context. In his ‘Confessions’ Augustine explains how he learned to speak as a small child by attending to the contexts in which certain words were used. Augustine explains, ‘I did not always manage to express the right meanings to the right people. So, I began to reflect. When my elders named some object and accordingly moved towards something, I saw this, and I grasped that the thing was called by the sound they uttered when they meant to point it out. Their bodily movements showed their intention, as it were the natural language of all peoples: the expression of the face, the play of the eyes, the movements of other parts of the body, and the tone of voice which expresses our state of mind in seeking, having, rejecting, or avoiding something. Thus, as I heard words repeatedly used in their proper places in various sentences, I gradually learnt to understand what objects they signified; and after I had trained my mouth to form these signs, I used them to express my desires.’ (Augustine 2015:1,8)

This passage is referred to by Wittgenstein (2014),<sup>100</sup> who introduced to philosophy his concept of the ‘language game’, where the importance of context is paramount. He writes, ‘For example, in one language game, a word might be used to stand for (or refer to) an object,

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<sup>100</sup> Wittgenstein is of the same generation as the proponents of the Dada movement.

but in another, the same word might be used for giving orders, or for asking questions, and so on. The famous example is the meaning of the word ‘game’. We speak of various kinds of games: board games, betting games, sports, and war games. These are all different uses of the word *games*.’ Wittgenstein also gives the example of ‘Water!’, which can be used as an exclamation, an order, a request, or an answer to a question. The word’s meaning depends on the language game in which it is used. Another way Wittgenstein makes his point is by suggesting that the word ‘water’ has *no meaning* apart from its use within a language game. One might use the word as an order to have someone else bring you a glass of water. But it can also warn someone that the water has been poisoned. The word may even be used as code by secret society members (Wittgenstein 1958). This is not the context to explore such matters in depth. Still, it is helpful to recognise that surrealism and its predecessor, Dada, were emerging at precisely the same time that such philosophical notions were stirring – notions which, by accounting for the creation of meaning via language, implied the potential for destabilising meaning.<sup>101</sup>

Reflecting their campaign to problematize meaning through deranging context, the surrealists’ artistic output intended to disturb. Challenging our reliance on conventionalised meanings had social, religious and ideological ramifications. Through undermining the familiar, the Surrealists believed they could make reality porous to what is repressed; re-writing context to yield different, novel, even paradoxical meanings would create a ‘pipeline’ to the unconscious.<sup>102</sup>

### 3.2.4 Breton’s Novel, ‘Nadja’: Chance and Feelings of Place

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<sup>101</sup> Perhaps (also) by introducing ‘chance’ to upset ‘order’.

<sup>102</sup> re-writing reality (as if subverting the subtitles of a film) was (a) possible and (b) revolutionary and (c)

psychologically authentic; true to the (inner) life.

In Breton's novel 'Nadja' (1928), a 'surrealist romance', he narrates a perplexing series of events relating to a mysterious muse-like heroine. Yet he does so in a studiedly dispassionate, even clinical tone<sup>103</sup>, imitating the idiosyncratic tone of Freud's case histories. The quasi-clinical tone in Breton deploys in 'Nadja', makes the novel's narrative voice documentary-like and – true to surrealist intentions of integrating the real with the imaginary – makes the reader unsure whether 'Nadja' is fiction or not. The 'literary' tone Freud uses for his case histories (which Breton found both beguiling and useful) provoked an outcry that was, as it were, right up the surrealists' street. The medical establishment mercilessly ridiculed Freud's case study of Dora, and its first review was condemned as 'a form of mental masturbation, an immoral misuse of his medical position' (Jones 1974:383).

Breton's 'novel' tells of his (real) encounter in the streets of Paris with an enigmatic woman who fascinated him. Highly atmospheric, 'Nadja' is peppered with chance events and discoveries and supercharges the banal with mystery, making real objects and places pregnant with elusive meanings: a woman's glove (Breton 1999:56), the name of a local shop ("Bois Chabbons" (Breton 1999:27)), and a municipal statue that has "always fascinated" yet "induced unbearable discomfort" (Breton 1999:24). While there is a *sense* of things being connected, Nadja's narrator (also 'Breton') 'find[s] it impossible to establish a rational correlation between them.' (Breton 1999:59) In Nadja there are absurdities too. The narrator and Nadja are dining in the 'Restaurant Delaborde' but their hapless waiter, besotted with Nadja, 'spills wine around our glasses' and, 'taking infinite precautions', nonetheless breaks eleven plates (Breton 1999:98). But Nadja is also notably an *atmospheric evocation of place*, which is why it plays so influential a role in the birth of psychogeography. Its backdrop,

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<sup>103</sup> Breton initially trained but did not in fact qualify as a doctor. It is possible that his admiration for Freud led him to appreciate the greater credibility a 'documentary' style could command (cf. Sebald's 'facticity' pp 44-45').

Paris, is effectively one of the novel's principal protagonists; a strange (or estranged) version of an otherwise familiar Paris is evoked (or perhaps more truthfully, created) via Breton's disconcerting narrative, compounded by the inclusion of illustrations and Jacques-André Boiffard's photographs of Paris. Like Aragon, in his account of Paris, 'Paris Peasant', Breton draws our attention to the *atmosphere of place* using documentary-like photographs that help situate Breton's account in 'real' locations, but which also give his fantastic narrative disconcerting verisimilitude.

Many events described in *Nadja* happen not by choice but chance, beyond the protagonists' control or ability to foresee. This is Breton's way of evoking mystery and how our unconscious irrupts and makes itself 'heard' by us (who, repressed, are so often deaf to it). Celia Rabinovitch (1984:143) points out that surrealist interest in mystery and weirdness may even have a *religious dimension*, as 'in the occult revival in late nineteenth-century Vienna, Freud's ideas form one element within a broader context that includes alternative religions, parapsychology, and a distrust of conventional rationality and religion.'

According to Pinder (2006:55), wandering the city, often at night, reflects the surrealists 'wider [...] interest in cultivating forms of *dépaysement*, of states of disorientation, combined with attentiveness to geographical locale as if seeing a place for the first time or through new eyes.' This attitude plays a crucial part in the birth of psychogeography. States of disorientation may give rise to seeing (familiar) things anew, as defamiliarized. Such transformative effects are picked up by philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), who reflects on the authentic quality of Cézanne's vision where portraits are 'strange as if viewed by a creature of another species.' (Merleau-Ponty, 1964:16)



The surrealist predilection for the ‘uncanny’ ‘relates, in Freudian terms, to the return of ‘material previously repressed.’ For Breton and the surrealists, such ‘uncanny’ material can powerfully disturb habitual relations with the city and ‘dislocate the hold of norms and identities, as what has been hidden is suddenly brought to light’ (Pinder 2006:58). Pinder instances Breton’s interest in the Place Dauphin as a case of the uncanny flagging up the concealed *historical and emotional intensity of a place*, not just a person. Pinder observes, ‘[t]he revolutionary and violent past of the Place Dauphine is important in understanding these hauntings.’

The surrealists followed Freud in identifying ‘chance’ as the bearer of meaning and significance. Sadie Plant (2002:48) explains that ‘dreams and wanderings of the imagination were said to bear a significance beyond the manifest incoherence of their images; random meetings between a material world and a ‘secret appeal from within’ in everyday life were privileged as moments of *objective chance*.’ But if ‘wanderings of the imagination’ were the precondition for being receptive to messages from a ‘profane beyond’<sup>104</sup> it was a short ‘step’ [sorry!] to making wandering the city aimlessly an ur-psychogeographic ‘practice’. In wandering the city, unsought, unintentional encounters and chance events could be conveniently reframed as emissaries/harbingers of meaning. Both *Nadja* and Aragon’s *Paris Peasant* (Le Paysan de Paris, 1926) are blueprints for subverting the sense of place by deliberately (!) walking aimlessly, replacing the notion of a destination with an openness to whatever might transpire; *receptiveness* became the *destination*!

Breton's fascination for discovering the exceptional via the exploration of ordinary places was already evident, pre-surrealism, when, still involved with Dada (Pinder 2006:53-54), he and other Dadaists planned visits to a series of random sites in Paris (ibid:54) to challenge the

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<sup>104</sup> Cf. Cocteau’s film *Orphée* (1950) and the writings of Walter Benjamin

boundary ostensibly separating art and life, thus ‘intervening in urban space through spatial practices’ (ibid:54), by upsetting the habitual impressions of familiar places, in this case, public gardens, and ‘discover[ing] other meanings and associations.’ (ibid:54)<sup>105</sup>

### **3.2.5 Louis Aragon’s Novel: Paris Peasant: Resonances of the Real**

Aragon’s Paris Peasant is like Nadja, a seminal influence on the birth and subsequent development of psychogeography. This work comprises four ostensibly disconnected parts: an introduction (‘Préface à une Mythologie Moderne’); the culture and geography of the Passage de l’Opéra (‘Le Passage de l’Opéra’); a visit to the Parc des Buttes-Chaumont (‘Le Sentiment de la nature aux Buttes-Chaumont’); and an epilogue (‘Le Songe du Paysan’). Aragon’s writing is full of ecstatic digressions, encompassing reflections on the city’s planning, philosophical ideas (notably Hegel’s), dream-like visions, meticulous descriptions, advertising ephemera, and (even) pricelists. Aragon explains that ‘[w]alking tipsily I set about forming the idea of a mythology in motion. It was more accurate to call it a *mythology of the modern* [italics added]. And it was under this name I conceived it.’ (Gilloch (2014:103) cites Aragon (1987:130)). In his peregrinations of Paris – the walks he claims were taken between 1924 and 1926 – Aragon celebrates being inspired, or somewhat intoxicated, by the detritus and ephemera of the everyday: ‘the great power that certain places, certain sights exercised over me, without discovering the principle of this enchantment. Some everyday objects unquestionably contained a part of that mystery for me, plunged me into that mystery. I loved this intoxication, which I knew how to implement, although I was ignorant of its causes.’ (Aragon 1987:126)

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<sup>105</sup> Pinder (2006:55) cites Alastair Bonnett’s *Art, Ideology and Everyday Space: Subversive Tendencies from Dada to Postmodernism*, Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 10 (1992), pp.69-86. Pinder writes: “Bonnett nevertheless argues that the Dadaists foundered on a continuing commitment to artistic ideologies in the form of anti-art and indifference”.

In this self-defined *mythology of the modern* Aragon recast the humble petrol pump as an idol as an example of partaking of the ‘new myths’ – myths which draw their ‘magic’ from the same ‘source’ as the “old myths of nature” (Aragon 1987:137). He describes how petrol pumps are ‘[p]ainted brightly with English or invented names, possessing just one long, supple arm, a luminous faceless head, a single foot, and a numbered wheel on the belly, the petrol pumps sometimes take on the appearance of the divinities of Egypt or of those cannibal tribes which worship war and war alone. O Texaco motor oil, Esso, Shell, great inscription of human potentiality, soon shall we cross ourselves before your fountains, and the youngest among us will perish from having contemplated their nymphs in naphtha.’ (Aragon 1987:132). Aragon evokes the covert, mysterious resonance of an everyday object, a resonance which, despite its meretricious modernity, nonetheless draws its power from our inner nature and the old myths of nature.<sup>106</sup>

As if ‘awakening’ to the myth-like potential of the city (Aragon 1987:130), Aragon affirms that ‘the knowledge deriving from reason [cannot] even begin to compare with knowledge perceptible by sense.’ (Aragon 1987:22) In his paean to what he calls the ‘imagination of the senses’, Aragon inveighs against ‘humanity’s stupid rationalism’ for engendering the ‘fear of error which everything recalls to me at every moment of the flight of my ideas, this mania for control, makes man prefer reason’s imagination to the imagination of the senses. And yet, it is always the imagination alone that is at work. Nothing, neither strict logic nor overwhelming impression, can convince me about reality, can convince me that I am not basing reality on the delirium of interpretation.’ (Aragon 1987:23) Giving free rein to delirious interpretation,<sup>107</sup> Aragon exuberantly treats the city as a ‘field convulsed and disrupted into a

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<sup>106</sup> It is instructive to compare this account with the Situationist ‘Spectacle’ – a proto-phenomenological account of why things seem to resonate so strangely.

chain of representations, each subsuming the other, the city as a continual process of reference.’ (Krauss 1981)

Aragon, ‘questioning the reality of certainty’ (Aragon 1987:20), suggests that any urban study requires psychological authenticity (i.e., a conscious and unconscious apprehension) and, inevitably, mandates *ambiguity*. Again, these tropes, which will become almost codified in ‘psychogeography’ activate some corners of contemporary research in human geography. In one of Aragon’s carefully descriptive, seemingly objective account, a walking-stick shop is described as offering ‘a wide choice of luxurious examples of [...] canes, displayed to show both stems and handles to their best advantage. A whole art of spatial panoply is at play here: the canes lower down form fans, while those higher up are crossed like Xs and, as the result of a strange tropism, incline towards the beholder their bouquets of pommels: ivory roses, dogs’ heads with jewelled eyes, damascened semidarkness from Toledo, niello inlays of delicate sentimental foliage, cats, women, hooked beaks, countless materials ranging from twisted rattan to rhinoceros horn and the blond charm of cornelians.’ (Aragon 1987:35-36) However, later revisiting the same shop, Aragon’s attention is suddenly attracted ‘by a sort of humming noise which seemed to be coming from the direction of the cane shop’ where he is ‘astonished to see that its window was bathed in a greenish, almost submarine light, the source of which remained invisible.’ He then resorts to personal memories to animate the experience, telling us that this was ‘the same kind of phosphorescence that, I remember, emanated from the fish I watched, as a child, from the jetty of Port Bail on the Cotentin peninsula; but still, I had to admit to myself that even though the canes might conceivably possess the illuminating properties of creatures of the deep, a physical explication would still scarcely explain this supernatural gleam and, above

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<sup>107</sup> Cf. Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas (b. 1944), *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan*,

all, the noise whose low throbbing echoed back from the arched roof.’ Aragon transforms this *momentary experience*, where observation, feeling, and memory fruitfully interact, into an image where he ‘observes’ that not only ‘[t]he canes floated gently like seaweed’ but ‘a human form was swimming among the various levels of the window display.’ (Aragon 1987:36-37) Such passages, where dreamlike visions or random associations are seemingly the offspring of careful, ostensibly minute, objective description, typify surrealist observational strategy: getting ‘drunk’ on the real is a necessary step to revealing the underlying, more authentically real.

For Vaclav Paris (Paris 2013:27), *Paris Peasant* is also a vehicle for Aragon’s political sympathies. In exploring thematic correspondences between *Paris Peasant* and Walter Benjamin’s unfinished *Arcades Project* (1927-1940, Benjamin 2002), which it no doubt influenced, Paris points out that while Benjamin’s earlier *Trauerspiel*<sup>108</sup> (2019a) evokes a *religious eschatology* – where ‘history [is] inevitable dereliction, a process of permanent catastrophe [and] points finally to the stability of the Judeo-Christian afterlife’ – *Paris Peasant* embraces Marxist eschatology. Without a hint of religious or spiritual fragility, Aragon angrily explores the ‘fragmentariness and fragility of our present’, taking the peasant’s side, aligning himself with ‘shop-owners defending their rights again [...] capitalist developers.’ Abigail Susik (2008) argues, contrarily, that Aragon has ‘no special regret for the loss of the Passage de l’Opéra or the woes of its inhabitants’ and no respect for the ‘giant rodent’ of ‘Hausmannization’. (Aragon 1987:14) According to Susik, Aragon “displays throughout the whole of Part I of *Paysan* a palpable disdain for *both* the advocates of demolition and the protesting defenders of the Passage de l’Opéra’, adding that Aragon devotes a colourful and

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<sup>108</sup> Benjamin’s post-doctoral ‘habilitation’ thesis, submitted to and rejected by the University of Frankfurt in 1925, but finally published in 1928.

sarcastic lengthy section ‘to the outright mockery of the *magnificent bacterial dramas* that characterize this public debate.’ (Susik 2008:32)

Even though Susik’s arguments are compelling, there is no reason to suppose that Aragon’s political perspectives (Aragon, a lifelong member of the Communist Party<sup>109</sup>) could not co-exist, albeit in a characteristically surrealist, incoherent manner, with his artistic experiments.<sup>110</sup>

More relevant to the purposes of this study, which traces the origins of, and inspiration for, the Situationist’s elevation of psychogeography to political practice, is (deploying Paris’s words) Aragon’s perceived *fragmentariness and fragility of our present*. *Fragmentariness and fragility* make the bland, yet risqué, locations featuring in Paris Peasant ‘inspirational’. Aragon responds deeply to the precarity and ephemerality of these locations, the intense darkness of their concealed histories, and their association with decay and death, themselves now threatened with demolition and oblivion.<sup>111</sup> Not only are these places vulnerable, but they are also on the brink of being effaced, erased, too trivial to be historical monuments and yet too telling of their (and our) times to be forgotten; (like Netherne) so pregnant with a surfeit of meaning. In reprising Aragon’s distaste for the ‘progress’ of ‘Haussmannisation’,

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<sup>109</sup> In 1927, after becoming a fellow traveller of the French Communist Party in the 1920s, Aragon and several other surrealists joined the Party.

<sup>110</sup> Until 1932, when Aragon definitively left the surrealist movement, “adopting instead the socialist realism endorsed by the communist party” (Young 2012:4)

<sup>111</sup> Walter Benjamin notes that Breton ‘was the first to perceive the revolutionary energies that appear in the *outmoded*’ - in the first iron constructions, the first factory buildings, the earliest photos, the objects that have begun to be extinct, grand pianos, the dresses of five years ago, fashionable restaurants when the vogue has begun to ebb from them. The relation of these things to revolution – no one can have a more exact concept of it than these authors” (Benjamin 2009:229) cited Gilloch (2014).

Susik reminds us, relying on Aragon's own words, that when places face imminent oblivion, their meanings become yet more resonant, for 'only today, when the pickaxe menaces them, that they have at last become the true sanctuaries of a cult of the ephemeral, the ghostly landscape of damnable pleasures and professions.' (Aragon 1987:14) (cited Susik 2008:34) My own 'psychogeographic' experiences of Netherne have led me to identical insights.

Susik (2009:64-71) recounts how, immediately prior to undertaking the walks which will form the basis of 'Paris Peasant', Aragon, Breton, and Marcel Noll abandon Dada-influenced random 'word games and automatist séances for the preferable diversion of a jaunt in a taxicab.' (Apparently, according to Susik (2008:31) Aragon did not share Breton's passion for automatism.<sup>112</sup>) Susik recounts how the trio remains aimless until 'Breton spontaneously suggests a nocturnal stroll within the shadowy confines of Buttes-Chaumont Park' which, as Susik (ibid:64-65) points out, was 'replete with historical, cultural, and temporal contradictions resulting from the simultaneous associations of the park's vastly antinomic past and present societal functions.'

This park is a locus of ghastly associations hidden by beautification, transformed, during 1862-1867 under Baron Haussmann, from barren tract to pretty park, and that the 'looming, pockmarked face of the former quarry' had been turned into 'a fairy-tale lookout topped with a faux-Grecian temple.' (ibid:66) This had become a beautified tourist spot which visitors were conducted to via a masonry bridge which itself became a favourite location for suicides. So, it seems history indeed reasserts itself through mood and place.

This decorous park, with panoramic views of Paris, bore the concealed scars of battlefields, violent deaths, mass-cremations, hangings (and other forms of execution), suicide, mass

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<sup>112</sup> Aragon consistently harboured a veiled distaste for automatic practices, chose instead to focus his pen upon a popular debate that had recently taken on added urgency in the Parisian press.

graves, and bodies anonymously abandoned that horrifically resurfaced (ibid:66). Reputedly haunted by the ghosts of the executed and killed in battle, this hiding-place for highwaymen was also a refuge for squatters and the intensely poor whose only livelihood came from the copious rags and rubbish dumped here through which they picked in the hope of uncovering items of possible use or value<sup>113</sup>, making their homes in the caves of the abandoned gypsum quarries. Yet, notwithstanding its grim history, the Parc des Buttes-Chaumont had resumed its popularity by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and (according to Susik) most fin-de-siècle travel guides omit to mention its grim history.

Susik (2009:69), persuading us of the Park's unstable cultural identity – *from a quarry site and battleground to an execution ground, to the foulest dump and equarissage, to an unblemished garden, and back again momentarily to a site of extermination and expurgation* – raises the suggestion that it is precisely such ambiguity of meaning, an ambiguity arising from juxtapositions of its multi-layered history, which made the surrealist encounter with the Parc Buttes-Chaumont so poignant, despite (or I would argue, *because of*), its superficial beautification. A 'pseudo-utopia' (ibid:69) like Netherne-on-the-Hill 'Village', this Park's grim associations persisted, nestling beneath its superficialities like the unconscious. This, argues Susik, is why the park offered such interpretative potential for Aragon. It was a 'singular paradigm of surrealist irony'.

### **3.2.6 Excavating the Deeply Real: Breton and Freud**

To unearth such rich, strange, and even contradictory meanings from the subsoil of a place's history is redolent of Freud's archaeological approach to the unconscious. Freud influenced the surrealists, especially Breton, who, as already noted, corresponded directly with Freud (to enlist unsuccessfully his support for surrealism). Breton himself studied medicine during

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<sup>113</sup> Cf. the value Walter Benjamin ascribes to detritus.



World War I, working under, Babinski, a celebrity neurologist. Breton even includes a description of Babinski's neurological examination in the First Manifesto of Surrealism. Breton became interested in psychiatric diseases such as hysteria and psychosis, which later may have served as a source of inspiration for automatic writing (Haan, Koehler, and Bogousslavsky 2012). In 1916, Breton, working as a medical aide encountering mental patients evacuated from the front, first heard of psychoanalysis and became acquainted with Freud's work (Davis 1973:127).

In 1919, Breton wrote, 'Completely occupied as I still was with Freud at that time, and familiar as I was with his methods of examination . . . I resolved to obtain from myself what we were trying to obtain from [patients], namely, a monologue spoken as rapidly as possible, without any intervention on the part of the critical faculties . . . unencumbered by the slightest inhibition.' (Esman 2011:173-174) Esman suggests that Breton's passionate interest in automatic writing, which he hoped would help release the potential of the unconscious for creativity and self-liberation, was, in effect, *confused* with Freud's approach to 'free association'. Kuspit (1988:51–60) suggests that Breton, contrary to Freud, understood psychoanalysis to be a comprehensive revolutionary programme for overcoming the common sense that occludes our psychic realities and that '[s]uch action would be based on feeling rather than reason, limited only by those societal rules that would keep one from being judged 'mad' and forced into an institution.' While his medical experiences may, in part, explain Breton's partiality to Freud, I am less interested here in well-rehearsed debates over Freud's influence on him than in framing both Freud and the surrealists as proponents of deploying narrative (albeit, in Freud's case, in the guise of *theory*) to *destabilise* established meanings of things (places, objects, emotions) in order to (a) enrich or problematize the familiar, (b) facilitate the emotional inflexion of places, and (c) remind us of the unstable

relationship we have with reality – all of which occupy a fundamental place in the ‘psychogeographic attitude’.

Freud’s use of archaeology as a metaphor for psychoanalysis is precisely one such narrative. Freud compared remembering and accessing his patients’ memories to an archaeological excavation (Freud 1953b). He was fond of seeing himself as archaeologically ‘uncovering pieces of [his client’s] past’ to reveal their ‘historical truth’ (Spence 1984). Freud states that he had read more archaeology than psychology (Thomas 2009:47) and was especially interested in Schliemann’s work at Troy, which intimated that science could recover mythic or long-forgotten entities (Thomas 2009:48). In 1896, Freud explained that ‘[the explorer] may have come equipped with picks, shovels and spades, and may press the inhabitants into his service and arm them with these tools, make an onslaught on these ruins, clear away the rubbish and, starting from the visible remains, may bring to light what is buried... If one tries in something the same way to let the symptoms of a case of hysteria tell the tale of the development of the disease... we proceed when the traumatic scene is reproduced to correct the original psychical reaction to it, and this removes the symptom.’ (Freud [1896] 1953:184-185) In 1937, Freud reused the same comparison: ‘Just as the archaeologist builds up the walls from the foundations that have remained standing, determines the number and position of the columns from depressions in the floor and reconstructs the mural decorations and paintings from the remains found in the debris.’ (Freud [1937] 1959:360)

In comparing repression to *archaeological stratification* Freud claims there is ‘no better analogy for repression, which at the same time makes inaccessible and conserves something psychic, than the burial that was the fate of Pompeii, and from which the city was able to arise again through work with the spade.’ (Freud and Jensen, 2003:66) Thomas summarises that Freud’s conception of the mind invokes the image of an accumulated ‘sedimentation’

where the deepest layers effectively transcend time altogether. These are tantamount to being archetypal or universal. Therefore both psychoanalyst and archaeologist must penetrate the transient to reach the eternal, and therefore, the metaphor of depth ‘takes the form of an opposition between the superficial to the profound.’ (Thomas 2009:58)

Freud’s choice of archaeology as a metaphor has been frequently questioned (Thomas 2009:60). Moreover, psychoanalysis, like archaeology, disturbs the material, compromising the historical reliability of what it unearths. Above all, it has been argued (Spence 1988:5) that the archaeological metaphor has falsified psychoanalysis by giving rise to the impression that ‘psychoanalysis *was* archaeology’ (Thomas 2009:60), that ‘the unconscious is a thing-like, content-rich entity, and that unconscious thoughts must be physically located in some *place*.’ (Thomas 2009:61) And even the contemporary archaeologist would define their practice as ‘hermeneutic’, working with ‘theory-laden and context-dependent evidence (like clinical data in psychology)’ and that ‘rather than alienated objects, archaeologists now conventionally see artefacts as imbricated in social relationships and cultural traditions.’ The representational theory of the mind is critiqued but is ‘radically embedded in a worldly context and a material embodiment.’<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Steen F. Larsen Steen F. Larsen (1987) Remembering and the Archaeology Metaphor, Metaphor and Symbol, 2:3, 187-199, DOI: 10.1207/s15327868ms0203\_2

(Notwithstanding these objections, some argue the continuing pertinence of Freud’s ‘archaeology’ metaphor to psychoanalytical practice. For Larsen, psychoanalysis, like archaeology, uncovers “archaic” materials - from strata of the unconscious. The validity of this metaphor is contingent on certain presumptions regarding memory: that memories, however dubious or unreliable, retain *elements of truth* which may be compared to the physical objects archaeologists find; that these *elements of truth* can be expertly prised from an accretion of untruths concealing them (the result of repression) – are comparable to the ‘debris’ deposited on objects by subsequent epochs which, like untruths, necessitate removal. That because memories tend only to consist of

‘fragments’, the analyst, working with the client, must use their ‘additional intuitions, knowledge, and theory’ to

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I will refrain from discussing the theoretical validity of Freud's archaeology metaphor to psychoanalytic practice<sup>115</sup> as my primary purpose here is to note its close parallels with the surrealists' aim to *recover* and *release* that which remains hidden in the unconscious – for provocatively artistic (and therefore 'revolutionary') ends. There is a great distance from Freud's notion of the archaeology of the individual's psyche to the layers of emotion and associations buried for Aragon in, say, the Parc Buttes Chaumont.

What emerges from these comparisons – between Freud and archaeology, and between these and the surrealists, is the urge to topographise (or spatialise) *feeling* – *a tendency either to associate places with feelings and occult knowledge with places; in short, to 'geographise' the mind.*

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reconstruct a more comprehensive account of the past from these fragments – again like archaeologists do.

Larsen concludes his analysis of Freud's metaphor, asserting [my emphasis], 'The archaeology metaphor implies *clear, practical guidelines* for carrying out "memory excavations" by analogy to the way archaeological excavations are supposedly done'.

Because memories tend only to consist of 'fragments', the analyst, working with the client, must use their 'additional intuitions, knowledge, and theory to reconstruct a more comprehensive account of the past from these fragments – again, like archaeologists do. Larsen concludes his analysis of Freud's metaphor, asserting [emphasis added], 'The archaeology metaphor implies *clear, practical guidelines* for carrying out "memory excavations" by analogy to the way archaeological excavations are supposedly done'.

<sup>115</sup> Foucault (1970) *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* is cited by Julian Thomas (2009:42); In connection with a changing sense of identity, Thomas (ibid: 42-43) cites Charles Taylor's work, where Taylor himself defines as 'an attempt to articulate and write a history of the modern identity ... what it is to be a human agent: the senses of inwardness, freedom, individuality, and being embedded in nature which are at home in the modern West'.

Using such archaeological and spatial narratives as tools, as ways of navigating personal experience, relocating personal inner meanings to places may also suggest a way to reach a true identification of the inner self, conflating an 'inner self' with the external 'material' world. Such potential harmonisation recalls the idea of 'l'homme' total (cf. Marx Lefebvre) and of using this new knowledge to challenge and change the world.

### **3.2.7 Walter Benjamin**

Although I do not dwell at length on the work of Walter Benjamin<sup>116</sup> (1892-1940), to whom industrial quantities of research have been devoted, his relationship with the surrealists deserves attention because Benjamin's interest in, and critique of, their approaches, rehearses, to some extent, the uses to which theorist and filmmaker, Guy Debord (1931-1994) and the Situationists subsequently put them and, more specifically, the 'epistemological game' they named 'psychogeography'.

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<sup>116</sup> Even a cursory knowledge of the ideas of Walter Benjamin explain why he found Paris Peasant so fascinating, e.g., 'Benjamin recognized the rapidly expanding and ever-changing metropolitan environment as the principal site of capitalist domination, and saw the interrogation of the city's architectural forms, spatial configurations and experiential modes as the key to unravelling the fantastical, 'mythological' features of modernity' (Gilloch 2014:7) and 'Benjamin discovers in Surrealism a radical appreciation of the afterlife of the object which mirrors his own understanding of the afterlife of the text. In the posthumous existence of architecture, commodities and technological innovations, original intentions and meanings are superseded and negated. The hidden truth content of these things manifests itself only through a process of ruination. The moment of extinction is that of a final profane illumination. Here, too, Surrealism comes to annihilate the tastes, prejudices and sensibilities of bourgeois art and culture through relentless ridicule. Surrealism is, Benjamin observes, nothing other than 'the death of the nineteenth century in comedy' (Gilloch 2014:108).

Briefly entranced by the surrealists, Benjamin's more politically astute thinking helps provide a bridge to is anticipates some of the thoughts of Lefebvre and the Situationists who were responsible for crystallising the notion of psychogeography.

Benjamin, alive to the surrealist ‘dream-intoxication’, writes in his essay, ‘Surrealism’ (Benjamin 2009): ‘Life seemed worth living only where the threshold between waking and sleeping was worn away in everyone as if in the toing and froing of streams of images; language seemed itself only where sound and image, image and sound, meshed so successfully, with such automatic precision, as to leave no chink through which the least grain of ‘sense’ might escape.’

Benjamin observed that for Breton and Aragon, at the centre of this world of things stands the most dreamed-of of their objects, the city of Paris itself (Benjamin shared their fascination with the French capital). However Benjamin shrewdly recontextualises the dream-like reflections and apparitions that enliven Aragon’s Paris Peasant with a more Marx-inflected analysis, writing: ‘capitalism was a natural phenomenon with which a new dream sleep came over Europe and with it, the reactivation of mythical powers.’ Benjamin understood that the objects and places of ‘modernity’ while reflecting profound human aspirations also, because being incapable of satisfying them, enshrining their own obsolescence, represented the frustration of these self-same aspirations. Gilloch (ibid:174) observes that for Benjamin (as also for Horkheimer and Adorno) ‘modernity, the supposed epoch of enlightenment and progress, is revealed as nothing other than the pre-eminent time of myth [or, in effect, a myth in its own right] where the fetishized commodity is not merely the modern form of repetition and consumption; it is also a wish-image, the distorted expression of genuine longing.’ In awakening from those dreams these very wishes would populate and lead to Benjamin’s messianic perspective: ‘in the dream context we seek a teleological moment. This moment is the waiting. The dream secretly awaits the awakening [...] like the Greek wooden horse in the Troy of the dream.’ (Benjamin unmasks that very triumphant rationalism that made an institution like Netherne possible and about which so scathingly alludes.)

Such ideas anticipate those of the Situationist International (1967-1972), Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991), and the Situationist 'Spectacle' analysis of capitalism. Indeed, it is the Situationists who first floated the idea that *science* could be developed capable of detecting the inherent emotional charge of real places and who name this 'science' *psychogeography*. Billing this as a 'science' while in part ironic also asserts how the factual seems to have power to 'affirm'; the same power that Breton invokes via his use of 'documentary' photography in *Nadja*, and evident in Aragon's mythological urban study (as well as, more recently, in Sebald's novels). The confusion between fact and fiction is deliberate: art posing as documentary and even science; and science as fiction, especially as reflected in the literary style of Freud's *Dora* - (Marcus 1981). In what is effectively a source text for psychogeography, Breton (in *Pont Neuf* 1950) describes the 'geographisation' of feeling as proto-factual, potentially scientific: 'The steps which draw us, year after year, without external constraint, to the same parts of the city testify to the way certain aspects, which in an obscure way present themselves as either benign or hostile, progressively impinge on our sensibility. A walk down a single street of sufficient length and variety - the rue de Richelieu, for example - if we focus our attention, we can provide alternating zones of well-being and disquiet between two street numbers that could be specified. No doubt a highly significant map should be drawn up for everyone, which would indicate in white the places he is prone to haunt and in black those he avoids, the rest being divided into shades of grey according to the greater or lesser degree of attraction or repulsion exerted.'<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Les pas qui, sans nécessité extérieure, des années durant, nous ramènent aux mêmes points d'une ville attestent notre sensibilisation croissante à certains de ces aspects, qui se présentent obscurément sous un jour favorable ou hostile. Le parcours d'une seule rue un peu longue et de déroulement assez varié - la rue de Richelieu par exemple - pour peu qu'on y prenne garde, livre, dans l'intervalle du numéro qu'on pourrait préciser, des zones alternantes de bien-être et de malaise. Une carte sans doute très significative demanderait pour chacun à être dressée, faisant apparaître en blanc les lieux qu'il hante et en noir ceux qu'il évite, le reste en

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### 3.2.8 Breton and Geographical Zones of Emotion

David Pinder (2006:40) agrees that Breton believed it perfectly possible to allocate emotions – ‘zones of well-being and discomfort’ – to specific streets, and that a map could be drawn to indicate them. Breton (1996:223). is also clear that significant places, ‘emotionally pregnant’ zones, arise from physical responses to the *complexion* of the streets and its buildings; these are also places impregnated by events that have occurred ‘here or there’ In other words, buildings become *vessels or touchstones of memory*.

### 3.3 From Breton to Henri Lefebvre and the Situationist International

Only five years after this seminal text by Breton, Debord, ex-Lettrist<sup>118</sup> and key ideologue of the Situationist International, proposes in the Belgian journal ‘Les Lèvres Nues’, (Knabb 2007:5-8) that walking the city is a radical and arguably ‘transformational’ practice: ‘Of all the affairs we participate in, with or without interest, the groping search for a new way of life is the only aspect still impassioning.’ Debord curiously argues central to this revolutionary programme are ‘certain processes of chance and predictability in the streets’. Debord adds: ‘The sudden change of ambiance in a street within the space of a few meters; the evident division of a city into zones of distinct psychic atmospheres; the path of least resistance which is automatically followed in aimless strolls (and which has no relation to the physical contour of the ground); the appealing or repelling character of certain places - all this seems to be neglected. In any case it is never envisaged as depending on causes that can be uncovered by careful analysis and turned to account.’ In other words, Debord was apparently interested in mapping receptivity to the changing variety of emotions that could be

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fonction de l'attraction ou de la répulsion moindre se répartissant la gamme des gris. André Breton, *Pont Neuf*, Paris, 1950 – cited by Sheringham (1996:90)

<sup>118</sup> ‘Lettrism’, founded by Isidore Isou in the 1940s: a provocative, sometimes ludic, avantgarde art movement, with roots in Dadaism and Surrealism.



experienced while being steeped in the everyday (Pinder 2006) - i.e., walking the everyday urban environment.

Debord's article predates the creation of the Situationist International (July 1957). However, the idea of constructively wandering the streets (*la dérive*) was proposed even earlier by Ivan Chitchevlov (a.k.a. Gilles Ivain, 1933-1998) in 1953 in his *Formulation Pour une Urbanisme Nouveau*. Sheringham (2009:164) makes the point that this avantgarde practice, in Debord's iteration, was influenced by 'pioneering sociology of Chombart de Lauwe' exploring 'micro-environments' generated by the patterns of movements and relations of Parisians to their respective *quartiers*, noting that 'an urban neighbourhood is determined not only by geographical and economic factors but also by the image<sup>119</sup> that its inhabitants and those of other neighbourhoods have of it.'

### **3.3.1 The Psychogeographic Dérive: Sociology or Play?**

In his *Theory of the Dérive*<sup>120</sup> (1956), Debord clarifies that the derive, drifting, walking the city without a destination in mind, is a 'technique of locomotion without a goal'.<sup>121</sup> A 'technique of transient passage through varied ambiances' is to be distinguished from the 'journey and the stroll' as it entails 'playful-constructive behaviour and awareness of psychogeographical effects.'<sup>122</sup> Sheringham suggests that 'transposing' Ivain's idea but also combining it with sociological analysis, Debord was effectively transforming *la dérive* (and psychogeography, and *detournement*) from 'visionary' creative practice into a more

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<sup>119</sup> The contentious status of the 'image' (versus the word) in situationist thought and, indeed, in psychogeography merits further research.

<sup>120</sup> Knabb 2007:50 (first published in *Internationale Situationniste* #2, December 1958)

<sup>121</sup> For Plant (2002:58) the *dérive*, or drift, was defined by the situationists as the 'technique of locomotion without a goal'.

<sup>122</sup> Knabb 2007:50 (Guy Debord, *Theory of the Dérive*, *Internationale Situationniste* #2, December 1958)

sociologically inflected enquiry. Yet Debord's interest in 'the image' of a neighbourhood, while conceivably pertinent to sociological urban study (and notwithstanding Debord's referencing 'research'<sup>123</sup> and purportedly useful psychogeographic 'data'<sup>124</sup> is too evocative of Debord's interest in the 'specific effects of the geographical environment [...] on the emotions and behaviour of individuals'<sup>125</sup> to presuppose his interest was exclusively 'academic'. Attributing to the Situationist theory of the 'dérive' a quasi-anthropological agenda – as Sheringham does (and notwithstanding Situationism's self-definition as a 'research laboratory')<sup>126</sup> – is to overlook the SI's attitude to the *revolutionary potential of playfulness*. We should bear in mind that, for Debord, the adjective 'psychogeographical' explicitly 'retains a rather pleasing vagueness'<sup>127</sup> – surely intended to mark psychogeography as drole rather than academically aspirational. Sidaway (2021:551)<sup>128</sup> suggests that although psychogeography was not originally framed as an academic pursuit, Debord 'did engage French academic geography through a critique of its *dominant organicist and nationalist trends*' (which, explains Sidaway, was the prevailing historiographical style that emerged in response to France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian war).

### 3.3.2 Henri Lefebvre

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<sup>123</sup> Knabb (2007:7) - *Les Lèvres Nues* #6 September 1955

<sup>124</sup> Ibid:50 - Guy Debord, Theory of the Dérive, Internationale Situationniste #2, December 1958

<sup>125</sup> Ibid: - Debord, Wolman, *Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography*, Les Lèvres Nues #8, May 1956

<sup>126</sup> Ibid:65 - 'Within culture the SI can be likened to a research laboratory...' *Detournement as Negation and Prelude*, Internationale Situationniste #3, December 1959

<sup>127</sup> Ibid:5 Introduction to 'A Critique of Geography'.

<sup>128</sup> Sidaway relies on McDonough T, pp. 241–265, *Situationist Space* (in: McDonough T (ed) (2002) *Guy*

*Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*. MIT)

Sociologist and theorist of ‘everyday life’, Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991), was, until his well-documented 1961 rupture<sup>129</sup> with them closely allied both to Guy Debord and the Situationists. Sheringham (2006:138) points out that in the first of his three-volume ((1947-1981) ‘Critique de la vie Quotidien’ (1947), Lefebvre makes Hegel’s axiom ‘the familiar is not necessarily the known.’<sup>130</sup> pivotal to his analysis. (While motivated by a rigorous ideological perspective, this is reminiscent of Breton’s idea that the familiar contains something *beyond* the real.) Prioritising analysing and reclaiming the most familiar of all – i.e. the ‘everyday’ – Lefebvre claimed that ‘man’s only future is in The Everyday’ (Sheringham 2006:134-5). In revising the Marxist critique of society, Lefebvre was influenced (ibid:135) by the interest in banal social details being taken by the burgeoning ‘sciences humaines’,<sup>131</sup> the *Annales* school of historians<sup>132</sup> and, later, by Gaston Bachelard<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> This rupture was occasioned by allegations accusing Lefebvre’s plagiaristic use of the SI’s *Theses on the Paris Commune* in his article ‘La Signification de la Commune’ (published in *Arguments* 27-8, 1962). Henri Lefebvre is reported saying (Ross, Lefebvre 1997), “*The Situationists ... it's a delicate subject, one I care deeply about. It touches me in some ways very intimately because I knew them very well. I was close friends with them. The friendship lasted from 1957 to 1961 or '62, which is to say about five years. And then we had a quarrel that got worse and worse in conditions I don't understand too well myself but which I could describe to you. In the end it was a love story that ended badly, very badly*”.

<sup>130</sup> Hegel writes in the preface to his 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit*: ‘Quite generally, the familiar, just because it is familiar, is not cognitively understood’.

<sup>131</sup> The ‘social sciences’: Sociology but also Anthropology, Archaeology, Economics, Geography, History, Law, Linguistics, Politics, and Psychology.

<sup>132</sup> A historiographic approach (founded in 1929 by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre) pays less attention to political, diplomatic, or military history, or to biographies of famous men, and instead prioritises long-term (the ‘longue durée’) historical patterns identified from social, economic, and cultural history, statistics, medical reports, family studies, and even psychoanalysis.

<sup>133</sup> Gaston Bachelard, French philosopher of science (1884-1962), influenced by phenomenology

(1884-1962) in his 'Poetics of Space' (1958). Lefebvre argued that 'The Everyday' – a once unified experiential totality – had been fractured; its naturally life-enhancing celebratory aspects (represented by 'la fête') had been split off from it, institutionalised, and isolated by Christianity and colonised by 'culture' (i.e. elevated to class-dividing 'abstraction', especially by elite practitioners of philosophy and literature) – thereby effacing its reality/accessibility for a working class further alienated (they have alienated already, in Marx's original economic sense, where labour is alienated from the very products it makes). 'Alienation' is a general term for all those factors impeding humanity from achieving its fullest potential. For Lefebvre (Lefebvre 1, 180<sup>134</sup>) alienation ('the factitious being... produced in me that I should no longer be myself' (Lefebvre 1, 180<sup>135</sup>)) is 'an experience of dispossession'<sup>136</sup>, the lived reality of 'everyday' life. But for Lefebvre, 'Everyday Life' remains also ambiguous – an ambiguity and elusiveness that has potential to act also as an liberating opportunity.

By studying it, we can become aware of what drives it; examining everyday life provides us with a portal enabling an awareness of how alienation operates in the context of real everyday life and, therefore, the means of overcoming it. Sheringham adapts Lefebvre's ideas thus [emphasis added]: '[f]ar more than just an abstract category, alienation had to be seen as a *lived reality, an experience of dispossession* that occurs in the very moment of imagined possession: in hit songs, verses learnt at school, financial transactions, shopping, posters.'<sup>137</sup> Our ownership of all that is authentically precious has been (temporarily) lost and confiscated from us (this seems redolent of the prelapsarian narrative). Lefebvre's critique of everyday life proposes minute and detailed sociological research (involving interviews) of ordinary life

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<sup>134</sup> cited by Sheringham 2006:135)

<sup>135</sup> Cited by Sheringham 2006:135)

<sup>136</sup> Lefebvre 1, 180 (cited ibid:135)

<sup>137</sup> Lefebvre 1, 197 (cited ibid:136)

– ‘une journée bangle’ (Sheringham 2006:136) – and life as a ‘work of art’ where life is lived for its own sake rather than a means to acquire. ‘L’art de vivre’, implying the end of alienation, contributes to its conclusion.

### 3.3.3 Life As Art

I have tried to elucidate those aspects of Lefebvre’s complex and compendious thought to map which coincide with and differ from the thought and programme of the Situationists. At times, Lefebvre’s revolutionary tone seems as urgent as the Situationists. Sadie Plant (2002:64) illustrates the self-evident appeal of Lefebvre’s work to the Situationists (and his indebtedness to them) by citing Lefebvre’s words: Let everyday life become a work of art! Let every technical means be employed for the transformation of everyday life!

Even though psychogeography has roots in an arguably psychotherapeutic and possibly even in religiously inflected *artistic* practice, the Situationists believed that art itself was redundant, complicit with what it called ‘The Spectacle’, capital’s chief instrument of alienation. The Spectacle was, according to the Situationists, a conspiratorial and manipulative project to disempower people by ensuring they remain compliantly passive spectators of capitalism’s endless stream of titillating images, or, in Debord’s gnomic terms (1992:17): the Spectacle is ‘capital accumulated to the point it becomes images.’<sup>138</sup> Moreover, Situationism was mindful of art’s susceptibility to ‘récupération’ – i.e. the cultural reappropriation and emasculation of any subversive symbols or ideas by mainstream culture.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Rebel Press (no date)

<sup>139</sup> For situationism, ‘récupération’ is the co-option, disempowerment, emasculation, and commodification of radical ideas and images within a media culture and bourgeois society that reinterprets them through a neutralized, innocuous, or socially conventional perspective.

However, the situationists certainly did not entirely discount the revolutionary potential of culture; creating havoc with the bourgeois idea of happiness was ‘a crisis [which must] must be provoked by *every means*.’<sup>140</sup> ((Knabb (2007:6) emphasis added) Indeed, Debord looked forward to ‘turning the whole of life into an exciting game’, envisaging not only ‘an adroit use of currently popular means of communication’ (including even advertising) while also looking backwards to the paintings of Italian artist, Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978), in many respects a de facto surrealist. Of these paintings, Debord writes sympathetically, ‘[that] they are provoked by architecturally originated sensations [which] exert in turn on their objective base to the point of transforming it’ (Knabb 2007:8 - from *Methods of Détournement*, Debord and Wolman), sensations which he believed proved useful. In this, Debord, perhaps inadvertently, connects psychogeographic sensibility to art. Debord (perhaps covering his back) subsequently asserts he does not have ‘plastic beauty’ in mind for a programme where ‘only extremist innovation is historically justified’<sup>141</sup>, as ‘the new beauty can only be a beauty of situation.’ Debord critiques conditionally the surrealist programme<sup>142</sup> which, he argues (Knabb 2007:17-25), by asserting the sovereignty of desire and surprise, proposes a ‘new use for life’, and is ‘much richer in constructive possibilities than generally thought’, but Debord at the same time derides it for the ‘devolution of its original proponents into spiritualism’, for its ‘ideological failure’, for its boring automatism, and its ostentatious and now quite unsurprising weirdness. Debord cites even Freud<sup>143</sup> to lay bare the fatuousness and redundancy of surrealism, declaring that, ‘For us, Surrealism was only a beginning of a

<sup>140</sup> Guy Debord, *Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography*, Les Lèvres Nues #6 September 1955

<sup>141</sup> *Methods of Détournement* by Debord and Wolman (Knabb 2007:8)

<sup>142</sup> Guy Debord’s *Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency’s Conditions of Organization and Action* (Revolution and Counterrevolution in Modern Culture, 1957:19)

<sup>143</sup> Debord citing Freud: ‘Everything conscious wears out. What is unconscious remains unaltered. But once it is set loose, does it not fall into ruins in its turn?’

revolutionary experiment in culture [...] If we are not surrealists, it is because we don't want to be bored.'<sup>144</sup> But notwithstanding officially 'rejecting' it, Debord and the Situationists continued to draw on the provocative energies of surrealism to develop their approaches to their hoped-for revolution of everyday life. Even the diatribes against art bear witness to the fact that Situationism is doomed to be haunted by it – art seems to remain the ineluctable paradigm for their programme. In its *Action in Belgium against the International Assembly of Art Critics*, the Situationists declared collectively, 'The Situationist International is now organising the unitary artistic activity of the future. You [the critics] have nothing more to say. The Situationist International will leave no place for you. We will starve you out.'

(Knabb 2007:49)

'Détournement', a favourite Situationist strategy, may be described as 'subversion via abusive re-use and re-contextualisation'. Danish painter and situationist Asger Jorn (1914-1973) in 'Detournement as Negation and Prelude' calls it (Knabb 2007:108-109) a kind of artistic 'game', where the authors additionally acknowledge it as characteristic of contemporary avant-garde art. Crediting Dada with 'bringing out into the open a permanent crisis in [...] intellectual and artistic valorisation'<sup>145</sup> and speculating that 'the artistic rebellion of the next generation may be able to avoid its recuperation,'<sup>146</sup> the situationists' paper asserts that they are 'discovering that it [art] is a subordinate aspect of the total transformation of our use of space, of feelings and of time.' (Knabb 2007:107) Art, notwithstanding their critique, remains paradigmatic for the Situationists.

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<sup>144</sup> See Pinder 2006:51

<sup>145</sup> In *Ideologies, Classes and the Domination of Nature (excerpts)*, unattributed, Internationale Situationniste #8, January 1963

<sup>146</sup> I.e., becoming absorbed into The Spectacle, and their works becoming economic units of exchange.

On the other hand, Lefebvre's programme for change is predicated on a more outright repudiation of surrealism, of whose culpability he complains that 'one of the most recent forms which criticism of everyday life has taken is criticism of the *real* by the *surreal*. By abandoning the everyday to find the marvellous and the surprising (simultaneously immanent in the real and transcending it), Surrealism rendered triviality unbearable. This was a good thing, but it had a negative side: transcendental contempt for the real, for work, for example.' (Lefebvre, 2004:314) Notwithstanding Lefebvre's participation in the Surrealist movement in the 1920s,<sup>147</sup> his eventual contempt towards it was based on his criticism of their *merveilleux moderne* 'seeking to think the sensory and the everyday rather than perceive them.' (Lefebvre 1:120)<sup>148</sup> In Sheringham's words (2006:135), for Lefebvre, their 'quest for the surreal undermines and deprecates daily existence'. Lefebvre's attitude in this regard would seem to leave scant room for culture to act as a revolutionary force, and he indeed judged it rather as divisive, separating *la fête* from *la banalité*. Lefebvre felt that the 'revolutionary' role of the artist lay 'simply in registering the ironic disparity between the world he aspires to and the real world he lives in' whereas Debord – typical of the Situationist preference for active intervention – adopts a less 'academic' distance from the actively subversive possibilities of art, or art-like, intervention.

It is easy to get lost in the ideological tussles between Lefebvre and the Situationists and between factions within Situationism itself (the Situationists fragmented in 1962)<sup>149</sup> however, in tracing what we do with our feelings about places and those practices that purport to

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<sup>147</sup> Sheringham 2006:135 cites various biographers of Lefebvre

<sup>148</sup> Cited by Sheringham 2006:135

<sup>149</sup> The Second Situationist International and the more overtly political Spectro-Situationist International under the direction of Debord and Raoul Vaneigem (b. 1934)



engage with this question, summarising aspects of their respective thinking is useful to my project's overarching quest and questions: What might be *done* with feelings about place?

- (1) which narratives do we use to explain them or explain them away
- (2) how seriously or otherwise we treat them
- (3) whether exploring and elaborating on these feelings, as the surrealists held (following Freud) offered a way to access some more profound inner reality (with the whole self)
- (4) whether construing buildings, streets, and districts as capable of generating moods and feelings was solely a strategy to revolutionise 'reality'
- (5) whether creative re-readings unpick alienation

Each question is motivated by and contingent on an ideological or artistic agenda.

### **3.3.5 Psychogeography: A 'Methodology' - But with Nothing to Show for Itself**

I have already alluded to the ambiguity of psychogeographic practice, the practice of the *dérive* – intentionally directionless, urban drifting – enabling participants to turn themselves into receptors of putatively obscured 'emotional messages' of place. Debord spelt it out: 'In a *dérive* one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there.' (Debord, 62)

However the situationists seemed to continue to struggle between framing the *dérive* as (yet another) playfully provocative gesture and some sort of quasi-academic 'sociological research project'. Indeed, it seems that many of the SI's 'pleasingly vague'

psychogeographical excursions were, in all but name, Parisian semi-drunken bar crawls for the boys.<sup>150</sup> Their psychogeography had little or nothing to show, without any tangible results

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<sup>150</sup> There is interesting research on participation by women in the situationist movement and extant critiques of the (male) situationist use of images of women in the material they produced.

or a practical methodology. It was soon quietly dropped from their revised programme which was becoming increasingly strident and overtly political. According to Coverley (2010:102) there is no mention of psychogeography in either of the key texts issued by the two principal ideologues of Situationists after the movement's internal split (Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967) and Raoul Vaneigem's *Revolution of Everyday Life* (1967)) although a plangent passage in Vaneigem's book (1983:94) wistfully invokes psychogeographic terminology, 'What is this detour whereby I get lost when I try to find myself? What is this screen that separates me from myself under the pretence of protecting me? And how can I ever rediscover myself in this crumbling fragmentation of which I am composed? I move forward into a terrible doubt of ever coming to grips with myself. It is as though my path were already marked out in front of me, as though my thoughts and feelings were following the contours of a mental landscape they imagine they are creating, but which is, in fact, moulding them.' But Vaneigem also specifically mentions psychogeography; he adjures that to repair the past requires changing 'the psychogeography of our surroundings, to hew our unfulfilled dreams and wishes out of the veinstone that imprisons them, to let individual passions find harmonious collective expression.'<sup>151</sup>

Debord's own words suggest that the Situationists gave up the ghost of psychogeography as a failure, a strategy (or ruse), with nothing to show for itself. Debord asserts that although '(t)he secrets of the city are, at a certain level, decipherable', their personal significance is *just too elusive* ('the personal meaning [these secrets] have for us is incommunicable'<sup>152</sup>). Even assuming their over-theorised psychogeographic jaunts were launched as little more than a prank (which, considering the Situationists' embrace of Dada-inflected legacy of 'revolutionary playfulness', is probable), the Situationists were on to something, even if

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<sup>151</sup> See Stracey 2015:54

<sup>152</sup> Sadler (1998:80) attributes this to Debord

unable to make anything of it. The Situationists perhaps hoped they could shock themselves into discovering a place's emotional valency by abandoning their intentions to do so, and by dedicating their peregrinations to chance. This did not seem to have yielded the hoped-for results.

However, I believe that assessing the 'usefulness' of psychogeography was the prime criterion for the Situationists (as for Lefebvre) in judging its value. The Situationists and Lefebvre were intensely engaged in framing theories, gathering experiences, and developing strategies towards specific ends. Their politics had sent them on a Marxist-informed teleological voyage where solely ideas and strategies that could prove themselves useful to their journey were allowed to survive. Receptivity to the subtle moods and atmospheres of the urban environment was simply of no obvious use. While much more has been and can still be written regarding the situationist attitude to culture, this project focuses on how emotional reactions to places affect how they are interpreted – and what role psychogeography may have in prioritising, studying and even systematising this.

Psychogeography has subsequently evolved in numerous ways. Initially, a 'pleasingly vague' concept, its useful vagueness, or flexibility, is reflected in a paper where Sidaway (2021:552) states (crediting an anonymous referee for the following formulation), 'Psychogeography [is] sprawling for it invokes many genres and practices and diverse intellectual, cultural and political domains. [...] There are many psychogeographies to address, from the political and functional gathering of data for the creation of 'situations' to proliferating literary modes and the practice-in-itself of self-reflexive walking-as-doing.'

For our purposes, it is neither necessary (nor possible) to provide an exhaustive panorama of the startling proliferation of 'psychogeography'. It has become an umbrella methodological

term for academic and non-academic pursuits. In August 2020, a Google search for ‘psychogeography’ yielded 437,000 links. Three years later, the same search word yielded 707,000 links! Of the many current uses of psychogeography, some might be summarily defined as sociological, geographical, and ethnological analyses but with *added feeling*.<sup>153</sup> I will temper this slightly harsh indictment by exploring some exemplars of recent ‘psychogeographies’. These evoke the breadth of its current applications and suggest what it has come to signify.

### 3.4 Psychogeography Now

I have chosen to explore papers by four academics, a school-teaching project, and a trilogy of films, all deploying or exploring psychogeography. The first paper compares psychogeography with marketing (specifically the historiography of modern marketing, starting with Stanley Hollander). I explore the psychogeographical dimensions of films by Patrick Keiller. I look at a recent academic thesis that provides a psychogeographic account

<sup>153</sup> For example: Megan Hicks *Pavement Graffiti: an exploration of Roads and footways in Words and pictures* (thesis 2013); Annemarie Lopez *MAPPING THE SHADOWLANDS: URBAN NOIR DETECTIVE FICTION AND PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY* (thesis 2018); Ralph Overill *Monsters and Margins* (thesis 2022); Michelle Williams Gamaker, *The Effectiveness of Symbols: Psychogeographic Explorations of the Body* in Monika Ankele, Benoît Majerus (eds.) *MATERIAL CULTURES OF PSYCHIATRY*, Columbia University Press (2020); David Ashford, *The Mechanics of the Occult: London’s Psychogeographical Fiction as Key to Understanding the Roots of the Gothic*, *The Literary London Journal*, Volume 10 Number 2 (Autumn 2013); Peter William Bailey, *UNSEEN STARS: A psychogeographical journey through time and dream towards acceptance*, (thesis 2013); Luke Bennett, *Bunkerology: a case study in the theory and practice of urban exploration*, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 2011, volume 29, pages 421-434; KIRSTIE BOWDEN, *Glimpses through the Gates: Gentrification and the Continuing Histories of the Devon County Pauper Lunatic Asylum* (2011) *Housing, Theory and Society*, 29:1, 114-139, DOI: 10.1080/14036096.2011.600773; Sarah Martin, ‘If I had any luck, he’d be a corpse’: Harriet Vane and the Psychogeographic Nature of Detection (2023) *Women: a cultural review*, 33:4, 380-393, DOI: 10.1080/09574042.2023.2183627;

of the financial hub, the City of London. I consider a geography teacher's use of psychogeography as a pedagogical tool. I make observations about a geographer's paper associating psychogeography with 'hanging out' and conclude with examining two interlinked papers by cultural theorist and psychogeographer, Tina Richardson.

### 3.4.1 Psychogeography and Marketing

Stephen Brown, writing (from a marketer's viewpoint) about the 'family resemblances' between psychogeography and marketing history, constitutes an attempt by a professor of marketing research to put the 'pretensions' of psychogeography in their place. He draws his definitions of psychogeography from familiar sources: Ellard ('how our surroundings affect us' (Ellard 2015:20)) and Coverley ('the impact of place on the human psyche' (Coverley, 2010)) and, pursuing his case, juxtaposes Niagara Falls and Stonehenge with a London store's window displays and 'the breathtakingly brilliant aesthetics of Apple's spit-and-polished flagship store in the Big Apple.' (Brown 2017:3) Deriding psychogeography's cool academic status, while name-checking geographers Doreen Massey and David Harvey, Brown (2017:10) 'observes' that scholars with a geographical background rank among the most radical in the academy (unlike marketers, he supposes). However, even though marketing academics are less 'cool' than geographers, Brown (2017:5) scornfully infers that marketing historians do not need psychogeography, arguing that marketers are more likely to infer that psychogeography is a fancy, fifty-dollar word for 'atmospherics', a term codified as a marketing concept (Kotler 1973) by marketing guru Philip Kotler (b 1931). Brown (2017:6) reminds us that coining *atmospherics*<sup>154</sup> 'remains a seminal moment in marketing

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<sup>154</sup> According to Brown, Kotler identifies atmospherics as comprising 'visual dimensions (colour, brightness, size, shapes), aural dimensions (volume, pitch), olfactory dimensions (scent, freshness) and tactile dimensions (softness, smoothness, temperature) – and noted numerous examples of atmospherics in action, everything from shoe stores and bargain basements to furniture retailers and restaurants'.

scholarship’ – a claim based on Kotler’s insight that the place/context where a product is bought may arguably be *more* persuasive than the product itself in luring the consumer to buy<sup>155</sup>; hence marketers’ sensitivity to place and the opportunities they must organise in them for profit. Justly identifying psychogeography as a characteristically literary endeavour,<sup>156</sup> Brown (2017:9-9) insists that marketers’ evocations of place both vie with and eclipse the best of psychogeographic writing. Brown (2017:6) tells us that ‘reading the compendious psychogeographical literature, it is evident that marketing’s contributions to the poetics of place are not pale imitations.’ Brown (2017:7) delights in picking out passages (including one by Holbrook) where ‘the sad side of psychogeography is on unseemly show’ and contrasts such writing unfavourably with, for example, J. F. Sherry’s (1998b:122) ‘scintillating study’<sup>157</sup> of *Niketown*, Chicago. Brown claims that while marketing, like psychogeography, is sensitive to the vibes of existing places, marketing’s own savvy use of atmospherics, and the ‘deliberate disorganising display’ principle (which he reveals as ‘atmospherics secret weapon’), empower it to create and orchestrate places.<sup>158</sup> He argues that

<sup>155</sup> Brown cites Kotler: ‘ [that] in some cases, the place, more specifically the atmosphere of the place, is more influential than the product itself in the purchase decision. In some cases, the atmosphere is the primary product’. (Kotler, 1973, p. 48) Kotler, P. (1973), “Atmospherics as a marketing tool”, *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 49 No. 4, pp. 48-64.

<sup>156</sup> Brown references ‘The intensely *literary* character of the psychogeographic community’ (Woodcock, P. (2000), *This Enchanted Isle: The Neo-Romantic Vision from William Blake to the New Visionaries*, Gothic Images, Glastonbury.

<sup>157</sup> See Sherry (1998:109-146): ‘The soul of the company store: Nike Town Chicago and the emplaced brandscape’, in Sherry, J.F. (Ed.), *Servicescapes: The Concept of Place in Contemporary Markets*, NTC Business Books, Chicago, IL.

<sup>158</sup> Brown (2017) approvingly quotes Kotler’s affirmation that ‘IKEA, surely, is the apogee of the deliberately disorganised display principle that’s atmospherics’ secret weapon (Kotler, 1973), the most twisted tool in marketing management’s psychogeographical toolkit’ and then with chutzpah, from Lowe and McArthur’s 2005

psychogeography is by comparison passive and at best only responsive. Brown however concedes that psychogeography's weakness for the magic and the mystical can yet teach a trick or two to those sad marketeers too habituated to statistical and neurological analyses. Brown seems to think that *magic* is 'unfailing front and centre' for psychogeography (it is not), and that its seam of magic provides a great opportunity for marketeers to mine, especially to address 'new age' consumers. Brown suggests for example that 'Ley lines alone are rich with marketing potential'. He correctly attributes the 'discovery' of ley lines to Alfred Watkins (1855-1935). Still, he pulls a fast one in drafting Watkins, a retired sales representative for an obscure local brewer, into the marketing fraternity. Watkins, now identified as an esoteric 'new age prophet' (Coverley 2012:51), was a visionary writer whose obsession with ley lines was decidedly not conceived as a marketing ploy<sup>159</sup> nor compatible with the psychogeography conceived by the Situationists.

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book, *Is It Just Me or Is Everything Shit?* (p.127): 'IKEA fucks with your head. All you want is some furniture: why do they want your sanity in return? The layout alone makes you feel like a lab rat. The stores are like psychoactive jigsaw puzzles with moving pieces, designed by a sick Swedish physicist with access to extra dimensions. They have short cuts between adjoining sections, allowing you to pop through a little walkway from one part of the store to another. But where you end up won't be where you were trying to get to, even if the store map said it would be. Worse, if you decide you were better off where you were, and pop back through the hole, you won't end up where you started, but in a different section again. Sometimes on a different floor altogether. In a different branch of IKEA'.

<sup>159</sup> Watkins, an English author, was a self-taught amateur archaeologist, antiquarian and businessman who experienced a revelation while standing on a hillside in Herefordshire, England, in 1921. He noticed on the British landscape an apparent arrangement of straight lines positioned along ancient features. For these he subsequently coined the term 'ley', now usually referred to as 'ley line' because the line passed through places whose names happened to contain the syllable 'ley'!

Brown's dismissal of psychogeography may be more than a little disingenuous. His narrative suggests that everything psychogeography does, marketing does better and that marketing, in any case, developed its 'weapons' without help from psychogeography thank you very much. His paper shows how much he and his coterie are indebted to psychogeography for putting a 'place' on the emotional map (psychogeography is his sole reference source). However, it also shows how easily the 'revolutionary' insights the surrealists and their successors shared with the world have been stripped of all ideological baggage they had been intended to carry. The surrealists, and possibly the situationists, believed that subversively reinterpreting the urban environment was a way of revolutionising everyday life; their innovations have become (at least for Brown) tantamount to an in-store IKEA *dérive*. Instead of psychogeography being a way to explore and respond to the emotional charge of place, it has become, for Brown, a method for concocting chemistries via artificially created environments to colonise human responses and manipulate human consumption. This bears an interesting comparison to the intentions of Netherne's architect, Hine, who hoped to create a mood-managing therapeutic environment [see later]. However, Brown is right in pointing to the literary-specific nature of psychogeography. Moreover, it is true that the subversive re-writing of place – as practised by Breton and Aragon et al. – can be easily subverted and put to other uses.

### **3.4.2 Post-Psychogeographic Filmmaker**

British filmmaker Patrick Keiller (b. 1950) may be described loosely as adopting (or co-opting) a psychogeographic approach. Keiller writes and directs 'documentary fiction' (Cooper 2017:160) - itself a problematic term<sup>160</sup> - exploring the 'subsumption of public space to private interest' (Cooper 2017). Their style is uniformly spare; the camera rarely moves,

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<sup>160</sup> Does this term mean making fictions out of facts, or fictions that seem 'factual', or simply a melange of fact and fiction?



and each shot is ‘locked off’. Commenting on this quality, geographer Doreen Massey<sup>161</sup> (1944-2016) (who collaborated with Keiller on this project) suggests that ‘these long takes are not about stasis either. Stuff is happening. The plants are getting on with their business. The bees and the butterflies are working with them. The air is busy with activity (Massey 1991). ‘Robinson had once said he believed that, if he looked at the landscape hard enough, it would reveal to him the molecular basis of historical events, and in this way, he hoped to see into the future.’ Just before we meet the teasels and the butterflies, we have learned of the longer historical story: ‘a 40-year study of plants, birds and, in particular, butterflies in Britain had given a firm indication of approaching mass extinction. But the moments spent with the teasel tell of what it takes to survive, just to go on, from season to season. The work must be done for both the teasel and the butterflies. These long takes give us a certain stillness amid the rush and flow of globalisation. But they are not stills. They are about duration. They tell us of becoming in place.’ (Massey 2008)

Neither the narrators nor the ostensible protagonists to which Keiller’s narratives refer ever appear on-screen. The delivery of the narration has documentary-like flatness, redolent of educational broadcasts, state-funded ‘beneficial’ educational programmes, and public service announcements of previous decades. The unadorned writing style of the narration often seems quasi-academic, giving it a style or patina of ‘truth’; such writing and delivery also

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<sup>161</sup> Radical geographer, feminist, theorist and political activist admired worldwide for her work on space, place and power who through her politically engaged books and essays, electrified geographical scholarship. Her concept of “geometries of power” drew attention to the ways in which different people and places experienced processes such as globalisation. Central to her contribution was her “relational” approach to understanding space and place. Rather than seeing space dispassionately as a surface on which phenomena were distributed, she theorised space in a much more lively and contested way as a constellation of different trajectories of activity. (Adapted from David Featherstone’s obituary for Massey, *The Guardian* (27 Mar 2016))

betray a minimalist, coolly understated ‘art’ vibe. Robinson, the eponymous hero<sup>162</sup> of Keiller’s trilogy - *London*, *Robinson in Space*, *Robinson in Ruins* – is, or has been, involved in an explorative journey. *Robinson in Ruins* is narrated by an unnamed director, the head of a group seeking to ‘reconstruct Robinson’s thinking from notes and films recovered from the caravan where he was last known to live’ (Fisher 2010). In each film, Robinson – initially described as having been commissioned by a London advertising agency to conduct his investigations – seems to be seeking answers to a *specific* problem. The musings that make up the voice-overs of these ostensible travelogues confront questions regarding England’s discretely hidden entrenched political, mercantile, and military interests and the country’s inevitable decline and drift towards collapse and perhaps, on an ecological level (in *Robinson in Ruins*) extinction. In *London*, we see ‘tourist-fave’ Tower Bridge – it could have been Carnaby Street or the Tower of London – while the narration rubbishes England, mentioning almost everything except its reputation for bad teeth: ‘Dirty Old Blighty. Undereducated, economically backward, bizarre. A catalogue of modern miseries, with its fake traditions, its Irish war, its militarism and secrecy, its silly old judges, its hatred of intellectuals, its ill-health and bad food, its sexual repression, its hypocrisy and racism and its indolence. It’s so exotic, so home-made.’

In his essay, Keiller (2013:7) writes that *London* was ‘Based on and sometimes parodied ideas about what constitutes successful urban space that had been current in architectural discourse since the late 1970s.’ He writes that although Robinson has been commissioned by a ‘well-known international advertising agency to undertake a study of the ‘problem’ of

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<sup>162</sup> Coverley (2012:16) claims Defoe (particularly on account of his novel, ‘Robinson Crusoe’) as proto-psychogeographer and uses him as exemplar to construct an argument for the British origins of psychogeography: “Defoe inaugurates a tradition of London writing in which the topography of the city is refashioned through the imaginative force of the writer “

England [...] it is not stated in the film what this problem is, but there are images of Eton, Oxford and Cambridge, a Rover car plant, the inward investment sites of Toyota and Samsung, a lot of ports, supermarkets, a shopping mall, and other subjects which evoke the by now familiar critique of 'gentlemanly capitalism', which sees the UK's economic weakness as a result of the City of London's long-term [English] neglect of the [United Kingdom's] industrial economy, particularly its manufacturing base.'

Massey (2008) cites the funding application for the films which she prepared with Keiller to explain the project: '[it was] to identify, understand and document aspects of the current global predicament in the UK's landscape, and explore its histories and possible futures by creating images and texts, and combinations of both, which together constitute a critique and a document of the UK's landscape at a particular point in its history, in a period characterised by conflict and anxiety about the future.' For Keiller (2010), evoking landscape in almost elegiac terms, the project contrasts near- epidemic levels of 'mobility and displacement' with a national regret for the loss of a more settled, agricultural past.

While the films are intended to operate also as political critique and polemic – cataloguing 'historical moments that reveal the barbarism of capitalist relations'<sup>163</sup> – they invoke psychogeography to do so. The spaces and places presented in these films are frequently layered with histories of conflict and repression, and their contestation is paralleled by a contestation of meaning arising from the disconnect between the films' images and the narration - a 'dialectical confrontation of image and narration.'<sup>164</sup> The resulting destabilisation of meaning provokes and invites transformations of meaning through re-reading or

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<sup>163</sup> Cooper (2019:168): 'In the same manner that Marx sought to denaturalise the bourgeois history propounded by the ideologues Ricardo and Malthus'.

<sup>164</sup> In connection with this, Cooper (2019:162) introduces Benjamin's notion of 'profane illumination'.

reinterpreting what you first thought something was about, which is a ‘classic’ psychogeographic terrain.

The transformative urge associated with revolution and psychogeography is often implicit in art in general<sup>165</sup>. Indeed, Keiller acknowledges psychogeography’s debt to the landscape tradition in painting and the ambiguity generated and celebrated by painting. Writing about Welsh landscape painter Richard Wilson (1714-1782), Keiller (2013) mentions the: ‘metaphorical transposition of landscape - seeing somewhere as *somewhere else* - and the consequent effect on the landscape are widely encountered in art, life and the relations between these’. Indeed Keiller himself avers that: ‘[t]he desire to transform the world is not uncommon, and there are several ways of fulfilling it. One of these is by adopting a certain subjectivity, aggressive or passive, deliberately sought or simply the result of a mood, which alters the experience of the world and so transforms it.’

Keiller recounts how his exploration of place shifts from meaning to mood: ‘The more I looked, the more I found, and the more I found, the more I looked, but gradually my interest shifted from the instant transformation of a building (object) to the discovery of a deeper sensation of place (space) akin to the *stimmung* that Nietzsche discovered during his last euphoria in Turin, and that so affected de Chirico.’

An overview of these films suggests that Keiller – seemingly subscribing to the belief that place is *always* potentially ambiguous and equivocal (and therefore contestable) – takes advantage of such qualities, reframing *place* to ‘prove’ his critique. Cultural theorist Mark Fisher (1968-2017) suggests: ‘The ‘ruins’ Robinson walks through here are partly the new

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<sup>165</sup> *Transform the world! Poetry must be made by all!*, is the title of a seminal exhibition at Stockholm’s Moderna Museet (curated by Ron Hunt, 1969) and was derived from writings by Lautréamont and Marx, respectively.

ruins of a neo-liberal culture that has not yet accepted its demise and, for the moment, continues with the same old gestures like a zombie that doesn't know it's dead. Fredric Jameson observes in *The Seeds of Time* [which the film cites] that 'it seems to be easier for us today to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and nature than the breakdown of late capitalism; perhaps that is due to some weakness in our imaginations.'

Keiller (2013) quotes Aragon's words approvingly. 'I felt the great power that certain places, certain sights exercised over me, without discovering the principle of this enchantment. Some everyday objects unquestionably contained for me a part of that mystery, plunged me into that mystery ... The way I saw it, an object became transfigured: it took on neither the allegorical aspect nor the character of the symbol; it did not so much manifest an idea as constitute that very idea. Thus, it extended deeply into the world's mass ... I acquired the habit of constantly referring the whole matter to the judgement of a kind of frisson which guaranteed the soundness of this tricky operation.' But where Keiller invokes familiar psychogeographic tropes to substantiate his polemic, he does so with reluctant hopelessness: things cannot be changed at all, and his country's demise is inevitable.

Keiller celebrates the *subjective transformations of everyday space*. They are, for Keiller, not only 'glimpses of what could happen' but also reflect what collectively happens during revolutionary upheavals. But the most that 'subjective transformations' can achieve is a 'dialectic' that shakes our habitual perspectives of our surroundings (Keiller 2013). Echoing the situationists' conclusion, it seems that psychogeography is – for Keiller – at best a wan partner for revolution. It is as if psychogeography becomes for Keiller less a matter of

exploring the strange emotional heft of places may consist of than an opportunity to make the environment illustrate, or ‘speak’, his polemic.<sup>166</sup>

### 3.4.3 Psychogeography of the City of London

In her thesis, *Members Only, Place and Performativity in the City of London* (2017, University of Essex), Louise Nash (2017:17), ex-City employee-turned-academic, explores the City of London ‘as a particular work sector and setting, [emphasising] the symbolic and material significance of place to understanding organizational life’ and the place of the City ‘as organization’. Her analysis (ibid:6) draws on Lefebvre’s theorisation of space ‘as socially produced and asserts that his work on rhythms emphasise how the City’s socio-cultural and material aspects are co-constitutive and compel and constrain particular behaviours’. In other words, how a place is organised and the individual corporate hierarchies existing within (and shaped by) that place can include and exclude various classes and genders. And, relevant to Nash’s uses of psychogeography: how these people *experience* in different ways and *relate* to (a) the place in which they work (and – of less relevance to me - (b) the extent to which they feel secure or vulnerable in their membership of a working community). Nash (ibid:9) ‘aims to recognise ‘[the] work setting as a dynamic nexus of meaning and materiality in which work is embedded’, arguing that a *sense of belonging* and *not* belonging shape a person’s *sense of place*.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Keiller’s use of tropes associated with psychogeography and Situationism leads to films which are, and are not, psychogeographic. His practice is notionally intended to provoke an independent reinterpretation of experience rather than a recipe for serving up pre-formed interpretation as an art-based three-course cinematographic meal.

<sup>167</sup> Invoking respectively, Tuan and Cresswell, and then Tyler

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In alluding to the feelings she had towards the City when a City employee, Nash invokes geographer Nigel Thrift (b 1949) to ask what gives the City its ‘distinctive patina’<sup>168</sup>. Do others *feel* as she did about it (and if so, how do such *shared meanings* come about)? Nash also asks whether the particular *feelings experienced* while working are gendered (investigating the expectations of the place and the costs of membership). Nash name-checks many scholarly authorities, but none more than Lefebvre, whose theories are used to buttress her methodology (ibid:21) differentiates Lefebvre from numerous geographers by identifying as his ‘USP’ the ‘sociological conception of the interrelatedness of space and place’.

Reminding us that for Lefebvre ‘spatial practices can be only evaluated empirically’ Nash explains that her *methodology* is some ‘highly subjective’ walking which she provocatively calls ‘streetwalking’. While for Nash (2017:14) her ‘streetwalking’ requires ‘the body to become immersed in the setting, noting the rhythms, perceptions, and emotional experiences’ – yet she refrains from alluding to the situationist *dérive*.

Nash (2017:17-18) states her aims as: *conceptual* (extend ‘organisational space’ to an entire district), *empirical* (researching an under-explored global financial hub), *methodological* (develop an organizational ‘rhythm analysis’ (after Lefebvre) incorporating ‘other elements’ of observational and embodied approaches to researching organisations), and *theoretical* (‘to apply a Lefebvrian reading of space as socially produced and able to be analysed using rhythms to the City, and to analyse the performativity enacted here about a particular place’). The last interests me the most as it has the greatest bearing on her appropriation of psychogeography.

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<sup>168</sup> Cf. Richard Hamilton’s 1956 proto-pop painting, entitled: *Just what is it that makes today’s homes so different, so appealing?*

Nash (2017:31) mentions in passing work by Damian O'Doherty<sup>169</sup> whose *walking-based research* leads him to speculate that a city may manifest behaviour that can imply (or be construed as) psychic agency and the city's own 'self-awareness' but Nash, as already mentioned, continually affirms Lefebvre as the conceptual lynchpin of her thesis, especially his 'Rhythmanalysis' where, according to Nash (ibid 2017:31,37), '[t]he rhythmanalyst perceives the whole of the space, not just visually, but with all her senses, and by using her bodily responses to analyse them' – this leads Nash to allege that 'specific spaces [i.e. places] have their *distinct rhythms* which can be both read and analysed and, importantly for Lefebvre, felt with the body.'

Nash contrasts Lefebvre's conceptualisation of space – including his idea that space is 'ontologically' unstable, constantly being brought into being, repeated, and remade<sup>170</sup> – with geographer John Agnew's belief that 'in the end it is the *concrete effects of place* that matter more than remaining at the abstract level of conceptualizing place.'

In summarising the history and the literature regarding the City, and stressing its historic 'maleness' and the tendency of its adherents to 'other' women and the 'invisible' low-paid migrant cleaning staff, etc., Nash (2017:55-56) again invokes Lefebvre to show how his concept of 'abstract space' (space represented by elite social groups as homogenous, instrumental and ahistorical in order to facilitate the exercise of state power and the free flow of capital) lends itself to a discussion of the manner in which 'downtown business spaces in [...] cities are exclusionary territories dominated by white, middle class males.'

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<sup>169</sup> O'Doherty (2013) *Off-Road and Spaced-Out in the City: Organization and the Interruption of Topology* (Space and Culture, 16(2), pp.211-228).

<sup>170</sup> Ibid:42 Agnew, J. (2011) Space and place. In Agnew, J.A. and Livingstone, D.N. (2011) *The Sage Handbook of Geographical Knowledge* pp.316-330. London: Sage.



Nash's exploration of gender and the effect of different masculinities in the work environment conspicuously omits her experiential / emotional perspectives on The City.

Bluntly, where is the 'psychogeography' here?

Acknowledging that an environment - the architecture of The City - affirms/reflects its gendered hierarchy<sup>171</sup> Nash addresses the methodology she previously called 'streetwalking'.

Guiding readers through Lefebvrian theorisation, Nash (2017:83-84) proposes that Rhythmanalysis is its most relevant methodological tool, yet despairs of its intrinsic intractability.<sup>172</sup> 'One of the difficulties of using Rhythmanalysis as a methodological approach is that Lefebvre gives little instruction on how to carry out this method; he gives very few details of his research.' (Nash 2017:90) This is perhaps unsurprisingly redolent of psychogeography's own (arguably deliberate) methodological ambiguity!

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<sup>171</sup> Nash (ibid:83-84) writes, 'The way in which the built environment both reflects and affects organisational gender relations has not attracted a great deal of attention (Bell and Valentine, 1995, is an exception, exploring sexualities from a geographical perspective, using place to understand how the heterosexual body has been both appropriated and resisted on a community and city scale). Organizations have, however, always used the built environment as a way of physically and symbolically signifying power and strength. That the built environment of the City of London is inherently masculine with its soaring towers has been noted, the obvious symbolism of a corporate tower block is used to depict a version of masculine corporate success or potency; what I have termed the 'hyper' masculine. Ideas about potency dominate modern mythologies of men in the City, particularly the hyper masculine. As well as the phallic structures of much of the modern architecture, successful City players are described in sexual terms as having a rampant libido, of having 'screwed' the markets, of being virile'.

<sup>172</sup>

Nash (2017:91) reassures us that, '[w]hat [Lefebvre] does always emphasise, however, is the importance of *listening to the body*, and of its centrality to understanding urban settings, an imperative that underpinned an approach described below as 'streetwalking', which formed the first dimension of my research methodology.'<sup>173</sup> After eruditely contextualising 'walking' as research practice, Nash (ibid:91) writes that: In an effort to develop a method of rhythmanalysis which involved all my senses and which was rooted in traditions of discovering and observing the urban, I turned to a number of walking traditions to analyse what could be utilised from each to supplement and augment the exploration of rhythms.'

Only at this point does Nash invoke (ibid:94-99) 'flânerie' and name-checks the usual suspects, pretty much following Merlin Coverley's own genealogy of psychogeography (Coverley 2012), including Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin and, subsequently, Blake, Rimbaud, Yeats, Poe, Dickens Ackroyd, Ballard, and Sinclair, yet continues to omit all mention of the Situationists. That it until Nash (ibid:100) informs readers that: 'Part of my own research is based on a personal and subjective approach, but [...] the aim is to communicate how the social and the material interconnect and interact in this setting, and to record emotional responses and urban rhythms; in this way, a methodology which uses elements from both flânerie, rhythmanalysis and psychogeography can help to 'map out' a new reading, or a new imagining of the setting', recalling that: 'The intention of the *dérive* is to surface emotional responses to urban sites, and is a purposefully observational method, concerned with the way in which certain areas, streets or buildings resonate with states of mind, inclinations and desires and which offer ways of re-imagining the city.'<sup>174</sup>

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Nash (2017:101-3) explains that her ‘streetwalking’ methodology enables a ‘full sensory experience of the City’ by combining the three methods: ‘On a practical level, the fieldwork involving walking drew on the key themes of observation from flânerie, movement and bodily experience from rhythmanalysis, and the more emotionally attuned and intense experience of the dérive, with its occasionally occult and mythological undertones which resonate with the ‘haunted’ palimpsest that is the City of London. [...] The streetwalking methodology - walking the streets of the setting over several days - is an attempt to integrate flânerie, psycho-geography and rhythmanalysis to be both fully immersed within the research setting and aware of my emotional responses (the psycho-geographic approach), aware of my own embodied responses to the rhythms and flows (the rhythmanalyst approach) and able to observe in a more detached way, looking for the unusual and the beautiful in the urban setting (the approach of the flâneur).’ Nash argues combining all three methods, ‘avoided the pitfalls of using only one walking method’ asking, ‘does a flâneur, for instance, pay attention to rhythms? Does a psycho-geographer use visual observation? Would a rhythmanalysis used in isolation include emotional attunement?’

Nash insists she pays rigorous attention ‘to the rhythms of place’ and observes ‘the order in which events unfolded, such as sequential patterns of behaviour, and the significance of the moments when activities routinely take place, in order to develop an understanding of the ‘time space’ of the City.’<sup>175</sup> Nash (2017:110) also notes [her own] ‘internal responses’ which includes ‘sensory perceptions, for example temperature, bodily (dis)comfort, as well as feelings and emotions, reflections and interpretations.’

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<sup>174</sup> Nash cites Phillips, M. (2010) from *The Waste Land to Past-Present Fuchsia: The re-development of the Broadmead Shopping Centre* (Culture and Organization, 16(3), pp.259-282).

<sup>175</sup> Nash cites: Lyon, D. (2016) Doing audio-visual montage to explore time and space: The everyday rhythms of Billingsgate Fish Market. *Sociological Research Online*, 21(3), p.12.

Nash (2017:122) reminds us that the centrality of Lefebvrian reading of socially produced space to her project (especially his notion of perceived space), calls for a methodology which ‘focuses on perception; both my own, and that of organisational actors in the setting. As Lefebvre informs us, the researcher ‘must arrive at the concrete through experience’.

In her ‘psychogeographic notes’ Nash (2017:125) records the behaviour of those she observes and the impact it has on her: ‘The sense of purpose is already apparent – very few people are stopping to get their bearings or consult maps, most move swiftly towards the tube entrance or to the main exits. I can’t hear the jumble of languages and differently pitched voices that you hear at an airport or other railway stations – the background noise is footsteps and automated announcements, there is little audible conversation.’ Nash (2017:126) recounts [emphases added] that ‘I travelled in at the end of the working day, arriving just as the rush hour was starting, with workers heading home in the opposite direction to me: It’s really busy, people everywhere, which I expected, but I’d forgotten how intent and focused rush hour crowds can be when the purpose is focused in one direction – out of the City – and onto the platforms or down into the tube. In contrast I am arriving and it is physically hard work moving against the flow, I am weaving in and out of people. *It feels very different to crowds in the West End*, at, for example, Oxford Street tube, because although that’s even busier, the crowds are all heading in different directions and the shop doorways are as busy as the streets. Here it’s more purposeful and directional.’

Nash (2017:126-127) registers her own surprise at becoming so conspicuous an ‘outsider’.

Notwithstanding her familiarity with the environment, she unexpectedly feels ‘out of place’.<sup>176</sup>

Although still confident of being able to orient herself, Nash, in realising ‘that all the small streets are pretty much identical - even the churches look the same after a while’ is prompted to recall ‘*Freud’s sense of the uncanny* when getting lost in an Italian city and constantly turning back on himself’ which leads her (2017:127-128) to ‘*feel quite claustrophobic and dwarfed* by the buildings, you just can’t get a clear view at ground level’. And yet by the time

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<sup>176</sup> ‘This *feeling of being both an insider* – someone who is familiar with the geography, used to navigating the spaces, with experience of working here, *yet simultaneously an outsider* – not dressed conventionally for this environment, *sometimes hesitant*, looking like a tourist when I took photos, was ever present, and I *felt far more of an outsider than I had expected*:

‘I *don’t feel anonymous* as I would in any other part of London; instead, I *feel conspicuous* due to my casual attire, and I *feel unprofessional and student-y*. It is rare for me to be dressed so casually during the working week and I *feel out of place*, especially when I take photographs and I *feel even more conspicuous*.

‘This *sense of ‘not belonging’* was manifested through the performative elements of the City dress code; formal, preferably dark, business attire marks you out as an insider and confirms the functionality of the setting; this is a place where serious work is carried out. I *felt especially conscious of my lack of business clothing* during the winter and spring; on the hot days in June and July women were noticeably more casual in summer dresses, and men were more likely to wear short sleeved shirts with no ties, although they were still more formally dressed than I am used to in my own current working environment.

‘What was interesting was when the transitions occurred. I *felt noticeably more out of place* at the beginning of each trip, particularly when I was arriving at the beginning of the working day and everyone else was so purposeful. This often coincided with me looking at street maps and working out where I would start my walk; once I started walking, *becoming absorbed in the surroundings with a ‘purpose’*, I *felt much more of an insider*. Once I stopped to take photos, however, I *felt awkward and in the way* again:

...taking photographs makes you stand out and potentially seem like a tourist *exhibiting a naïve fascination* with what is commonplace to insiders.’ [emphases added]

of her final walk, Nash recovering a more confident, less vulnerable perspective<sup>177</sup>, observes further evidence of male hegemony.<sup>178</sup>

Nash, captioning one of her photographs as an ‘Impromptu meeting, Fenchurch Street’ (visible in the foreground is a woman ‘encumbered’), explains that her photograph illustrates the sense of ‘City streets functioning as office corridors’ where ‘meetings are held in the middle of the road [and] men call out to one another, and people move between office buildings carrying files and laptops and often stopping to talk enroute.’ This, claims Nash (ibid:133), highlights how the City functions as ‘an organization beyond the boundaries of individual institutions or workplaces.’

Although Nash lucidly conveys her observations and conclusions, I am principally interested in how she understands and makes use of ‘psychogeography’. Many of Nash’s experiential observations concern feelings included or excluded – on account of Nash’s dress, behaviour (taking photographs, not rushing to work or to meetings), or gender (in a place, she argues, of male empowerment). Such observations and feelings are clearly intended to map onto Nash’s thesis of a place equating to ‘space-as-organisation’, and the ‘sense’ of place this consequently generates (moreover, one shaped by belonging or by its opposite: not

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid:128 ‘By the time of my final walk, however, I was beginning to *feel a sense of ownership* of, and identification with, the City which surprised me. On this occasion I had participated in a guided walk, but informative though it was, I *felt quite irritated* at following someone else’s schedule, and *felt as if the streets and their rhythms were now imprinted upon me*. My ‘outsider’ status was reduced by my familiarity with the geography of the place and from my adoption of the busy rhythms; I had learned how to navigate the confusing streets, remembered how to walk purposefully, and *felt an emotional connection with some favoured areas*. This is a place which demands that you work hard for your acceptance; if you don’t dress correctly or have the right job, you can belong, to an extent, by understanding and negotiating the space.’

<sup>178</sup> Ibid:132 ‘I notice two separate groups of men greeting one another in the middle of the street – expansive handshakes, loud chat, a quick walk together along the pavement before parting. I see no women greeting one another in this familiar way. Again, the sense of being in the corridors of an office is strong – with the (male) executives calling out to each other as the secretaries scurry past.’

belonging). Her observations follow her ‘organizational rhythm analysis’ (incorporating what she defines as ‘observational and embodied research approaches’) and rely on a Lefebvrian reading of space to show that it is socially produced, using the rhythms of the City to ‘analyse the performativity enacted’ there. Her other experiential observations concern her emotional connectedness, on account of her familiarity with certain locations, the discomfort at getting lost (in connection with which she mentions relating to Freud’s ‘sense of the uncanny’), and her claustrophobia at being overcome (dwarfed) by the magnitude of the architecture (identified by Nash as ‘phallic’).

Many of Nash’s observations strike me as banal (and familiar) and seemingly serve only to support or confirm pre-existing notions. I was hoping for surprise and contradiction, but although my disappointment may say more about me than about psychogeography, I wish to explore it just the same. There is of course no reason at all why a ‘psychogeographic’ reading – assuming it responds to the moods that place engenders – will not reveal also the banal.

Uncovering the banal does not invalidate the research preceding it. But such discovery does raise questions: is the ‘personal’ research involved authentic, or does it simply tick boxes? Is this a case – to cite Lawrence Sterne (1759-1767) – of hypothesis tyrannically dominating all subsequent observation, compelling observation to fit a conceptual hegemony? In his novel, *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne writes ([1759] 2003) : ‘It is like a hypothesis, when once a man has conceived it, that it assimilates everything to itself, as proper nourishment; and, from the first moment of your begetting it, it generally grows the stronger by everything you see, hear, read, or understand.’

Is surprise and strangeness the sole quarry of psychogeography – to discover the unexpected at all costs (Lefebvre’s hostility to the exceptional (and therefore to surrealism) comes to mind) – if not, what is the problem of the banal? Surely, psychogeography – if it has any

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methodological validity – must be *empirical* – even if it seems contradictory when describing those infamously elusive qualitative phenomena: mood and atmosphere. In the same way that the *dérive* was conceptualised as intentionally unintentional/directionless (in terms of the route its practitioners followed), then surely psychogeography must abandon its highly prejudicial conceptual agenda and be sincerely, recklessly, playfully, experimentally open-ended (indeed as ‘open-ended’<sup>179</sup> as the very world which it intends to observe and on which it comments). Lastly, if psychogeography involves asking people how a place makes them feel (as Nash does), is it sufficient to take their answers at face value? Can such casual answers genuinely reflect the depths of feeling they may experience?

### 3.4.4 Psychogeography: Pedagogical Tool

In her paper: *Protected: Walking in Paris: Locating Hidden Sights in the City*<sup>180</sup> schoolteacher Emily Chandler<sup>181, 182</sup> name-checks the ‘usual suspects’ – the flâneur, Surrealism, and the SI – explaining that as the inspiration behind a study intended to encourage participants (her school pupils) to rely not on a map but on ‘the sights and their emotions’ to direct their walk around Paris, and to explore how walking in this unplanned way may influence their experiences of the city. She informs us that her study ‘builds on

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<sup>179</sup> See *Geoforum* 33 (2002:437–440) Introduction (Enacting geographies) source:

[www.elsevier.com/locate/geoforum](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/geoforum)

<sup>180</sup> Emily Chandler, Routes: The Journal for Student Geographers VOLUME 2 ISSUE 2 ISSN 2634-4815 Teacher Special Issue

<sup>181</sup> When her paper was produced Chandler was a geography teacher at St George’s The British International School, Düsseldorf Rhein-Ruhr.

<sup>182</sup> Chandler was given the ‘Rex Walford; Award for trainees or teachers who have just started their careers

<https://www.rgs.org/schools/competitions/rex-walford-award/2020-winner/>



[academic] work relating to the flâneur and Situationist International, as well as the more general concept of psychogeography to explore how people's experiences of walking around and discovering hidden sights within Paris differ.'

Citing cultural geographer Jon Anderson (2004:254-261)<sup>183</sup>, Chandler informs us that 'place is considered one of the most important concepts in Human Geography and plays an important role in forming identity'; citing Wunderlich<sup>184</sup> that 'people can develop a sense of place through walking', and citing Tuan (1977) for whom for 'a place to be created, meaning needs to be invested in it through movement.'

Providing her *Walking in Paris* project with cultural context, Chandler explains its debt to the Surrealists (their interest in 'out of the way places' and 'obsolete spaces') and to the SI (the SI's *dérive* as urban exploration is in effect a way of creating 'new possibilities for everyday life'). Chandler cites sources<sup>185</sup> arguing that walking can be a technique for changing ourselves and enhancing (our sense of) freedom, invoking the 'flâneur' ('one who wanders') who can 'find new experiences in the city', and Certeau's perspective (1984) that walking (especially when innovating routes) can open up a variety of possibilities.

Chandler explains that 'Following the walks, maps of the routes were hand drawn, showing only the roads walked and main roads, and photographs were added' and that '[t]he maps were created drawing inspiration from the psychogeographical maps created by Guy Debord.' Chandler exhorts us to pay attention to our surroundings, noting that 'people do not always look around or pay attention to the sights around them' and that such inattentiveness has been

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<sup>183</sup> *Talking Whilst Walking: A Geographical Archaeology of Knowledge*. Area, 36 (3)

<sup>184</sup> Filipa Matos Wunderlich (2008: 125-139), *Walking and Rhythmicity: Sensing Urban Space*, February, Journal of Urban Design, 13(1)

<sup>185</sup> E.g. Gros, F. (2014). *A Philosophy of Walking*. Verso Books: London.

exacerbated by ‘increased mobile phone use, resulting in people focussing on their phone rather than their surroundings.’<sup>186</sup>

Chandler recounts how even though one participant walked through an area familiar to them, they ‘noticed sights they had not seen before, such as the comic-themed shops’ as opposed to the ‘main tourist attractions’ she focuses on when walking with friends or relatives. Chandler invokes Benjamin<sup>187</sup> to explain her pupil’s change of attention, from the tourist’s inauthentic gaze to the flâneur’s ‘indigenous and local’ grasp of their surroundings.

Illustrating the possible effects of place on emotion (and reminding her readers that the SI ‘were particularly interested in the effect that the city had on emotions’) Chandler reports that participants ‘overwhelmingly responded with positive emotions about noticing hidden sights’; these emotions she categorises as ‘happy’, ‘exciting’ and ‘special’. Chandler even includes a pie chart showing which emotions prevailed: happy, special, proud, nice, relaxing, want to see more, and exciting.

Chandler concludes that her ‘research showed that this was a very different way of encountering the city for participants.’ She adds that, notwithstanding the different aims motivating the Flâneur and the Situationist International to explore the city, her research shows ‘that [such methods are] still relevant in modern life, allowing one to engage with the city’s authenticity and gain a deeper understanding and enjoyment of the city.’

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<sup>186</sup> Chandler, in line with much ‘academic’ writing, substantiates the all-too-familiar by citing specialists: Nasar, J.L., and Troyer, D. (2013). *Pedestrian injuries due to mobile phone use in public spaces*. *Accident Analysis and Prevention*. 57: 91-95 Stavrinou, D., Byington, K.W., and Schwebel, D.C. (2011). *Distracted Walking: Cell phones increase injury risk for college pedestrians*. *Journal of Safety Research*. 42(2):101-107

<sup>187</sup> Benjamin, W. (2002). In connection with this, Chandler also mentions: Plate, L. (2006). *Walking in Virginia Woolf’s footsteps: Performing cultural memory*. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*. 9 (1): 101-120.

Chandler's project is not intended to contribute to academic 'discourse'. It is a modest but beguiling example of how she encourages careful observation and self-reflection as 'psychogeography' to encourage her students to sharpen their awareness of their environment but also of their own emotional reactions to it. In some ways – not least because of its playful, uncomplicated, and relatively agenda-free / open-ended spirit – it seems closer to at least some of the original intentions of the situationists than some other examples I have instanced. This project may have been more compelling if it had explored fewer 'upbeat' emotions, but one assumes that the age of her pupil cohort may have made this strike her as inappropriate. And yet, here is psychogeography reduced to a pedagogical device / a plaything / a thing of safety and reassurance rather than a search to unveil the hidden, the concealed, or the genuinely unexpected, robbed of its foundational political agenda. Tina Richardson (2017:12) suggests, 'Today psychogeography has become a generalized term for any form of urban walking or aesthetic response to space, which may not have any relationship to the activist approach the Situationists took.'

### **3.4.5 The Psychogeography of Hanging Out**

Unlike Chandler, Finnish geographer, Noora Pyry (2018:314-323) conscientiously contributes to academic research. In *From psychogeography to hanging-out knowing: Situationist dérive in nonrepresentational urban research* Pyry applies a *non-representational* framework to her urban research suggesting that the situationist dérive may act as a way of 'becoming with' – contributing to – a 'continuous invention of the city (and the self) through ephemeral encounters.' She contrasts this with 'what the Situationists considered as gaining *objective* knowledge of a city's 'psychogeography' (my emphasis). Examining her paper in detail requires we look at *non-representational* urban research to see

how such research differs from what Pyyry alleges is the quest for ‘objective’ knowledge by the Situationist International.

The authors of ‘Enacting Geographies’, aligning themselves with *non-representationalism*, dismiss any intention claiming to ‘show things the way they are’ as ‘neo-Kantian’. Instead, they ‘work on *presenting* the world, not on *representing* it, or *explaining* it.’ (my emphases) They acknowledge that ‘non-representational theory is [...] characterised by a firm belief in the *actuality* of representation’<sup>188</sup> but that a specific representation, say a painting, while of course a ‘real’ thing, is not privileged by this reality; it is not outside, beyond, or above other real things, has no special hegemonic advantage, authority, or viewpoint.’ The authors suggest rather that non-representational theory<sup>189</sup> helps us focus on the *constituents* or *qualities* of representations (i.e., their ‘material compositions and conduct’<sup>190</sup>) rather than accept solely their authors’ intended *meanings* (meanings generated by the representation but which are not intrinsic to it)<sup>191</sup>. In this conceptual framework, representations are construed as acts that pose as ‘understandings’ and that such ‘understanding’ are performed and, therefore, not radically connected to the phenomena on which they ‘comment’. They are contingent on a notion that they emanate from ‘outside’ the very world to which they ineluctably belong; in the authors’ own words (Dewsbury 2002:438): ‘there is no time-out from the happening of the world’. Pyyry (2018:320) echoes this: ‘This is the problem of a ‘detached’ individual

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<sup>188</sup> Dewsbury 2002:438

<sup>189</sup> ‘Presentation’ (as opposed to ‘representation’), contributes dynamically, performatively to the world.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid:438

<sup>191</sup> Dewsbury (2002:438) cites Guattari (1994) *What is Philosophy?*: “If resemblance haunts the work of art it is because sensation refers only to its material: it is the percept or affect of the material itself, the smile [I assume this is supposed to read ‘smell’] of oil, the gesture of fired clay, the thrust of metal, the crouch of Romanesque stone, and the ascent of Gothic stone” Deleuze, G., Guattari, F., (1994) *What is Philosophy?* Verso, London

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knower (St Pierre 2008). From a posthuman perspective, we are never separate from data, so we cannot ‘collect’ it.’ Several aspects of non-representational theory are reflected in the manner Pyyry frames her project. She explains (2018:316) the ‘focus is on what emerges during the walk. not on the *end-product* [in her case, photographic documentation]’. In nonrepresentational research, the influence of words, photographs or other representations is not ignored. Still, they are understood as performative, not as evidence of some separate world ‘out there’ (a world which nonrepresentational theory suggests is a fiction of the academy). Pyyry (ibid:320) explains that in nonrepresentational research, ‘representations such as nationalistic symbols are understood to have productive power, just as honking car horns or clanking kettles did when people took to the streets in Catalonia... [but] rather than telling stories that lie behind them, representations [including Pyyry’s photographs] act and take part in the unfolding of life.’ She cites Anderson<sup>192</sup>, that ‘[s]ometimes, a change can be ‘felt in the air’ when the form of it still escapes comprehension and description.’

As the authors of *Enacting Geographies* (Dewsbury 2002:439) remind us (citing Merleau-Ponty) we are ‘caught in the fabric of the world’ adding that we are ‘cast in its materiality, in a world of transsubjective modalities of experience, an in-between world of imperatives instigating our activities.’ They instance affect exemplified by ‘the push of the terrain upon the ‘muscular consciousness’ of the body (referencing here, Bachelard 1986), the spiritualized pull or uplift of a chord of music, and the stillness struck by the colour of paint.’ They further elaborate that *affects* are confined neither to the perceiving / reacting subject nor to the object imputed with affect but to *the relations* inspiring them (that ‘inspire the world’ they write). They continue, referencing Deleuze and Guattari (Deleuze and Guattari 1996:163– 199), that ‘such affects and percepts extract from representation another way of judging, another way of reacting to the world about us. There is a need to move away from

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<sup>192</sup> Anderson (2009)

speaking of affections and perceptions (which would overemphasise a too subjective, too human, account), to move towards *an account that takes seriously the world's own forces.*' (Dewsbury 2002:439) emphasis added) Representations are not overarching presences that conceptually govern the phenomena they reference but are freestanding entities or utterances with no claim to superior validity.

The non-representationalism Pyry refers to here, I think, focuses on *processes* that occur prior to conscious reflection and practices (like dance, play, walking, cooking) rather than privileging representations of *phenomena* as *the* primary source of knowledge of what goes on in the world. Non-representationalism also refutes the personal ownership of experience, which is treated as 'trans-subjective' where both the precepts and effects, contingent on the subject, allow for the continuous emergence of us and 'the world'. Non-representationalism is also attentive to peripheral awareness that registers transient, even momentary, states of previous and actual states of being and becoming.

Pyry adds that 'there is no time-out from the world's happening, no moment of unity in which something like a culture, envisioned thus, could cohere. Our pluralism is not a simple relativism. Rather, there are events of enunciation, invocations, iterations, and empirical callings up of the concept of culture to do work; perhaps in these speech acts that culture exists, and these may be considered in all their contestation but never 'culture' in itself.'<sup>193</sup>

These are the kinds of ideas that Pyry (2018:316) references to validate exploring the *dérive* as a process of cultivating 'thinking with' the urban flow of things, in contrast with what the Situationists considered gaining 'objective' knowledge of a city's 'psychogeography'.

Pyry re-works Situationist critical practice with a non-representationalism which 'conceptualises the world as fluid and constantly in-the-making'. This, Pyry writes, enables

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<sup>193</sup> See: Dewsbury 2002:438

her to move beyond the role of being a ‘detached explorer’ and places her in the world where she is ‘continually becoming *with* the research process, [and] changing along with it’ (my emphases), thereby overcoming the traditional (and the situationists’) typical subject-object divide and relinquishing the pretence of accessing a city’s ‘true’ character (which, as processual, cannot exist).

Invoking the processual thinking of Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) & Félix Guattari (1930-1992)<sup>194</sup>, Pyry suggests that from a non-representational perspective, the act of the *dérive* *participates in* building the city. i.e., ‘it takes place within the continually forming urban assemblage’ (Pyry 2018:316). She also leans on the work of British geographer, Nigel Thrift (b. 1949) who encourages experimentation to make sense of today’s world in which we are ‘swimming in the sea of data’.

While hanging out, young people form creative momentary engagements with their urban landscape while seemingly doing nothing noteworthy. From this characteristically non-instrumental involvement, spatial-embodied reflection about one’s place in the world emerges. This hanging-out knowing is an ongoing process in everyday encounters through negotiations responsive to the urban landscape of which one is a part (Pyry 2016a). In invoking many current theorists to support her approach, Pyry moves the psychogeographic goalposts, albeit in exciting ways. However, while steeped in contemporary theory (in which she is clearly well-versed), the research she offers lacks experiential pragmatism or empirical material, and this leaves me wondering to what extent it is valid to describe what she is doing as psychogeography.

### **3.4.6 An Academic Psychogeographer**

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<sup>194</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, 1987

Like others deploying psychogeography, Tina Richardson (2017) claims that the ‘built environment can often subliminally operate on our psyches, such that its changes—even when this involves substantial developments—become incorporated into our spatial awareness quickly and subtly’ and that it is indeed possible to ‘give voice to what is under the veneer of our everyday urban spaces.’ Notwithstanding, Richardson questions whether psychogeography merits academic validation, asking whether ‘there is nothing that already exists in the toolbox of academia that currently does the job [of psychogeography]?’ and noting that ‘the practice of psychogeography itself is not recognized as being scientific in any way. Subjective, heterogeneous and un-repeatable experiences of space cannot be easily tested in any way science would deem acceptable.’ But again, counters Richardson, even Freud’s theories elude the acid test of scientific validation. Her response to this dilemma is to introduce us to her own psychogeographic practice, which she names ‘schizocartography’. This practice, explains Richardson, is informed by theories examining ‘subjectivity, heterogeneity, and power’ derived from Pierre-Félix Guattari’s ‘schizoanalysis’.<sup>195</sup> Schizoanalysis developed out of Guattari’s reaction to his work as an institutional psychoanalyst at the La Borde clinic. However, for our purposes, it is appropriate to discuss Richardson’s use of theory rather than attempt to explore Guattari’s own intentions. For Richardson (2014:132), schizoanalysis looks at ‘representations of power’ and ‘proposes ways of challenging them through creative avenues,’ which she argues gives her licence to make it part of her creative psychogeographical approach.

Richardson (2017:12) informs us that she created *schizocartography* ‘to emphasize its critique of the spectacle in a psychogeographic setting (which was so important to the Situationists and is still relevant today), and to situate it in contemporary culture and in

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<sup>195</sup> See Guattari, F. *Schizoanalytic Cartographies* (2013)



postmodern space’. However, following Guattari, Richardson resists describing schizocartography as a methodology, ‘since [...] the idea that a method is a fully formed, clearly defined process of analysis [...] would have been anathema to Guattari.’<sup>196</sup>

Richardson also invokes *chance*, which the surrealists embraced to circumvent conscious control: ‘Schizocartography is [...] the outcome (output) of the analysis applied to the study of the thing itself, whether that outcome is uncovered by the producer of the analysis or not—for instance, it can also be attributed to chance findings that come about through psychogeographic explorations on the ground.’

Backgrounding her own research project regarding Leeds University campus Richardson (2014:140) explains that in the 1960s, when additional land was acquired by the university for its intended expansion, a cemetery located on this land became a ‘place of tension, controversy, and a politico-legal battle’ which pitted Leeds University against the relatives of the dead. Richardson informs us of her ‘discovery’ of a drawing of a bird, which she thinks may have been a phoenix, chalked on a gravestone. Richardson ‘runs’ with this possibility and suggests that such symbolism (if intended), was to evoke, if not bodily ‘phoenix-like’ resurrection, at least a hoped-for reestablishment of a concealed graveyard on the site (now

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<sup>196</sup> Richardson adds: In a sense, even describing [schizocartography] as a set of methods may not be appropriate since it is concerned with more than just the application of a set of theories or practices on a given subject, object or element within a field of study. Schizocartography is also the outcome (output) of the analysis applied to the study of the thing itself, whether that outcome is uncovered by the producer of the analysis or not—for instance, it can also be attributed to chance findings that come about through psychogeographic explorations on the ground. It could also be argued that the practice aspect of schizocartography itself (or psychogeography) is what legitimates the wide-ranging choice of tools that can be used to uncover elements such as social history, creativity, and the alternative voices that become revealed under examination in concrete space. And to a degree the practice itself has a retroactive effect on the theories (tools) selected.

grassed-over and ‘landscaped’), along with a revival of the stories of those interred. In Richardson’s words, (2017:11) ‘...the phoenix drawing, propagated by the desire of a specific individual at a particular time, worked counter to the discourse of the cemetery.’ Richardson frames such ‘moments of creativity’ as eluding ‘the ordinary games of discursivity and the structural coordinates of energy, time and space,’<sup>197</sup> concluding that just such a gesture and in such a place constitutes therefore ‘a new semiotic assemblage’, referencing Guattari and Rolnik: <sup>198</sup> ‘Schizoanalysis . . . is interested in a diversification of the means of semiotization. . . . [I]t abandons the terrain of signifying interpretation for that of the exploring of assemblages of enunciation.’

Regarding the repressed/suppressed graveyard Elsewhere, Richardson in discussing repression references also Freud’s theory of the uncanny which, she writes, is very much related to haunting (‘uncanny’ is a common trope of psychogeography), and ties in with the return of the repressed, since ‘every affect arising from an emotional impulse [...] is converted into fear by being repressed’ and repressed experiences have the ‘need’ to return in other forms (Freud 2003,p. 147).

In pursuing a schizocartographic exploration of the Leeds campus, Richardson (2014:134) opts to undermine<sup>199</sup> traditional ‘authoritative’ map-mapping by composing ‘emotional, cognitive, or vernacular’ maps (Richardson, 2014:131) which, while not ‘intentionally subversive,’ challenge ‘dominant representations’ of space to reveal the ‘aesthetic and ideological contradictions that appear in urban space’ and that these maps can also reclaim

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<sup>197</sup> Guattari, Félix. (1995:138) *Chaosmosis: An ethico-aesthetic paradigm*. Trans. Paul Bains, Julian Pefanis. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

<sup>198</sup> Guattari, Félix, and Suely Rolnik (2008:395) *Molecular Revolution in Brazil*. MIT

<sup>199</sup> ‘Dominant representations created by those in power lend themselves to being détourned (rerouted, reused, reformulated) for the purposes of subversion and can turn this process into a political act’.

the ‘subjectivity of individuals’. Richardson argues that because these hand-drawn maps record ‘an aesthetic/affective response to space,’ they may be construed as challenging established / establishment topographic representations. Richardson associates her team’s subjective responses, as embodied in maps she produced alongside them, with the *political importance* of subjective expression for American cultural and political theorist Frederic Jameson (b. 1934). Jameson (2009:51) argues that subjective responses ‘enable a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole.’<sup>200</sup>.

To achieve the kind of subjective cartography Richardson envisages, she launched several *dérive*-style walks, leaving the routes to chance methods (referencing the SI’s penchant for intentional unintentionality) including throws of the dice, deriving routes maps with random arrows, mutilated maps (cut-up and reassembled), or taking directions from unrelated texts and places. Richardson observes that while the SI’s utopian psychogeographic map-making excluded cognitive maps (the *dérive* and any maps associated with it were intended to critique the city-as-spectacle) her cognitive maps, in that they were strictly provisional and processual rather than conclusive or definitive, can elude ‘recuperation’.

Nevertheless, it offers a concise study of psychogeographical cognitive effects and provides some helpful definitions of cognitive mapping that may be a useful starting point for taking further their ideas into postmodern space: ‘Cognitive mapping is an abstraction covering those cognitive or mental abilities that enable us to collect, organize, store, recall and manipulate information about the spatial environment,’\* explaining that ‘cognitive maps are not just visual images contained in our minds, but are also connected to our other senses.’

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In another projects *Emotionally Mapping the Campus*, Richardson (referencing Christian Nold's *Emotional Cartography: Technologies of the Self* (2009)), invited her students to hand-make maps that reflected places of (emotional?) importance to them. One student for instance includes in her map 'two different halls of residence, the sports centre, a student pub on the edge of the campus, and the Student Union (which she has placed in a heart-shape and called 'the heart of campus').' This student also positioned one building as the 'centre of knowledge for the university' where, Richardson observes laconically, 'little teaching is carried out'. Still, Richardson concludes that this student's map shows places that 'have a direct subjective meaning to her, and she has even expressed their emotional significance on the map itself.' According to Richardson (2014:148), such maps are 'micropolitical responses or are formed from psychological/emotional imagery.' Richardson comments (2014:144) that this project 'draws attention to the places [students] might only subconsciously think about from day to day' and provides 'cues to what students might consider significant.' In sharing affective responses to campus space which while not 'overtly political' challenge 'the capitalist subjectivity of student as consumer' demonstrating that 'capital's power to reappropriate, recode, and reterritorialize break-out flows means that alternative narratives about the lived experience need to be constantly reworked'. Wrapping up her account of schizocartography – *Assembling the Assemblage: Developing Schizocartography in Support of an Urban Semiology* – Richardson reassures readers that her psychogeographic practice is formulated to sit within 'contemporary culture and postmodern space' to carry forward the SI's mission of 'critiquing the spectacle'.

Richardson's exploration of psychogeography takes her closest to the ideological position of Debord and the Situationists but one asks why her interpretation needs to be so freighted with theory. Harrison explains Guattari's theory of transversality as, 'crossing boundaries' and that

‘transversality’ is ‘Guattari’s response to the hierarchical concept of transference that occurs in the psychoanalytic process’. She adds<sup>201</sup> that ‘[f]or Guattari transversality is a particular form of communication which forms a bridge that takes unconventional routes between systems.’

Richardson illustrates this with the following incident drawn from her research. Near the cemetery, she encounters a male student scaling (‘traversing’) its wall, presumably finding it offers a shortcut to his destination. Richardson determines that even if this was not done in ‘an openly activist way’, the student was following his desire in choosing to cross the park ‘in an unconventional manner’ and this made his act<sup>202</sup> ‘an expression of transversality’ such that it: ‘enables one to question the underlying logos of the space in the sense that individuals have certain ‘common sense’ actions expected of them. Desire finds a route through transversality, releasing it from overriding social forms that attempt to regulate the subjectivity of the individual and their behaviour within specific settings.’ (Richardson 2014:241)

While Richardson’s analysis of the student’s act shows an impressive grasp of postmodern theory it rather transforms, and even subordinates, this student’s act (along with other acts and phenomena she features) into illustrating ideas. Indeed, Richardson’s ‘use’ of psychogeography significantly focuses on locating its notional practice within a richly complex conceptual framework. Not only am I unsure whether such conceptual excursions (perhaps she is covertly transforming theory into narrative?) constitute what should be understood as ‘doing psychogeography’, Richardson’s approach (and to an extent Pyry’s too) are helpful in shedding light on a fundamental dilemma afflicting psychogeography from

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<sup>201</sup> Citing Guattari (*Chaosmosis: An ethico-aesthetic paradigm*, 1995:22-24)

<sup>202</sup> Richardson instances ‘parkour’ as similarly exemplifying ‘transversality’.

its inception. As academia tries to absorb psychogeography as a ‘methodology’, this dilemma has become yet more evident. To some extent, this dilemma was implied by Nash’s thesis concerning the City and, in a different way, also by Patrick Keiller’s films.

Richardson concludes her *Assembling the Assemblage* paper by quoting Australian media and gender theorist McKenzie Wark (b. 1961). Wark (2013:47) thinks that what is ‘important’ is ‘the remaking of counterstrategies that do not necessarily reveal the real behind the symbolic curtain, but rather attempt to produce a different kind of social practice for expressing the encounter of desire and necessity, outside of power as representation and desire as the commodity form.’ Richardson curiously includes a quote that lays bare the psychogeography ‘dilemma’ to which I refer. Wark (2011) – who ideologically strongly identifies with the SI – advocates revolutionary strategies that are efficacious *irrespective* of whether they ‘reveal the real’; it is enough that they can threaten and provocatively undermine, and therefore transform, current social practice.

### 3.5 Conclusion

At the very outset of this enquiry, I introduced ‘psychogeography’ as a method ‘for the study of the effect of geographical location(s) on the emotions and behaviour of individuals’ and juxtaposed this rough definition with Merlin Coverley’s perplexity whether psychogeography is ‘a literary movement, political strategy, series of new age ideas or a set of avant-garde practices’ (a perplexity which doubtless many share). However, it is certainly the case that psychogeography – especially as it informs studies in contemporary human geography (whether acknowledged as such or not<sup>203</sup>) – has accumulated a range of meanings broad

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<sup>203</sup> Sidaway (2021:556) asserts that ‘The best-known geographical writing on rural walking draws on a phenomenological approach that does not situate itself as psychogeography. Ditto, those who have followed in Wylie’s footsteps, such as Riding...[and] the inclusion of a chapter on psychogeography and urban exploration

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enough for versions of this practice to be deployed in quite different academic contexts. The apparent elasticity of psychogeography, favouring its adoption in various areas of research, may well be the outcome of a sea-change in the academy's interest in effect, apparent in, say, work by theorist Brian Massumi and by human geographers, including Nigel Thrift and others (both of whom draw on the theories of Deleuze and Guattari) and who all embrace the idea that encountering phenomena is a dynamic relational process<sup>204</sup> where affect plays a central role (Massumi is one of those locating effect in *encounters* between us and *things*<sup>205</sup>, and not, as is routinely thought, confined to our psychological interiority). While it is challenging (but not the role of this project) to draw a causal link between such ideas and the blatant provocation motivating the SI's introduction of psychogeography, there is little doubt that these areas share some common ground. The Situationists called its provocative practice *psychogeography*, and geographers, long engaged in exploring the formative power of the natural environment on human development, have more recent anthropologically inflected interest in the effects of the 'artificial' urban environment and its influence on states of mind, extending this exploration. This interest has been compounded by the influence of certain strands of philosophy concerned with affect and the power of things to reach out to us and

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in a recent textbook on Creative Methods for Human Geographers (von Benzon N, Holton M, Wilkinson C, et al. (eds) (2021) *Creative Methods for Human Geographers*. London, Thousand Oaks, CA, New Delhi, Singapore: Sage.) perhaps marks its developing place on undergraduate curricula.

<sup>204</sup> And any resemblance to quantum theory is not accidental as nonrepresentationalism and the focus on affect can claim Nils Bohr's interest in quantum interrelationality as one of its influences

<sup>205</sup> In arguing that affect and direct perception exist beyond the human, are 'transindividual' and spread across the 'nature-culture continuum', qualifies Massumi's thought as a variety of pan-experimentalism. In this connection, he has characterized his thought as an "extreme realism," by which he means a philosophy asserting the ultimate reality of qualities of experience, conceived as irreducible to either subjective qualia or objective properties, and as defying quantification.

invite our attention (Böhme 2020). These developments also seem to be connected to the psychogeographical enterprise – seeking to interrogate experience and consciousness and the affective relationship we have with places and things. Such projects are concerned with acquiring knowledge and deepening understanding of intangible qualities which, while agreed to exist, do not lend themselves to empirical research or verification (and thereby are used also to show the limitations of conventional empirical research).

Having explored at some length the conceptual origins of psychogeography and some contemporary instances of its use I remain puzzled. Psychogeography is, in theory, the study of the mood of a place – and I use ‘mood’ in its broadest sense – and yet there is, surprisingly, almost no discussion of or even reference in the literature I have examined here to developing an awareness of that ‘mood’, or learning to navigate one’s feelings (emotion and affect) about the place. This strikes me as extraordinarily difficult to account for. It is as if the proponents of psychogeography are prepared to acknowledge only those unequivocal neon-lit undeniable feelings, and yet if we have learnt anything about feelings, we appreciate that they are subtle and evanescent and may often be ambiguous. Therefore, I will continue to call my enquiry ‘psychogeographic’ but predicate it on the need for self-awareness, careful introspection, and acute sensitivity to pursue my emotionally- and affectively-led *psychogeographic* navigation of Netherne.



## Chapter Four: The ASYLUM

*I have previously examined ways feeling (experience), place, and interpretation (as well as other 'narrative' forms) interact. I have shown how these more or less intersect in the practice of psychogeography. I am also mindful of how 'narrative' – 'information' such as data, history, anecdotes, gossip, etc. – regarding place colours and even overdetermines the experience of a place. To show the influence such information can have, I outline changing attitudes to mental illness - attitudes which contribute to the infinite sadness and profound existential perplexity Netherne evokes.*

*This tune was composed by Spencer the Rover*

*As valiant a man as ever left home*

*And he had been much reduced*

*Which caused **great confusion***

*And that was the reason he started to roam*

Anonymous Yorkshire folksong (emphasis added)

This project looks at Netherne through an emotional-affective lens, interpreting its buildings and its locale via how the feelings these arouse. Places, like other human constructs and creations, have *emotive consequences*. But, in common with fiction and other artifices, *facts* can also operate upon our feelings; facts, too, are emotive. Exploring the origins and development of the asylum provides an instructive guide to the *historical* medical, architectural, and moral considerations from which Netherne (and other Victorian and Edwardian asylums) sprung. But facing Netherne *experientially* – the focus of this project – involves, where possible, suspending 'knowledge' about it, to be perplexed by Netherne and

the uncomfortably resonant feelings it evokes, open to that ‘great confusion’ of the song<sup>206</sup>.

From such a standpoint, I inevitably proceed to ask Netherne: what *manner* of place *are* you?

What might I learn about you that may help ‘make sense’ of those feelings you arouse?

Exploring the history of the asylum means appreciating that encountering Netherne means encountering and interrogating echoes of its predecessors and even resolving the history of the asylum itself as a *history of perplexity*.

Madness, that very *great confusion*, long impervious to reason, was reframed by the eighteenth century as a bodily, not spiritual, sickness, making reason alone capable of addressing and mastering it (this attitude reaches its apogee in the late Victorian period and is reflected in Hine’s ideas for Netherne and his other asylums, explored in the following chapter).

How was this fantasy of affectless mastery connected to previous attitudes? In the Middle Ages, there was no pretence of understanding madness (although its spiritual ‘causes’ were debated). It was accepted as a mystery (for some, a God-given mystery) but (as is still the case in Geel in Belgium) was also a condition that merited empathy, pity, charity, generosity of spirit, and protection. In exploring feelings aroused by Netherne, I am acutely aware of feelings of empathy for its victims and the victims of madness, and find such attitudes also reflected in the history of the asylum, to a place which apparently substituted empathy with taxonomy and feeling with reason.

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<sup>206</sup> Although reticent to spell this out, there would seem to be some sort of parallel between the unwilling disorientation of madness and a response to place which excludes ‘knowledge’ in favour of feeling (although R. D. Laing (2010) would see madness as in some senses a willed, even potentially therapeutic, response to an ‘untenable situation’).

Netherne Hospital (known variously as ‘The Surrey County Asylum at Netherne’ and ‘Netherne Asylum’) was, when founded in 1905, only the most recent of a very long procession of institutions established to cure, treat, protect, discipline, or simply contain the ‘great confusion’, i.e., mental illness. Such institutions were influenced and formed by changing ideas of what madness is and what causes it, as well as by shifting attitudes regarding the ethical (and even spiritual) obligations and social responsibilities owed to sufferers of mental illness by families, communities, religious (and other) organisations, and the state.<sup>207</sup>

Irrespective of the different ways madness was accounted for (a story which has already been told many times over) my interest in the history of this institution is in helping me ‘sound’ the affective nature of Netherne, of the overwhelming sadness it evokes. I review how the mad have been treated at different times and the fluctuating levels of (seemingly religiously motivated) compassion they received. Such fluctuation serves as a barometric indicator of how ‘human’ people understood the mad as being, and whether they were worthy of social inclusion, or rather as irredeemable, expendable outcasts.

One notable instance of a fully realised architectural ‘othering’ of the mad (although there are many other comparable examples) – and therefore othering of the inconvenient self – is Vienna’s remarkable 1784 *Narrenturm* (*Fool’s Tower*), its creation ‘inspired’ by the hideous underground dungeons in which Viennese Capuchin monks ‘housed’ (can you believe!) their mentally-ill brothers. The *Narrenturm* (now a museum) is a monstrous 28-roomed, five-story,

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<sup>207</sup> Strous 2007:6:8, In Nazi Germany, highly trained psychiatrists clearly held that no obligations at all were owed to the mentally ill. Applying scientifically invalid conclusions by combining neo-Darwinian principles with their obsession with ‘racial hygiene’, these psychiatrists engineered for themselves a theoretical basis to ‘rationalise’ participation in the slaughter of an estimated 200,000 mental patients (source *Psychiatry during the Nazi era: ethical lessons for the modern professional*, *Annals of General Psychiatry*, 2007, 6:8).

circular fortress ringed with rows of external slit windows (a colosseum of madness where gladiatorial delusions battled over souls). Each of the 139 individual cells accommodating its 'patients' was locked with strong, barred doors, and its walls thoughtfully accoutred with robust restraining chains. The very construction of *Narrenturm* was confirmation that the mad had, at last, acquired their special status, ceasing being simply another constituent of that amorphous category: the 'poor'. However, illustrating how quickly and radically attitudes towards the mad can alter, the *Narrenturm* had, with the advent of the Enlightenment, become already obsolete by the late 1790s.

Netherne's career faltered suddenly, too (a case of one complex system being assimilated by another, yet more complicated system). The entire asylum system, absorbed into the immense organisation of the National Health Service<sup>208</sup>, fell under close public scrutiny in the 1960s. Attitudes to the hospitalisation and institutionalisation of the mentally ill were swiftly changing. Incidents involving the scandalous treatment of defenceless patients hidden from public view came to light and were highly publicised; 'Who could defend institutions that handled people like human trash?' asked one journalist<sup>209</sup>. Members of the anti-psychiatry movement were vocally hostile to the asylum which, for them, was nothing less than legitimised dehumanisation and punitive incarceration by another pseudo-medical name; the economic climate was ill-disposed to funding the unsustainably soaring costs of staffing and

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<sup>208</sup> The 1959 Mental Health Act and the 1962 Hospital Plan anticipated diminishing and closing asylums and putting psychiatric care into the general hospital system.

<sup>209</sup> This is what one journalist demanded in the wake of a major exposé of the treatment of the demented elderly at Friern in the late 1960s. Barbara Taylor (2010) cites Barbara Robb as the source for this comment in Robb's, *Sans Everything: A Case to Answer* (1967) adding that 'Robb's book caused a furore. An independent committee of inquiry was established to investigate her allegations of abuse and neglect; for its findings (which many commentators at the time decried as a 'whitewash')'. see [www.sochealth.co.uk/history/Friern.htm](http://www.sochealth.co.uk/history/Friern.htm).

endlessly maintaining these mammoth old buildings; a prevailing environment of neo-liberalism, championing independence and self-reliance, favoured what was – at least for numerous sufferers – the pipedream of the remotely-assisted ‘self-cure’, in turn, fostered by the increasing availability of psychotropic medications. Barbara Taylor, (2011) historian and patient of Friern Barnet, writes, ‘The asylum story is not a good one, but if the demise of the asylum means the death of effective and humane mental health care, then this will be more than a bad ending to the story: it will be a tragedy.’

Netherne was designed for an era where the mad, whose various conditions were as baffling as ever, constituted a now evolved, ‘tamed’ medicalised mystery. Madness had, since Tuke and Pinel, ceased to be a divinely ordained illness, an affliction, a penance, or a curse, and epilepsy, of course, no longer had a supernatural origin.<sup>210</sup> But the unwell, the now ‘scientifically’ (and juridically) insane, could no longer expect the ‘moral care’ informed by Tuke<sup>211</sup> and Pinel’s enlightened ‘sentimentalism.’<sup>212</sup> Treatment had deteriorated as attitudes to the mad became, in a sense, ‘industrialised’ (with all the cold and inhumane distance suggested by this term). While it is the case that Victorian medicine identified several psychological maladies and, by the latter part of the century, had begun to log the neural pathways, doctors were typically neither able to determine their causes nor treat them.

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<sup>210</sup> Dodds (2020:66) explains that in Ancient Greek word for epilepsy suggests the intervention of a daemon and was considered the sacred disease *par excellence*

<sup>211</sup> Samuel Tuke claimed, ‘the almost infinite power of judicious kindness and sympathy on disordered minds’ Taylor (2011:206) cites: Anne Digny, *Madness, morality and medicine. A study of the York Retreat 1796-1914*, Cambridge University Press, 1985, 37, 51, 58-61

<sup>212</sup> McLaughlin (2014:35) explains that Pinel featured little in nineteenth century British medical literature and Yanni (2003) suggests that Tuke and Pinel were unaware of each other’s efforts.

‘Paresis’ or general paralysis of the insane (GPI)<sup>213</sup> was, for instance, a madness commonly attributed to ‘dissolute character’. Although syphilis was identified by the mid-nineteenth century as its probable cause, an obdurate medical profession did not universally accept the explanation until 1913 when it was shown that syphilis bacteria populated the paretic’s brain.

Unwavering (and sometimes foolish) scientific hubris often led to a conviction that remedies were latent, imminent, and almost within the grasp of medical science. Ingrid Zechmeister alludes to a wave of ‘therapeutic optimism’ (which she links to growing *secularisation*) which encouraged the belief that madness was indeed curable; a belief responsible, in early nineteenth-century Austria, for precipitating the changing status of asylums (like the *Narrenturm*), where inmates were freed ‘from chains, straitjackets and other physical instruments of restraint.’ (Zechmeister 2005)

Notwithstanding this outbreak of ‘therapeutic optimism’, the mad continued to disrupt, presenting chronic behavioural challenges which could, at best, be, like rare butterflies, organised and taxonomized; the patient’s suffering possibly alleviated but not resolved. In a ‘scientific’ age, proud of its accomplishments, its conquests of knowledge and geography, the mad continued to represent an implied criticism of what it meant to be ‘human’. An embarrassment, they needed to be distanced, hidden away, confined to darkness, literally as well as metaphorically.

Madness was construed as an unfortunate and possibly helpless byproduct of contemporary existence, for, as contemporary statistics of hospitalisations indicate, madness significantly increased under the enormous social destabilisation taking place during the Industrial

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<sup>213</sup> In 1857 it was suggested that GPI was caused by syphilis. Prior to the discovery of pharmaceutical remedies, notably penicillin, GPI was inevitably fatal, and accounted for as much as 25% of the primary diagnoses for residents in public psychiatric hospitals.

Revolution. Unlike some far earlier asylums, Netherne was designed and located to conceal and isolate the mad (those mad, which county asylums like Netherne were built to house, being poor, were even more abject). Dealt with either as ‘impaired’ humans or even as ‘less than human’, they were scorned and humiliated, hurt and objectified, alienated and confused, and inspired neither awe<sup>214</sup> nor respect<sup>215</sup>. The buildings that made up Netherne are embodiments of the harsh scientific chill the insane would meet with in such institutions; a systemic lack of empathy. Clair Wills, who grew up in Netherne (where her mother worked as a psychiatric nurse), writes of elusive ‘outsider’ artist and patient of Netherne, J. J. Beegan, as ‘simply one of hundreds of bruised and bandaged patients living on the back-wards, who had to be managed as best they could.’<sup>216</sup>

Yet in stark contrast, amazed *medieval* European travellers to the Middle East wrote first-hand accounts marvelling at the extreme kindness they saw lavished on the insane in the Bimaristans<sup>217</sup>; a Cairo hospital (built 872) was reputed even to have included music therapy as part of caring for its insane (Koenig 2009). In the nineteenth century, the therapeutic value

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<sup>214</sup> Dodds (2020:68) evokes Ancient Greeks attitudes to the insane: ‘Even at Athens the mentally afflicted were still shunned by many, as being persons subject to a divine curse, contact with whom was dangerous: you threw stones at them to keep them away, or at least took the minimum precaution of spitting. Yet if the insane were shunned, they were also regarded (as indeed they still are in Greece) with a respect amounting to awe; for they were in contact with the supernatural world and could on occasion display powers denied to common men’.

<sup>215</sup> In the 1978 film, *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* (written and directed by Ermanno Olmi) a simpleton regularly visits the households of a 19<sup>th</sup> century Lombardy agricultural peasant community where they are enormously respectful of the blessing he mumbles in their homes, feed him and bless him in return

<sup>216</sup> [www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v43/n22/clair-wills/life-pushed-aside](http://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v43/n22/clair-wills/life-pushed-aside)

<sup>217</sup> Of Persian origin, meaning hospital; ‘bimar’ in Persian is disease and ‘stan’, place/location; bimaristan = location/place of disease.

of music (and as a form of ‘moral management’<sup>218</sup>) was far from unrecognised, too, especially in smaller, private Victorian asylums. Music was also to be found in state-run institutions like Netherne, where dances were regularly held. Still, the perceived therapeutic benefits of music in asylums were eclipsed by the introduction of ECT (which remains in use and has many proponents) as well as other less ‘innovative’ therapies.<sup>219</sup>

Historian, Roy Porter (1979) warns against imagining most medieval Moslem hospitals<sup>220</sup> resembled these upbeat, possibly exaggerated examples (it seems possible to me that the astonishment of these travellers is more a comment on the way they were used to seeing their own homegrown mad treated than on the hospitals they saw elsewhere). Indeed, Michel Foucault’s ‘garbage can’ view has been applied to early modern European hospitalisation,<sup>221</sup> to contrast it unfavourably with the medieval Islamic equivalent.

Endeavouring to explain such contrasts, Michael Dols (1984) differentiates *Islamic attitudes* to both madness and suffering from those of contemporary Byzantine and Medieval Christianity. He cites the Koran’s affirmation that ‘the blind, the lame, and the sick bear no blame or guilt (‘haray’) for their afflictions’. Dols adds that another Koranic verse mandates treating the insane benignly and responsibly: ‘Do not give to the incompetent their property

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<sup>218</sup> ‘Moral management’ replaced physical restraint by focussing on using employment, diet, surroundings and recreational activities as forms of therapy

<sup>219</sup> <https://theconversation.com/music-and-mental-health-the-parallels-between-victorian-asylum-treatments-and-modern-social-prescribing-200576>

<sup>220</sup> Porter ‘They were a drop in the ocean for the vast population that they had to serve, and their true function lay in highlighting ideals of compassion and bringing together the activities of the medical profession’.

<sup>221</sup> Dols urges his readers to examine criticism of Foucault (1973) by H. C. Erik Midelfort, ‘Madness and Civilization in Early Modern Europe: A Reappraisal of Michel Foucault’, in *After the Reformation: Essays in Honor of J. H. Hexter*, ed. Barbara C. Malament (Philadelphia, 1980), 247-65.



that God has assigned to you to manage; provide for them and clothe them out of it and speak to them honourable words'. (It is difficult not to contrast so humane an injunction with the rampant fear in eighteenth and nineteenth-century England that people, accused of madness by covetous relatives, could be too easily incarcerated.) Dols adds that Islamic hospitals were not intended to be places of 'cruel and unusual punishment' but rather were 'pragmatic responses to a difficult social responsibility' and 'resulted from a combination of religious charity and medical science, in which Islamic doctors were able to interpret their [Byzantine] Galenic heritage<sup>222</sup> quite literally and to consider insanity as a mundane affliction like all other illnesses.'<sup>223</sup> A seventeenth-century commentary on Byzantine history<sup>224</sup> mentions a 'morotrophium' or 'home for lunatics', as one of thirty-five charitable institutions functioning in Constantinople at the beginning of the fourth century. Fifth-century records<sup>225</sup> mention a Jerusalem hospital for the insane and it is believed there were many others like it elsewhere in the Middle East at this time.

In Europe monasteries were devoted to caring for the sick, which, it is proposed, undoubtedly included the insane (Burdett 1893). Insane asylums existed in Metz in 1100 and near Danzig in 1320, and in 1371, a licence to create an asylum near the Tower of London (known as Berking Church Hospital)<sup>226</sup> was acquired from King Edward III 'for the poor priests and the men and women in the sa[i]d city who suddenly fall into a frenzy and lose their memory, who

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<sup>222</sup> Claudius Galen, 130 ace -210 ace, foremost doctor and medical authority of the Roman Empire

<sup>223</sup> Modelled on the Byzantine 'xenodochium'

<sup>224</sup> Charles du Fresne Du Cange, *Historia Byzantina duplici commentario illustrate* (1680, known as 'Charles Dufresne' (1610-1688) was an eminent French philologist and historian of the Middle Ages and Byzantium)

<sup>225</sup> [www.newadvent.org/cathen/08038b.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08038b.htm)

<sup>226</sup> Sir William Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, London, 1655-73

were to reside there until cured; with an oratory to be said to the invocation of the Blessed Virgin Mary’.

A medieval legend tells of Dymphna, an Irish princess, who fled to Geel, near Antwerp, in the 7th century. Devoting herself to the mentally disabled of Geel, she was subsequently brutally slain by her father, from whom she had originally fled. A 14th-century shrine dedicated to her, St. Dymphna's church, became a popular pilgrimage site for those seeking relief from mental distress. Initially, chronic sufferers were left near the shrine where inhabitants of Geel attended to them, even caring for them in their own homes (a rare example of active voluntary community care of the insane, and one which continues). Many shrines elsewhere in Europe were frequented by the insane in search of relief or cure. Like Spencer the Rover, their ‘great confusion’, incomprehensible even to themselves, compelled them to roam, abandon work and family (conditions incompatible with their madness), and search desperately for a remedy.

In England (Clay 1909:5), the insane were generally cared for in ‘Houses of Hospitality’ or hospitals. These, the earliest charitable institutions in England, functioned as both guest houses and infirmaries, having been established to provide shelter, hospitality, and to care generally for travellers, including pilgrims<sup>227</sup> and later vagrants,<sup>228</sup> all of whom were inevitably vulnerable to various dangers, including injury from man (and beast<sup>229</sup>), ill-health, and insanity.<sup>230</sup> (Contemporaneously)<sup>231</sup> ‘hospitals’ (or Houses of Converts) were set up for

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<sup>227</sup> Similarly, ‘Road Bimaristans’ were established for the care of pilgrims travelling to Mecca

<sup>228</sup> Vagrancy and homelessness have long related to mental ailments – see folksong: Spencer the Rover (first collected in 1907 in Hooton, Rotherham, Yorks.)

<sup>229</sup> At Flixton in Holderness was a house of refuge “to preserve travellers from being devoured by the wolves and other voracious forest beasts.” (Clay 1909:2)

Jews accepting the Christian faith.<sup>232</sup> (It is ironic that Netherne Asylum itself became a professional refuge for Jewish doctors fleeing Nazi persecution.)

Providing hospitality and care to all such people was a 'Christian duty' and, in the case of pilgrims, a sacred privilege; the rule of the Benedictines states (Clay 1909:3) that '[g]uests are to be received as if they were Christ Himself.' Did this include the mad? Could it be that the madman was tantamount to Christ? A mad Christ? The Saviour indeed represents an image of man, albeit an inverted 'ecce homo'. In the Middle Ages, in addition to the monasteries and friaries which, as previously mentioned, took in people in need, there were upwards of 750 such 'hospitals', of which around 200 of these were at one time occupied by lepers. These were places of care but not of cure.

As late as the sixteenth century, the insane were still frequently being taken to shrines and wells in the hope of being miraculously cured, where 'vexed with demons' their 'fiends' could be cast out. In Canterbury Cathedral, a thirteenth-century stained-glass window

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<sup>230</sup> Ibn Abi Usaibia, 1194-1270 writes in his *History of Physicians* how Wahid al-Zaman would treat mental illness; Bimaristans had locations dedicated to the mentally ill

<sup>231</sup> Henry III founded the House of Converts (for the maintenance of converted Jews) in 1232, Hospital of St. Mary or "Converts' Inn," near the Old Temple. Matthew Paris described its purpose (c 1252): "To this house converted Jews retired, leaving their Jewish blindness, and had a home and a safe refuge for their whole lives, living under an honourable rule, with sufficient sustenance without servile work or the profits of usury. So it happened that in a short time a large number were collected there. And now, being baptized and instructed in the Christian law, they live a praiseworthy life under a rector specially deputed to govern them".

<sup>232</sup> For instance, the Oxford *Domus Conversorum*, established by Henry III, was a place where "all Jews and infidells that were converted to the Christian faith were ordained to have sufficient maintenance. By which meanes it was soe brought about that noe small number of these converts had their abode in this place and were baptized and instructed."

advertises a typical before-and-after case, attesting to just such a miraculous recovery.<sup>233</sup> The insane, without differentiation, were also admitted to non-specialised ‘hospitals’ alongside sufferers of other kinds of sickness. Clay (1909) cites yet another distressing ‘Spencer the Rover’ type case but ends well. This is documented in a (twelfth century) chronicle of St. Bartholomew’s hospital Smithfield, where...one young man lost ‘his reasonable wyttys’ on his journey to London. He wandered about running, not knowing whither he went. Arriving in London, he was brought to the hospital and ‘ther yn shorte space his witte was recoueryd.’ Another patient was taken with the ‘fallynge euill’ [epilepsy], which Clay (1909:32-33) alleges was described as a sickness hindering the operation of the senses.

That London’s Bethlem Royal Hospital, reputedly Europe’s first asylum, was originally established in 1247 as a *priory* raises questions about the medieval perception and collocation of madness. The familiar Christian imperative to care freely for the sick is reflected, for example, in Matthew (10:8): ‘Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with skin diseases, and throw out demons. You received it without having to pay. Therefore, give without demanding payment,’ in Luke (10:9): ‘Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you,’ and again in Matthew (9:35): ‘And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction’, et al. But in addition to this imperative, something else may be involved. Christian dogma suggests that not only did its most pious adherents recognise they were enjoined to care for the sick but also had a keen sense of the ‘intangible’ cause of sickness, especially where its symptoms were spiritual

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<sup>233</sup> Clay 1909:31 – ‘an early thirteenth-century window at Canterbury shows a poor maniac dragged by his friends to the health-giving shrine of St. Thomas. He is tied with ropes, and they belabour him with blows from birch-rods. In the second scene he appears in his right mind, returning thanks, all instruments of discipline cast away’.

(behavioural) rather than physical. They understood that madness needed care even though, and maybe even because, it was beyond seeing and beyond understanding (see Hebrews (11:1): Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.) I do not propose to labour this interpretation but wish simply to use it to draw attention to the attitudes we have towards intangibles like feelings and madness.

London's Bethlem Royal Hospital became first a general hospital (in 1330) but, in 1407,<sup>234</sup> opened its doors to the mentally ill. There are, however records of an insane asylum preceding it existing near Charing Cross<sup>235</sup> but an unnamed king<sup>236</sup>, uncomfortable at discovering the insane so near his palace (on his 'doorstep', so to speak) had these unappetising neighbours conveniently transferred to, note well, another church: 'St Mary de Bedlam' (St. Mary of Bethlehem), identified in 1437 as a place for 'the succour of demented lunatics'<sup>237</sup> is described (c 1451) as a place where the insane might recover: 'A chyrche of Owre Lady that ys namyde Bedlam. And yn that place ben founde many men that ben fallyn owte of hyr wytte. And fulle honestely they ben kepte in that place; and sum ben restoryde unto hyr witte and helthe a-gayne. And sum ben a-bydyng there yn for evyr, for they ben falle soo moche owte of hem selfe that hyt ys uncurerabyll unto man.'<sup>238</sup> Threatened during Henry VIII's dissolution of all religious institutions (1536-1541), Bedlam, this place that 'full honestly' helped those who had 'fallen out of their wits' was saved from closure by the Lord

<sup>234</sup> Clay (1909:33) writes that in 1403 in Bethlem there 'were confined six men deprived of reason (mente capti), and three other sick, one of whom was a paralytic patient who had been lying in the hospital for over two years'.

<sup>235</sup> There is evidence of lazar houses being used to house epileptics

<sup>236</sup> Clay (1909:32) attributes the following to Stow (John Stow (*also* Stowe) 1524/25 – 5 April 1605, English historian and antiquarian): "but it was said, that some time a king of England, not liking such a kind of people to remain so near his palace, caused them to be removed farther off to Bethlem without Bishopsgate."

<sup>237</sup> Clay (1909:33) alludes to a 'Patent Roll' entry, 1437.

<sup>238</sup> Gregory, citizen and mayor, *Historical Collections*

Mayor and citizens, and, in 1560, Queen Elizabeth herself issued an appeal on its behalf:

‘Sume be straught from there wyttes, thuse be kepte and mayntend in the Hospital of our Ladye of Beddelem untyle God caule them to his marcy or to ther wyttes agayne.’

Bethlem however was an exception, not the rule. Until the early eighteenth century Bethlem remained astonishingly the *sole* state-run institution for the insane. Moreover until the eighteenth century nor was there an appreciable growth in the number of private asylums (the rise of the state-run asylum was largely a Victorian phenomenon in England), and this was notwithstanding in this period, the numbers of the insane were significantly increasing. Several reasons for such growth have been suggested: improved medical practice led to reduced mortality, rapid population growth (increasing from 7 million to 12 million in England and Wales, 1760-1820), and the economic and social changes wrought by the industrial revolution (urbanisation and displacement) also led to a vast increase in the number of paupers. Indeed, there was a fear (but also ‘evidence’) in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century that madness was dramatically increasing and that not only are there ‘more people mad than are supposed to be so’, but that there are ‘...atoms, or specks of insanity, which the naked or uneducated eye cannot discern.’<sup>239</sup> Madness as contagion is a familiar trope that implies the mad be approached with caution lest the healthy contract their diseased condition. (I allege that, even in the face of scientific knowledge, this concern remain; that keeping distant from the mad is tantamount to distancing oneself from one’s own potential for madness and that such this fear can notoriously extinguish pity.)

Notwithstanding the lack of public provision for the insane, private care and housing for the mentally ill was available – at least to those who could afford it. Such establishments, run along purely commercial lines, inevitably offered questionable levels of care. To address this

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<sup>239</sup> Parry-Jones (2007) explores the beliefs of John Reid an English physician (1776 –1822).

problem, The Madhouse Act (1774) stipulated that housing the insane, previously an unregulated commercial enterprise, would require henceforth a license and be subject to annual inspection. Apart from simply legally tinkering with the available provision, the most significant change in attitudes to and treatment of the mad occurred in the late eighteenth century, which Parry-Jones attributes to the influence of the enlightenment, notably to the influence of the philosophers Locke, Hume, and Hartley. This revolution in understanding gave rise to new classifications of insanity and the moral imperative (and the corresponding growth of public conscience) to establish institutions of care for the insane. Parry-Jones (2007:10) writes that the founding of institutions for the insane by voluntary public subscription became established eighteenth-century practice.

Arguably inspired by the new rational-humanitarian spirit, the Enlightenment Quaker philanthropist William Tuke (1732-1822), like his contemporary, French physician Philippe Pinel (1745-1826), strove to reform the treatment of the insane (Foucault ruthlessly critiques such reforms<sup>240</sup>). In 1792, Tuke argued that the Quaker ‘Society of Friends’ should run an institution of its very own to provide care along humanitarian lines for those who ‘laboured under that most afflictive dispensation – the loss of reason’. According to Andrew Scull, a historian of mental illness, ‘curative optimism’ was entirely consistent with this so-called ‘age of reason’.

Tuke set up his enlightened private York Retreat (1792) – a place in which the unhappy might obtain a refuge; a quiet haven in which the shattered bark might find the means of reparation, or of safety’ – to treat patients in a beneficially therapeutic location where a carefully designed regime of work and leisure, by and large, took the place of coercion and

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<sup>240</sup> Foucault blames enlightenment moral treatment for the eventual corruption of independent consciousness via societal introjection of moral self-doubt.

restraint and induced inmates to ‘collaborate in their own recapture by the forces of reason’ (Scull, in King 1980:37–60). The number of patients at York was highly manageable: just thirty. Such initiatives provided a model of enlightened treatment but did nothing for the poor insane as those who ran private asylums remained *commercially* driven, rather than sensitive to the ethical or therapeutic dimensions of their activities. Therefore, reformers believed that the only hope of emulating the kinds of reforms implemented at York would be in the context of new, state-run institutions.

To remove and relocate pauper lunatics from workhouses and prisons, the County Asylum Act (1808) promoted the establishment of public asylums, empowering Counties to raise money to build and fund County Asylums. In these the insane were to receive *dedicated treatment* instead of simply being consigned to the workhouse. (One of these, St Andrew's Pauper and Private Asylum for Northampton – opened as ‘The Northampton General Lunatic Asylum’ on 1 August 1838 – housed poet John Clare (1793-1864) for 23 years.) In the eighteenth century, two or more justices of the peace were empowered to authorize the town or parish officials to apprehend, confine, and, if necessary, chain lunatics (but not whip them); no treatment was provided. The costs of ‘curing’ the pauper lunatic, and also of housing them in a private dwelling, were to be met from the coffers of the lunatic’s parish – such dwellings became known as ‘mad-houses’ (Parry-Jones 2007:7). Parry-Jones (2007:1-2) points out that although the eighteenth century saw a growing awareness of the need to care for the pauper mad, publicly-sponsored ‘humanitarian’ institutionalisation, in the form of county asylums, was but a slow-growing phenomenon and that private asylums continued to play a significant role - in also caring for pauper lunatics until the end of the nineteenth century



Indeed only twenty asylums were built as a result of the County Asylum Act (1808). The County Asylum Lunacy Act (1845) was intended to address this shortfall by legally compelling Counties to provide ‘humanely’ for their insane, i.e., as *patients*, not prisoners. Sixty asylums were subsequently built between 1845 and 1890, and a further forty after 1890. However, these asylums soon became overcrowded, and public worries surfaced that people were being wrongly confined to them. As the 1845 Act required only two medical certificates signed by qualified medical doctors for admission to lunatic asylums,<sup>241</sup> the Lunacy Act (1890) went some way to addressing this fear by changing the legal procedures for committing patients (although these changes were aimed mainly at regulating the intake of private institutions rather than of pauper lunatics).<sup>242</sup>

Improvements in the treatment of the insane set in motion by the example of Tuke and others, are reflected in patients being left at liberty to walk around freely (in Hanwell Asylum, established 1832) and a concomittant conviction that religion and unpaid work (patients being the main workforce of such institutions) would provide a therapeutically beneficial regime. By 1845 physical restraint was phased out of most British asylums. However, those administering the underfunded and overcrowded new mental asylums, found it increasingly difficult to cope humanely with their mushrooming populations and gradually resorted to mass confinement, restraint, padded cells, and sedatives as well as other ‘treatments’, including bleeding, leeching, shaving the head and bathing in ice.<sup>243</sup> By the end of the

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<sup>241</sup> On the medical certification of lunacy before 1889, see: Bartlett (2001: 107–31); Wright (1998:267-290), Cited by Takabayashi (2017).

<sup>242</sup> <https://www.countyasylums.co.uk/history/>

<sup>243</sup> <https://theconversation.com/music-and-mental-health-the-parallels-between-victorian-asylum-treatments-and-modern-social-prescribing-200576>

century, conditions in these overcrowded asylums had become severe and gloomy.<sup>244</sup> While there was, in some quarters, the will to provide therapeutic conditions for the insane, the money was simply not made available to finance them. In other words, the mad were perceived as not worth the money their care required.

The sprawling magnitude and sheer theatricality of the monumental nineteenth-century asylums have made them visual emblems of the popularised characterisation of madness. Whereas previously instances of madness would have been dealt with domestically, or at least locally, the rise of capitalism is understood to have eroded this venerable tradition<sup>245 246</sup>. Not only had the cost of care been previously borne by individual families and communities, but the erosion of this system had eroded care itself. Care was being devolved to the state, and the state, obsessed with its economy, was neither an interested party nor a relative nor a friend to the sufferer. Perceptions and the status of madness were transformed. Madness was now understood not only as diagnosable but also as certifiable by a select new group of legally recognised experts.

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<sup>244</sup> <https://www.historyhit.com/life-in-a-victorian-mental-asylum/>

<sup>245</sup> It was the responsibility of their relatives and friends to keep the lunatic, and others, from harm. One of the ‘Customs of Bristol’ (1344) orders that the goods and chattels of demented men be delivered to their friends until they come to a good state of mind (*ad bonam memoriam*) – source Clay (1909:32 and 37)

<sup>246</sup> Andrew Scull (King 1980:19-31) identifies the rise of the asylum as part of a general change in social control techniques taking place between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, prior to which the “control of deviants of all sorts” (i.e., the morally disreputable, the indigent, and the helpless - including vagrants, minor criminals, the insane, and the physically handicapped) had been tackled locally, which usually left them at large in the community. Families generally had to provide for their own but could receive assistance from the community. Only exceptionally were lunatics treated differently from other deviants (in which case they were confined to a specially constructed cell or else imprisoned). Andrew Scull in, *A Convenient Place to get rid of*

*Inconvenient People* .

Parallels between asylum and prison architecture are obvious. Both constituted “moral architecture”: places for human “refuse” but also places of disciplined improvement and regeneration. Foucault makes much of Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon, conflating the asylum with that other ‘grand architectural-social project’, the prison (both the criminal and the insane were defective and, therefore, in need of correction).

Shaw argues that it is, in fact, erroneous to assume that institutionalism, represented by the nineteenth-century insane asylum, was a phenomenon that simply mirrored the growth and proliferation of urban centres. Scull (1977) believes that the grand public asylum – a ‘segregative response to madness’ is just one of the expressions of the ‘commercialisation of existence’ where a maturing market economy undermined long-standing family and social structures, whether rural or urban; where a ‘boom-and-slump’ economic cycle made budgeting for harsh circumstances difficult for the poor and the care for children, and the aged, and where the insane became an unsustainable burden for poor families. Moreover, in an economy where the individual capacity to produce was becoming the major criterion of human value, the asylum, like a prison, had become a place to dump and confine the non-productive. But what kind of dumps were these intended to be?

Tuke himself introduced classifications of the insane <sup>247</sup> (classification went on to become an obsessive feature of Victorian asylums); patients would be carefully classified by their proximity or distance from ‘reason’ – a state whose distance from reasons was ‘measurable’, and which signified the various levels of control different madnenses required (involving asylum management techniques). In Bethlem all but the turbulent, who were chained in their cells, were otherwise free to mix<sup>248</sup>. A family-like ‘home’ was the pretty paradigm Tuke’s York set for the ideal asylum where the number of patients should be (1) limited so that the

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<sup>247</sup> Tuke, :Description of the Retreat

staff could know them and (2) treated as individuals and thus be encouraged to return to reason (i.e., to their ‘natural’ state<sup>249</sup>).

Following the example of Tuke, W.C. Ellis (author of *A Treatise on the Nature, Symptoms, Causes, and Treatment of Insanity*, London: Holdsworth, 1838) advised that 100 to 120 patients was the *optimum asylum population*; other authorities thought this figure could be comfortably increased to a maximum of 200 or 250. Yet by the end of the century, it was not uncommon that asylums, built originally to house 500 patients, were doubling their capacity or more and even housing patients in their thousands.

That the population merely doubled, when those certified mad increased fivefold<sup>250</sup> has led to blaming this vertiginous rise in the incidence of madness on the very existence of the asylum system, which, by providing somewhere for the insane could be – if not cared for, at least housed – encouraged a growing ‘elasticity’ in the diagnostic criteria for madness. Moreover, the numbers of the ‘cured’ did not keep pace with the growing numbers of those certified

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<sup>248</sup> Scull (King 1980:19-31) records that John Howard, visiting Bethlem in 1788 discovered that: ‘The patients communicate with one another from the top to the bottom of the house, so that there is no separation of the calm and the quiet from the noisy and turbulent, except those who are chained in their cells’.

<sup>249</sup> Scull

<sup>250</sup> From 20,809 (1844) to 117,200 (1904)

insane.<sup>251 252</sup> In 1875 a House of Commons report predicted, accurately according to some, that fewer than *eight per hundred* were likely to be cured.<sup>253 254</sup> In the face of such hopeless prospects for recovery, magistrates, while prompt to commit the certified pauper insane, were reluctant to sanction the expenditure of large sums on so self-evidently a lost cause. Budgets consequently matched expectations. One asylum administrator even remarked that once certified insane, a person was, in effect, cheaper to look after than when healthy!<sup>255</sup> Such were the poor levels of care the sick were destined for. Thus were families weaned off their traditional role as carers of their own sick, their mentally ill relatives consigned to bleak hopelessness.

The history of the asylum describes a trajectory from family, community, and religious custodianship of the mentally ill, via Tuke and Pinel's sympathetic re-educationally

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<sup>251</sup> Scull (King 1980:19) argues that '...whereas in the eighteenth century only the most violent and destructive among those now labelled insane would have been segregated and confined apart from the rest of the community, with the achievement of what is conventionally called lunacy reform', the asylum was endorsed as the sole officially approved response to the problems posed by mental illness. Throughout the length and breadth of the country, huge, specialized buildings had been built or were in the process of being built to accommodate the legions of the mad'.

<sup>252</sup> At the start of the 19th century there was an estimated few thousand "lunatics" in various asylums across England which rapidly grew to over 100,000 at the start of the 20th century - <http://beyondthepoint.co.uk/a-history-of-mental-asylums/>

<sup>253</sup> House of Commons, *Report of the Select Committee on the Operation of the Lunacy Law* (1877), 386.

<sup>254</sup> This is challenged in Rehling, J. and Moncrieff, J. (2021)

<sup>255</sup> See: P. J. Bancroft, 'The Bearing of Hospital Adjustments upon the Efficiency of Remedial and Meliorating Treatment in Mental Diseases' an appendix to H. C. Burdett's *Hospitals and Asylums of the World* (1891, v2: 271).

orientated 'open' confinement, to the hubristic, highly organised mechanisation (and subsequent medicalisation) of madness and the concomitant transfer of all responsibility for its care to the state (and eventually, to the state relinquishing its custodianship). It also suggests an enduring perplexity about what madness is and, therefore, what was to be done for and to it. Madness is a phenomenon which each age is destined, or condemned, to reinterpret in its own image and its designs for madness are an inadvertent portrait of itself as mad.

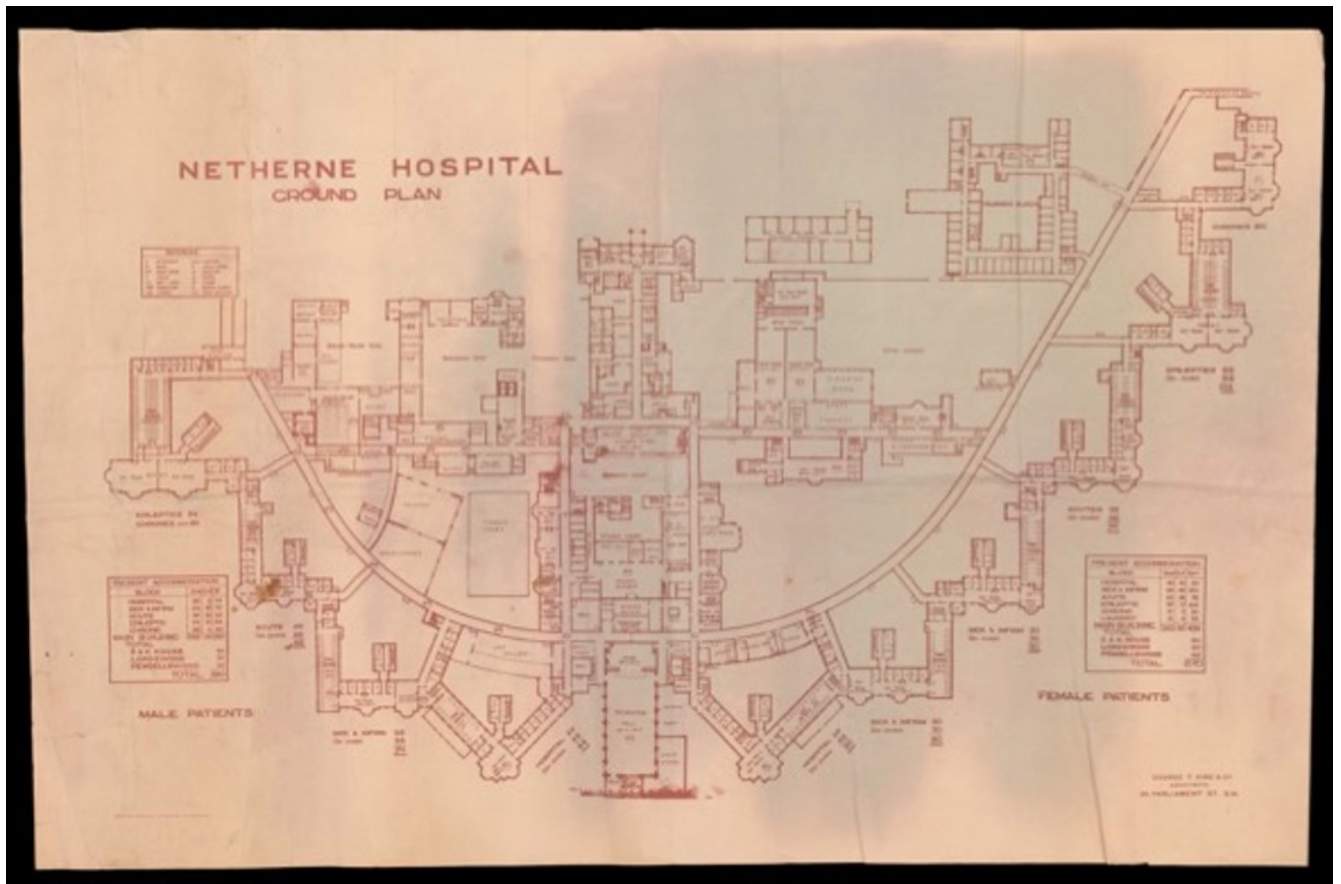


Figure 1: Plan, Netherne Hospital

<sup>256</sup> Edginton, B. (1994a:2)  
177



Figure 2 Block plan, Netherne Hospital







Figure 4: Plan and elevation, St Luke's, Netherne



Figure 5 Plan, Netherne Hospital

*Accounts of how Netherne was conceived and designed are also a variety of narrative and, as already demonstrated, narrative influences moods and emotions associated with place. In this chapter, I examine architectural asylum typologies, and Netherne in particular. I explore the rationale Hine, the architect of Netherne, uses to explain his design. I note how his confidently rationalist approach (towards mental illness as much as architecture) shaped the design of Netherne. I suggest that such 'rationalism' is intrinsically incommensurate with, and inadequate to answer, 'madness.' Using 'reason' absurdly or inappropriately is a trope of chapter six, where 'reason', mimicking madness, is made to 'account' for obscure architectural details and incidentals thus turning the madness that Netherne was built to contain (if not treat) against the place itself.*

Architect George Thomas Hine intended Netherne Asylum to accommodate numerous categories of patients and facilitate their care and treatment. But he also intended that its *architecture* exercise a *therapeutic influence* on them. This latter ambitious (even hubristic) intention - which may be interpreted as either benign or sinister – is one of the reasons why Netherne remains so strange and troubling a place. It was believed that the diseased mind could be therapeutically influenced by an environment designed to orchestrate feeling. My own emotional and affective experience of Netherne does not corroborate Hine's architectural agenda, and my *inability to detect* Hine's purported ethos becomes an aspect of how I experience Netherne – as tragically indifferent to the terrible reality of life insane.

Hine's asylums were his and his age's 'best possible interpretation' of madness, a language they understood not. Their 'idea' of the asylum and its design was shaped by their deciding what madness *needs*, not by what madness *is* (and this seeming perplexity about, even indifference to, madness, surely the asylum's principal *raison d'être*, adds to what makes Netherne feel so tragic). Hine, aspiring to some sort of therapeutic role for his asylums, was responsible for intricately designed machines for madness, sprawling, complex systems of interconnecting buildings reflecting quasi-Darwinian, managerial-like subdivisions of the mad: severe, chronic, curable, intractable, hopeless, fractious, dangerous, harmless, stable, aged, moribund, idiot, epileptic, etc. This 'administrative psychiatry'<sup>257</sup>, redolent of an ingenious plumbing system carrying toxic effluences to their correct places of disposal, turns madness into architecture and architecture, systematised madness. Ignorance is built into an elaborate architectural semblance of knowledge. How should we interpret Hine's

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<sup>257</sup> Grob, cited by Brown, T. (1980) (historian Gerald N. Grob in the introduction to his 1973 study *Mental*

interpretation? Clearly, Netherne's architecture will not mean quite the same to us as it did to Hine and his contemporaries, but does this necessarily compel us to limit our readings, our interpretations, of Hine's asylums? Or are these (like insanity) unlimited?<sup>258</sup>

In exploring the background to Netherne, its history, design, architect (and later, even its locale), Netherne is framed as an exemplar of so-called 'therapeutic architecture', where the architect, committed to meticulously organising madness, confident in his understanding and mastery of unreason, faces down the incommensurable, unfathomable meaninglessness of insanity. His rationalistic confidence, by providing a foil to my empathetic psychogeography of Netherne, partly explains why Hine and Netherne form the fulcrum of this project, which examines the spontaneous correlation of feeling with the place (Hine, too, was concerned with the feelings of place, albeit for different purposes). Netherne, this most intricately, rationally designed therapeutic institution, a monumental bulwark against our elusive yet precious inner selves, makes this 'organisational machine' the perfect touchstone for those feelings of vulnerability – be they emotional or affective – which constitute our own inexplicable, 'inner irrational'.

Since the advent of Samuel Tuke's York Retreat and Tuke's own 'enlightened' approach to insanity, asylum architects and mental illness reformers have pondered how an appropriately designed environment might help improve prospects for a sufferer's recovery. In 1841, the Metropolitan Commissioners in Lunacy (alluding doubtlessly to the direst possible places of confinement) asked caustically whether 'the great principle adopted in recovering the faculties of the mind was to immure the demented in gloomy and iron-bound fastnesses: that these were the means best adapted for restoring the wandering intellect, correcting its illusions, or quickening its torpidity: that the depraved or lost social affections were to be

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<sup>258</sup> Redolent of Marx: Philosophers come to interpret the world; our job is to transform it.

corrected or recovered by coldness and monotony’?<sup>259</sup> This reflected an already well-established conviction that miserable environments did not favour recovery. However, asylum architects aimed at more than merely removing obstructions to wellness.

In his ‘Lecture on the Management of Lunatic Asylums’ (1839), Robert Gardiner Hill (1811–1878), surgeon and originator of the non-restraint system in lunacy, insisted that only in a building *designed for the specific purpose of treating the insane* might a person be able to recover their reason. Asylums were to be designed not only to facilitate the organisation and administration of treatment to the insane but also to exercise a benign influence on them. Its architecture was part of the treatment.

Architects envisaged therapeutic asylum designs by closely partnering with asylum superintendents. There was some awareness of which qualities to avoid (‘gloom’ being clearly one of them), but how an asylum design might make it *actively therapeutic* was less unclear.<sup>260</sup> Such vagueness, however, did not weaken Hill and his contemporaries’ confidence in architecture’s therapeutic potential or in their power to harness such potential

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<sup>259</sup> Cited by Scull (King 1980:19) Report of the Metropolitan Commissioners in Lunacy to the Lord Chancellor. Presented to both Houses of Parliament by command of Her Majesty (Bradbury and Evans. 1841). To prepare himself for this demanding commission, Howard, like Duncombe before him, ‘made a tour of the United States in search [sic] of the best information upon that Subject’. He visited asylums in Utica, Syracuse, Boston, Philadelphia and New York, collecting floorplans and talking with their medical superintendents. What he was told, in effect, was that in asylum architecture, the form was to follow function. Insanity, the prevailing psychiatric orthodoxy held, was an organic brain disease. Still, it was most often brought on by ‘moral’(i.e. psychological) stresses in the environment. It followed, therefore, that if insanity was the product of a faulty social environment, it could be cured by placing the insane in a controlled ‘therapeutic’ environment, an asylum. It was for this reason that such lavish attention was devoted to every detail of asylum architecture. Everything about the asylum was to be ‘therapeutic’ – Brown, T. (1980:110) and the Westminster Review, vol. 43, (1845:

for the benefit of patients. Ideas concerning the environmental influences on disease were far from new, and evidence for such ideas may be found in the works of Hippocrates and earlier. Additionally, it has been suggested (McLaughlan 2014:38) that generally, a ‘pleasant and tranquil outlook was believed to have a calming influence on the mind.’ Yet positioning architecture as an actively curative element elevates such assumptions to quite another level.

As it became commonplace to regard insanity as a bodily disease rather than a spiritual affliction, efforts were certainly made to ensure that asylum environments were ‘healthier’. Indeed, ‘design [was] treatment’ (Edginton 1994a:2). Moreover, it might be suggested that, in an era characterised by a growing physicalising (or medicalising) of ‘madness’, the search for correspondingly *material* remedies, including architecture, was perhaps inevitable. Moreover, as scientifically verified treatments were virtually non-existent, at least the environment might ply its therapeutic potential. Positioning wards and day rooms to enable patients to benefit from daylight became, for example, one of a number of therapeutic priorities for late Victorian and Edwardian asylum architecture, a priority Gillian Allmond uses (Allmond 2016:2) to challenge the familiar assumption (held by Scull and others) that ‘asylum buildings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries [were] simply featureless *warehouses* for society's unwanted.’ Allmond, arguing that such asylums have been excessively demonised, endeavours to redress the balance in their favour by focussing on the way *light* was medicalised, a belief whose origins can be traced to Florence Nightingale and whose importance contemporary medicine now vindicates.<sup>261</sup> Allmond writes, ‘light in the

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<sup>260</sup> (perhaps architecture can never be more than peripherally benign, avoid deleterious effects, rather than play an active, specifically therapeutic role?).

<sup>261</sup> Lockley (2024): ‘numerous studies have shown that Nightingale was right: daylight is a critical determinant of human health and wellness. Patients in rooms with daylight and views of the outdoors have quicker recovery times and need fewer painkillers. Natural light has been shown to decrease heart rate, lower blood pressure, and

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second half of the nineteenth century assumed an importance in medical discourses that was linked to multiple layers of meaning, layers which are amenable to excavation from within the mental health literature and are indispensable to our reading of institutional buildings themselves.’ (Allmond 2016:3) Allmond explores the metaphorical significance of light for the Victorians, which, representing above all ‘cheerfulness’, stood also for vitality and health, was identified as antiseptic, humane, and, via its power to vanquish darkness (and all that it stands for), made it a veritable symbol of civilisation itself. Regarding ‘gloom’, that archenemy of the asylum architect, ‘[c]onsistent reference is made to ‘cheerfulness’ as a quality associated with light so that light asylum accommodation is also cheerful. Light is one aspect of the therapeutic influence of environment, which is expected to operate on the mentally ill by elevating mood.’ (Allmond 2016:5)

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, asylum design aspired (wherever budgets allowed) to make surroundings attractive in recognition of their perceived therapeutic benefit (Richardson. H, 1999:175). ‘The Builder’ magazine (July 1892) rhapsodises over the interior of Hine’s own Claybury Asylum as almost ‘palatial in its finishings, its pitch-pine joinery, marble and tile chimney pieces, and glazed brick dados, so much so that some of the visitors flippantly expressed a desire to become inmates.’ (Richardson. H, 1999:175) County asylums, however, were by no means as palatial and richly appointed as such lavish descriptions suggest and, in any case, systemically inadequate funding was a significant constraint on the design of even treat depression faster than antidepressants. Importantly, just as Nightingale theorized, daylight can also decrease harmful bacteria and viruses. Lockley (2024): ‘...cells, dubbed “nonvisual photoreceptors,” play an important role in maintaining our sleep, productivity and overall health. The cells are particularly sensitive to the short-wavelength blue light corresponding closely to peak wavelengths found in sunlight. Exposure to this short-wavelength light stimulates us, keeping us alert, improving reaction times, learning and a range of other cognitive functions. Light, particularly short-wavelength light, also elevates mood, and, in clinical patients, can be used treat depressive disorders and fatigue’.

county asylums. This inexorably led architects to opt for the plain and spartan. Hine confesses he had to grapple with reconciling functionality with aesthetic charm: ‘The architect [...] must rely for external effect on the skilful grouping of his buildings and their fair proportions, and must aim at attaining a simple dignity to compensate for the lack of elaboration in detail [...] These buildings [...] are forced upon the public, with no power of veto; are paid for by them, and, being for strictly utilitarian purposes, should be constructed on the most economical lines consistent with efficiency and durability.’ (Hine 1901:161-2)

For Hine, the pauper asylum – funded by frugal local authorities – obliges the architect to achieve a dignified and unadorned harmony without recourse to elaborate detailing or opulent decoration. In describing such asylums as being built for ‘strictly utilitarian purposes’ Hine also alludes to familiar negative attitudes to madness which treated the asylum as ‘a dull and begrudged necessity, stripped of nobility and vision’ - an attitude markedly at odds with the experimental exuberance and splendour of its Viennese contemporary, the *Am Steinhof* asylum.<sup>262</sup>

Innovations dating back to Tuke familiarised debates about the ‘mood-managing’ power of landscape, décor, and architecture. Brown (1980:110) notes that when English-born, Toronto-based architect, John G. Howard, was commissioned in 1844 to design an asylum, he visited American asylums where he was told that ‘in asylum architecture, form was to follow

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<sup>262</sup> Hine’s ‘reluctant’ or ‘inadvertent’ embrace of an approach that is quasi-functional illustrates the priorities and miserliness of a Victorian and Edwardian architectural taste so utterly out of step with the European avantgarde and its incipient embrace of a pared-down functional or ‘industrial’ aesthetic – discussed in the influential polemical essay ‘Ornament and Crime’ (1908) by proto-postmodernist, Adolf Loos (1870-1933), and exemplified in the work of Peter Behrens (1868-1940) whose revolutionary AEG Turbine Hall in Berlin, completed in 1909, is, remarkably, contemporary with Netherne.



function. Insanity, the prevailing psychiatric orthodoxy held, was an organic brain disease, but it was most often brought on by ‘moral’, i.e., psychological stresses in the environment. It followed therefore that if insanity was the product of a faulty social environment, it could be cured by placing the insane in a controlled ‘therapeutic’ environment, an asylum. It was for this reason that such lavish attention was devoted to every detail of asylum architecture. Everything about the asylum was to be ‘therapeutic’.

While actively debating the architectural implementation of therapeutic qualities, Hine and his contemporaries had no recourse to reliable data, on which to base their design decisions. Ironically, the lack of data itself may even account for their continued confidence in architecture’s therapeutic potential (there was no way of verifying the therapeutic efficacy of their designs). Yet, my encounters with Netherne do not reveal reassuring, never mind actively ‘therapeutic’, buildings.

## 5.1 Background

The decision in 1898 by Surrey County Council to commission a new asylum<sup>263</sup>, Netherne, was prompted by the pressing need to accommodate a surplus of patients from overcrowded Brookwood Asylum (established 1867) whose population, swollen to 1,965 patients, had already exceeded the statutory maximum<sup>i</sup>. Farmland at Netherne, purchased to commission a new asylum<sup>264</sup>, became the site of the new Netherne Asylum, which was built between 1907 and 1909 at a cost of £300,000. Situated some twenty-five miles east of Brookwood, Netherne was built to serve the eastern half of Surrey and accommodate 960 patients. Merely two weeks after its official opening date – remarkably scheduled for ‘All Fools’ Day, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1909 – Netherne had already acquired five hundred patients, more than half its intended maximum quota.

## 5.2 Architectural Typologies of the Asylum

### 5.2.1 Pavilion Plan

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<sup>263</sup> Under an Act of 1828 Justices at Quarter Sessions were allowed to create county asylums to house people who could not afford private asylum care. Funding for their construction was paid by mortgaging the county rates. A further Act of 1845 said that all counties had to provide an asylum but by then Surrey had already opened its first asylum at *Springfield, Wandsworth, in 1841*. A second asylum was built at *Brookwood*, near Woking, opening in 1867, and a third at Cane Hill, Coulsdon, opening in 1883. A fourth county asylum was established at *Netherne Hospital, Coulsdon* by the newly-created Surrey County Council in 1907. Most of the patients in these county asylums were poor ‘pauper lunatics’ because anyone who was able to pay usually went to a private asylum. ‘Pauper lunatics’ were generally cared for by the county, and their local poor law authorities paid borough asylums, but the expense of their maintenance. Many of the patients were admitted to workhouses first before being moved to the county asylum so, someone identifying an ancestor in a county asylum may have to go back to workhouse records to learn the earlier part of their story. source:

<https://www.exploringsurreypast.org.uk/themes/subjects/disability-history/introduction-hospital/>

<sup>264</sup> Cost: £10,000

Preceding Netherne, previous asylums had used the so-called ‘pavilion’ plan. This improved on the earlier ‘corridor’ plan and the still earlier panoptic ‘radial’ plan (blatantly carceral, and all but deprived of natural light, ventilation, and without outdoor ‘courts’ – i.e., patient open-air recreational spaces). The pavilion asylum, featuring ‘a series of satellite buildings clustered around a central wing’<sup>265</sup>, avoided some of the pitfalls of its predecessors, but its conglomerated arrangement continued to prevent ward blocks from receiving adequate daylight or ventilation. While the preceding ‘corridor’ asylum had avoided these deficiencies it did so by incorporating impractically long corridors and were moreover spatially profligate, especially the larger, more extensive ‘corridor’ asylums, e.g., St John’s, Lincoln (1852, archs. John R Hamilton and James Medland); Littlemore, Oxford (1846, arch. Robert Clarke); City of London Asylum, Stone House, Kent, (1866, additions 1874, 1878, and 1885, arch. James Bunstone Bunning).

The ‘pavilion’ plan (which Hine would challenge) appeared in three variants: (1) The *standard pavilion* consisted of a long linear corridor extending either side of the administration block, the ward blocks orientated perpendicular to the corridor and attached at their ends; the stores/water tower could be located centrally or remotely. There were only a few of these examples built around the country.

Hellesdon Hospital (1880, Richard Phipson) & the Annexe at Lancaster Moor (1883, Arnold Kershaw) exemplify this layout. (2) In the *dual pavilion* layout, administration and services blocks were flanked by long corridors; these were, in turn, flanked by ward blocks. This arrangement made it easy to segregate difficult cases; however, its considerably lengthy corridors made operating these asylums onerous and inefficient (examples include Whalley

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<sup>265</sup> Alexander (2008:210)

Asylum, Calderstones (1915, arch. Henry Littler) and St James Hospital, Portsmouth (1879, arch. George Rake)). (3) The *radial pavilion*, halfway between the pavilion and echelon, had a semi-circular corridor accessing blocks (on the outside) and services (in the centre); only Cane Hill Hospital, Coulsdon (1882 & 1888, arch. Charles Henry Howell), and St Luke's, Whittingham Hospital (1873-1875, arch. Henry Littler) are of this type. It is evident from these evolutions that the principal arbiters of asylum design, like factories, were economies of scale, organisational and logistical practicality, light and ventilation.

### 5.2.2 Echelon Plan

The original spearhead-like *echelon* plan, superseding the pavilion plan around 1880, featured a long corridor, interconnecting wards, offices, and services. Its popularity and adoption were due to practicality: its wards, offices, and services were conveniently positioned off a single large corridor, and its diagonal corridors, with blocks projecting radially from them, ensured that, unlike its predecessors, these blocks benefitted from adequate daylight and ventilation.

There were two main types of echelon plans: the *Broad Arrow* and *Narrow Arrow*<sup>266</sup>. High Royds in Menston, designed in 1884 by West Riding County surveyor J. Vickers Edwards<sup>267</sup>, opened as the West Riding Pauper Lunatic Asylum in 1888<sup>268</sup>, is arguably the earliest extant

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<sup>266</sup> <https://www.thetimechamber.co.uk/beta/sites/asylums/asylum-history/asylum-architecture>

<sup>267</sup> <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1001469?section=official-list-entry>

<sup>268</sup> The asylum was intended to be largely self-sufficient, and was provided with its own library, surgery, dispensary, butchery, dairies, bakery, shop, upholsters and cobbler's workshops and a large estate partly devoted to agriculture and market gardening. The patients lived in wards and if they were able, were expected to work towards their keep either on the farm, in the kitchens and laundry, or in various handicrafts. The hospital was formerly connected to the Wharfedale railway line by its own small railway system, the High Royds Hospital Railway, but this was closed in 1951. <http://www.strayoffthepath.co.uk/high-royds-asylum.html>

example of the *Broad Arrow* echelon plan and predated Hine's own Claybury Asylum by three years. The subsequently evolved *compact arrow* echelon plan became Hine's architectural hallmark. This configuration retained the long corridors of the *broad arrow* but, dispensing with the broad arrow's unnecessary short corridors – linking blocks 'umbilically' to the main corridor – repositioned the 'pavilions' (or ward blocks) far closer to the corridor<sup>269</sup>, 'hugging' it instead of being placed some way away.

### 5.2.3 'Compact Arrow' Echelon Plan

The *Compact Arrow* echelon plan, so closely identified with Hine's work, is credited with having '...revolutionised the design and construction of asylums throughout the UK.'<sup>270</sup> and for being greatly appreciated for its eminent practicality. This layout kept the asylum's services conveniently centralised. Although retaining the Broad Arrow's long corridors, it positioned the ward blocks more closely to them, dispensing with the need for many shorter corridors. A design innovation is prioritising logistical convenience. Its provision of ample

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<sup>269</sup> There were two types of the Compact Arrow plan, one where the wards were set away from the corridors as Pavilion type ward blocks. The other was where the wards were all conjoined, to form one large building – this allowed for staff to move very quickly through the buildings – the differences can be seen below. Later examples of the Compact Arrow plan also included villas on the outskirts of the asylum for epileptic and chronic cases; this led to the further development of the colony layout with open corridors

<https://www.thetimechamber.co.uk/beta/sites/asylums/asylum-history/asylum-architecture>

<sup>270</sup> <https://www.thetimechamber.co.uk/beta/sites/asylums/asylum-history/asylum-architecture#:~:text=Compact%20Arrow,of%20all%20the%20asylum%20architects>.

ventilation and daylight gave this layout a ‘light and airy’<sup>271</sup> feel, which was identified as beneficial to patient well-being (as discussed previously).

The Compact Arrow plan may be further subdivided into two types. In the first, the wards were set away from the corridors as ‘Pavilion’ type ward blocks; in the second, all wards were conjoined, producing, in effect, one large building through which staff could pass easily and quickly. The main radial corridor of the *compact arrow echelon plan reduced the previously unconscionable distances that staff and patients* had to travel. It facilitated the provision of heating and the delivery of food. Depending on the project, irrespective of whether ward blocks were interconnected or remained distinct, they typically zig-zagged along the main corridor. Subsequent iterations of the Compact Arrow plan, dedicating separate villas specifically for epileptics and chronic cases and locating these at the edge of the asylum, led to the ‘further development of the *colony layout* with open corridors.’<sup>272</sup> Staggering the pavilions in order to maximise exposure to sunlight and access to fresh air exploited those qualities already well-established as beneficial to patient health. Cromeey (2019:28) points out that asylums reflected the Victorians’ prioritisation of the benefits of ‘clean air’ where holiday villages and seaside resorts were not only attractive holiday destinations but also [became] a major tourist factor because of their perceived health benefits.

As in preceding plans, men and women were strictly segregated, a ‘*sine qua non*’ of asylum management, echoed in Hine’s comments regarding Claybury: ‘Patients of both sexes, with their nurses and attendants, can approach the central departments without either sex coming

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<sup>271</sup> <https://www.thetimechamber.co.uk/beta/sites/asylums/asylum-history/asylum-architecture>

<sup>272</sup> I am indebted to the following for the clarifications included here:

<https://www.thetimechamber.co.uk/beta/sites/asylums/asylum-history/asylum-architecture>

into contact with the other—a very necessary consideration in the planning of these large institutions.’ In a desexualised world where the order was all (and where insanity was perceived to threaten order), the insane were regimented - strictly gendered, relegated and confined to their respective zones, which, in turn, flanked the shared services and offices located in the centre<sup>273</sup>, embodying the centralisation of order, reason, and sustenance.

### 5.3 Netherne

Netherne, Hine’s *seventeenth* asylum<sup>274</sup>, again deployed Hine’s signature *Compact Arrow* plan. Netherne’s ward blocks, located around the outside of a broad semicircle, were stepped. Netherne, in common with most of Hine’s later asylums, limited patient-blocks to two stories. Patients’ rooms were on the ground floor for safety reasons and to make staff access to them easier and swifter. Access to all patients’ areas was by corridor, and none, for ‘obvious’ reasons, had doors to the exterior.<sup>275</sup> All central services were ‘cradled’ within this semicircle, i.e., its administrative offices, laundry, workshops, water tower, boilers, and recreation hall. St. Luke’s, its free-standing chapel, is positioned at the front and in front of the hospital buildings. In contrast, an isolation hospital and patients’ cemetery were reassuringly distant to the north of the main buildings.<sup>276</sup> The orthogonal arrangement of buildings (other than the wards) meant that the administrative buildings, community hall and church were grouped along a main north-south axis. Such arrangement bears comparison with asylums elsewhere. Although of a more strictly orthogonal design, it is instructive to note ways *Stulecie szpitala w Kocborowie* (as described by Anna Staniewska<sup>277</sup>) echoes features of Netherne. ‘The main

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<sup>273</sup> <http://studymore.org.uk/asyarc.htm>

<sup>274</sup> <https://www.countyasylums.co.uk/netherne-hooley/>

<sup>275</sup> Alexander 2008

<sup>276</sup> Source: <https://www.countyasylums.co.uk/netherne-hooley/>

<sup>277</sup> established 1822, this is Poland’s largest asylum, significantly expanded in several stages until 1914

axis of the complex was an important element in hospitals built on the orthogonal plan. It separated the pavilions for the patients (grouped by types of illnesses) deployed symmetrically on its sides. One side gathered the pavilions for the women, the other – for men. The main axis opened with the building of hospital administration and was usually continued with the service buildings for the entire facility. These included both the back office (kitchens, bakeries, laundries, and boiler rooms) and buildings with special functions, including the facility's theatre and/or social building, and the church. Kocborów is an example of such a solution, with the axis terminating in a chapel adjacent to the wall separating the grounds of the hospital from the cemetery situated in the forest. For major religious ceremonies, the function of the church was taken over by the social building situated on the main axis, immediately behind the building of administration.'<sup>278</sup>

### 5.3.1 Architectural Style

Initially utilising his father's signature 'Jacobean' style for both Mapperley (1880) and Claybury (1893) asylums, Hine drew on a range of styles for his later asylums. He chose 'Edwardian Baroque'<sup>279 280</sup> for Netherne's red-brick administration block, which, typical of

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<sup>278</sup> Staniewska 2018

<sup>279</sup> Alexander 2008:213

<sup>280</sup> Although Edwardian architecture was generally less ornate than high or late Victorian architecture, major buildings during this period (estimated by Bremner as 1885-1920) were often designed in 'Edwardian Baroque' which was a Neo-Baroque architectural style drawing on the architecture of Christopher Wren and 18<sup>th</sup> century French Baroque, typically including extensive rustication (usually more extreme at ground level) often running into, and exaggerating, the voussoirs of arched openings (derived from French models); domed corner rooftop pavilions and a central taller tower-like element creating a lively rooftop silhouette; revived Italian Baroque elements such as exaggerated keystones, segmental arched pediments, columns with engaged blocks, attached block-like rustication to window surrounds; colonnades of (sometimes paired) Ionic columns and domed towers modelled on those of Wren's Royal Naval College. Some Edwardian Baroque buildings also include details



all of Hine's buildings for asylum staff, was stylistically differentiated from the ward blocks and featured rusticated brick pilasters, substantial arches, prominent keystones, architraves, heavy windowsills and frames, and horizontal stripes - all in contrasting pale stone. While this stylistic choice for Netherne's administration block - the 'brain' of Netherne - the seat of its governance - may have merely reflected contemporary architectural tastes, it nonetheless raises questions, for Alex Bremner argues that 'Edwardian Baroque' ('bold and ebullient, if not aggressive') was a style 'born of a certain *psychic fragility* predicated on feelings of insecurity and doubt'<sup>281</sup>. Such doubt, Bremner further argues, was fostered by the increasingly perilous state of international relations, and which expressed itself in the architectural style of a 'New Imperialism',<sup>282</sup> affirming strength-through-style to mask weakness (a weakness perhaps to which Hine himself was no stranger). Additionally, it may also have been intended to embody other values. Michael Ledger-Thomas suggests<sup>283</sup> that while Edwardian Baroque was the 'style of choice' for buildings of civic, and indeed imperial, importance, it also conveyed Britain's pledge 'to rule with justice and freedom' - an architectural embodiment of a vision already under attack, and replete with contradictions. Architect William Mountford (1855-1908) remarkably (and bizarrely) recycled stonework for a court of justice - the 'new' Old Bailey - from a place of imprisonment, Newgate Prison (which was demolished to make way for the court); the festive inauguration of the town hall in Johannesburg 'to the strains of Edward Elgar's 'Land of Hope and Glory' had its Edwardian stonework 'already pocked with bullets fired during a Boer rebellion against British authority.'

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drawn from other sources, e.g., the Dutch gables of Norman Shaw's Piccadilly Hotel.

<sup>281</sup> Bremner 2021:121

<sup>282</sup> J. Tosh *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth Century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family, and Empire*, 2005:208, cited by Bremner:

<sup>283</sup> <https://jacobin.com/2023/02/alex-bremner-edwardian-baroque-book-review-empire-capitalism-architecture>  
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### 5.3.2 Hine's 'Asylums and Asylum Planning'

Hine's 'Asylums and Asylum Planning' (Hine 1901), delivered in an address to the RIBA, is a remarkably comprehensive presentation of an architect's approach to their profession. In it, Hine traces his professional trajectory and his achievements, explains his attitudes to asylum design, and, by implication, enables us to ponder his views on mental illness (about which he is rarely explicit).

In this presentation, Hine paints a vivid and grim picture of previous asylums and, pointing out the shortcomings of the frequently used 'corridor' plan, covertly sets the stage for the superiority he claims for his design innovations: 'In the early days of manacles and fetters asylums were constructed on the model of prisons-massive walls and dungeon-like cells, with vaulted ceilings of masonry or the window openings being barred with iron stanchions, and the day rooms being nothing more than passages of communication to the single rooms generally occupied by the patients both day and night, like felons in their cells. Over time, as less restraint was exercised and patients were allowed a certain amount of freedom, the passages became widened into galleries, and, later, an occasional bay window was introduced to break the long line of the wall. Still, the old plan was followed, and the long gallery, with single rooms opening out of it, was the only recognised principle on which an asylum could be built, and which, in time, became known as the corridor type of planning; most of the earlier asylums were constructed in this way, generally with a separate single room for each patient.' (Hine 1901:164)

In contrasting a grim past with 'innovative' contemporary asylum design and its implied therapeutic advantages, Hine evokes an almost evolutionary process where the asylum, as a natural organism, develops galleries from corridors and spontaneously sprouts windows.

Until the end of the eighteenth century, there were no purpose-built asylums in England, the ‘modern’ asylum effectively fused two previous models: the benign ‘retreat’ and the more austere, purely custodial institution (Edginton 1994b:380), becoming ‘benignly’ custodial, but with ‘added’ therapeutic intentions. Hine recognises that patient restraint has been relinquished but tellingly avoids mentioning solitary confinement, which controversially substituted it.<sup>284</sup> The very reason why Hine, an architect, may have been expected to opine on patients’ *medical* treatment is because the asylum, as has been pointed out, was understood not solely to facilitate treatment but, architecturally, *to be* treatment. Edginton points out that to make sanity achievable the architect was the partner of the doctor, who, together, influenced this ‘environment of healing’ (Edginton 1994b:376) (although Donnelly puts matters more cautiously, arguing that the asylum milieu ‘depended equally on the skills of the architects; it was their task to prepare the physical space of confinement, where in turn physicians could create the proper therapeutic atmosphere’ (Donnelly 1983:48, cited Edginton 1994b:376) i.e., the architect was responsible for the place, not the practice). But the prevalent belief of design-as-treatment is not only evidenced by debates about asylum design, but is also nicely illustrated by a quaint, appreciative comment from a 1900 Visitor's Book at The York Retreat, where someone wrote ‘we were interested to notice the excellent fixed pictures in the part occupied by the more refractory patients and were informed that the brilliant colours were used so as to produce brain waves.’ (Edginton 1994b:377)

While all principal asylum architects recognised the therapeutic value of the asylum landscape – its gardens and its views – it seems that Hine preferred to delegate this aspect of

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<sup>284</sup> See Leslie Topp (2018:754-773)

his projects<sup>285</sup>. Sarah Rutherford points out that Hine was uncomfortable with the combined role of architect and landscape designer, protesting that '[i]t is not part of the Architect's duty to be a Landscape Gardener' (Rutherford 2005:75), yet Hine's reluctance to engage in landscape design is notable. Landscapes had become, with the asylum, an integral part of the therapeutic apparatus. The first purpose-built asylum in England, Bethlem (Moorfields, London, 1674-1676), included 'controlled provision' for patients to enjoy 'the associated landscape within exercise yards, known as airing courts.' (Rutherford 2004:28-29)

Tuke's introduction of 'moral treatment' (the prevailing ethos of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century asylums) meant that his paradigmatic York Retreat (1792-96) incorporated not only Bethlem's exemplary 'airing courts' (for confined exercise) but also added an eleven-acre institutional landscape of 'domestic and agricultural character' (Rutherford, S. 2004:29) - amenities explicitly intended to help restore a patient's reason. In his *A Description of The Retreat* (Tuke 1813), Tuke advocated a beneficial homely environment as an improvement to the 'general treatment of insane persons [which] was too frequently calculated to depress and degrade, rather than to awaken the slumbering reason, or correct its wild hallucinations.' (Tuke 1813:23, cited McLaughlan, R. 2014:35) William Alexander Francis Browne (1805–1885), the Scottish lunacy reformer, affirmed in *What asylums were, are, and ought to be* (1837), Browne (1991:183) that the asylum 'ought to be constructed with a direct reference to the comfort and the cure of the inmates.'<sup>286</sup> Another Quaker-run asylum, Brislington House, Bristol (1804-06), for mainly paying patients, boasted an 80-acre landscape and asylum sites of 100-200 acres became common after that (Rutherford, S. 2004:31). It has been evocatively suggested that 'Victorian asylum builders, the countryside was an unquestionable good:

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<sup>285</sup> For more ample treatment of this topic see Rutherford (2004)

<sup>286</sup> Conolly's *The Construction and Governance of Asylums* (1847) was followed as a significant, if not equally influential, guides to asylum administration and design.

God's chosen people lived close to the land, and the insane would benefit from bucolic settings. Each asylum was surrounded by acres of picturesque gardens.'(Yanni, C. 2003:34)

In acknowledging the 'heroic' scale and complexity of asylum design, Hine compares the asylum architect's enormous task, not without reason, to designing 'a little town'. Other contemporary asylums echo such grandiosity. Leslie Topp writes, 'With a church in the middle, a farm and a mortuary on the periphery, and following the principles of free treatment and therefore enlivened by visible, quasi-conventional human activity, the central European asylum of around 1900 lent itself to representation as a world unto itself' (Topp, L. 2017:59). Topp calls Vienna's monumental *Am Steinhof* asylum (built 1904-07) a 'city built from scratch' (Topp, L. 2017:73) and attributes this complete artwork (the asylum) - this *gesamtkunstwerk* to 'the ideal of the utopian community, or colony, on unbuilt land outside the city', which, she writes, 'was very much in the air.'

In fleshing out the magnitude of the asylum architect's task, Hine bleakly points out that most modern asylums will need to accommodate hundreds, if not thousands, of strictly segregated male and female patients. Accepting this as inevitable, the spectre of hundreds of town-sized quasi-industrial asylums is raised by not questioning them, as if to suggest that the task of the asylum architect is to quantify, plan, and build, but not to question. Referring to having to house such unprecedented patient numbers, Hine says of Claybury 'that the old mansion house on the estate, which was enlarged and adapted as an asylum for fifty private patients, has been already absorbed by the great influx of pauper patients, and the two buildings originally designed for 2,050 patients now accommodate nearly 2,500, in addition to about 400 of the staff, giving a total accommodation for nearly 3,000 people in this asylum.' (Hine 1901:168)

Elaborating further on the rapid rise in patient numbers, Hine comments, ‘that in 1845 there were only about thirty pauper asylums and hospitals, the latter chiefly for private patients, besides several registered houses, and, as nearly as could then be estimated, about 17,000 pauper lunatics in England and Wales. Now (in 1901), there are no fewer than 100 county and borough asylums and hospitals, together with something like seventy registered houses, all of which must be inspected once, in some cases four times, a year, and 107,000 certificated lunatics to be interviewed by the Commissioners.’ (Hine, G.T. 1901:163) Again, Hine omits to opine why numbers were rising so vertiginously.

For Hine, a phenomenon necessitating the construction of vast cities of the mad is a given, requiring neither elaboration nor ulterior explanation. It is as if such *quantified information* is simply too unequivocal to necessitate debate. Hine, while referring to fellow mortals going mad in their thousands and tens of thousands, is primarily concerned not with the tragedy this represents but only with how his architectural bravura might *accommodate* them. Instead of lamenting the ‘explosion in madness’, Hine subdivides patient types, explaining how differentiating between patients who might benefit from therapy from those requiring isolation and worse is principally an *architectural* problem: they will need to be put in different containers.

### **5.3.3 Only Seven or Eight Percent**

In planning for an ‘acute hospital’ unit, Hine claims he need only accommodate ‘seven to eight per cent’ of a hospital’s total patient population. In basing his formulation on existing ‘statistics’, he is counting on most patients falling within the category of ‘hopelessly incurable’, which means that, in the hospital he refers to, there will be eleven hundred incurables to around eighty to ninety potentially curable patients! (Hine, G.T. 1901:175).

Hine insists that these wards ‘must, of course, be conducive to recovery, where this is deemed

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likely, and in all cases, help make patients' lives 'bearable, and, as far as possible, comfortable.' (Hine, 1901:161)<sup>287</sup>. Hine stresses the value of creating dedicated spaces for recovery, the therapeutic potential of appropriate patient segregation, and spatial separation.

#### 5.3.4 Liaising with and Learning from Medical Staff

In advocating that the asylum architect listen to and learn from medical professionals, Hine effectively establishes an intimate connection between *treatment, cure, and architecture*. He exhorted fellow architects to 'study asylum construction in the light of those whose duty it is to look after the insane [...] [for] it is necessary [for the architect] to *know something* of the eccentricities of insanity and the habits and treatment of the insane.' (Hine 1901:174, emphasis added)

To know 'something' and remain persistently optimistic about the therapeutic contribution which informed design can make, Hine cites Thomas Clouston's adage<sup>288</sup> that 'cure, not mere confinement, should give the keynote of construction.' (Hine 1901:174) Hine seemingly gratuitously asserts that it is '*well known* that many forms of insanity are readily curable at an early stage.' (Hine 1901:171) Hine<sup>289</sup> affirms that design can contribute to patient comfort and happiness provided the asylum environment is designed to *appear* reassuring, concealing from the patient elements that would lead him to fear restraint and detention (irrespective of

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<sup>287</sup> There exist extant contemporary suggestions for 'beneficial' colour schemes

<sup>288</sup> Scottish psychiatrist Sir Thomas Smith Clouston (1840 – 1915) was appointed in 1789 as the first ever Lecturer on Mental Diseases in the University of Edinburgh. Clouston lectured internationally on adolescent psychiatric disorders and his *Clinical Lectures on Mental Diseases* (1883) was followed by popular publications including his *Unsoundness of Mind* (1911). Clouston maintained a belief in 'masturbational insanity' and served as President of the *Medico-Psychological Association of Great Britain and Ireland*, where in 1898, Hine was elected Honorary Member: "a distinction but sparingly bestowed even upon medical men, and which had only thrice previously been conferred on anyone outside the medical profession".

<sup>289</sup> Citing Conolly's work on Asylum Construction,

whether these were still ‘officially’ applied). Disguising confinement is one of the five ways McLaughlan usefully extrapolates from Tuke’s *Description of the Retreat* (1813), Browne’s *What Asylums Were, Are and Ought to Be* (1837), and Conolly’s *The Construction and Governance of Asylums* (1847) as being understood to maximise architecture’s curative influence. The others are ‘proximity to society, the role of nature, concerns of safety and issues related to privacy and dignity for patients’, and a need for ‘individual treatment and tranquility.’ (McLaughlan 2013:83)

Conolly (whom Hine cites approvingly) argues that the architect ‘must remember that he can materially assist the doctor in his cure, as well as his protection, of the patient [and] must design buildings that provide security without the appearance of restraint. The ever-present sense of detention is, in a way, as inimical to cure as were the cells and fetters of the eighteenth century.’ (Hine 1901:174) In connection with Connolly’s injunction, Hine favourably mentions German asylums, singling out the *Alt Scherbitz* Asylum, where ‘everything possible’ was done to ‘dispel the idea of detention’ and ‘the buildings are very *home-like* in character.’ (Hine 1901:173) Hine praises the management of the ‘colony’ on the south side of the road at *Alt Scherbitz* where: ‘The villas are constructed very much like boarding schools, with day and classrooms on the ground floor and associated dormitories above. [...] doors and windows are open, and the patients come and go as they please, wander about or work in the grounds, enjoying comparative freedom, but are constantly watched by carefully trained attendants. Hine seems to think that the comparatively open environment of these radical German asylums may foster patient self-control and whether these were exemplars of a style of treatment more humane than those currently existing in



England. A dissenting comment (attached to his presentation, when published by the RIBA) effectively makes the point that such laxity would not work in here, in England! <sup>290</sup>

Regarding Hine and his contemporaries, it is unclear whether humane treatment of the mentally ill was primarily an ethically driven priority or a rational (because functional) objective; more *engineered*, it was ‘therefore’ more therapeutically efficacious<sup>291</sup>, and, in that sense, more ‘productive’. ‘Enlightened’ opinion of the period favoured treating the insane with greater dignity (although this had been the case since introduction of Quaker reformer Samuel Tuke’s ‘Moral Treatment’<sup>292</sup>). But did such dignity reflect concern for the patient, or was it to preserve the ‘dignity’ of the ‘enlightened’ doctor and, in this case, also the architect? Certainly, humanely treating patients had successfully dissociated its practitioners from the barbarism of previous eras, and those advocating and administering ‘moral treatment’ could feel virtuous about themselves and the exercise of their professions, but such attitudes were buttressed by power and confidence; tackling mental illness was no longer an intimidating

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<sup>290</sup> Although Hine refers on several occasions to *Alt Scherbitz* in the discussion that followed his presentation (published in the same edition of the RIBA Journal) a dissenter expresses the following curious distinction between English and German lunatics:

*It must be borne in mind that many of the so-called lunatics in German asylums and he had noted it from personal observation were cases of so mild a type that in this country they would not be considered suitable cases for asylum treatment but would be dealt with in workhouses or would remain in their own homes. It followed, therefore, that what had been found to answer in an asylum like Alt Scherbitz, where the colony or cottage system was largely in vogue, would not necessarily answer in this country.*

<sup>291</sup> But this also begs the question of whether making such distinctions is anachronistic and more a symptom of our times and judgment than Hine’s.

<sup>292</sup> Redolent of 19<sup>th</sup> century accounts (anonymous) of ‘Kaspar Hauser’ (1812-1833) adapted for film by film director, Werner Herzog, as ‘The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser’ (1974) which seems to reflect evolving attitudes towards the care of the insane.

matter but had been ‘tamed’. Professional practitioners could assert mastery over the challenges of madness by having the power to *organise* it and its treatment.

Although Hine defined patients as those ‘...who cannot take care of themselves, and who have to be watched, nursed, and provided with employment and recreation under conditions inapplicable to sane people; and to provide for all these, while the subjects are under enforced detention, a *very special knowledge* is required to make their lives bearable, and, as far as possible, comfortable’.<sup>293</sup> [emphasis added] But what did Hine, his fellow architects, or anyone else know about madness? What did Hine’s stipulated ‘special knowledge’, which he mentions as indispensable to the exercise of his profession, consist of? He certainly knew how to design an asylum. But to what end? The asylum was built to detain those who may never recover. Yes, it provided the opportunity for the mad to be observed at close quarters, which could arguably ‘augment’ medical knowledge of mental illness, but as for recovery, how? Hine does not help us answer these difficult questions. The asylum was a refuge<sup>294</sup> that guaranteed a modicum of hygiene and shelter, where ‘salutary’ routines prevailed (or routines that were salutary *because* they were routine): diet, discipline, sport, and entertainment [of the new Govan Asylum at Hawkhead Hine says it ‘possesses one of the finest recreation halls

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<sup>293</sup> Hine 1901:161

<sup>294</sup> early 15c., earlier *asile* (late 14c.), "place of refuge, sanctuary," from Latin *asylum* "sanctuary," from Greek *asylon* "refuge, fenced territory," noun use of neuter of *asylos* "inviolable, safe from violence," especially of persons seeking protection, from *a-* "without" (see *a-* (3)) + *sylo* "right of seizure," which is of unknown etymology.

Literally, "an inviolable place." Formerly a place where criminals and debtors sought shelter from justice and from which they could not be taken without sacrilege. The general sense of a "safe or secure place" is from the 1640s; the abstract sense of "inviolable shelter, protection from pursuit or arrest" is from 1712. The meaning "benevolent institution to shelter some class of persons suffering social, mental, or bodily defects" is from 1773, originally of female orphans. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/asylum>

in the country, with a stage equal to that in many modern theatres<sup>295</sup>]. Asylums often granted patients agreeable panoramas and fresh air. Still, despite that ‘special knowledge’ to which Hine lays claim, it seems that in the absence of any understanding of, or engagement with, ‘madness’, asylum architects had only faith in the power of place to justify their practice. Edginton writes: ‘The design discourse [of the asylum] is grounded in its potential, not its function’ (Edginton, B. 1994b:376) where ‘design is treatment’. (Edginton, B. 1994a).

A pursuit that both Hine and the doctors equally specialise in is taxonomy. For Foucault, classification – in ‘othering’ the insane – objectivises the patient: ‘The science of mental disease, as it would develop in the asylum, would always be only of the order of observation and classification. It would not be a dialogue (Foucault 1988:250). But like so many others, Hine has been profoundly seduced by the Darwinian / Victorian passion for classifying phenomena, architecturally and nosologically, an understanding that proceeds both teleologically and retrospectively, like an ill-fated Orpheus.

### **5.3.5 Productivity / Value for Money**

In presenting his plans for East Sussex Asylum at Hellingly, Hine pounds his audience with prodigious ‘numbers’ (his architectural ‘money shot’) promising ‘immediate accommodation for 1,115 patients, and provision for extension to 1,275, arranged as follows; 1. An acute hospital for eighty patients, which, you will see, is near the entrance to the estate, and nearly half a mile from the main asylum; 2. A main asylum building for 840 patients of all classes; 3. Four detached villas, each holding thirty patients; 4. A block for sixty idiot and imbecile children, with rooms for fifteen quiet female patients, who assist in nursing the children. This makes up the 1,115 we are now building for. The remaining 160 patients to complete the

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<sup>295</sup> Hine 1901:172

ultimate number will be provided for in further blocks attached to the main asylum or in more villas, whichever is found in experience to be more desirable' (Hine 1901:175-6).

Hine has again demonstrated a highly engineered rational approach to organising patients, where everything functions, save for the patients' minds. His design envisages devoting half of the asylum to the 'accommodation of infirmity, recent, and acute cases', reassuring his audience that epileptics needing urgent intervention, and who anyway have an elevated risk of inadvertent self-harm, are all housed safely on the ground floor 'both by day and night', etc. The more autonomous, less risk-prone 'working patients' who work on the farm or in the asylum laundry do not require regular access to the 'airing court'<sup>296</sup> (controlled open-air spaces) and will be 'housed in blocks fronting the two large interior courts' (Hine 1901:169). Hine's passion for classification gathers apace: 'The rooms must be of various forms and sizes, with ample means of segregation. There should be much scope for classification, but not quite on the same lines as in the main asylum. A ward which can be subdivided for the acutely maniacal, a ward for the quiet and melancholic, and a ward for convalescents are necessary; and, above all things, plenty of single bedrooms and two or three private sitting rooms where single patients can be treated separately.' (Hine 1902:176)

Evidently, 'designing for madness' signified, for Hine and his contemporaries, *organising* madness, which now seems a kind of unacknowledged mania, if not madness. For Hine, asylum design aspired to be a 'harmonious whole' but seems suspiciously like a surrogate for *understanding madness*. Maybe he and his generation felt that madness was adequately

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<sup>296</sup> Neighbouring Cane Hill asylum, and specifically its 'airing courts', were once described by MP Christopher Mayhew as, 'ugly, oppressive, wretched ... You feel you're in a 19th-century prison or workhouse ... staff shortage and overcrowding mean locked doors and gates – it's the only way hardworking staff can manage. This gate locks patients into this exercise yard, or airing court as it's called. It's sunless, crowded, ugly, like a cage for wild animals' (quoted by Claire Wills)

understood because it was identified, classified, and named. Asylums could, therefore, be confidently planned, based on these conclusive categories, the subdivisions of madness, which were, beyond doubt, immutable.

Is there a strain of utopianism in Hine's ambitiously 'harmonious whole'? his finely detailed 'machine for madness', a fully-fledged, perfectly functioning, highly evolved artificial organism? Or a machinery that filled the void left by uncharted madness? In Hine's entire presentation, there is barely a hint that understanding madness is a prerequisite. This ideal city, isolated, efficient, self-contained, with a clear mission to alleviate suffering, was designed without understanding what this suffering was or how to treat it; a rational organisation of the irrational; 'modern' management proud of putting its ignorant predecessors to shame.<sup>297</sup>

Yet despite seeming to embrace 'moral treatment', Hine was, unlike his contemporaries, strangely reluctant to engage in asylum landscape design. This specialism may not have been his 'thing' or else his disinterested attitude to landscape, a key asset of 'moral treatment', may have reflected the gradually diminishing belief in the therapeutic validity of design ('medical professionals in Britain lost their faith in moral treatment prior to 1878' (McLaughlan 2014:280-1). Hine continues regardless to affirm the therapeutic role of asylum architecture. Still, McLaughlan pointedly observes that even though the 'asylum ideal was that the appropriate articulation of architecture and landscape would aid the restoration of reason over madness [...] *how* architecture and landscape were understood to facilitate a return to sanity was not defined' (McLaughlan 2014:37). In other words, the notion that architecture was potentially therapeutically efficacious seems more an article of faith, than

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<sup>297</sup> See, in contrast, a utopian asylum, Kingseat, Aberdeen, built 1901-1905, inspired by Ebenezer Howard's

'garden city' ward, see Allmond (2016).

something *known*<sup>298</sup>. While earlier asylum reformers were also intent on making the asylum more therapeutic (and ‘more cheerful’) this was primarily by making the asylum *less carceral*<sup>299</sup> whereas Hine’s architectural aim was to design somethings positively therapeutic.

How best to model environments capable of benefitting patients’ states of mind continues to excite debate and enquiry, albeit now augmented with data and theory drawn from a panoply of psychological studies. Amanda Knapp (Knapp 2020), in exploring for example the ‘reassurance’ that ‘homely’ environments can give patients in therapy-rooms, avails herself of multiple authorities to substantiate how people may come to feel more comfortable and relaxed in certain environments (e.g. Scannell, L., & Gifford, R. (2010); Fullilove, M.T. (1996); Fried, M. (2000); Stedman, R.C. (2003) et al) but she nonetheless arrives at some equivocal results. Her conclusion (Knapp 2020:38) that ‘[t]here is a significant relationship between homely items in a therapist’s office and psychological wellbeing’ includes her affirmation that ‘homely therapeutic landscapes (i.e., therapy rooms that contain homely items) are positively related to aspects of client wellbeing such as heightened mood, decreased stress, and increased comfort’ is at variance with the experienced of some patients for whom (Knapp 2020:44) ‘elements of the space that contributed to greater anxiety for them’ and who were aware of ‘items in the room as distractions that interrupted their thought

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<sup>298</sup> Both Leslie Topp (2005:136) and Anne Rigby (1985:50 & 1985:41) argue that ‘moral treatment’ at the York Retreat was associated also with its décor, architecture, and lifestyle evoking an idealised domesticity (cited by McLaughlin 2014:37).

<sup>299</sup> Browne opposed anything suggesting oppressive confinement, e.g., surrounding airing courts with high walls, and cage-like iron stairwells. Tuke, in the Retreat, had iron window-bars concealed in wooden sashes, door-locks muffled, and opted for sites that disguised the height of perimeter fences. Conolly advocated sinking such fences to allow for more wholesome views of the surrounding landscape, and to ensure that the appearance and setting of the asylum be ‘more cheerful than imposing’ (Conolly 1847:14), e.g., by using the ‘Georgian domestic style’ which Digby (1985:39) suggests translated as ‘everyday accessibility’ (McLaughlan 2014:60).

process; these things did not in any way help them self-regulate and decrease their stress’ and that for even one patient, ‘the space made them feel ‘enclosed and trapped’ etc. Long, C. G. *et al.* (2011) discuss the therapeutic value of ‘homeliness’ in a secure psychiatric unit environment.<sup>300</sup>

While such qualities are assessed by recourse to quantitative methodologies the idea of ‘homeliness’ as being potentially therapeutic can be traced directly back to Tuke who, in connection with his York Retreat, argued for the efficacy of a homely environment (an approach harshly critiqued as an insidious example of bourgeois mind-control by Foucault). Indeed, Tuke’s York Retreat is frequently scrutinised to understand how architecture’s (then) novel therapeutic role was supposed to work (McLaughlan 2014:37). Leslie Topp’s description of York (Topp 2005:136, cited by McLaughlan) as an attempt to replicate the normality and sanity of the world outside it, and therefore ‘deliberately domestic’ (but also, strangely, a ‘parallel universe’), is compounded by Anne Digby’s observations that its everyday rituals (Digby 1985:50, cited McLaughlan) and even its ornamentation (Digby 1985:41: “Plate 4. New dining-room for ladies, 1899.”) were drawn from ‘normal’ domestic life. It seems very much that we are still grappling with the themes and ramifications of ‘moral treatment’ in our attempts to orchestrate therapeutically efficacious environments, although we now seem to take for granted the insidious power of modern retailers to corral consumers and lull them into mindless spending. Samuel Austin elegantly demonstrates this in his analysis of the motorway service area which, he argues, having become a ‘reassuringly familiar’ place of consumption has also therefore become, for some people, ‘a place for dealing with difficult issues: for separated parents to exchange children; for confronting

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<sup>300</sup> Long 2011:205-212

employees with tough; for making the extraordinary seem ordinary decisions.’ (Austin 2012:15) But maybe ‘science’ like psychology, admits solely ‘scientific’ proofs.

In trying to unpack Hine’s conviction that asylum architecture might be designed to help effect cure, it is worth exploring Clare Hickman’s fascinating insight that eighteenth-century writers on the landscape, such as Joseph Addison, influenced the opinions of nineteenth-century asylum superintendents, suggesting opinions regarding asylum design were based on taste rather than knowledge. In 1712, Addison wrote that ‘Delightful scenes, whether in nature, painting, or poetry, have a kindly influence on ... the mind, and not only serve to clear and brighten the imagination but *can disperse grief and melancholy*’.<sup>301</sup> (Addison 1824:191-2) The appropriation of the ‘picturesque’ in this context reads very much like conflating therapy with aesthetics: natural *and* artistic beauty as curative<sup>302</sup>. Such conflation intriguingly connects asylum architecture with psychogeography. Where Hine and other asylum architects acknowledge the potential of the asylum environment to create or affect mood, psychogeography strives to detect and locate it in the environment.<sup>303</sup> One is intent on orchestrating it, the other identifying and celebrating it.

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<sup>301</sup> quoted Hickman (2009:426), in McLaughlan (2014:38)

<sup>302</sup> ‘Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast etc.’- from *The Mourning Bride* (1697), by William Congreve (1670-1729).

<sup>303</sup> McLaughlan categorises the ways in which it was understood that architecture could be curative - Browne’s *What Asylums Were, Are and Ought to Be* (1837)<sup>2</sup> and Conolly’s *The Construction and Governance of Asylums* (1847)<sup>3</sup> followed as significant, if not equally influential, guides to asylum administration and design. Within these three sources five main themes develop: (1) proximity to society, (2) the role of nature, (3) disguising confinement, (4) concerns of safety and issues related to privacy and dignity for patients. These themes can be translated architecturally to provide a set of architectural criteria considered vital to support the delivery of moral treatment (table 3.1). McLaughlan 2014:58



## 5.4 Conclusions

The assumption that asylum architects could formulate environments to manage emotions creates a curious bridge between architectural practice and psychogeography. I have previously identified psychogeography as a creative, interpretative practice which, by privileging feeling, may challenge preconceived aspects of place. As axiomatic that a building's 'meaning' is always *equivocal*, psychogeography favours receptivity to place - in effect, an '*emotional pragmatism*' or realism. In contrast, asylum architects assumed that their practice may impact, even orchestrate, patient emotions. What both architects and psychogeographers share and acknowledge is

a conviction that places have emotional and affective power. Where they diverge is in their aims, ambitions, and ideals. Asylum architecture, albeit without any clear understanding of how this was to be achieved, sought to impose on the patient the architect's vision of what they should and should not feel. This implicitly utopian, even autocratic ideal of emotional management treats the world, both things and feelings, as vulnerable to creative intervention and manipulation. The psychogeographer's perspective on the world is attuned to its multiple nuances intended and otherwise. It is as if the world has become art, a spectrum of experience open to emotional and affective interpretation.

## 5.5 Hine's Own Nervous Disease

To remind his peers at the RIBA how superbly 'rational' his asylums were, Hine evokes Joseph Conolly's<sup>304</sup> portrayal of 'the terrible sufferings of patients incarcerated in Bedlam

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<sup>304</sup> John Conolly (27 May 1794 – 5 March 1866) was an English psychiatrist. He published the volume *Indications of Insanity* in 1830. In 1839, he was appointed resident physician to the Middlesex County Asylum where he introduced the principle of non-restraint into the treatment of the insane, which led to non-restraint became accepted practice throughout England. But see Scull on Conolly's abject refusal to acknowledge that: "*Nonrestraint was introduced, not by him but by one Robert Gardiner Hill, then a twenty-*

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where ‘they remained day and night, dirty, ill-fed, and utterly neglected, excepting on Sundays when they were exhibited to the public, who flocked in to see the mad people caper, the gaolers being allowed to charge a penny or twopence a head to see the show’.<sup>305</sup> But what about Hine’s own show? Hine, at this, the pinnacle of his career, invited by the nation’s most prestigious architectural organisation to present an exhaustive two-and-a-half hour<sup>306</sup> detailed analysis of a subject he knew more about than anyone else alive, is forced to resort to his friend and colleague, Hayes Newington, to deliver his paper for him. Hine could not do it. He stammered.

Articled to his father aged 17 in 1858 until 1864, Hine (according to Hine’s obituary) ‘owing to a *serious impediment in his speech*’ left England and spent three years sheep-farming in Australia. At his father’s request, Hine returned to England in 1867, and having ‘partly overcome’ his infirmity of speech, Hine accepted the partnership his father offered him and ‘devoted himself assiduously to his profession.’<sup>307</sup> Yet despite the Australian sojourn in 1901, his stammer, as noted, remained insurmountable. That Hine’s stammer was beyond his (or anyone’s) power to rectify contrasts with Hine’s own belief, echoed in the approval he readily gives the relatively liberated conditions at the *Alt Scherbitz* asylum, that some of the mad could indeed control themselves: ‘Great value is attached to residence in the colony, and

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*four-year-old house surgeon at the provincial subscription asylum at Lincoln”.*

With colleagues Conolly founded the 'Provincial Medical and Surgical Association', and founded the 'British and Foreign Medical Review' ('A Quarterly Journal of Practical Medicine'). See also unflattering obituary on Conolly by pioneering English psychiatrist, Henry Maudsley (1835-1918) - Conolly was Maudsley’s father-in-law! See also Maudsley’s papers on Edgar Allan Poe (1860), challenging popular opinion that a dog could have committed suicide.

<sup>305</sup> Hine 1901:162

<sup>306</sup> It is estimated that Hine’s 14,000 words would require 2.5 hours to be read out .

<sup>307</sup> Hubert Bond, *Journal of RIBA*, June 10<sup>th</sup> (1916:257-258).

patients are given to understand that their stay there depends entirely on their good behaviour, and are thus encouraged to exercise self-control.’<sup>308</sup>

In the nineteenth century, there were as many ‘remedies’ for stuttering as there were theories to explain it. Indeed, the Victorian age saw a marvellous abundance of quack remedies developed, some highly remunerative, for conditions which contemporary medicine failed to resolve<sup>309</sup>. Hine had sought help from a certain Dr Lewis, a United States citizen who visited England on several occasions to give inspirational talks and whose methods, which Hine teasingly alludes to, but sadly does not describe as ‘unorthodox’,<sup>310</sup> may have included auto-suggestion. Hine had already previously consulted eight ‘experts’<sup>311</sup> to no avail.

Like other afflictions entailing involuntary movement, stammering was construed in the nineteenth century as a ‘nervous disease’ and understood as speech ‘*interrupted*’ by ‘involuntary twitches and contractions of the tongue’. It was claimed that weak nerves (or even weak character<sup>312</sup>) compromised the ability to control one’s own body. But as ‘nervous afflictions’ were generally understood to be a ‘feminine’ pathology, why were so many men affected? As doctors were unable to explain this apparent paradox, theories abounded.

Contemporary statistics showed that women were far less likely to stammer than men, so it

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<sup>308</sup> Hine 1901:173

<sup>309</sup> My own favourite example being ‘The Carbolic Smokeball Company’ which offered £100 REWARD “to any Person who contracts the Increasing Epidemic, INFLUENZA, Colds, or any Diseases caused by taking Cold, after having used the CARBOLIC SMOKE BALL according to the printed directions supplied with each Ball”.

A claim which led to a court action in 1892 – *Carlill v Carbolic Smoke Ball Company* [1893] 1 QB:256

<sup>310</sup> Alexander 2008:215: ‘including “*physical restraints, mechanical devices, dietary regimes, and other methods based on physical deprivation*’.

<sup>311</sup> Alexander 2008:215

<sup>312</sup> This era was fond of using ‘character’ to explain medical or psychological conditions – compare this with the commonly explanation for General Paralysis of the Insane: the dissolute character.

was hypothesised that women's smaller larynxes made speech easier for them or that their 'natural loquacity' helped them develop a fluency eluding some men.

Surgeons, often derided as 'heartless butchers', were known to be overly keen to operate on the stammerer's vocal organs, but medically unqualified therapists were denounced as quacks. Not until the 1870s did a new, third type of expert emerge in speech pathology. One of these was William Ketley who, at the turn of the century, offered help in the form of treatment that followed the 'Beasley Method', a method developed by his father-in-law, Benjamin Beasley. A cured or ex- stammerer. Beasley flattered potential clients - male stammerers - by claiming that no class of men is '*better equipped in mental abilities, in versatility, in the depth of penetration, in nervous force than the stammerer.*'<sup>313</sup> He argued that their gifted intellects and 'nervous force' made them victims of a jealous society. And what is the cause of these men's distressing condition? The suppression of healthy instincts by modern civilisation<sup>314</sup>. Ketley explains that 'The child of the savage is brought up like a healthy little animal, [...] knowing nothing whatever of the repressions which count so much in the decencies and refinements of conduct among civilised peoples [...] How different, when compared with this, is the every-day training of the child brought up in a civilised environment. From the very first day he can make his wants known by word of mouth, he is taught to whisper of the most intimate things to disguise his real instincts.'

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<sup>313</sup> William Ketley Stammering: The Beasley Treatment (1900) (cited by Josephine Hoegaerts - <https://diseasesofmodernlife.web.ox.ac.uk/article/victims-of-civilization-the-stammerers-identity-in-victorian-britain>)

<sup>314</sup> A universal cure for stammering has long remained elusive and it is still unclear if genetic predisposition plays a role in the condition. Ward (2012): For adults who stutter, there is no known cure, and although stutterers often learn to stutter less severely, 'others may make no progress with therapy' (Guitar 2005).

To blame stammering on modern civilisation's oppression of a person's 'true' nature may seem strangely modern, redolent of theories explaining neurotic *self-repression*. Yet Samuel Tuke (1784-1857), Quaker pioneer of 'moral treatment', also held, in common with William Blake and many nineteenth-century Romantics, that 'civilisation' was accountable for madness and indeed a whole host of ills (such notions, which still resonate today, can be traced at least to Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), if not before (here is not the place to reprise such theories<sup>315</sup>).

Whatever inspired Ketley's approach, Hine seems to have found no respite for his condition and would have doubtless felt embarrassment by it, and experienced or imagined a degree of social marginalisation: stammering generally was not a good look<sup>316</sup>. But Hine must also have had some difficult questions to answer; although outwardly optimistic about medicine's (and architecture's) power to master madness, why was it so powerless to cure a mere stammer?

For Hine, stammering – uncomfortably classed as a 'nervous disease' alongside epilepsy and other involuntary behaviours – risked being associated with madness. Moreover, 'nervous diseases', chauvinistically identified by the Victorians as 'feminine', implied that those suffering from it were weak and needed a dose of drastic, remedial character-building. Thus, did poor Hine's father pack off this 23-year-old lad to farm sheep – one supposed to 'toughen him up and make a man of him' - in remote and still brutal Australia? Such was that era's

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<sup>315</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* ([1754] ed. Hackett 1987:64) 'Nothing is so gentle as man in his primitive state, when placed by nature at an equal distance from the stupidity of brutes and the fatal enlightenment of civil man'.

<sup>316</sup> Martin (no date) explores attitudes to stammering in Victorian literature: When Victorian writers reference speech disorders, they tend to focus on either minor humorous or grotesque representations of stuttering individuals or the trials and tribulations of 'major' contemporary public figures who stuttered, such as Charles

Lamb, Charles Kingsley, and Lewis Carroll.

absolute credence that naturally superior ‘masculine values’<sup>317</sup> (e.g. ‘reason’) were essential to character formation that had, if necessary, to be instilled regardless of cost and suffering. Although it may shock that ‘nervous diseases’ were identified as ‘feminine’, still more shocking (if unsurprising) was that such bias against the ‘feminine’ – and against women – was reflected in the population of the mad, where asylum provision for female patients consistently outnumbered that for male patients<sup>318</sup>. Upon sharing his plans with his RIBA audience for *Claybury*, Hine explains unapologetically that ‘... the accommodation provides for 1,200 women on one side, while on the other are wards for only 800 men’<sup>319</sup> – this

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<sup>317</sup> There are an estimated 80,000 18–22-year-old prostitutes in London currently, one per 34 men. ‘Fallen women’ were frequently condemned to penitential labour in the carceral Magdalen Asylums (first established in Whitechapel, London, 1758, and later (1866?) moving to Streatham). ‘Magdalens’ were named after a false identification of the ‘sinner’ [in Luke, 7:37] who, with Mary Magdalene, ostentatiously washed and anointed Jesus’s feet, and *called* ‘hospitals’ because their severe, work-orientated regime, where every detail of life was organised, was ‘therapeutic’. Showing inmates ‘as a sight’ made visiting the Magdalen Hospital a popular and thrilling ‘East-End’ entertainment, which Prince Edward attended, as Horace Walpole describes to a friend. In 1846, Charles Dickens and philanthropist Angela Burdett-Coutts [the first primary school I attended was called ‘Burdett-Coutts’, in Victoria] established *Urania Cottage*, a far more benign alternative to the Magdalens. Like Hine, some of Urania’s ‘graduates’ were shipped off to character-building Australia to start their new life!

Sources: <http://www.stgitehistory.org.uk/magdalenhospital.html>

ME: The Irish Magdalene Laundries, known also as Magdalene Asylums for Penitent Females, were operative from the 18th to the late 20th centuries and although initially housed prostitutes expanded to house unmarried mothers and their children, and sexually vulnerable or ‘seduced’ young women and girls. A disproportionate amount of those children of unmarried women died; the bodies were recently discovered to have been disposed of in septic tanks.

<sup>318</sup> 1851 Census showed 4% more women than men, the additional 75,000 women were referred to as “superfluous” or “redundant” women <https://revisitingdickens.wordpress.com/prostitution-victorian/>

<sup>319</sup> Hine 1901:168

imbalance was typical of the populations of English asylums and persisted until their very closure.

Observations and thoughts regarding Hine's inner life are not made to gloat over his psychic vulnerability but rather to flag up the implicit contradiction between Hine's (and his age's) rationalism (including his intensely diligent approach to asylum planning) and irrationalism (including behaviours like Hine's irresolvable speech-impediment), that such diligence 'should' have been able to master. Such contradiction seems especially blatant in a professional life dedicated entirely and confidently to building massive therapeutic complexes whose supposed *curative* purposes and processes were themselves ambiguous, even unknown. A case perhaps of *domination* being a substitute for *understanding*; the Victorian manly spirit in action, i.e., "we may not truly understand madness, but we will certainly *not* yield to it; we are privileged with an enormous power to *do*. As Foucault remarks laconically, madness was [only] controlled, not cured (Foucault 1988:244).

Hine's meticulously planned asylums are his and his age's best attempt to 'interpret' madness. By building for madness, reinterpreting space to address madness, and housing it, (as if madness needed its place), Hine's asylums are highly formalised and formulaic interpretations of madness<sup>320</sup> (maybe even visualisations of madness). Arguably, the outlook of the age couldn't approach madness in any way but organisationally (because madness couldn't be articulated, other than organisationally). The paradox: designing for the unknown and (arguably) the unknowable. How courageous, how stupid, how sad.

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<sup>320</sup> A narrator has the uncanny impression that the labyrinth he dreams of is an image of a cross-section of his

## Chapter Six: Placing Feelings

*This chapter, the culmination of the enquiries preceding it, features ‘readings’ of Netherne, augmented by historical and non-historical references, random associations, and dramatized personifications of architectural details and other incidentals. All ‘readings’ have been developed from observations recorded using different media – notes, voice recording, and especially photographs – during numerous visits made to Netherne (only rarely do the following readings respond to a photograph of Netherne, rather than directly to Netherne, the place; the majority of photographs were taken to capture one or more specific details, or the kernel of an idea, explored subsequently).*

My ‘readings’ of Netherne are ‘close readings’: symbolic, allegorical, and digressive elaborations of small details (n.b. these are ‘close readings’ of *place* and *self*, not of literary texts<sup>321</sup>). Just as Freud identified profound significance in seemingly incidental details, telling environmental details offered similar interpretational opportunities. Although my reflections and reinterpretations of Netherne concern the locale, as well as Netherne’s ponderous architecture (although both seem infected with mental illness), they are also very much coloured by sadness – which is the specific *emotional lens* (or ‘register’) I have chosen to apply to the place. These readings – and the feelings suffusing them – reverberate with the history of Netherne but also with the wider history of ‘othered’ madness, its housing, and treatment.

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<sup>321</sup> ‘Close reading’ (known also as ‘Practical Criticism’) typically involves examining the constituent parts of a *text* instead of its overall narrative or meaning. This approach, developed by I. A. Richards (1893-1979), was intended to sensitise the reader acutely to the *intrinsic character* of a literary works by relinquishing preconceptions about it. Influenced by Richards, William Empson (1906 -1984) offers (in his ‘Seven Types of Ambiguity’) idiosyncratic accounts of literary works, emphasising their ambiguity and the multiplicity of possible meanings that may be ‘found’ in them.



The following readings reflect my interest in the work of Bachelard and Merleau-Ponty, in that I am not only intent on *seeing* buildings but also on being aware of *how* I see and feel about them. Often, they are guided by some sort of ‘size, identification’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2012) where *body consciousness* – our identification of an object *with* our bodies – prompts us to ‘feel’ that object’s form, shape, bulk, angularity, disjointedness, fragility, etc., as if we can ‘know’ such qualities in the ‘same way’ we ‘know and feel’ our own bodies.

My creative experiment, in testing the collision of ostensible incommensurables – narrative and architecture – parallels Foucault’s and Certeau’s respective calls for a transgressive, ‘inventive criticism’ and an equally transgressive ‘resistant reading’. I explore how meandering interpretation (and misinterpretation) can open new vistas on what is being observed. My approach also adapts Tschumi’s programme for ‘energising’ architecture by introducing narrative to it (an idea also explored by Havik (2014)). Finally, I also adopt Buber’s dialogic approach, addressing a building or place in the second person (you) as an entreaty to discover what this entity may ‘say’ to me. Its ‘answers’ are invariably coloured either by emotion or affect (which I have defined in a previous chapter as sentiment and (received) sensation respectively). As stressed previously, the following accounts – influenced by the feelings of sadness, alienation, and hurt I felt whenever visiting Netherne – are my attempt to interpret Netherne, a place of seemingly ‘infinite sadness’, through the lens of this emotion.

It should also be stressed that some of the interpretations which follow are, in effect, attempts to convey ‘figuratively’ the kinds of feelings alluded to at the very outset of this exploration: those unrecognisable, unnameable, almost subliminal feelings that are part of our reactions to place - subtle and ephemeral; eluding verbal description they can seem incommunicable, and ‘therefore’ worthless. This thesis has sought to redress such neglect by unpacking the

dynamic between buildings, feeling, and narrative (I take ‘narrative’ to include stories, descriptions, and explanations).

My walks around what remains of an asylum are also, in effect, walks around the *idea* of an asylum: records of how I have felt about *and* towards Netherne. In ‘reading’ Netherne, I have been reading myself, subsequently *ordering* what I noticed and felt, both whilst there (under its ‘spell’) and subsequently. These narratives continually re-frame an inner image of Netherne and the very personal sense of vulnerability I associate with Netherne (throughout my visits, I have been troubled by the strange symmetry between my perplexity – how can feelings relate to inanimate *place* – and the imagined patient’s perplexity at their madness (anything resembling madness detectable in the following ‘psycho-geographic’ accounts is intentional).

I have prioritised a particular emotional register, sadness, in this work. Sadness, therefore, permeates my readings of Netherne, and my observations of the place have coalesced around this feeling. Above all, my readings of Netherne are intentionally *disruptive* – irrational, pseudo-rational interpretations of place intended to divest buildings of conventional ‘meanings’ – and help see and experience them as both fresh and alien<sup>322</sup>.

#### GENIUS LOCI:

A standard gambit of psycho-geographical practice involves positing a ‘genius loci’ – an underlying ‘spirit’ that influences or ‘causes’ whatever occurs in that place. This effectively

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<sup>322</sup> Und wenn ein Held bevorsteht, der den Sinn, den wir für das Gesicht der Dinge nehmen, wie eine Maske abreißt und uns resend Gesichter aufdeckt, deren Augen längst uns lautlos durch verstellte Löcher anschauen: dies ist Gesicht und wird sich nicht verwandeln: daß du zerstört hast... (trans: “Even if a hero's coming, who shall tear meaning we take to be the face of things off like a mask and in a restless rage reveal us faces whose mute eyes have long been gazing at us through dissembling holes...”) From ‘For Wolf Graf von Kalkreuth’ by

identifies a single, unifying factor to ‘attribute’ what has gone on there to a place’s specific resonance or spirit, i.e. marries mood to events. I shan’t attempt to appraise this obviously metaphysical notion. Still, it is inarguable that our relation to a place is affected, in part, by what we know about it – from *information*. Some of the following ‘stickiest’ peripheral information concerning Netherne nicely affirms Netherne’s mood as sad, cruel, dissonant, dark, dishonest, desperate, and deviant:

### **6.1 A Mendacious Survey**

Netherne is situated on a chalk plateau above the A23 Brighton Road that runs through Hooley. The site, originally a farm, was purchased in 1898 by Surrey Council to establish a mental hospital<sup>323</sup> overlooking the village of Hooley. It was chosen for its attractive, southerly aspect (Florence Nightingale had famously promoted the therapeutic importance of fresh air and sunlight for all kinds of patients). Archaeological exploration of the site of the asylum was undertaken in 1997-1999 by J Stevenson and G Hayman of SCAU on behalf of ‘Netherne-on-the-Hill Village’ developers, Gleeson Homes, and revealed evidence of Mesolithic, Neolithic, and Bronze Age activity, and a medieval and post-medieval farm. In other words, they conveniently discovered nothing that might impede the development as envisaged by the developers or impair its potential profitability for them. Although a few Roman tiles and potsherds were also discovered, ‘no evidence’ was found of any nearby settlement. However, long-time residents - ex-employees of Netherne - have told me how often Roman coins have been seen by children playing in the field adjacent to Netherne’s neglected cemetery. Archaeological exploration acknowledged evidence of a 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>-century farmhouse and the footings of a later 16<sup>th</sup>-century farmhouse<sup>324</sup>.

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<sup>323</sup> <https://www.geograph.org.uk/snippet/18431>

<sup>324</sup> <https://www.surreyarchaeology.org.uk/content/former-netherne-hospital-chipstead>

## 6.2 A Real Bridge, An Imagined River: Fake Explanations for Architectural Features

Mr. Bragg, Netherne's 'Senior Building Officer', is reported<sup>325</sup> as having discovered 'unexpectedly' a stream purportedly identified as the *Netherene River* 'as far back as the seventeenth century'. This stream allegedly runs some 35 feet underground through parts of the hospital estate and is recorded as 'flowing somewhere around the vicinity of the [hospital's] Social Club' which, Bragg explains, is why a 'small hump bridge' exists at the bottom of Netherne Lane, as 'years ago', he writes, the river flowed beneath it. An 'old map' discovered by Bragg shows the hospital blocks and 'the route of the *river Netherene* clearly through the hospital land.' Yet I have found no references anywhere else to such a river.

## 6.3 Nobel Prized: Trapped Vermin, Bombed Humans

The site that became 'Netherne' sits within the traditional village (i.e. 'parish') boundaries of Merstham, referred to in 1522 as 'Lez Nedder'<sup>326</sup>. The Merstham area has been settled since pre-Roman times, and its name, located within the Anglo-Saxon administrative division of the 'Reigate hundred', was recorded in 947 as *Mearsætham*, probably Anglo-Saxon *Mearþ-sæt-hām*, meaning "Homestead [ham] near a trap set for martens or weasels". It seems there has been a church at Merstham since c. 675. The current parish church (est. c. 1220) replaced a previous church dating from c. 1100. The Domesday Book (1086) mentions Merstham (as

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<sup>325</sup> The article was published in the 75<sup>th</sup>-anniversary edition of Netherne's staff magazine: 'Network' (Netherne Hospital 1909-1984) p16-17 'In the Name of Change' [Wellcome Library, General Collection, cat. No. P3078].

<sup>326</sup> Nedder (Middle English) Noun: an adder (kind of snake). Saxon nedder, a serpent (probably allied to Nether, as crawling on the ground); for etymology, see

[https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED29005\\_](https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED29005_). See for reference to 'Neddre'

(Surrey History Centre, SHC Ref No: LM/341/24, Surrey History Centre, Woking, Date: 20 May 1432:

*Feoffment 1) Richard Payn, cloth merchant, and John Rede, dyer 2) John Lacy and William Essex, dyers,*

*Richard Fordell, cloth merchant, and Thomas Warfeld, dyer (all citizens of London). Neddre [Netherne] in*

*Merstham, and the lands etc in Wandsworth which they had by gift of Lacy and Fordell.*

‘Merstan’) as well as its stone quarries, where ‘Reigate stone’ was extracted to build parts of Westminster Abbey, Windsor Castle, and Henry VIII’s *Nonsuch Palace*. Merstham became the terminus of the ‘Croydon, Merstham and Godstone Railway’, the world’s first public railway (albeit only for goods). The quarries are also noteworthy for their historic association with dynamite: no lesser personage than Alfred Nobel publicly displayed the wonderfully destructive potential of dynamite for the first time in July 1868 in Price’s Grey-limestone chalk quarry.

#### **6.4 Routine Murder - Death and Madness; the Train Track to Netherne**

Dynamite, but also a Hitchcock-like murder mystery, and a secret underground pipeline colour the area’s history. On September 24th, 1905, in the first of the two Merstham railway tunnels to be constructed, the mutilated body of Mary Sophia Money was found. First thought to be a case of suicide, the scarf found on the victim’s throat and marks on the tunnel wall showed the victim had been thrown from a moving train. A guard on the train said that he had seen a “man and woman” together in a first-class compartment at East Croydon - the woman matched Mary’s description. He saw them again at South Croydon railway station, and at Redhill station, he saw the man leave what he thought was the same compartment and exit the train. The man, described as thin, with a moustache, and wearing a bowler hat, could be neither identified nor traced. A signalman at Purley Oaks had even seen a man and woman *struggling* in a first-class compartment, but so accustomed was he to seeing passengers ‘wrestling amorously’ in first-class carriages that he attached little importance to it<sup>327</sup>. Suspicion came to rest on Mary’s brother, Robert, a dairy farmer from Kingston Hill, who was called to identify her body the following day. Although the crime of Mary Money’s murder has never been solved, seven years after her murder, five bodies were salvaged from a

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<sup>327</sup> <https://www.btp.police.uk/police-forces/british-transport-police/areas/about-us/about-us/our-history/crime-history/murder-of-mary-money-1905/>

burning house in Eastbourne. One of these was identified as Robert's. The other bodies were of his wife and his three children - each had been murdered. A second woman, the mother of two of the murdered children, was, in fact, the wife's own sister. She had survived two bullet-wounds to the neck. The murderer was Robert Money, alias 'Robert Hicks Murray', who had married both sisters, neither of whom had known of the other's marriage.<sup>328</sup>

### **6.5 Pipeline (Concealed Truth)**

Running through Merstham, the secret PLUTO pipeline (Whittle, T. 2017:62) constructed in 1943, supplied fuel to secret cross-channel pipelines (code-named DUMBO), that ran to Boulogne pumping 820 million litres (8% of all fuel required) to support the eventual allied invasion of Normandy. This pipeline runs from the Thames through to Dungeness, a headland on the Kent coast. Dungeness, one of the largest expanses of shingle in Europe, and allegedly Britain's only 'desert', is the infamous site of two nuclear power stations, and the location of celebrated avantgarde artist and filmmaker, Derek Jarman's 'Prospect Cottage'.

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<sup>328</sup> <https://www.btp.police.uk/police-forces/british-transport-police/areas/about-us/about-us/our-history/crime-history/murder-of-mary-money-1905/> For further information, see also

<https://www.westwatfordhistorygroup.org/2020/01/the-girl-in-tunnel-mary-money.html>

## Placing Feelings

Feelings – emotions, atmospheres – are intriguing yet challenging. As affective lenses, they play a decisive role in how we apprehend, relate to, and relate (in the sense of ‘tell’ of) the world. However, they are also challenging because notoriously elusive, momentary, fickle, unnamed (and often unnameable). Cultural theorist and psychogeographer, Tina Richardson, observes that ‘a visit to the same place a year hence would quite likely bring about a different aesthetic’.<sup>329</sup> Although it seems *absurd* to tie feelings so immutably to place, whether we like it or not, feelings *stick to places like glue*. What is more, feelings about place seem to *happen* to us, and *in* us; they are both ourselves and *not* ourselves. Although feelings about places are called ‘subjective’, they form part of an *encounter*, a relationship, arising *between* rather than exclusively *within*. Moreover, when we choose to call a place gloomy, awe-inspiring, uncanny, wild, tranquil, and so on, the places themselves seem, by comparison to the *moods* we attribute to them, relatively solid, stable, even permanent. Perhaps our so very evanescent feelings are pulled to the *sheer materiality* of place; we need to be able to allocate – or ‘place’ – our feelings, anchor them, lest they escape irretrievably, like stray balloons.

Repeated encounters with Netherne and my own feelings which I have brought to the place, shape how I think about how we correlate feelings with place. As already amply acknowledged, the emotional ‘significances’ of place arise and endure *partly* because of what we bring to them; for instance, my emotional experience of Netherne is influenced by *all that I know*, or assume, about Netherne (not to mention associations the place conjures) – because even *information* informs an emotional ‘story’ (I have explored elsewhere in this project the history of the asylum and Netherne asylum). We also experience feelings about places seemingly arising independently of any associations or foreknowledge – feelings so subtle

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<sup>329</sup> Richardson 2017

that we struggle to identify or name them. Yet, like atmospheres, these are indubitably present; they are *there*. The following ‘psycho-geographic’ accounts do not name them either – they cannot. But the range of readings Netherne prompts evokes some of them.

## **6.6 No Return Journey**

Netherne, this large complex a place of severe order, serves as a touchstone for emotional experience but is also a locus of mystery, ghosts, infinite sadness, of submerged and even relegated memory; a symbol of the utter disorientation that severe mental illness presupposes - a world turned unrecognisable, hostile; minds irretrievably transformed and further displaced, through surgery, loss, and disorientation; an emotionally intense landscape and a place of repression and confinement, of detachment from all conventional sense of home or belonging in, or to, the world; of a mother, and of lost mother; a ‘home’ representing homelessness and a place of homelessness (and a homeless place); the homeless mind, wandering, tormented by anxiety and noise, real or imagined, – unstill, stranded, precarious; an accumulation of varied vivid and livid memories; longing for a confiscated past, for stability, for reassurance that there is such a thing as a *way back*, a return journey. Netherne is associated with a sterile interrogating of memory and mental ‘functions’, but also with experimenting with narrative, narrative as therapy, a therapy beyond brutality, the surgical excision of neuroses. As such, Netherne turns in on itself. Furthermore, because the site has been nullified by redevelopment, it becomes place of memory, of vanishing madness.

## **6.7 Cemetery**

Looking for evidence confirming a presupposition about a place and its history. Trapped by disappointment at finding nothing and allowing that disappointment to blind you to what is there. Looking for the material, the tangible, as the only proof worth having. As if feelings alone say nothing. I would set off for Coulsdon anxiously hoping maybe this time I’d stumble



across something that could genuinely ‘connect’ me to Netherne’s past: a building I hadn’t previously noticed, vestiges of an asylum corridor, or a random inscription or something scrawled. But a past that’s imagined, felt; how could that be found?

Feelings are talismanic<sup>330</sup> and protect me against the mental fog emanating from the dull and resolute blandness of all that has taken the place of the asylum. Yet, I always come away empty-handed. This is inevitable. So thoroughly did the developers, M. J. Gleeson, re-fashion the entire site (for ‘re-fashion’, read ‘exploit’) that little remains of ‘original’ Netherne (or of some of the developers’ promises<sup>331</sup>). Intensive residential redevelopment overwhelms most old buildings, but the residual atmosphere remains. The developers’ promotional literature promised a redeveloped site where future residents would be greeted by ‘the gentle bounce of tennis balls on private courts’ and ‘the distant voices of children’ but, as Chaplin and Peters (2003: 227-229) point out, residents would find its actual history less beguiling. A 1976

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<sup>330</sup> Robert R Cargill: “From the Greek word *télesma* (τέλεσμα), meaning "completion (including of a religious rite), payment," which itself is from the Greek verb *teleō* (τελέω), meaning "I complete, pay, consecrate," a talisman is an object supposedly possessing religious or magical powers designed to protect or heal the individual possessing it. They were often acquired following the completion of religious or magical rituals designed to gain favour with beings in the supernatural realm. Similar to a good luck charm, talismans can be amulets that are worn or hung on a wall, or can be special clothing, weapons, or written documents inscribed with religious or magical texts thought to protect the wearer”.

<https://bam.sites.uiowa.edu/its-greek-me/talisman#:~:text=From%20the%20Greek%20word%20t%C3%A9lesma,or%20heal%20the%20individual%20possessing>

<sup>331</sup> January 18<sup>th</sup> 1999 Reigate and Banstead’s Director of Environmental Services granted permission for M.J. Gleeson Group’s outline planning application to develop a “new village” with 520 homes, “including a 30-unit retirement complex, a nursing home, shop, a management business centre, a public house/ restaurant... (Drawing Nos: AP1, GLE004P/04, A/01 and 95122/DWP2/F, Borough of Reigate and Banstead, Environmental Services Dept., Ref. T.P.3/No. RE96P/0681 (Outline)). The homes were built but the other commitments were seemingly not profitable enough for Gleeson to want to honour.

inquiry (Martin and Evans, 1984) blamed Netherne's high levels of suicide on severe understaffing and unsatisfactory ward conditions. If you listen carefully, you can still sense the suffering. Netherne is a protecting home of suffering, for suffering, for perpetuating suffering.

'The nature of home – a place of peace: a shelter safety, for convalescence, the shelter not only from all injury but from all terror, doubt and division hidden where possible. In so far as it is not this, it is not home; so far as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate it, and the inconsistently-minded, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world is allowed by either husband or wife to cross the threshold, it ceases to be a home; it is then only a part of the outer world, which you have roofed over and lighted fire in.'<sup>332</sup>

The developers butchered Netherne, cutting up and cutting down Hine's two near-interminable, jagged ward-blocks, the angled teeth jawbone of his hallmark 'compact arrow' scheme (designed to slay which nameless foe?). Although specific wards comprising the arrow were earmarked to remain,<sup>333</sup> the developers found a way to flout the very scheme they undertook to deliver, creating instead politely tame 'village' pathways to fill the voids left by wards covertly truncated and annihilated. Other blocks were strategically sliced into separate, smaller, more 'manageable' (because they were less preponderant) units. Yet, tell-tale patches of faked 'aged' brickwork remain as giveaways, palpable scars of numerous indiscreet and botched amputations. Some surviving blocks still face, unobstructed, the unaltered 'calming' countryside views doctors and architects were keen to secure for their patient's wellbeing. Lawns and oaks give way to a well-worn panorama of timid, bored,

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<sup>332</sup> John Ruskin, 'Sesame and Lilies' 1891:36-37, cited Kaika, 2004.

<sup>333</sup> See the 'LAND USE' plan of March 3 1997 received by Reigate and Banstead Council April 8 1997.

natural ‘wilderness’, proffering pointless relief to unwell minds which, only too ready to spurn distraction, would take refuge in the most familiar; distress, their inner home.

The current residents – homeowners, not patients – gaze soul-gnawingly too, losing themselves, not in the landscape, nor even inwards; instead, ignoring the panorama, they gawp at the incessant mind-itching flow of screened images. Alas, gone now<sup>334</sup> are Fairdene North and Fairdene South, too, is no longer; gone is Broadwood and Shaftesbury House, gone with them is John Reid acute Admissions House (for those under 65s), as is Downs House, and as for poor Pendlewood, Pendlewood was ‘mistakenly’ demolished by developers. But why lament? These were not happy places<sup>335</sup>.

What remains? St. Luke’s. Residents, anxious to lose that hastily gobbled over-calorific (‘shouldn’t have’) lunch, tap in for swift turn-style entry to their own membership-only private leisure centre<sup>336</sup> where they manically ‘work-out’. Soft daylight filters wanly through St. Mary ‘Blessed Mother’, Our Saviour, ‘Ascend to My father and Your Father’, and dear St. therapeutic Luke, the ‘Apostle and Healer’ (the apse has retained its three stained-glass windows). Here, bodybuilding and swimming take God’s place. But I’m not permitted to view the swimming pool (‘you know, just in case...’) occupying two-thirds of St. Luke’s floorspace, concealed behind fitted, ceiling-high partitions.

These too remain: the omniscient water tower, now luxury apartments; the lodge, again, apartments; the community centre and the remaining wards block chunks flanking it, yet more apartments. There’s such abundance of living here, yes... and then there’s the

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<sup>334</sup> All demolished wards

<sup>335</sup> See Aragon’s regret for the loss of history

<sup>336</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wACgT1uCGqQ>

cemetery<sup>337</sup>. Entirely remote from view, the asylum cemetery, isolated by a broad field from all this living, is where the blessed but all-but-forgotten dead of Netherne are consigned to their own miniature Elysium. Ex-staff now chuckles darkly that bodies of infants interred here were ‘nothing other’ than the unwanted fruit of forbidden staff-patient dalliances<sup>338</sup>. Here, alongside them, incongruously lay the spent bodies of Second World War Luftwaffe Dornier pilots, downed in bloody dogfights over nearby RAF Kenley<sup>339 340</sup>. On loan to Netherne, the victims’ bodies were later redeemed – exhumed and repatriated – by family members reclaiming their own, once hostilities ceased. The cemetery had been place-holder, a short-term storage depot, for cherished relics; buried enemy treasure. Walking from St. Luke’s to the cemetery you’ll pass a bunch of modest ‘twenties semis, flanking the field, Netherne’s periphery. Pebble-dashed and a hundred years older than the ‘smart’ newbuilds nearer the heart of Netherne (if it has one), these once housed the multitudes of Netherne

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<sup>337</sup> Rodéhn 2022

<sup>338</sup> Retired Netherne staff reminisced to me over the ‘ghost children’ who would peer in at them through ward block windows

<sup>339</sup> During the Second World War six wards and two villas were used for air raid casualties. The hospital “helped assemble electrical parts for a nearby munitions factory and by the end of the war most patients were employed in sustaining the war effort. Being close to targets such as RAF Kenley and a main road/rail link to London, several bombs fell in the grounds including one in the nurse’s home which failed to explode”.

[http://studymore.org.uk/4\\_13\\_TA.HTM#Netherne](http://studymore.org.uk/4_13_TA.HTM#Netherne)

<sup>340</sup> A Spitfire also crashed into the sewage plant at Netherne 1st December 1942: “A collision on a training flight from Kenley resulted in the loss of a Spitfire, which crashed in the grounds of Netherne Hospital, near Coulsdon.” Sources:

<https://www.facebook.com/crashinbayeux/>

<http://aviation-safety.net/wikibase/wiki.php?id=91457>

<http://www.rafcommands.com/forum/showthread.php...>

<https://aviation-safety.net/wikibase/wiki.php?id=91457>

employees. Some still live there: a retired nurse from Austria with her Irish husband, one of Netherne's several chefs.

Curiously, the cemetery is nowhere near the centre of Netherne, and St. Luke's church has no graveyard of its own<sup>341</sup>. Death, placed out of sight, is banished to the outer edges of life - but by only fifteen minutes. Could I estimate the car journey? No, there is no road (no road, Orpheus, don't waste time looking back). Netherne's chef, L., told me that once a track crossed the field to the cemetery, but it was, says he, wide enough only for a horse-and-cart or, at a push, a car. The track, disused, has disappeared. There are no visible signs of it left. I checked.

At the far edge of that broad field, obscured by overgrown brambles, are the cemetery's rusting wrought-iron gates, jammed open, permanently welcoming. The dead call us, beckoning: can you give us poor nameless souls your company for a bit? Alternatively, you can decide instead to thrill at the presentiment of death, welcomed by those who have preceded you. Arched over the gates, the remaining iron letters read, 'NETH'. Sadly, it is not 'ETHER', not 'NETHER', and not 'NEITHER', either.

Why is this cemetery so well hidden? To discourage visits, perhaps? Didn't people want to pay their respects? No. Leave these be. Like the vanished memories they have now become, they were of no account. They were life's mistakes: embarrassing, pointless, their minds vacant. Even when still alive, they were overweight, food-craving automata. 'Staff hate

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<sup>341</sup> I measured 394 paces from the cemetery to the nearest road, Tugwood Close (crossing the field by the cemetery); 90 paces to the corner of road where there is a gate and a public footpath; 106 paces to the edge of The Doctor's House (now known as 'Netherne House'); plus 32 paces of the Doctor's House frontage; 400 paces to St. Luke's.

mealtimes. They say it's always the same in every unit. The patients will argue that they didn't order the food they were given and that someone else is favoured with a bigger portion. They try to barter their food with each other. There will be an argument; someone will kick off about something. You can see the staff visibly tensing as a meal- times approach. They start to gather together, and before you are properly aware of what is happening, they form up around the ward. Cutlery is carefully observed. Patients are encouraged to eat up. On some wards, the only way to get through mealtimes without conflict is to give each patient a number and call them up. So eating becomes atomized, an exercise in ensuring nutrition is provided quickly and safely.' (S. D. Brown 2019:20)

Malodorous, defecating, dirty, helpless, now lifeless. Obscene bodies, to be dumped and forgotten. The cemetery is a forsaken patch and perhaps the cheapest land available. And them? They were a waste of money when alive; why pay out even more to bury the buggers? Troublesome they were - abandoned by their families, even their minds took flight, and now their lives have left us only refuse in need of disposal.

Building an asylum was costly, as was purchasing the site<sup>342</sup> so economics alone does not account for the cemetery's location. Yes, that must be it: it was 'healthier' keeping the cemetery and hospital well apart. Let's stay optimistic: we return our patients to everyday life after treatment. But "many patients remained in [these] institutions to the ends of their lives."<sup>343</sup> Having death on display was unseemly and too close to the mad. Madness and death – both as involuntary as sex - both signpost irretrievable losses, irreversible annihilations. Distancing the cemetery helped the asylum distance itself from death (the other

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<sup>342</sup> In 1898 Surrey Council selected Netherne as the site for a new asylum and purchased The Netherne Farming Estate for £10,000 [http://studymore.org.uk/4\\_13\\_TA.HTM#Netherne](http://studymore.org.uk/4_13_TA.HTM#Netherne)

<sup>343</sup> Staniewska 2018

great incurable). We don't want patients to dwell on the dark inevitability of life, do we? Bad for recovery!

How were burials managed? Uncrowded, sparse, perfunctory, committals unwitnessed. The dead were buried unaccompanied, with neither fuss nor ceremony. Most were already long 'dead' to their families, friends, or partners. Dead to themselves, too, drained of life, of self, after decades of surveillance, control, punishment, medication, brain surgery, boredom, solitude, loneliness, insomnia, and nightmares. This was total exile. Perplexed but repulsed by their mad, relatives were too poor or too mean to visit these, their remote, remote own. Some weren't mad at all: girls from poor families 'expecting', were shut away simply for misbehaving, and 'therefore' mad and now prisoners.

In any case, traditional family and social support for the mad had long been eroded by 'unprecedented' social and economic upheaval. Families of the mad stayed away; no sadness at the loss of an already 'lost' relative, and who'd want to stump up for a funeral (hadn't Netherne 'anyway' been their 'real' home)? The mad may sometimes have outlived their families. And those dead infants buried there? Tragedies: momentary desire, chance, indifference, and sickness<sup>344</sup>. Never well-paid at the best of times, the poorest of Netherne employees were also interred here.

Friendships existed between patients. When one died, no friends came to the funeral or visited the numbered place of burial, i.e., a stick with some card. The asylum had its routine. You had work to do. Everyone did. The asylum, callously indifferent to patient friendships,

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<sup>344</sup> [https://www.yourlocalguardian.co.uk/news/8437328.diaries-of-devoted-nurse-reveal-tale-of-child-buried-at-](https://www.yourlocalguardian.co.uk/news/8437328.diaries-of-devoted-nurse-reveal-tale-of-child-buried-at-netherne-asylum/)

didn't provide attendants to see you to the grave and back. Forget it, mate. Here, we do one-way journeys only.

Death and madness, dirty and contagious. Hospital supervisors are notoriously intolerant of dirty environments. The mad, 'selfhood lost', their body filthy (and neglected), and their mental decay, like tooth decay, shows as physical dirt. Contagious rottenness is popularly predicated on dirt. Madness is catching. Mental health professionals are regularly debriefed: a disinfestation, a shower rinsing from them the contagious 'madness' they rub shoulders with daily. Dirt is that which is out of its place.<sup>345</sup>

## 6.8 Looking Over Other Burials

Netherne teems with signs, but none tell you where the cemetery is. Instead, they're bossy: 'You're on 'private' land'. The cemetery, a small patch of ground, flanked on either side by a crooked line of guardian oaks, opens onto a picturesque rural view, a view of a *beyond*: 'Farthing Downs'. This protected semi-natural downland is exceptionally rich in rare herbs and scarce wildflowers. Its occupation stretches back 6000 years to the Neolithic period. Anglo-Saxon communities buried their leaders along the lines of ancient earthworks: Iron-Age earth and chalk banks. Roman cart ruts are still visible over two thousand years later. Sixteen Anglo-Saxon barrows sit at the centre and north of Farthing Downs, whose 'exceptionally springy' ground made it irresistible to nineteenth-century horse trainers.

A diminutive, knee-high, cornflower-blue plaque marks Netherne's all but hidden burial plot, informing visitors that 1,369 people are buried here.<sup>346</sup> 'Patients and workers at the Netherne Hospital included several soldiers who fought in the First World War.'<sup>347</sup> (Netherne was

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<sup>345</sup> Tamney and Douglas, 1967

<sup>346</sup> Between 1909-1994

<sup>347</sup> including shell-shocked suicides



temporarily a military hospital)<sup>348</sup> A wind chime hangs on the cemetery gate, where even the faintest breeze awakens its plaintive song. By its side is a tiny globe, a miniature world of interlocking metal circles. Both console the forgotten dead.

1,369 people? No gravestones remain, save for are five barely decipherable horizontal gravestones and a cross embedded in a single 6' x 8' horizontal plinth just beyond the ruined wrought-iron gateway. These recall: Martha (died 1910); David Alfred Matheson (died 19<sup>th</sup> June 1916, aged? years); C. A. Jennings (died March 28<sup>th</sup> 1919, aged ?3 year (sic)); Betty Trotman ("In loving memory... May 31 1929 aged 7 years). Perhaps this plinth is the remaining floor of a small chapel<sup>349</sup>? I am told of a woman who came from Australia to pay

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<sup>348</sup> Like many asylums. Surrey County Council. *Annual Report of the County Asylums at Brockwood and Netherne*: Netherne took in large numbers of patients from "neighbouring hospitals, which the military had taken over". Food from the market gardens contributed to national supplies and convalescent soldiers and German [Prisoners of War] were brought in to assist. [http://studymore.org.uk/4\\_13\\_TA.HTM#Netherne](http://studymore.org.uk/4_13_TA.HTM#Netherne)

<sup>349</sup> See also: <https://shadowsflyaway.wordpress.com/2017/11/26/as-anonymous-in-death-as-they-were-in-life-part-1-of-a-visit-to-netherne-hospital-cemetery/>

<https://www.derelictplaces.co.uk/threads/netherne-asylum-cemetery-july-2014.29303/>

<http://www.simoncornwell.com/urbex/hosp/n/e140106/1.htm>

<https://www.yourlocalguardian.co.uk/news/10494304.campaign-victory-after-netherne-cemetery-in-coulson-is-finally-cleared/>

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/thisisengland/8105448602>

<https://ezitis.myzen.co.uk/netherne.html>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/519190095645635/>

<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/463c420b-0755-41ef-a77d-a7fca23705f4>

<http://notabingdon.uk/2009/12/29/netherne-hospital-1977-and-netherne-village-on-the-hill-2009/>

[http://studymore.org.uk/4\\_13\\_TA.HTM](http://studymore.org.uk/4_13_TA.HTM)

[http://studymore.org.uk/4\\_13\\_TA.HTM#Netherne](http://studymore.org.uk/4_13_TA.HTM#Netherne)

records of the dead: <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.7208/9780226331133/html>

her respects to a distant relative, one of the many dead, but there was nothing to see, no tomb, nothing. Mortified, she hurriedly left.

## **6.9 Health-Promoting Architecture**

Some died young at Netherne, too – by their hand or from the ‘treatments’ they received<sup>350</sup> – incarcerated, institutionalised, their deaths, like their lives, were neither meaningful nor memorialised. And what is institutionalisation? Well-designed buildings exert a beneficial influence on mental illness.<sup>351</sup> No, it wasn’t the institution’s fault. Long before hospitalisation, they’d behaved impossibly. Friends and family felt wary, even disgust, towards a person now unrecognisable to them, possessed.

## **6.10 Names and Numbers / Coulson South Station**

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<sup>350</sup> Psychosurgery was not without fatalities

<sup>351</sup> [in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the ‘Asylum Era’] ...The architecture of asylums soon became a subject of careful thought. Luther Bell, quoted by Dorothea Dix, in 1850, expounded: ‘An asylum, or more properly a hospital for the insane... [is] an architectural contrivance to meet its specific end. It is emphatically an instrument of treatment.’ George Paget topped this in 1866, calling them, ‘the most blessed manifestation of true civilization the world can present’ (Burns 2014:44).



*Figure 6: View of Coulsdon South station, in Coulsdon, photo by author.*

‘Coulsdon South’, Netherne’s nearest rail station, opened in 1889. Originally simply ‘Coulsdon’, this station has endured four name changes to date. It became ‘Coulsdon and Cane Hill’ because of its proximity to Cane Hill Psychiatric Hospital (whose design influenced Hine, the architect of Netherne). For the convenience of those headed for Cane Hill, a covered walkway connected the station directly to the asylum. This was removed in the 1960s. Subsequently re-named ‘Coulsdon East’, the station has become, at least for now, ‘Coulsdon South’. This place, patient-like, keeps losing its name. Names and vestiges of pre-asylum life were important to patients. A name: your parents’ first gift. It’s who you are. At Netherne, names were not always used. Art made by patients under the direction of a

pioneering art therapist, Edward Adamson, was catalogued only with the patient's number, not their name. Art, relieved of their creator's identity, was orphaned. And then lost.<sup>352</sup>

A sheet-iron covered footbridge rests comfortably on matching twin staircases (these 'feed' the bridge with people). Painted bilious green, its regularly spaced carriage-like windows give it the look of an airborne train, stretching away, spanning tracks distantly beneath it. After being carefully hoisted by a crane, the footbridge was slowly rotated through precisely ninety degrees, gently manoeuvred into an east-westerly direction, and laid to rest in its final position. Depending on the mood and the weather, it may sometimes look like a futuristic, science-fiction dwelling or even an implacable but pointless suspended barrier. The footbridge refuses to 'self-identify' as a bridge, cherishing the prospect of metamorphosing into a carriage one day. It dreams of accommodating its little load: lively, bustling human freight which it will convey, in raptures, along the gleaming rails. But for now, the bridge consents to play the part of a bridge (which it insists is its strictly transitional role), and so currently perching, chrysalis-like, awaiting that special day of rebirth. When that day arrives, and the bridge undergoes its final transformation (which it insists is inevitable), it will immediately stab the staircases, its two staunchest supporters, in the back. The footbridge is merciless. The bridge can feel only disdain for the servile 'craven' staircases, even while (currently) quite literally depending on them. For now, the footbridge is discreet about its hopes and plans. It shares them with no one, keeps its council, bides its time, and feigns a willingness to serve both staff and passengers who are grateful for being able to cross the tracks safely, protected from wind, rain, and snow.

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<sup>352</sup> The so-called 'Adamson' collection of patient art, held by the Wellcome Foundation, consists of some 5000

The ever-vigilant, deeply suspicious footbridge untiringly, unceasingly combs the tracks for traffic - any traffic - through its unglazed window slots, obsessively appraising trains, trucks, passengers, employees, maintenance staff, and stray furry wildlife; anything that moves. It sat heavily, its massive staircase legs planted resolutely astride the burnished tracks, and nothing escapes it. If they wish, interested passengers and other visitors may, from a safe distance and by expending only modest effort, catch glimpses of the folk trapped helplessly within the dreadful maw of the footbridge. Although the regularly spaced, diminutive windows give the bridge a deceptively ‘dinky’ look, the dwindling plaintive cries of those locked inside can still be heard; these tell another terrible story: unfolding tragedy. Unglazed windows ensure that the interior is most thoroughly ventilated, lashing the victims and hastening their demise, rushing inwards are the ferocious icy gusts of numbing mid-winter air.<sup>353</sup>

It was of air that German serfs were appreciative. They relied on a medieval legal principle: “Statute macht frei” – urban air liberates.<sup>354</sup> To free themselves from serfdom, they had to prove they had remained in the ‘air’ of the city for a year and a day. Philologist Georg Anton Lorenz Diefenbach (1806-1883) substitutes the more familiar ‘air’ with ‘work’ when he named his 1873 novel: “Arbeit macht frei” (*work* liberates). Diefenbach’s yarn recounts degenerates (gamblers and fraudsters all) who eventually find their path to virtue through labour. The Magdalen Laundries (1758-1998) were ‘penitentiary work-houses’ where ‘fallen’ women were incarcerated and forced to work, their infant children covertly disposed of, buried in mass graves. ‘Liberation through work’ – a wonderful notion – was translated into

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<sup>353</sup> Unused: One goes I know not wither. The other led me from ‘home’ to here. My home I don’t remember my home. I don’t remember it. But what is ‘here’? I know it only as a place where I have ceased travelling, where they have finally stopped urging me travel. I feel ill. Why do they keep moving me? What has movement to do with the way I am? Why is movement binary - this direction or that? Why travel in straight lines?

<sup>354</sup> Or *Stadtluft macht frei nach Jahr und Tag* (“city air makes you free after a year and a day”)

French, as ‘le travail rend libre!’, by Swiss entomologist, neuroanatomist, and psychiatrist, Auguste Forel (1848-1923) for his 1920 study of Swiss ants, ‘Les Fourmis de la Suisse’ (Ants of Switzerland). Forel became director of the famous *Burghölzi* mental asylum where, initially as one of only three doctors treating 300 patients, he significantly improved the place’s staffing, and transformed Burghölzi into one of Europe’s best-run asylums. Although Forel published numerous scientific papers, he retained a special interest in the behaviour of ants which, he believed, helped shed light on the machinations of human society – and in 1921 published a massive work<sup>355</sup> dedicated to the topic. Just one year after this work’s publication, an ethno-nationalist organization, the ‘Deutsche Schulverein’ of Vienna, purporting to ‘protect’ Germans living in Austria, produced membership stamps with the ‘Arbeit macht frei’ a slogan – work liberates – a slogan which shortly after was routinely placed above entrances to Nazi concentration camps.

Doctors Freudenberg and Reitman, both Jews, were employed at Netherne and quit Germany and Hungary, respectively, before the outbreak of World War Two, arguably escaping with their lives. Under Freudenberg’s direction, Netherne’s rehabilitation wards provided patients with access to work. He set up supervised (and vetted) programmes and paid work opportunities for all categories of disabled patients, including those with even the most severe disabilities: hospital maintenance, laundry, domestic and industrial sub-contract work, and offices for clerical work, etc.<sup>356</sup> Reitman, somewhat like Freudenberg, was schooled in the tradition of ‘biologic psychiatry’ and committed to using ‘physical treatments’ – leucotomy and E.C.T. – to tackle mental illness, maintaining a particular interest in the physical basis of schizophrenia. Two years after Reitman started working at Netherne, he became head of clinical research, working under its then-medical superintendent, Eric Cunningham Dax.

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<sup>355</sup> ‘Le Monde social des fourmis du Globe comparé à celui de L’homme’ (Forel 1921)

<sup>356</sup> Becker and Bennett 2000:189-211





*Figure 7: Gateway to Graveyard, Netherne, photo by author*

Dax surprised Edward Adamson by boldly appointing him to be Netherne's first 'art therapist' ('art therapy' - a term first coined by Adamson's mentor, Adrian Hill). Dax initially saw this measure as a way of stemming patient boredom. Adamson's appointment was a significant innovation and, along with the presence at Netherne of a Jungian (Susan Bach)



and a Freudian (Sybil Yates), suggests that at that time a certain 'intellectual eclecticism' prevailed at Netherne (Cummings 2017: 71).

*Figure 8: Covered bridge, Coulsdon South station, photo by author*



This relatively relaxed atmosphere gave Reitman the freedom to pursue his own wide-ranging interests. While Reitman's exploration of the diagnostic potential of art produced by schizophrenic patients preceded Adamson's arrival in Netherne (1944) and the introduction of what came to be described as 'art therapy', Reitman nonetheless continued pursuing also his 'biologic psychiatry' work and research, involving the use of mescaline and prefrontal leucotomy right up to his death 11 years later.



*Figure 9: Iron bridge, Coulsdon South station, photo by author.*

Approaching Coulsdon South from the capital, those destined for Netherne would be greeted by two implacable column-like staircases (fig. 8). Flanking the bridge, these grim sentinels

warned new, arriving patients by portending they would henceforth be flanked perpetually on either side by guards (as attendants or nurses) who would guide, guard, supervise, and, where necessary, discipline them. They had no idea what they were in for.

Passengers arriving at platform two who choose to spurn the covered walkway may avail themselves of an old green iron footbridge (fig. 9) constructed of massive, battleship-like riveted rectangular and semi-rectangular panels (configured as right-angled triangles) and of specially fabricated diagonal sections (this latter line its staircases). The diagonal pattern of each panel is arranged to match precisely those of the panel beside it, giving the impression that an *unbroken pattern* spans the entire bridge (although vertical divisions mark the end of each section), a pattern that could continue in theory indefinitely, forever. A reflective observer may be in two minds whether or not the ‘divisions’ marking the end of each panel are *decoratively superimposed* on continuous diagonals (they are not). The stanchions also accompany the cradle-like bars, which reach beneath and grope to support the underside of the bridge, constructed from uniform, width-sized wooden planks. Load bearing, transverse bars (these support the planks) have jaunty elbow-like uprights extending out sharply from the sides of the bridge, like arms akimbo; these transverse bars care both for the bridge and those using it. Wherever the thick, protective green paint has peeled off, the bridge is rusting. Green paint was chosen to help ‘lose’ the ironwork by causing it to blend into the surrounding countryside. This iron bridge enables uninterrupted access to the central (Brighton) road (as well as to car-parking facilities, busses, and a small cafeteria) as it bypasses the main entrance. Passengers can thus avoid those who typically populate stations soliciting various types of casual ‘assistance’.

It must be noted that a barrier (made of white fencing) prevents users of this bridge (which connects platform ‘two’ to the main road) from directly accessing the nearside platform

(platform ‘one’). Those wishing to do so must first *leave* the station before re-entering it via the main station entrance. Low-level ‘planters’ (fig. 10) filled abundantly with jolly red geraniums are imprisoned on the ‘platform’ side of the barrier, safely distanced from (and out of reach of) passengers climbing the bridge. Some flowers nonetheless manage to poke their cute little ‘petal heads’ through the railings, mute captives staring wistfully at heedless



passengers.

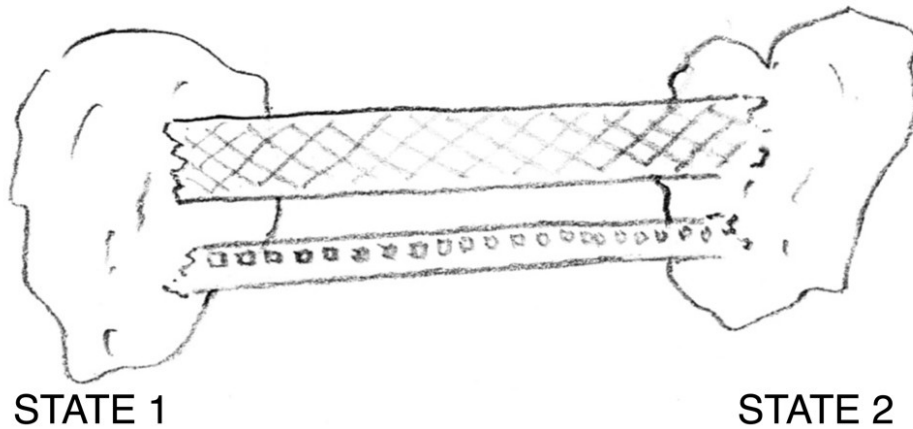
*Figure 10: Geraniums: Coulsdon South station, photo by author*



Figure 11: Disciplined Routes: Coulsdon South station, photo by author

Although the traveller easily follows the route set by the uncovered bridge, he finds it difficult to conceptualise what's happening here. While the arrangement of steps and barriers is clear, the cascading fences are confusing (fig. 11). The passenger looks through them to a puzzling labyrinthine *concatenation* of railings, endlessly multiplying, as if reflecting each other into existence and like a circus attraction, branching off into myriad directions. Oh, my poor brain.

Coulsdon South Station offers passengers two bridges. Both bridges traverse the same train track. Both enable the passenger to transform their 'being' from an 'arrival state' into a 'world-at-large' state (fig. 12). That the passenger must choose to achieve identical outcomes is troubling and potentially immobilising.



*Figure 12: Transforming Being from an Arrival State to a World-at-Large State, illustration by author.*

Passengers may access the 'station' side of the iron footbridge only after activating and passing through a fully automated electronic ticket barrier. This 'barrier' (on platform two) has been installed beneath a protective 'glazed' shatter- and vandal-proof plastic structure. When Coulsdon South Station is lashed by rain, passengers are welcome to seek the protection this structure kindly offers. However, if a passenger is troubled by loud noises, they are advised to seek shelter elsewhere. When heavy rain bashes the plastic sheeting, the noise is intense.





*Figure 13: Kindly Tuscans: iron bridge: Coulsdon South station, photo by author*

The bridge is supported or CARRIED by reliable, muscular workmen. Kindly ‘Tuscans’ we call them (fig. 13). A colour, which we have named ‘Surrey Rural Green’, is the colour of both bridges. It is noted that ‘Surrey Rural Green’ has leaked inexplicably onto the external fencing, deterring rioters from clambering uphill to the trackways. These external fences and also mark the limits of ‘station’ territory.



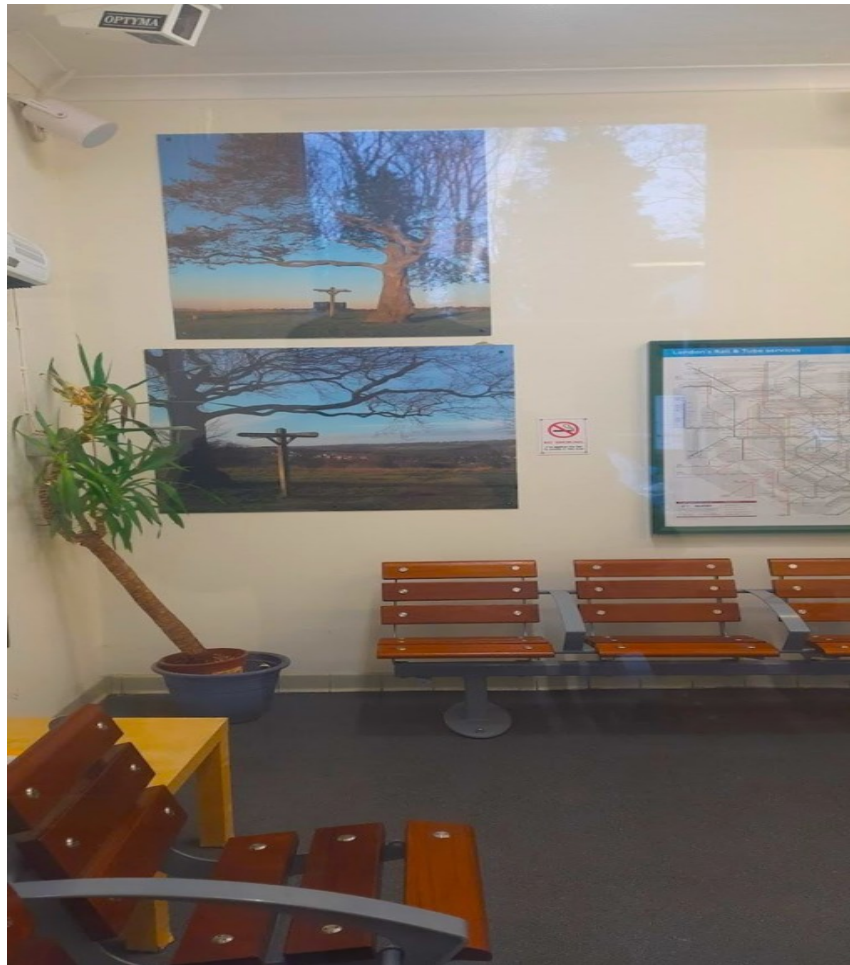
*Figure 14: Iron Bridge: Coulsdon South station, photo by author*



*Figure 15: No Smoking: waiting room, Coulsdon South station, photo by author.*

In the waiting room, adjacent to the ticket hall (fig. 15), real plants vie aggressively with photographic representations of live plant life (a tree) and dead plant life (dead-wood crucifixes; life and death), which also signposts various terrestrial destinations. In several photographs displayed, the same tree mysteriously reappears, but from different points of view. I do not know why the same tree has been re-photographed. Were none others available? Or has this been done to test my acuity? Do I notice the deception? It *is* a recognisable tree. Its lowermost branch has a sharply angled 'V' kink towards the trunk. This distinguishing feature is a discerning eye visible in all images. On January 16, 1985, at Coulsdon South railway station, Terry chose death in front of a moving train. He is the schizophrenic half-brother of celebrated famous musician David Bowie (1947-2016).





*Figure 16: Waiting room, Coulsdon South station, photo by author*

There is nothing to explain why yuccas lean nonchalantly against the walls (fig. 16). This sparse interior is regimented; no light, air, or thought is admitted. Life's choices are matters of black-and-white in the station's public conveniences. Current tastes make safety a conspicuous affair.

Passengers may confidently utilise the conveniences provided (fig. 17), whether to defecate, urinate, or meditate. The contrasting black toilet 'seat' and grab-bars (or grab-handles) are functionally visible. I won't say they 'jump out' at you as I don't want to cause alarm.



*Figure 17: Conveniences, Coulsdon South station, photo by author*

### **Coulsdon South Station: Exterior**

The station's modest 'access' (or 'service') road considerably offers a passenger 'drop-off' area and limited car-parking for passengers' vehicles. Diminutive grass verges separate the 'service-road' (if this is what it is called) from the main highway. The 'verges' are a restrained, but begrudging acknowledgement of 'nature' (in the form of scruffy grass 'beds'). Confined to strictly pre-defined zones, 'beds' are marked and edged with paving-stones. Horizontal metal guards fastened to short H-profiled concrete stumps, defend the grass by preventing the infiltration of undesirable vegetation. This is Nature, policed (fig. 18).



*Figure 18: Nature, policed: grass verge, drop-off area, Coulsdon South station, photo by author*

## **Bus Stop**

At a bus-stop a glass-covered poster aggressively sparkles with chaotic reflections and turns a simple message into something manic, overwhelming (fig. 19). I can't read it. When the light is kindly overcast, I can see a pensive, unknown man, his image framed with words seeking to persuade those ordinarily using vehicles, to walk or cycle; this will improve our health and also reduce the harm we cause to the environment.



*Figure 19: Unknown Man: poster, bus stop, Brighton Road, Coulsdon South Station, photo by author.*



Netherne spreads its dark contagion, madness and death, well beyond its borders. Its perfidy detectable at least as far as Coulsdon South station where I now find a previous informational poster (to reduce pollution), replaced with a demented horse (fig. 20).



*Figure 20: Demented Horse: poster, bus stop, Brighton Road, Coulsdon South Station, photo by author.*

## **The Bus and Beyond**

A ten-minute bus ride takes you from Coulsdon South station to Hooley, the closest you can get to Netherne using public transport. Near the bus stop, a sequence of paths leads to Netherne, a pilgrim's way intended for its staff (but asylum visitors, too). As for the visitor facilities at Netherne, this is a hospital, but there is no 'hospitality'. Visits, advised against, are seen as 'difficult'. Architect Hine makes no mention of accommodating visitors. Visitors are an embarrassment and intrusive. This is not their world.



*Figure 21: Spiteful Numbering: Brighton Road, Hooley, photo by author.*



*Figure 22: Spiteful Numbering: Brighton Road, Hooley, photo by author.*

Small retail outlets line the road adjacent to the Star Garage bus stop. Single doors bear multiple numbers, which are deliberately confusing and spiteful (figs. 21 & 22). Before reaching the shops (if walking in a southerly direction), a temporary<sup>357</sup> memorial<sup>358</sup> to a traffic accident, the victim reads like a death fugue to the madness of Netherne. For Dulwich Picture Gallery (opened to the public in 1817), its architect, John Soane (1753-1837), erected a mausoleum, a deathly prelude to the gallery. Soane eruditely mined tradition to create an authentically classical funeral monument with ‘urns atop the building, sarcophagi above the doors and sacrificial altars in the corners.’<sup>359</sup> At Hooley, a tattered, artless commemoration is dedicated to the victim of a casual but hideous road traffic accident (fig. 23).

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<sup>357</sup> Cf. ‘spontaneous memorials almost constitute an oxymoron: memorials are usually intended to help make permanent something that otherwise might slip out of view, but the impromptu memorial, like any utterance, often lasts less time than the memory itself’ (Shanken 2012).

<sup>358</sup> think of triumphal arches or other ways of signposting places of entry and departure – liminality (see Singley)

<sup>359</sup> *John Soane: about our architecture* (no date) [dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk](https://www.dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk/about/our-architecture/). Available at: <https://www.dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk/about/our-architecture/> (Accessed: October 19, 2023).



*Figure 23: Memorial, Brighton Road, Hooley, photo by author*

An ephemeral memorial, its surface is inscrutable. Physically impenetrable, thick bushes, restrained by a wire link-fence, threaded with messages, photos, and miserable bunches of always-dying flowers. Deathly-dark green foliage, partially concealed, is a brooding backdrop to the paraphernalia of cards arranged in a rough circle, like a ring of roses (fig. 24). Of the four bunches of flowers, one is central, the others describe a diagonal, a ‘grave’ accent. The dying flowers mock the long-faded, time-worn cards and photos. The assemblage features a young man, smiling, no date of death announced. Perhaps this flowery memorial is re-composed annually, recalling festival-like, a pagan anniversary of a fatal accident, another Tammuz heralding spring’s resurrection. He looks young, but now absent, the photograph, the most cherished photograph, represents the best possible memory<sup>360</sup>.

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<sup>360</sup> (Plato 2005): Socrates even argues that writing is inferior to spoken language and impairs memory ‘since if written words are asked a question, they always give the same answer...once words are written down, they tumble about anywhere among those who may or may not understand them’.





**Figure 24:** Memorial, Brighton Road, Hooley, photo by author

## Ephemeral Microarchitecture

A sprig of berries leans over a weatherworn note. Coy traces of words remain, now illegible, on this page from the ‘Book of the Dead’<sup>361</sup>. It looks handwritten, but no, look closely, it’s printed. Less robust than the others, its broken lettering has translated itself into some alien

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<sup>361</sup> ‘And, nothing himself, beholds; nothing that is not there and the nothing that is’ – from ‘The Snow Man’ by poet Wallace Stevens.

tongue. The other cards are still legible and mainly addressed to 'Son'. How many parents did this deceased have?

Cards are commercially available for those who can't find their own words. Now decaying, they rhyme with the fatality: no one talking to no one (and those who chose them can be only inferred). There is no sign of dedication or authorship. A son's death is a terrible iconographic platitude: Jesus. This memorial is far too transient, and its fragility as humbling as money. But why display it here? On a chain-link fence and at a lay-by. Private, intimate, yet on display? This 'adornment' resembles a promotional announcement for products currently available, but where there are no guarantees of stocks remaining. Sales are simply promises. And those robust live black berries dangling over sad messages to the dead? Artful. Mental illness is also natural; all are part of the same damned system.

In some spiritual traditions, those who have led 'worthy' lives are vouchsafed a place in the next world, and a reward is contingent on believing that a 'next world' exists. If you don't believe it, you don't get it. Is the 'next world' is an 'afterlife', or Hooley's 'Star Garage' elsewhere? Temporary memorialising is all you get.

## **Ryan Gurl**

Messages: 'always thinking of you'. Celestial, baby-blue and fading, they become more delicate, subdued, bleached but sweeter. Sunlight and weather have drained them of colour and of life. The dead cards are fastened with great care to a plasticised green metal 'link' fence, which now 'acts' (inadvertently) as a place for temporary memorabilia. The fence long predated the victim's death and had no previous purpose. No one knows why it is there. Its current function had never been anticipated.

Leaves and stems poke through, adorning - almost grasping - the condolences. The fence confines the untended foliage, ruthlessly forcing it back. Against this, the rebellious vegetation is powerless. But contained, you might say 'compacted', the vegetation has grown muscular. Such vigorously though this thick plant life is, it cannot travel and has no means of escape. Now grown thick, seeing through, or beyond it, is impossible. No depth, no 'beyond', only surface. The 'beyond' is denied: No heaven. No afterlife. Normally, chain-link fences enclose, but with concealing.<sup>362</sup>

Five cellophane-wrapped bunches of flowers. Four 'in memoriam' cards. One portrait. Ryan, it has been 20 long years without you in our lives. Forever in our hearts. As always, thinking of you [words picked out in pale blue are:

Laugh / Think / Voice / Hear / There / Happy / Thoughts / Soothed].

### **Man Killed in Freak Accident**

1st January 2000 / 13th September 2001

Man Killed in Freak Accident: Wire Fence Kills Man. Those midnight vandals who moved a portable cabin and fencing used by builders could have been responsible for a horrific death in Hooley at the weekend. A distressed mother spoke today about the freak road accident

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<sup>362</sup> A memorial. An ephemeral paper card in (heavenly) sky-blue. Fading from sunlight and weather, fastened top and bottom to a green plastic-covered metal 'link' fence. Protruding leafy stems poke through.

The fence holds back (prevents, withholds, restrains) untended vegetation, dense because contained, restricted, confined. Vegetation with nowhere to go, nor means of escape.

The chain-link does not obscure that which is beyond it, but, owing to the density of the vegetation, there is no depth to the 'view' - no visible 'beyond' - 'beyond' is denied. No heaven. No afterlife.

which killed her son. Green fencing played its part in these events. Those who moved the fencing during the night recklessly left it jutting out into Brighton Road, Hooley, London, after police interrupted the vandals' activities at 2.00 am on Saturday (September 8). A mere eight and a half hours later, 20-year-old Ryan Gurl, a passenger in a white Transit van, leaned out of the van window, hit his head on the fencing, and was killed instantly. Ryan, who as a child attended Coombe Road Primary School and, later, Patcham High School in Brighton, was on his way to *Ikea* in Croydon to help a friend buy *affordable* furniture for his new flat when the terrible accident happened. Sharon Gurl (the victim's mother) said: 'He was a son to be proud of. He was one in a million and would not hurt a fly. He was a soft lad who never got into trouble.'

Ryan, who worked as an estate agent, had three brothers, Brett, 22, Aaron, 18, and Rhys Poulton, whose fourteenth birthday was the day his brother died. Mrs Gurl said of Rhys, her 'baby': 'He wouldn't open any of his [birthday] cards, but we are trying to do our best. The whole family has come together to support each other.' Ryan also had a young nephew, Brandon, and a girlfriend, Hannah Cowley, 18. Mrs Gurl said: 'Ryan loved Brandon and worshipped the ground he walked on. Hannah is a wonderful girl, and she is heartbroken. The whole family is devastated.'

Terry Mussett lives opposite the accident scene near the junction of Star Lane. As soon as he saw a vehicle with a crane lifting the cabin and the fencing early on Saturday Mussett called the police. Mussett said: 'I thought it was an odd time to be moving the cabin around, and considering the workmen had had equipment stolen recently, I thought it was thieves. I saw the police talking to the driver who, after a while, put the cabin back and they let him go.' He continued, 'The fencing was not moved back, though. The accident was terrible, such a freak occurrence. It seems that this sequence of events could have been responsible for that

youngster's life.' When Police and paramedics were called to the scene at 10.35am on Sunday Mr Gurl was dead. Sergeant Peter Penoyre, who is leading the investigation, said the victim had very severe head injuries. He said: 'We are currently looking into all leads and any information we gain will be reported directly to the coroner.' No arrests had been made<sup>363</sup>. Sergeant Peter Penoyre denied suggestions the victim had been decapitated. He said: 'It is not accurate to say that, but he did have very severe head injuries. We are currently looking into all leads and any information we gain will be reported directly to the coroner, [but] we are not prepared to discuss what kind of enquiries we are currently making.'



*Figure 25 Memorial, Brighton Road, Hooley, photo by author.*

About ten bunches of flowers were laid at the scene by Tuesday. Surrey Police said, as the local paper went to press, that no arrests had been made in connection with the accident but

<sup>363</sup> <https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/5143964.man-killed-in-freak-accident/>



refused to confirm whether their officers had attended a call out to the scene at 2am on Saturday<sup>364</sup>.

### **Father, Son, Holy Ghost**

Opposite the temporary memorial to Ryan Gurl, close to where the fatal accident took place, stand three solemn, traumatised terraced houses. Standing in judgment, they stare unceasingly at Ryan Gurl, mourning him. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.



*Figure 26: Father, Son, Holy Ghost: houses opposite Star Garage, Hooley, photo by author*

### **Homeliness**

The parade of shops includes the ‘Simply Java’ Coffee Lounge, whose owners have fastidiously ‘curated’ the décor to create a delightfully ‘homely’ place. This is nice. Netherne Asylum wasn’t at all ‘homely’, but ‘Simply Java’ is packed with charming little details, and

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<sup>364</sup> <https://www.thisislocalondon.co.uk/news/155628.wire-fence-kills-man/>

curious knick-knacks. Yet the effect is xenophobic. Bickering over what to display, its ‘compromised’ (with themselves) and included every possible alternative. ‘I hope that the clientele will share my taste. I am unaggressive. I place their comfort before my own. All this stuff makes the place harder to clean’.



*Figure 27: Kids' Corner, Java Coffee Lounge, Hooley, photo by author.*



*Figure 28: Instructive Switch: Java Coffee Lounge, Hooley, photo by author.*

In the single ‘convenience’ reserved exclusively for the café’s patrons, a ‘glam’ toilet seat-cover in silver on white is embossed with a stylised side-by-side ‘man’ and ‘woman’ sign. A patron will see this only *after* having entered the convenience, at which point the sign is redundant. Solicitous yet redundant over-signification typifies the hosts’ other messaging too:

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How *helpful* we are; How *welcoming* we are; How *nice* we are. But no-one cares. The hosts, anxious and overeager to please, continue to compound each other's insecurity. Traumatized, they feel endlessly compelled to explain themselves. They have been too frequently misunderstood, but the more they explain, the more likely they are to be misinterpreted. Such is the fate of the desperate. Maybe they share a love for decoration (which, for them, could never be 'excessive'). They gaze fondly at their hand-written cursive greetings, shlock furniture, and dodgy paintings; it's 'their' talkative style. They dislike the severely modern: chilly sophistication, as mute as the grave.



Figure 29: Christiana Interiors, 2017

The 'Simply Java' Coffee Lounge: one-of-a-kind? Similar, ornate one-offs abound. Quirky, comfy, and impatiently welcoming, and where nothing matches. Furnished with recycled armchairs, some of ageing 'Dralon' (a washable, fake velvet) – that pair looks like they've been rescued from a geriatric unit, except that hospitals stick to easily washed and disinfected upholstery. Give me vinyl every time.





*Figure 30: Mauled Door, Brighton Road, Hooley, photo by author*

Meaningless lace-edged signs call out to nobody. Suffocatingly decorative. It's like when cologne sits on top of sweat but doesn't hide it.

Chairs around a table look like industrial cotton-reel, a goblin's bobbin, and a kitsch, cosy, homely (fig. 27). German psychologist Carl Graumann points out that we usually only say we feel at home' when we are elsewhere (Graumann 1988). Ernst Gombrich proposes that intense patterning [perhaps like other manifestations of the excessively decorative] functions as a picture frame might for sacred images, spaces, and writing, 'The richer the elements of the frame, the more the centre will gain in dignity' (Carrier 2008:12) writes Gombrich. The 'centre' here is the café's bickering owners.

Toilets are places of death (cf. Kaika 2004). They contaminate. Redolent of decay, infestation, contagion, and corpses. Some faiths mandate that a corpse be fastidiously cleansed before interment to await, like seeds, revival. Flowers festoon the toilet door, and

the wallpaper is patterned with *pictures* of more décor (home-sweet-home, butterflies, etc.). A mirror topped with a miniature lighthouse brings a token of ‘seaside freshness’ to a place deprived of windows and ventilation. Illustrated books sit enticingly arranged on a cotton-reel-shaped ‘table’ in a corner set aside for children. *Simply Java Coffee Lounge* embroidered cushion are ‘thrown’ on armchairs; their ‘brand’ parodies of modern marketing. This is some pilgrims’ waystation for those needing rest and refreshment en route to their deity; the onerousness of travel edifies and expiates. The geographical ‘destination’ is but a secondary reward.

Pine-panelled walls evoke warmth, intimacy, and privacy in the booth. The whole place was lethargic. Overdone hospitality is a triumph of complaisance, but we don’t buy over-curated homeliness. You can’t feel at home’ in a place that, like an asylum, is nobody’s home. It is unfamiliar (Austin 2012:113), worn and incoherent as a poorly told story.

An inverse relationship exists between *horror vacui* and value perception. Commercial designers favour *visual clarity* in shopwindow displays and advertising campaigns, a quality that, like understatement and restraint, appeals strongest to affluent and well-educated consumers.<sup>365</sup> Mentally ill artists (like Adolf Wölfli) crowd their artworks with significations.

Vegetation is, in effect, a ‘mixture’ of live and dead grasses, traps and hordes of discarded ‘blister’ packs; the effect is nest-like. Adult foraging birds painstakingly gather such materials. They know these are wonderfully adapted for the nests they construct for their longed-for offspring.

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<sup>365</sup> Butler (2010:128–9)

### **Comic Boxes / Buffoons / Mourners / Bores**

Standing beside the Star Garage are several steel boxes of different sizes, uniformly dark grey. Their locked doors are visible on their road-facing sides, and their purpose is concealed. They are baffling. Unflinching, they stare outwards, straining to transfix passing traffic.



*Figure 31: COMIC BOXES / BUFFOONS / MOURNERS / BORES, grey boxes by Star Garage, Hooley, Brighton Road, photo by author*

*I found that I was in a gloomy wood, because the path which led aright was lost*

Dante, Inferno



*Figure 32: Detached house, Brighton Road and start of Forge Bridge Lane, photo by author*

## **Forge Bridge Lane**

An outpost of Netherne (may suit porter, or similar). A look-out or surveillance post. Ford Bridge Lane enables, or provides, pedestrians a route for reaching the path intended for, or dedicated to, those travelling to Netherne from Hooley on foot.



At the beginning of Ford Bridge Lane, closest to the ‘main’ A23 ‘Brighton’ road, and on the right-hand side (approaching Netherne), is a shallow, private car-parking space (or ‘drive’). This acts as a ‘forecourt’ for a single-storey ‘double’ garage. Two ‘garage’ doors face the parking spaces. Both garages (and the parking spaces) are conveniently situated for the A23.

### Undue Influence



*Figure 33: Undue Influence: detached house, Brighton Road and Forge Bridge Lane, photo by author*

A waist-high zig-zag wall is attached to the garages. Depending on how such features are read, several unequally spaced columns, or piers are set into’ or ‘connect to’ wall section. These are dignified by their greater height and girth than the wall, which is topped with narrow coping. Echoing the coping these piers have matching but superior square stones. Most of the columns are ‘capped’ in the same way. One supposes that over time, some have ‘lost’ their caps as these can no longer be seen, even in the vicinity. It cannot be verified whether these ‘caps’ disappeared ‘one at a time’ or collectively (as victims, let’s say, of a ‘campaign of destruction’). It is also impossible to determine whether these disappeared recently. The amounts of vegetation and rubbish surrounding the site suggests not. As no new

capstones have been fitted, it seems likely these piers will continue to be neglected. One stone cap may have topped the right-hand pillar framing the ‘garden’ entrance. It is difficult to be sure of this. However, the pillar, to the left of the ‘garden’ entrance, as well as the pillar meeting the wall (‘bonded’ the building), both boast capstones. This makes it likely that the right-hand pillar’s capstone has simply gone. Of course, this absence may have been deliberate: a ‘design decision’. But consciously designing upsetting, even offensive, asymmetry seems unlikely.



*Figure 34: ‘Undue Influence’: detached house, Brighton Road and Forge Bridge Lane, photo by author*

If you carefully trace the precise direction taken by the longest part of the wall, you are forced to conclude that this wall is what is best described as a ‘submissive’ wall, a wall forced into complying with the collective will of several bold, iron posts standing adjacent to it. Independent-minded and shamelessly irregular in height, these posts exude undeniable

authority, as if threatening, if necessary, to use brute strength to enforce their will. Had this wall say preferred to have meandered freely, with such posts as these in the vicinity, the wall's freedom was a 'pipedream'.

Precisely where the posts are embedded in tarmac, tufts of exuberant wild grasses spring forth, surrounding them with fragrant garlands but <sup>366</sup> these also conceal where the post meets the ground, sweetly concealing the intimacy of a mysterious and vulgar juncture. But it is also possible that joyous festive foliage spontaneously sprouted upon the impact of the iron posts from above. Judging from their age, the iron posts have previously supported less 'decorous' boundary structures (that preceded the wall). In other words, these posts have a sordid past. They've been 'around'. But that's the past. Now, they fiercely concentrate their energies on, or at, the wall; they are its custodians, its masters, jealously guarding it from but inches away.

The 'garden' entrance (to a decidedly ramshackle garden) is invitingly gate-less. This open entrance offers, allows, gives, permits, enables, or provides access both to what may be called a 'front' 'garden' and to a concrete path (leading to a dwelling). A roof-drainage down-pipe fits discreetly and conveniently on the garden side of the wall. Photographs of this location are inclined to mislead and will give the impression (which some would argue is incontrovertible evidence) that the pillars at either side of the entrance are situated on the same 'plane'; that the cap-less pillar, while of course,, *shorter*, is *just as high* as the capped one. This visual error is sometimes used to 'explain' that, for reasons of symmetry, this pillar would never have had its capstone. This is not the case.

The unequivocally shortest section of the wall (to the left of the entrance and attached to the building) has no coping. It is constructed of different bricks and is only four courses high.

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<sup>366</sup> This makes the iron posts look like small baby trees (or perhaps herms) the grass.



Facing the entrance from precisely this point of view makes it clear that both the column and the iron post are insolent ‘confederates’ which, together, conspire to confront the viewer – me – with their joint defiance. Light and shade cast two triangles and a rhombus.



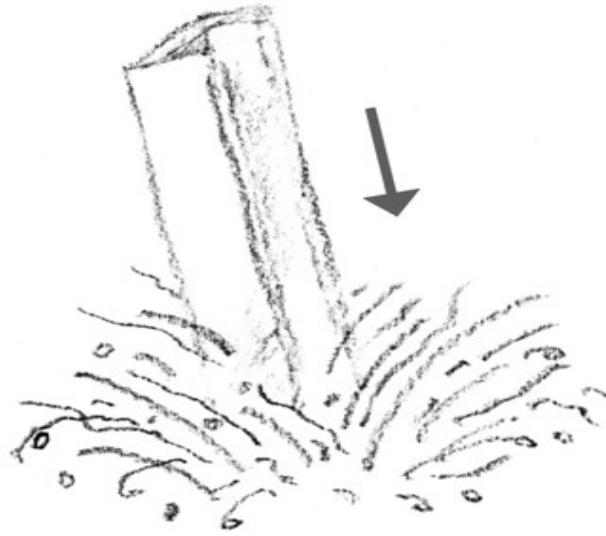
*Figure 35: ‘Undue Influence’: double-garage doors, Forge Bridge Lane, photo by author*

While the one-storey garage ‘boasts’ two identically sized entrances, it *enjoys* its different doors (fig. 35). On the left the door is of black metal and of the ‘up-and-over’ variety. On the right, a pair of hostile semi-glazed, painted wooden doors, open defiantly outwards. The contrast between these two entrances could not be more striking, and meaningful. These doorways, from different cultural backgrounds, or provenances, vie continually with each other. The door on the left is dark and entirely concealed any interior space; its existence can be only conjectural. An H-sectioned metal post is embedded in the ground at jaunty, or

rakish, angle (fig. 36): friendly, cheeky, casually familiar, or sloppily indifferent? It keeps a watchful eye on the garages.



*Figure 36: Jaunty Girder: Forge Bridge Lane, photo by author*



*Figure 37 Girder plunges to earth, vegetation sprouting, illus. by author.*

### **Concrete Ribs Shore Up Artificial Valleys**

The ribs, stripped-bare, the body flayed, like Actaeon (figs. 38 & 39). These are my bones, chafing against a hurtful world. Slopes so emaciated (as in pharaoh's dream of starving kine) that the fragile concrete retaining ribs are made visible. Worn by wind and the cold, they are at risk of loosening their grip, relinquishing their hold on the hills, and all the houses, and everything beside them, left to slide and plunge: 'Out of the depths have I cried for Thee, O Lord' <sup>367</sup>.

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<sup>367</sup> Psalm 130



*Figure 38: Concrete Ribs: railway cutting, looking eastwards, Forge Bridge Lane, photo by author*

The terrain is constrained by feeble buckling concrete ribs that seem in pain. The land strains every sinew to break away from them and free itself. But if it does, the ribs will crack, fragment, and tumble down the side of the railway, cutting to the trackway below. The escarpment, a body of compact earth and rock, would lose itself if concrete ribs were not there to hug it, lovingly holding it captive, keeping it in its rightful place; soft yet firm maternal affection, affectionately disguised as discipline.





*Figure 39: Railway cutting, concrete ribs, looking westwards, Forge Bridge Lane, photo by author*

Struggling fence panels cannot adapt to an inclined landscape and are staggered; like the aged, they fearfully tackle the incline, fumbling one step at a time (Fig. 40).



*Figure 40: Fumbling: private fence, Forge Bridge Lane, photo by author*





*Figure 41: Railway bridge, fence, looking westwards, Forge Bridge Lane, photo by author*

Carefully crafted glyphs, disguised cries of pain, mark aeons of forced marches to Netherne (figs. 41 & 42).



*Figure 42: Railway bridge, fence, looking westwards, Forge Bridge Lane, photo by author*

Deep Transit: Inaccessible and swift; those who are free are out of reach, are heard, but do not hear.



*Figure 43: Railway bridge, wall, looking northwards to Hooley, Forge Bridge Lane, photo by author.*

A narrow passageway separates a building from spiked metal fences stretching the entire length of both sides of the bridge. Bright, silvery structures to deter and obstruct pedestrians from accessing the fatal slopes of the cuttings.





*Figure 44 Railway cutting, Forge Bridge Lane, photo by author.*

A routine wooden palette (fig. 45) fits the space it occupies perfectly, functioning as a modest perforated barrier. It also separates *and* connects a building (on one side of it) to a metal fence (on the other side of it) functioning as a half-height door, happily turning a gap into a doorway into a passage. Proceeding down this passage (we are now on privately-owned land) the fence gives way to a less substantial, inexpensive wire barrier. Free-and-easy, temporary, improvised, the unworried palette mocks the sad permanence of those nearby double-garage

doors. Horizontal gaps between the slats are similar in size to the vertical gaps in the spiked fence.



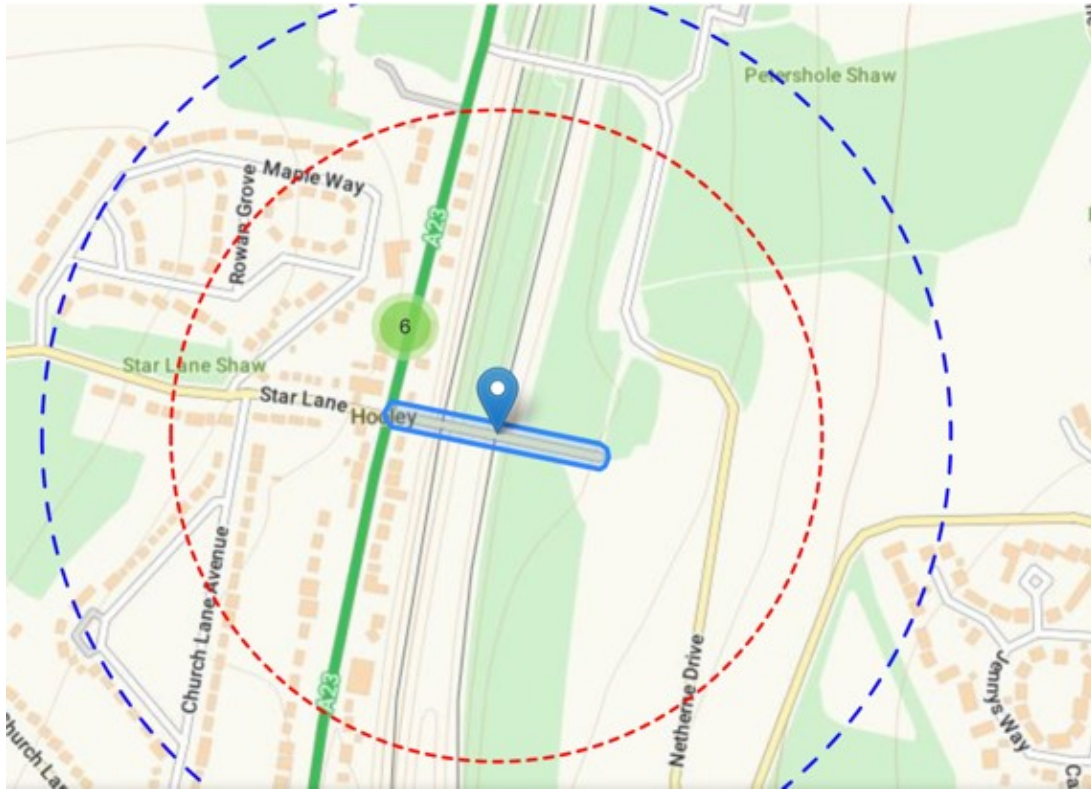
*Figure 45: Temporary partition, Forge Bridge Lane, photo by author*

We initially remembered that passageway behind that makeshift ‘palette-door’ as one of gentle descent, preceded by three rustic steps cut roughly into the earth. But we remembered incorrectly. There are no steps, only a succession of brick-and-concrete low barrier-walls.

These are pointless hurdles, unused storage areas. A shadow of its vertically posed twin, a



*second* palette lies prone. Wedged against the first palette to keep it upright, this palette generously provides a shallow step for those needing its help to clamber over the upright palette.



*Figure 46: Ford Bridge Lane, map*

### **Forge Bridge Lane in Hooley**

Forge Bridge Lane is a Street in the Surrey village of Hooley and measures approximately 186 metres long. In Great Britain, only one street is named Forge Bridge Lane, making it unique. Forge Bridge Lane is within the area of Reigate and Banstead District (B) Council provide services such as refuse collection and are responsible for the collection of council tax. Forge Bridge Lane has been given the Unique Street Reference Number of 3120054 in the National Street Gazetteer. The average elevation of Forge Bridge Lane is roughly 111.81

metres above sea level. with the highest point being 121.70 and the lowest point being 103.60. A change of 18.10 metres.

Forge Bridge Lane is located within the county of Surrey, which is in the UK's Southeast (England) region. It is 14.44 miles south of the centre of London, 17.62 miles East of the centre of Woking, 18.58 miles East of the centre of Guildford, and 29.29 miles west of the centre of Maidstone.

Occasionally, road vehicles use Forge Bridge Lane to reach roofless commercial depots at both sides of the far end of the Lane. To deter drivers from obstructing other vehicles, a sign warns: 'No Parking Access in Constant use' [the 'u' of 'use' is uncapitalised].

In Forge Bridge Lane, on one side stand two robust iron posts (fig. 47). Bound and 'bandaged' as if wounded, they kiss. The two fellows' weaker (but taller) are bowing, leaning for physical and emotional support towards their sturdier, upright, shorter neighbour or companion.



Figure 47: Two Robust Iron Posts: barrier, railway bridge, Forge Bridge Lane, photo by author.

Joseph, the youngest of his siblings, dreams of haystacks that bow to him, honouring him. For his brothers, this dream proves Joseph's plan to dominate them. It portends the power Joseph will come to hold over an entire nation. Esau, physically sturdier than his brother Jacob, runs to greet him after their long separation. Esau bows, or falls, on Jacob's neck to kiss him (fig. 47). Both weep. The extraordinary punctuation found over the word 'kiss' is interpreted<sup>368</sup> This means that Esau's kiss is not genuine, but it disguises his malice. Others interpret<sup>369</sup> Esau, swept away by the emotion of the encounter, is suddenly *wholehearted*; his heart mended as it were, repaired, made whole by the sheer emotional intensity of the encounter; Esau's gesture: an awakening of dormant pity. Both posts are striped, increasing

<sup>368</sup> Rabbi and biblical commentator, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchak, known also as 'Rashi' (1040-1105).

<sup>369</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE Galilean rabbinical sage, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, known also as 'Rashbi'.



their visibility to drivers, especially at night. However, they do not pose a hazard to drivers (even though the road is narrow). Any vehicle that strays would collide with these posts. Together they would protect the driver by preventing from veering into the fence, forcibly ripping through it, and plunging catastrophically to the terrible depths. The fence is succeeded by a robust brick wall, obviating the need for additional protective barriers.



*Figure 48: Fast Food Detritus, Forge Bridge Lane, photo by author*

Forge Bridge Lane, a site rich in refuse (fig. 48 & 49). Littered with many types of discarded paper and plastic food-wrappings, these remain trapped, caught up in vegetation and brambles which sprout lustily along both sides of the Lane.



*Figure 49: Detritus, Forge Bridge Lane, photo by author.*

Several plants grow from casual strips of soil running alongside the wall on both sides of the road. Although these do not manage to conceal the brickwork, in sunshine their serrated leaves cast neat, crisp shadows on the wall. The plants, admiring themselves, use the wall as a mirror (fig. 50).





*Figure 50: Railway bridge, wall, Forge Bridge Lane, photo by author.*



*Figure 51: Railway bridge, wall, Forge Bridge Lane, photo by author.*





*Figure 52: Railway bridge, view westwards over tracks, Forge Bridge Lane, photo by author*

A fanfare plant (fig. 53) temporarily ‘lords’ it over the metal barrier, outreaching even the fence’s topmost razor-like teeth. Vi rant but futile, it points upwards with its two fingers. It has no awareness of its own hopeless transience.



*Figure 53: Fanfare Plant, Larding It: railway bridge, fence (looking eastwards), Forge Bridge Lane, photo by author*





*Figure 54: Detail of fence, Forge  
Bridge Lane, photo by author*



*Figure 55: Detail of fence, Forge  
Bridge Lane, photo by author*



*Figure 56: Detail of fence, Forge  
Bridge Lane, photo by author*



*Figure 57: Detail of fence, Forge Bridge Lane, photo by author.*

## Upon Close Examination

Close examination of the fence reveals anomalous inconsistencies in how the fence is fixed to the wall (see figs, 55-58). Individual square metal-wire grills are held (or ‘sandwiched’) between horizontal and vertical flat bars. These bars are (in turn) bolted both to one another and, indirectly - sandwiched by even heavier bars - to the brickwork beneath. But the manner of this fixing, connecting, or overlapping them worryingly lacks uniformity. Inconsistencies in the way such work has been undertaken may be the outcome of the varying proximities (or relations) of brickwork to bars - the brickwork itself may sometimes impair access to (presumably pre-drilled) holes in the bars.

Everywhere fences. Everything ‘enjoys’ its own enclosure. Imagining secrecy (and protection) but in fact trapped by its own defensiveness. A concrete block ‘judges’ it has successfully consolidated its territory but actually is incarcerated by red barriers (fig. 58).





*Figure 58: Temporary barrier, Forge Bridge Lane, photo by author.*

Near to the ‘depot’ situated on the far right-hand side of the Lane, an empty plastic water bottle has inserted itself diagonally in a small gap in the fence. (fig. 59). The narrower ‘open’ end of this bottle faces downwards, opening towards, as if attempting to drink in the ground itself: the entire earth. Or has it uncontrollably vomited its contents earthwards? Or perhaps selflessly shared its insides with the ground, given ‘of itself’? Did it anticipate being appreciated for so conspicuous an act of self-sacrifice? The lower part of the bottle sits more or less adjacent to a smaller, water bottle, which is also empty and has a pale blue cap. The two bottles nuzzle each other. Like a mother-cow its calf. The smaller bottle faces away from the larger bottle, ignoring it; the devotion it benefits from too familiar to require either gratitude or even recognition. The second bottle points signpost-like (but to what?), in a direction roughly 45° with respect to that of the larger bottle. Beads of moisture stick visibly on the inside of both bottles. The colour scheme is vaguely Italian.



*Figure 59: Bottles dumped near fence, Forge Bridge Lane, photo by author.*

A small metal-lined, square hole in the road. This is a microarchitectural structure. An orifice that may serve also as a drainage point, as well as facilitate access to hardy pipework concealed either within the surface of the road, or, if not, attached confidently to the dark underside of the bridge. Modest foliage grows compactly, happily nestling within the metal-lined cavity. The leaves protrude, just ‘proud’ of the tarmac (fig. 61).



*Figure 60: Forge Bridge Lane, looking North, photo by author*



*Figure 61: Detail, Forge Bridge Lane, photo by author.*

In a beholder’s eyes, some attributes give ‘significance’ to an object, even if coincidental. The item, thus enhanced, is then deemed ‘worthy of attention’. But there is a perceptual hierarchy. Features that seem ‘permanent’ features are ‘worthier’ of attention than the ‘merely’ ephemeral. An arabesque-like string, at rest, has snagged on an irregularity in the surface of the tarmac. Any apparent ‘permanence’ is relative. Big things seem more important than small things.

Foliage, making full use of the ambient barbed wire, anchors, secures, attaches, and fastens itself to a slender concrete fencepost (fig. 62), embracing it, flourishing in a precarious, 'unlikely' position. Notably, it has befriended what a hostile, unyielding material has surprisingly aided, or at least not impaired, its persisting presence. The clustered foliage, amiably tangled with barbed wire, now enjoys a clear view of precipitous railway cutting and concrete 'ribs' reinforcing the grassless slopes farthest from it.



*Figure 62: Forge Bridge Lane, photo by author*





*Figure 63: Forge Bridge Lane, photo by author*

There is a solitary green lamppost, immersed in unpruned trees and untamed bushes. An overrun wire ‘link’ fence simply disappears into the ivy. A solitary vehicle is parked next to the depot.

A final longing glance, rearwards to the old Brighton Road, captures a scene that becomes a brief memory: Forge Bridge Lane, fringed with glittering metal fences topped with fang-like prongs, but threaded with gorgeous, deep-blue, industrial plastic piping, looping like a necklace, or a noose (for a necklace is also a noose).





THE NECKLACE

*Figure 64: Noose as Necklace, detail of fence, Forge Bridge Lane, photo by author*

Mental health staff at Royal Blackburn Hospital believed their 56-year patient was getting better but found him tragically hanged just one day before the anniversary of the dissolution of his 20-year marriage and the death of his aunt. Edna Bennett confided that her son had struggled with depression for over two years. She identified three causes for this: the loss of his job as an alarm fitter, the breakdown of his marriage, and the death of his aunt, whom he was exceptionally fond of. Edna visited her son just two days before his death. She said how excited he was to be finally going home. She invited him for tea on Sunday but was never to speak to him again.<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>370</sup> Adapted from: *Found Hanged: a Blackburn mental patient* (no date) [lancashiretelegraph.co.uk](http://lancashiretelegraph.co.uk). Available at: <https://www.lancashiretelegraph.co.uk/news/4656284.blackburn-mental-health-patient-hanged-ward/>.

On March 17, 2015, Cecil Clayton, aged 74 – suffering from dementia and with an IQ of only 71 – was executed. Clayton was missing a significant part of his brain due to an accident. His attorneys argued that because of this, he should be spared; he could not understand the punishment to be carried out. He sustained his brain injury in a sawmill accident in 1972. This accident required the removal of about 20% of his frontal lobe – a part of the brain usually responsible for controlling impulses, problem-solving, and social behaviour. After his accident, Clayton began experiencing violent impulses, schizophrenia, and a paranoia so severe that Clayton checked himself into a mental hospital, fearful he could no longer control his temper. In 1983, psychiatrist, Dr Douglas Stevens, examined Clayton concluding, ‘There is presently no way that this man could be expected to function in the world of work. Were he pushed to do so he would become a danger both to himself and to others. He has had both suicidal and homicidal impulses, so far controlled, though under pressure they would be expected to exacerbate.’ In the past decade, six psychiatric evaluations have found that Clayton should be exempt from execution because he does not understand that he will be executed, or the reasons for his execution. However, since his execution date was set, he did not have a competency hearing before a judge that could spare him from execution. An MRI scan of Cecil Clayton’s brain showed the front left part of his brain was entirely missing.<sup>371</sup>

At the Netherne end of Ford Bridge Lane, large arrogant structures, slender but robust, securely anchored (to prevent them drifting) to private land, peer superciliously, inquisitively, from behind a new fence of virgin timber.

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<sup>371</sup> Adapted from: *mentally ill prisoners executed* (no date) [deathpenaltyinfo.org](http://deathpenaltyinfo.org). Available at:

<https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/policy-issues/mental-illness/mentally-ill-prisoners-who-were-executed>, and Williams (2015 and Rizzo (2015)



*Figure 65: Supercilious Structures, Forge Bridge Lane, photo by author*

### **The Overgrown Path**

A neglected, overgrown beaten track, embedded fragments of formal paving and a concrete kerb have been trespassed on, then overcome by rampant ivy, relieving you of all vestiges of sin, and forgiving blasphemy, leading you directly to the pilgrimage footpath linking Forge Bridge Lane to Netherne.



*Figure 66: Overgrown Path, photo by author*

Self-creating stories: a shaded, rough track. Rammed into the bushes, an abandoned stroller. I had the baby unmarried. I wasn't allowed to keep it.



*Figure 67: Abandoned Stroller, Forge Bridge Lane path, photo by author*

As if wind-blown (but they are not) trees and bushes strain (fig. 68) to lean outwards, pulling away from the path, leaning field-wards. They shrink from the cursed ramp to Netherne and the misfortunates climbing it.





*Figure 68: Trees lean outwards, Netherne Footpath, photo by author*

### **The Footpath to Netherne**

Almost leaning on the handrail are hedgerows and, beyond them, fields. Bearing the name of their manufacturer and ‘handy’ part reference-numbers, bolted rotating joints (rotating, flexible but firm, lest the rail is thinking of contesting its servitude) link the horizontal handrail sections to one other but also to reliable, unthinking uprights.





*Figure 69: Manageable Steps Netherne Footpath, photo by author*

Along the entire route, no places—not even Netherne—are discernible. While disorienting, this may prompt the pedestrian to search inwards, fostering insight, spiritual growth, and maybe enlightenment. The footpath is divided, offering pedestrians useful choices: they may opt to climb the narrow ramp or else take a shallower path, which incorporates regularly-spaced clusters of three tolerably manageable steps.





*Figure 70: Holy Trinities, Netherne Footpath, photo by author*

Holy Trinities of steps (fig. 70) nod discreetly to the Blessed Mary, and St Luke, both of whom accompany poor Madness homewards. In the apse of St Luke's Church, Netherne, three stained-glass windows celebrate The Virgin, St Luke, and Madness (in the figure of our Saviour), for the insane guest is believed, by the Benedictine order, to be *as Jesus*; its rule of hospitality compels them to receive any guest as if the guest is *Christ Himself*. Clustered steps alternate with level areas of 'respite'; innumerable stations of the cross for patient and visitor alike for rest, contemplation, and to 'catch' their breath before resuming the ascent - arduous for the infirm, problematic for those suffering visions, fits, or spasms. The kindly, galvanised iron handrails offer us their modest succour before ceasing, as abruptly as the Day of Judgment itself. Adornments, being worldly, are discarded hereon; the hollow tube of the



handrail is left unfinished, open; unclothed, unprotected, and vulnerable, seeking only mercy. Some stretches of the handrail have no visible connecting sections; these are the ‘sinuous liars’ (fig. 71).



*Figure 71: No Visible Connectors, Netherne Footpath, photo by author*



Missing junctures: the carefree trajectory of a hollow tube is brusquely arrested by its ‘Caregiver’ (fig. 72), a grimly gnarled concrete pillar, resolute, savage. Indifferent to all emotion, it is unmoved, remorseless, deaf to all entreaty and to eternity.



*Figure 72: Caregiver, Netherne Footpath, photo by author*



Two sections of handrail just miss meeting (fig. 73). Now irrevocably separated, they pine for each other, staring powerlessly at the prospect of their union eternally denied.



*Figure 73: Union Denied, Netherne Footpath, photo by author*

## Vigilance

A roof peppered with many observational windows, undoubtedly look-out posts. Extreme vigilance (fig. 74) protects us from abuse, blasphemy, bestiality, vandals, intruders, trespassers, aliens, strangers, threats, assault, harm, interference, and indifference.



*Figure 74: Vigilance, Netherne, photo by author*



*Figure 75: Look-outs, Netherne, photo by author*

### **Deception of Fatherhouse Sanctity**

Patriarchally self-assured, but inwardly scared of being dethroned, he offers architectural decoys to divert attention from his deep-seated fear of manifest weakness. You are intentionally led ('up the garden path', one might say) to think the door, the entrance, the most important feature. But you would be wrong. A massive projecting 'wing' draws, *compels*, your attention. Looking proud and (of course) impenetrable, the authentic entranceway is ridiculed, mocked and made to seem fragile; a dwarfish sidekick, trivial and





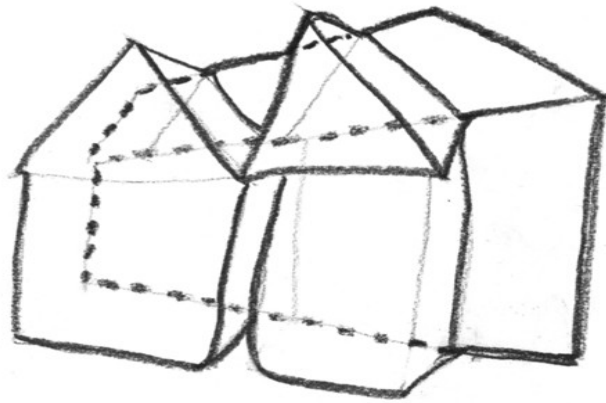
irrelevant. Its denial is either a show of weakness, or actual weakness (it is the sole visible point of entry).

*Figure 76: Compelling Wing, Netherne, photo by author*

Perilous extrusion: self-projection is taking the initiative to grow but without having first sought permission from ‘The Whole’.



*Figure 77: Residential Extrusions, Netherne, photo by author*



*Figure 78: Extrusions, illustration by author*

### **Keeping an Eye Out**

the grey land and the spasms of bleak dust which drift endlessly over it, you perceive, after a moment, the eyes<sup>372</sup>. They look out of no face, decoratively integrated into the first-floor's pointless, spindly railings.

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<sup>372</sup> Scott-Fitzgerald, F. (1925) *The Great Gatsby*  
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*Figure 79: Watchful, Netherne, photo by author*

Feint chalk-lines of narrow kerbstones snake through tended, deaf lawns (fig. 80). The ward blocks glare. Stalwart oaks and planes shield them from an uncharted ‘unconscious’, an uncharted Beyond of scruffy, untamed vegetation (fig. 81).



*Figure 80: Stalwart Oaks, Netherne, photo by author*

The method and mix of materials used on the bench (fig. 84) to fix it to the ground with the hope that these will give it some sort of ‘permanence’, challenging time itself, seems to hint at some sort of mystic or alchemical marriage. A union, if not of opposites, at least of differences. Magic, severely proscribed in the Old Testament, often involves combinations of forbidden materials. No reasons are given for this prohibition.



Madness is getting things wrong and misinterpreting them.



*Figure 81: The Scruffy, Untamed 'Beyond', Netherne, photo by author*

The more distantly a person walks away from Netherne and turn their back on the damned place, the wilder the prospect becomes. A plastic bench faces wild grassy meadows, swaying bushes and proud funereal poplars, Its plastic simulates the hue and grain of wood.



*Figure 82: A Wild Prospect, Netherne, photo by author*





*Figure 83: Plastic Bench, Netherne, photo by author*

The bench has a dedication (fig. 84). It is a memorial<sup>373</sup>. Screwed to the backrest, an inscribed commemorative brass plaque reads: “In memory of Robert Murdoch [no date] who loved this beautiful Village [capital ‘V’] and gave his time freely to make it an even better place [no full stop]”.



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<sup>373</sup> For French historian, Pierre Nora (b. 1931) memory and recollection become sanctified and contained in specific things (such as space, gestures, images). These preserve and identify the spiritual quintessence of some historical or individual-personal phenomenon which is no longer ‘accessible’ or ‘repeatable’, but which can be phenomenologically reproduced in consciousness as an ‘intentional object’.

*Figure 84: Dedicative Plaque, photo by author*

Robert Murdoch is possibly *Robert Lindsay Murdoch* (b. 1952), a chartered surveyor who from 2011-2017 served as a director of Netherne Management Limited and, simultaneously, director of Netherne Community Bus Company Limited. From 2008-2010, Murdoch had been a partner at Drivers Jonas LLP. Has this brass plaque been reused, removed from a traditional, oak *asylum* bench? This is unlikely. Has Netherne been referred to as a ‘Village’ since being redeveloped.



*Figure 85: Plastic, photo by author*



The plaque refers to ‘distress’ – speaking for the all-but-forgotten patients of Netherne: ‘Let not our hardships seem small to You. Swiftly may Your compassion reach us on the day of our distress’.



*Figure 86: Plastic Simulates Wood, photo by author*

The original version of this text hails from a fairly obscure passage of Jewish liturgy. An English translation of the Hebrew is rendered as: ‘...may our travails not seem petty to You. May your mercies meet us swiftly in our time of distress.’<sup>374</sup> This motto imbues plastic - an

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<sup>374</sup>Scherman 1984:132 These words appear at the conclusion of the added supplicatory prayers to the extended ‘Tachanun’, recited in orthodox Jewish synagogues only as part of regular Monday and Thursday morning services. Kabbalistic literature teaches that on these specific days the Heavenly Court judges man. According to

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ignoble, meretricious material - with yet greater pathos. The choice of plastic may well have been to ensure that this commemorative bench ‘enjoy’ greater longevity; more ‘eternal’ than wood, a fraction closer to eternity. This is certainly plastic: go on, touch it, caress it! Your fingers slide haltingly over its insidious, waxy surface, smooth but marled with unnatural whorls.



Figure 87: Feet of Concrete, Bench, photo by author

A captive bride, the bench has been forcibly and inescapably ‘married’ to the ground (fig. 88), bolted to it via metal angled-brackets: sycophantic ‘intermediaries’ lulling the amnesiac bench into compliance. Each anchored bench-leg now ‘sleeps’ forever in its very own bed of the ‘Artscroll Siddur’ must be said while *standing* (“and because of their nature, with great feeling”), yet these words have been affixed to a bench. The *Artscroll Siddur* elaborates: The Kol Bo and others record a tradition regarding the authorship of these prayers. Three elders, Rabbi Shmuel, Rabbi Binyamin, and Rabbi Yosef were set adrift on rudderless boats by the Romans after the destruction of Jerusalem. They landed on a distant shore where they were persecuted by the local ruler. Each of the three composed a prayer requesting the easing of their plight. God heeded their supplications: the ruler died and was succeeded by a benevolent king who treated the three with respect and kindness. Seeing that their prayers had been pleasing to God, they distributed copies of the text to other Jewish communities, which added them to the Tachanun on Mondays and Thursdays.

poured-concrete. The complex conjunction of three materials tells the story of an ascent spanning millennia: from the face of raw, teeming primal material (earth), passing through an age of stone (poured concrete), through the age of iron (the angle-brackets), to this, our ‘modern’ age of synthetic sterility (plastic).



*Figure 88: Angle-bracket, photo by author*

The first synthetic polymer was invented in 1869 by John Wesley Hyatt, galvanised by a prize of \$10,000 offered to anyone providing an effective substitute for natural elephant ivory, supplies of which had been strained by the growing popularity of billiards. By treating cellulose, derived from cotton fibre, with camphor, Hyatt discovered a material that could be crafted into a variety of shapes and imitate natural substances like tortoiseshell, horn, linen, and ivory. Manufacturing, finally liberated from natural constraints, could be devoted to the production of new materials, liberating people from relying on natural resources. Inexpensive



celluloid made material wealth more obtainable. Nature could provide only so much wood, metal, stone, bone, tusk, and horn, but discovering the power to create new materials would protect the natural world from man's rapacity<sup>375</sup>.

The foot of the bench is firmly embedded in concrete; Feet of Clay (figs. 89 & 90): "You were looking, O king, and lo! there was a great statue. This statue was huge, its brilliance extraordinary; it was standing before you, and its appearance was frightening. The head of that statue was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.



*Figure 89: Permanence, photo by author*

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<sup>375</sup> <https://www.plasticreimagined.org/>



*Figure 90: 'Book of Daniel', photo by author*

As you looked on, a stone was cut out, not by human hands, and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, were all broken in pieces and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.<sup>376</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> Biblical book of Daniel, Daniel 2, verses 31–45, where Daniel interprets the king's dream:  
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*Figure 91: Psychotic Housing, Netherne, photo by author*

The formal instability of a family house: garages are its ‘thing’ (fig. 92), next to which its fragile pseudo-Georgian entrance doors, with their silly brass adornments, are simpering weaklings.



*Figure 92: 'Garages are its Thing', photo by author*

Guests are swiftly ushered through them, uninvited to linger before the majesty of those immense and mighty garage-doors which dominate the façade and mask the capacious unlit caves whence this house send forth its conquering denizens.



*Figure 93: Lions, Couchant, photo by author*



Multiple echoes posing as ‘architecture’: three levels of the stepped façade of a creamy-corniced, detached house, monotonously repeat each other’s refrain: ‘If you don’t hear me, I’ll tell you again, and again. You to respect me’. The façade postures (fig. 94), squares up, muscles tighten, ready for confrontation, for any imagined threat or enemy. My right shoulder involuntarily mimics its posture, and would do so even more effectively were it to dislocate and detach itself, and push forwards offensively; my back tightens, my jaw too.



*Figure 94: A Posturing Façade, photo by author*



*Figure 95: Tree of Death, Netherne, photo by author*

Netherne, bloated with new dwellings, was rebranded a ‘village’<sup>377</sup>. A village is typically a reclusive place of tranquillity and history, *far from the bustle of modern life [...] quiet and harmonious*. The designs which developers originally presented for the houses they proposed were clearly intended to evoke an ‘arts-and-crafts’ village-like atmosphere. These designs were never implemented, and developers opted instead for updated pseudo-Edwardian designs.

Netherne, like nearby Coulsdon South station, has had a change of name but it has also endured physical changes. Wards and many ancillary workshop and storage buildings - including a printshop, an upholstery shop, staff café, and laundry - were demolished. These vacated sites, together with previously undeveloped recreational and agricultural land, were used for the construction of large, detached and semi-detached, ‘family’ dwellings. When Enoch Powell, who advocated the closure of asylums<sup>378</sup>, visited Netherne, its herd of milk-cows was sold off.

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<sup>377</sup> <https://www.timeout.com/london/things-to-do/old-fashioned-places-near-london>: The popular fascination with ‘the village’ is evoked in the following: ‘Enter through a tunnel of trees, pause at the medieval market cross at the heart of the village and it’ll legit feel like you’ve fallen through time [...] you’re surrounded purely by cottages [...] some dating back to the sixteenth century. Cosy up in The Castle Inn or pre-book scones at the quirky Old Rectory Tearoom. All you need to do is soak up those old-fashioned vibes’.

<sup>378</sup> Enoch Powell (1912-1998) Conservative Minister for Health, 1960-1963. In his landmark ‘water tower’ speech he announced the closure of mental hospitals and its ‘corollary’, the introduction of its patients into the community: <https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-11/nhs-history-book/58-67/powell-s-water-tower-speech.html> - an excerpt from his speech: “There [the asylums] stand, isolated, majestic, imperious, brooded over by the gigantic water-tower and chimney combined, rising unmistakable and daunting out of the countryside - the asylums which our forefathers built with such immense solidity -to express the notions of their day. Do not for a moment underestimate their powers of resistance to our assault.”

Land surrounding each individual dwelling, like a lake, is entirely in the possession of the householder, and this normally includes areas publicly visible and those which are not and concealed are intended as 'private'. Generally, these 'private' areas are not visible either to pedestrians or those passing by in motor vehicles. Normally situated *behind* the properties, the designated 'private' areas are effectively screened from public scrutiny, partly by the sheer bulk of the dwellings themselves. In this sense, the houses are barriers and guarantors of their own privacy.

Some private areas are also concealed by other means. These include, for example, potentially contested patches of land *between* those unfortunate houses destined by their architects to reluctantly share a common border (their preference would have been for total separation and thus freed of any of the dangers that contiguity may confer). Perhaps it is more fitting that such spaces be considered as 'intermediate' rather than 'shared' or 'in common' - as they are not. These spaces can be more properly described as divided, as exactly half 'belongs' to each pair of adjoining properties.



The paths that lead to these ‘intermediate’ spaces deceptively resemble informal thoroughfares that invitingly beckon entry to the property. This is not so. It is a lie. Each



pathway is peremptorily barred, or terminated, by a decisive band of wooden fencing separating publicly displayed areas from those which are unequivocally intended to remain hidden. Private areas, which might risk being visible to unauthorised persons, are defined and defended by fencing. Such fencing, attaching neighbouring houses, is commonplace in the entire estate.

*Figure 96: The Short Fence, photo by author*

## **The Short Fence**

Two neighbouring properties; a short fence (fig. 96) joins them. It also ensures they remain separated. The fence stops each property sliding towards the other but also, by tethering them, prevents each from drifting *away* from its neighbour. Although each property is fully independent and has its own separate rear garden, the mutual objective of the houses (as expressed by their short, shared fence): to protect their respective privacy.

Although there are pathways around the periphery of each property, seemingly inviting a passer-by to tarry and explore private spaces, the shared fence dissuades curiosity in a resolute fashion. A fence is also a de-fence. The wooden fence (see the photograph) ‘stretches’, as if tautly, between two recently built, single-family dwellings. In affirming and ‘closing’ the gap separating the two houses, the fence in effect ‘joins’ or marries each house to its neighbour. Joining, yes, but also ensuring prevents any further proximity, holding, securing, establishing ineluctably, each dwelling at a prearranged distance from its neighbour.



*Figure 97: The Short Fence (partial view), photo by author*

In short: filling (or ‘bridging’) the space between two houses the fence ensures and guarantees their mutual separation, preserving the distance mandated between them.

In truth, a flimsy Fence is but a fragile contrivance, little more than an idea, and easily destroyed by fire or by =being rammed at speed by a rogue delivery van driver carelessly reversing his vehicle. The Fence may be little more than an idea, but ideas have a decisive force of their own. It may thus be understood as performing a forceful, quasi-mythological role, a weaker or weakened party capable of heroically vanquishing a better-endowed opponent (David versus Goliath; Samson, captive in the Philistine temple) in ‘heroically’ maintaining the separation between two buildings.

And what of the Fence’s aetiology? Is it possible that the fence long preceded the construction, or even the conception, of these houses and thus, pre-determining the distance between them, lay down their architectural fate long before they were thought of, like God who is understood to have gazed into the pages of His own history of creation to seek instructions on how best to proceed? Who then built this fence, and with what intentions? Did it arise spontaneously, uncaused? Has it always existed, like some sort of Platonic presence?

It is beyond doubt that the fence also acts also as a commonplace defensive barrier, deterring intruders and excluding easy access to private land from low-risk outsiders, including domestic pets, and natural pests, small children, not to mention refuse, unwanted packaging and promotional literature, and other familiar nuisances. The fence has been imbued with Creosote. Creosote, Cu Hs O8, is a tar-like substance, produced from either coal or wood. Since scientists have alerted us to its possibly carcinogenic properties, it is no longer available for purchase by the public. Creosote was however once a commonly used in the

dental surgery as a material for filling teeth<sup>379</sup> and for treating toothache. George Watt<sup>380</sup> maintained that: 'For the relief of toothache resulting from exposure of the pulp, [Creosote] is the sovereign remedy. By devitalizing the surface of the pulp, and forming an elastic, flexible, and insoluble layer over the subjacent living parts, it usually gives complete, and almost instantaneous relief. By applying it around the neck of a tooth, by means of a soft string, or otherwise, the pain of dental periostitis is often allayed. In the cure of alveolar abscess, it is

<sup>379</sup> Discovered in 1832 by chemist Karl von Reichenbach, (1788-1869), a nineteenth-century German chemist.

During Reichenbach's student days, Germany was under the military control of Napoleon's France, and at the age of sixteen Reichenbach founded a secret society to set up a German state in the South Sea Islands.

Reichenbach was arrested by the Napoleonic police and detained for some months as a political prisoner but after his release he continued his studies and obtained his Ph.D. He spent over two decades experimenting with a mysterious force which he named "od" (also known as odic force or odyle in various translations – William Gregory who translated Reichenbach's researches into English, translated Reichenbach's "od" as "odyle," perhaps feeling that this term would sound more acceptable to scientists). This purported force has its intellectual roots in mesmerism, had particular relevance to concepts of the human 'aura'. Reichenbach's experiments in this field involved attempts to demonstrate a mysterious vital force which he named "od," for the Norse deity Odin, indicating a power, like the animal magnetism conceived by Franz A. Mesmer, which he wanted to show permeated the whole of nature.

Detection and demonstration of this force depended upon sensitives—specially gifted individuals rather like psychics, although Reichenbach's 'sensitives' were ordinary people from all walks of life. These individuals experienced specific reactions to the proximity of other people—feelings of pleasant coolness and drowsiness or, on the other hand, disagreeable, numbing, or exciting feelings. They also manifested a special right-hand/left-hand polarity, which affected their reactions to other people standing or sitting near to their right or left sides, and particularly to sleeping positions with partners. They were also sympathetic to the colour blue, and antipathetic to yellow; they had particular food fetishes; were sensitive to certain metals; and unpleasantly affected by mirrors.

In a long series of experiments with some two hundred individuals, Reichenbach documented the reports of 'sensitives' to seeing emanations from crystals and magnets in total darkness and detecting alternations of electric current. They could also perceive an aura surrounding the human body.

invaluable. The sac at the end of the dental root may be totally obliterated by passing creosote into it, either through the canal or by an opening made through the gum and process. Its combination with iodine is valuable in this respect, especially with scrofulous and syphilitic patients.'

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Reichenbach studied the various manifestations of this vital force in its relationship to electricity, magnetism, and chemistry. He experimented with its connection to water-witching (or dowsing), mesmerism, and similar psychic subjects. He tried to show that the force could move objects without conscious effort, as in the table-turning of the Spiritualists.

However, Reichenbach was neither a Spiritualist nor a mesmerist. His interest was purely scientific, his hundreds of experiments were conducted with empirical precision. Unfortunately, his experiments ran both against the dominant mechanistic view of the universe held by most mid-nineteenth-century scientists and had a significant methodological flaw. While he could and did produce a wide range of positive results, he was never able to demonstrate his major causative agent, the od. He was never able to eliminate a variety of possible causes, both paranormal and mundane, for the effects.

Reichenbach was an expert on meteorites, and the discoverer of kerosene, and paraffin. In 1832, he discovered Creosote (and other coal-tar products such as eupion, and pittacal (pitch)) in its wood-tar form, when he found it both in the tar and in pyroligneous acids obtained by a dry distillation of beechwood by mixing acetic acid and wood tar. Because pyroligneous acid was known as an antiseptic and meat preservative, Reichenbach conducted experiments by dipping meat in a dilute solution of distilled creosote. He found that the meat was dried without undergoing putrefaction and had attained a smoky flavour. This led Reichenbach to reason that creosote was the antiseptic component contained in smoke, and he further argued that the creosote he had found in wood tar was also in coal tar, as well as amber tar and animal tar, in the same abundance as in wood tar. He found it to be a very effective protein coagulator and the following year used it to treat toothache. When combined with formalin to produce formocresol, which has been used for many years in the mummification of pulps and pulp tomies in deciduous teeth..In recent years, concerns have been expressed regarding its possible carcinogenic properties. Sources: <https://www.dental-nursing.co.uk/features/a-whiff-of-a-problem> ,

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/science/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/reichenbach-baron-karl-336>

Watt adds: ‘When the dentist desires an irritant, an escharotic<sup>381</sup> [a substance that kills unwanted or diseased tissue, usually skin or superficial growths like warts, leaving them to slough off], or an antiseptic, creosote will not disappoint him,’ but in conclusion he cautions: ‘A strange fallacy in regard to creosote has almost universal credence [...] that it promotes the decay of the teeth, Many physicians [...] believe that creosote causes decay of the teeth; yet they smoke their bacon, *to impregnate it with creosote*, to prevent its decay.’

The dental use of creosote would not have been unfamiliar to those draconian dentists of Netherne who, under direction from the superintendent, would frequently remove patient’s superior and inferior arches of teeth entirely, a practice associated also with Henry Cotton (May 18, 1876 – May 8, 1933). Cotton was an American psychiatrist, who, during his tenure as medical director of the New Jersey State Hospital at Trenton (now Trenton Psychiatric Hospital), from 1907 to 1930, and together with his staff, deployed experimental surgery and bacteriology techniques on patients. These included routinely removing some or all of patients' teeth (as well as tonsils, spleens, colons, ovaries, and other organs). These pseudoscientific procedures persisted even after statistical reviews disproved Cotton's claims of high cure rates and revealed high mortality rates because of these procedures. Cotton’s attitude to patient care was in some respects ‘humane’; he abolished the use of mechanical restraints for patients and required staff to meet daily to discuss outpatient care, he was

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von-1788-1869

<sup>380</sup> George Watt, *The Dental Register*, Vol XX, No 1, January 1886 pp 12-14

<sup>381</sup> An ‘eschar’ (Greek: ἐσχάρᾱ, romanized: *eskhara*; Latin: *eschara*) is a slough or piece of dead tissue that is cast off from the surface of the skin, particularly after a burn injury, but also seen in gangrene, ulcer, fungal infections, necrotizing spider wounds, tick bites associated with spotted fevers and exposure to cutaneous anthrax. The term ‘eschar’ is not interchangeable with ‘scab’. An eschar contains necrotic tissue whereas a scab is composed of dried blood and exudate, from: Dorland's Medical Dictionary (1890)



committed to having psychiatric nurses trained, ensured that attendants were retrained and disciplined, introduced occupational therapy, removed cells, and had fire alarms installed (fires were a major danger of institutional life). But notwithstanding his 'humane' approach, Cotton's medical practices were truly horrific. Believing that certain mental illnesses were caused by bodily infections (and not heredity),<sup>382</sup> Cotton was convinced that surgical intervention was beneficial. Cotton therefore doggedly pursued a surgical programme, despite evidence being presented to him that it was useless and cruel and countless patients were either mutilated or lost their lives.<sup>383</sup>

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<sup>382</sup> A medically-trained psychiatrist, Cotton adhered to the then commonly-held medical 'focal infection' theory which held that localized infections (often asymptomatic) – including tooth decay – can cause chronic and systemic diseases, including *mental illness*. Cotton was reacting against an ongoing revolution in the understanding of psychiatric illness (including Freud's psychoanalytic theories). 'Focal infection' is an ancient medical concept, which was given new life at the turn of the previous centuries. Henry Maudsley, the doyen of British 'Alienists' (psychiatrists), (after whom London's Maudsley Hospital is named, and son-in-law of Netherne's architect, G.T. Hine) in the closing decades of the 19th century had postulated a connection between 'morbid poisons' and delirium.

'Alienist' was used to describe those who worked in psychology. It has been suggested that 'alienist' originated from the French word *aliene*, meaning 'insane', thus the noun *alieniste* (or alienist in English) was used to refer to someone who treated the 'insane' person who 'alienated' from their fundamental self or personality, thus in a state of 'madness'.

<sup>383</sup> Freckleton (2005) singles out the following hideous example: 'Cotton's] attack on focal sepsis persisted. An 18-year-old girl with agitated depression successively had her upper and lower molars extracted, a tonsillectomy, sinus drainage, treatment for an infected cervix, removal of intestinal adhesions — all without

effecting improvement in her psychiatric condition. Then the remainder of her teeth were removed and she was

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A fence, once creosoted, can be considered as having significant, although not complete, protection against excessively weathering and other forms of natural deterioration. The fence itself is typically constructed from relatively economical kiln-dried, evergreen softwood, usually pine, larch, or spruce. The creosote, in significantly darkening the naturally pale wood of the fence, causes it to contrast strongly with the pale brick walls to which it is attached, or ‘anchored’ to, and on which it depends for the staunchest of support.

The reinforcing magic of such easily achieved darkening (of the wood) enchants most strangely and persuasively, masking the innate fragility of highly combustible wood<sup>384</sup>; the barrier stained with resilient creosote appears straightway formidable, more robust and impenetrable than it indeed is. There is therefore a *cosmetic* but very real *deterrent strength* obtained by the application of creosote. Creosote also causes that with which it is stained to resonate with a symbolic strength derived not only from the powerful role it has played in the history of modern dentistry, as protector and preservative but from the strength of the personality of its discoverer, Karl von Riechenbach (1788-1869), whose serious researches in the auras of humankind, causes the fence, by simple association, to radiate with the aura of his aura. And maybe the fear- and derision-defying confidence of the man of reason, these men of science.

*It may be added that the height of this structure would make it easily scalable, and, as has been mentioned, almost any motor vehicle, driven inattentively, recklessly, or maliciously, would effortlessly trample it.*

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sent home, pronounced cured’.

<sup>384</sup> Actual fragility, as well as relative fragility, that is by comparison to the brickwork on which this fence depends for support at both ends

Many of the properties in this estate are decoratively ‘faced’ with pale brickwork. This is intended to create a springlike effect summoning notions of eternal youth, newness, and freshness, with notes of that lightest of English informality: the pale beige-linen summer suit. Darker, more austere brickwork would not achieve this effect. Deciding whether the fashion for such fresh-looking brickwork is disingenuous is difficult. It mitigates any shame the owner feels in visibly having achieved the acquisition of so emphatically imposing a dwelling and masks the severity and rapaciousness attitudes of those who would need to acquire the capital needed to purchase them. But in our age, we are very familiar with images portraying successful bankers and powerful politicians wearing a ‘mufti’ of espadrilles and piqué tennis-style shirts, a uniform which affirms their privileged status by the means they intend to conceal it.

The clean-and-new look is the inverse of insane-and-dirty. Tell me about hygiene and mental health: a healthy mind, a healthy body, and compulsive handwashing. The fence, acting as a barrier, is well placed to keep without that which has no business being within. It pre-emptively purges the organism but prevents contagion *ab initio*. Being made conspicuous will affirm and enhance its profound role. The fence prevents unauthorised entry to those private, side, and rear parts of both dwellings as well as to their respective private gardens. It also screens and protects those using the garden from any unwelcome gaze.

Standard garden fencing is six feet tall, the minimum height assuring privacy. Redolent of the ecclesiastical triptych, the fence, or barrier, comprises three sections in an A-B-A scheme.

Likened to more easily corruptible sentinels, two single openable doors are discretely situated either side of a larger, blatantly immovable, implacably static central panel. That there is no visible door ‘furniture’ not merely implies but affirms that these doors may be unlocked and opened exclusively from within the private confines of the property at the sole behest of those

already behind them. Doors this discreet are not designed to signpost access to the properties but rather exist exclusively to confer on those *inside* the privilege of offering access or exiting the property at will.

The central section of the fence is a climactic centrepiece. Larger and more imposing than the 'weaker' flanking sections (the doors), the central section connects decisively to the ground beneath it (as doors need to swing freely to function, space beneath them is therefore indispensable). However, there is zero gaps beneath this central section and thus, no daylight emerges. There are, in short, no gaps in this armour. This structure, while effectively 'merely' two-dimensional, is dignified with its own 'skirting' or base, which mirrors that of the house to its left.

The several contrasting red brick lines emphasise the horizontality (and bulk) of the property on the right and dramatize the presence of the fence. To all intents and purposes, the fence interrupts the line of sight these decorative lines suggest; the lower pair of horizontal red lines collide with the fence, a clash exacerbated by the verticality of the fence posts.

Two paths, separated by lawn, lead to these two partially concealed fence doors. The fact that the viewer's eye is literally 'led down the garden path' makes the barrier seem even more abrupt, almost aggressive.

Two drainpipes, one attached to each house, appear to be 'influenced' by the fence. Both are dark, like the fence, creating a visual kinship; their configuration with the fence implies a further trinity: pipe-fence-pipe.

The pipe on the left is closer to the fence as if pulled towards it. At the bottom of the wall is a kind of skirting or base, which means that the pipe can only uniformly 'hug' by the wall by

‘kinking’ or ‘bending’ to accommodate the unanticipated irregularity. Yes, that vertical post connecting the fence to this wall is indeed cut to accommodate this feature, but being heavier (or thicker) than that post attaching the fence to the other house, it does not seem especially weakened by this feature; if anything, it shows strength in the manner it meets the challenge.

The drainpipe on the righthand side strikes the viewer as less encumbered (the wall to which it is attached is straight, offering no resistance) and, therefore, at liberty to have wandered from the fence.

Although the fence seems to be saying: ‘dare come no further’ and offers no hint of what might be concealed behind it (a scary mirror image of what is in front of it, death, abyss (see Larry Sultan’s ‘Swimming Pool’ photo). Or do the lawn and paths simply ‘emanate’ from this structure – generated or spawned by it? Its forbidding aspect is countered by the sunnier notion that the fence may be capable of sliding open, its sections disappearing into the walls of the houses it is connected to. Or perhaps less felicitously, the fence may be capable of pivoting 90° on its two posts and forming a kind of absurd head-crushing roof structure or shelter... Or can the entire fence pivot around a vertical central point like a revolving door?

The one priority keeping us together is our shared aim: your exclusion.

Our insanity is our affair, and we do not grant you the power to see inside us.

This ‘fence’: a vestigial reminder of the mentalities of Netherne hospital.



*Figure 98: The Short Fence: Drainpipe, photo by author*

The architecture of Netherne has many 90-degree angled corners in which you can neither find privacy, nor nestle, nor even hide.



Figure 99: Blind Mother with Daughter, photo by author.

Two ‘arts-and-crafts’ storage structures, one larger than the other are a blind mother and her daughter (fig. 99). The mother, mute, overbearing, but emotionally damaged, withholds any sign of tenderness. Severely dressed, but adorned in a way that aggressively emphasises her height and bulk. The mid-height cornice is worn to draw attention to her exaggerated height. The roof of the neglected daughter has been cropped; her deliberately rough *rustic* ‘medieval’ timber roof-supports are deteriorating. She is hollow, empty, and feels purposeless. That a insolent yellow sandbox has chosen to ‘shelter’ within her space, is not company its exploitation pure and simple. Even though the sandbox is perfectly able to withstand pretty much any kind of exposure, it has decided to take shelter, unnecessarily, spitefully; its



attachment to the ‘daughter’ is malicious. Experiencing negative or unpredictable responses from a caregiver has led her to develop an insecure ‘attachment style’. She sees adults or other seemingly autonomous beings as unreliable and may not trust them easily. With her insecure attachments she may avoid others, exaggerate her distress, show anger, fear, and anxiety or, as is the case here, simply refuse to engage with them.<sup>385</sup>



Figure 100: Insecure Attachment, photo by author.

Psychiatrist John Bowlby's last work, published posthumously, is a biography of Charles Darwin, which discusses Darwin's "mysterious illness" and whether it was psychosomatic. In this work, Bowlby explained:

‘To obtain a clear understanding of the current relationships between members of any family it is usually illuminating to examine how the pattern of family relationships has evolved. That

<sup>385</sup> Adapted: Morin (2019)

leads to a study of earlier generations, the calamities and other events that may have affected their lives and the patterns of family interaction that result. In the case of the family in which Darwin grew up, I believe such study to be amply rewarding. For that reason alone, it would be necessary to start with his grandfather's generation.'

Bowlby pointed out that Darwin suffered a curious denial about his mother's death, once he wrote in a letter expressing condolences, "never in my life having lost one near relation", and during a Scrabble-like game when another player added 'M' to 'OTHER', he stared long at the board then cried: 'There's no such word as M-OTHER'.<sup>386</sup>

British psychiatrist John Bowlby (1907-1990) wrote a biography of Charles Darwin; this, his last work, was published posthumously. Darwin claims to be concerned with a single, crucial question: 'Why are not all organic things linked together in an inextricable chaos?' (p. 453) [...] He does not wish to suggest, as many of his contemporaries held, that all classification systems are arbitrary, that is, mere products of the minds of the classifiers; he insists that there is a real order in nature. On the other hand, he does not wish to regard this order as a product of some spiritual or teleological power. [...] Like Kant before him, Darwin insists that the source of all error is semblance. Analogy, he says again and again, is always a 'deceitful guide' (see pp. 61, 66, 473). [...] Everything, for Darwin no less than for Nietzsche, is just what it appears to be...<sup>387</sup>

Bewildered men in suits (yes, in suits) carrying bricks in a film shot by Freudenberg; no one knows why they are doing this. Neither do I. One man stops and stands there, brick in hand, staring straight in front of him, thinking God knows what. He resumes his task as if he's

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<sup>386</sup> Holmes (1993)

<sup>387</sup> White (2019)

suddenly remembered something or someone has remotely thrown a switch. He has returned from another dimension.



*Figure 101: Freudenberg, still from film (Freudenberg 1954)*

### **Cut ‘n’ Slice**

A residential block is vertically divided, inexplicably (fig. 102). A sharp and narrow channel separates into two parts that ought to have remained whole. A lobotomy<sup>388</sup> (alt. leucotomy) is carried out to sever surgically most of the connections to and from the prefrontal cortex, the anterior of the brain's frontal lobes. Far more lobotomies were performed on women than on men: a 1951 study found that nearly 60% of American lobotomy patients were women, and

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<sup>388</sup> . Greek: λοβός lobos "lobe" & τομή tomē "cut, slice".

limited data shows that 74% of lobotomies in Ontario from 1948 to 1952 were performed on female patients.

By 1951, almost 20,000 lobotomies had been performed in the United States and even proportionally more in the United Kingdom. 190. In 1942, ace neurosurgeon Eric Radley-Smith performed fifty lobotomies at Netherne, but with mixed results - as was usually the case. It is however clear from the numerous accounts of the 'lobotomy era' that post-operative monitoring was, unlike the 'procedure' itself, often but superficial. Would you like a cup of tea, dear? One of the objectives of the operation was to *quieten down* violent or difficult patients for the benefit of hard-pressed staff. Nurse J personally told me she can still recall finding 'really rather attractive' some smoothie who'd roll up from London in his flashy sports car to do lighting lobotomies. Show-off London-based neurosurgeon Wyle McKissock smugly estimated that a bilateral prefrontal leucotomy could be done in as little as *six minutes*. 'The operation was carried out with the primary object of relieving the most disturbed patients in the hospital quite independently of their poor prognosis. They formed a large proportion of the most violent, hostile, noisy, excited, destructive or obscene cases in the hospital; the type who distress their relatives upset the other patients and consume the time and energy which could be put into so much better purpose by the staff.' <sup>389</sup>

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<sup>389</sup> Dax and Smith (1943:182)





*Figure 102: Lobotomised Residential Block, photo by author.*

Those windows, wet with tears, suspended from thick whitewashing lines, are dry.



*Figure 103: Windows Wet with Tears, photo by author*



*Figure 104: Tutelary Deity, photo by author*





*Figure 105: 'Lurking: The Water Tower, photo by author*

Totemic Water Tower is a proud, panoptic overseer, a tutelary deity, and looming horror.  
(fig. 105).



*Figure 106: Recreation Hall (now Community Centre), photo by author*





*Figure 107: Precarious architectural elements falling from roof, illus. by author*



*Figure 108: Festooned in Animal Pelts, photo by author.*

Nature has but one use: to soften the transition between the horizontal and the vertical

*Figure 109: Softening the Transition, photo by author.*



*Figure 110: Presence, in Readiness, photo by author*



The semblance that each ‘UNIT’ is separate exists only to mislead. For, behind locked doors, each ‘UNIT’ interconnects with ALL OF its neighbours, and together they enjoy a shared, dark void, a massive inner space to which I am not privy and from which I am excluded. Each is impervious to light, knowledge, wisdom, and mercy.



*Figure 111: Locked and Regimented: storage boxes, photo by author*



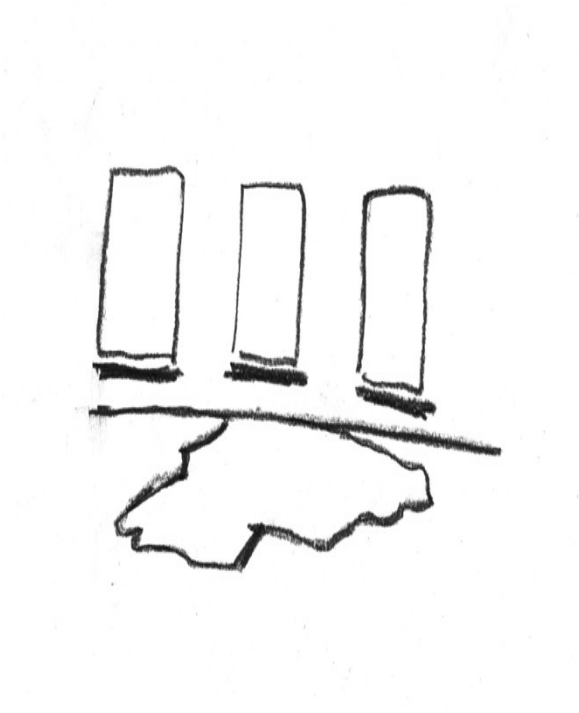
An enclosure, an exposure: Forever open a permanent unhealing wound. It needs protective solitude, secrecy. Its protection has been rudely breached, torn open. Any internal space is now barely hidden, its contents unwillingly on display.



*Figure 112: Doorless and Wounded, photo by author*

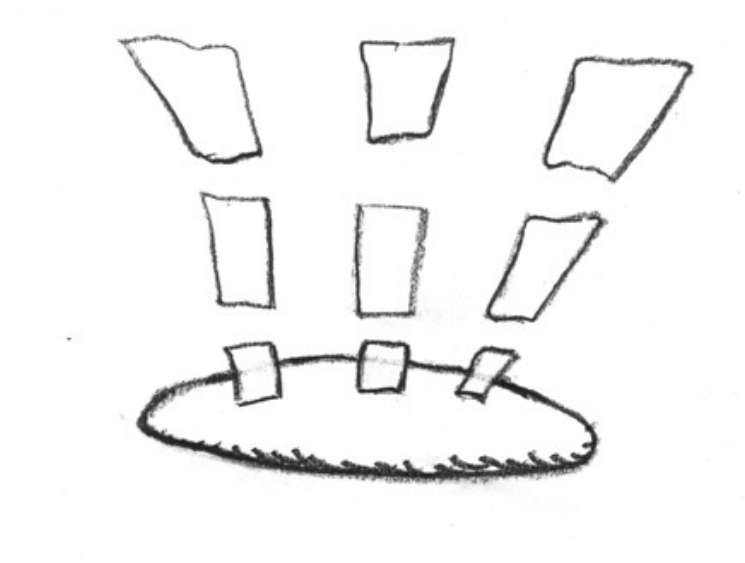
Denied privacy, being doorless is to be wounded. Deprived and traumatised, it remains trapped in an inward loop of pain. Powerless to conceal itself from paralysing examination, it cowers.

An imposed paved patio ‘signposts’ its poor inner life to whomever passes.



*Figure 113: Stoic Windows, illustration by author*      *Figure 114: Stoic Windows, photo by author,*

Three windows maintain a calm and stoic yet quietly domineering watch over a tremulous circular presence which, having become conscious of unflinching regard of its entirely self-appointed ‘guardians’, dares neither stray nor stir. Transfixed, terrified and traumatised.



*Figure 115: Emanating Circle, illustration by author*

A placid circular shape set solidly into the earth benignly emanates from itself rank upon rank of rectangles which, floating light as angels, awestruck, remain suspended, free of all gravity, blissfully transfixed by the circle's radiating power.





*Figure 116: Emanation, photo by author*

The terrifying confidence of extrusion. A tape-worming wooden fence is a tentacular extension of a house it has ingratiated itself with and then attached itself to. Improvised and potentially infinite, it can in effective extend the house's brick-built domain indefinitely, engulfing and appropriating wherever it so wishes to. Meanwhile, the house already rigid, and inherently immobile, is alarmed by the threat of such elasticity. The fence, smug, self-assured, tethers the house to road.



*Figure 117: The Tethering Fence, photo by author*

A sinuous fence solicitously tethers its ward – a ‘substantial’ property – preventing it from straying capriciously.

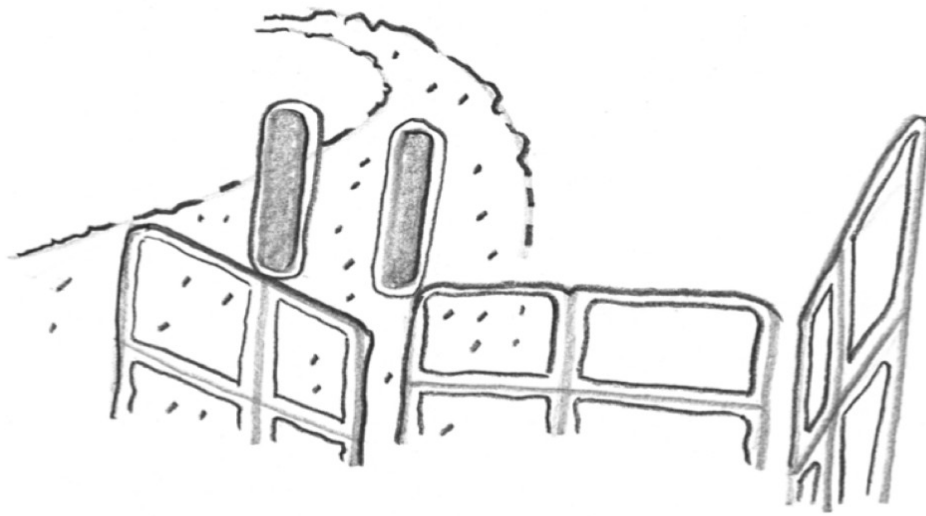


There is an illusory choice where a ‘new’ footpath beckons you (fig. 118). Its two posts insinuate something not quite clear. They fake that they echo the galvanised iron handrails and the barriers of the stairway opposite. More dissimulation.



*Figure 118: Free Will and Determinism, photo by author*

The ‘new’ footpath inveigles (fig. 119), whereas the road, clearly the ‘superior’ and more important of the two thoroughfares, is downgraded to becoming a humble subsidiary crossing between infinitely inferior routes.



*Figure 119: Free Will and Determinism, illustration by author*

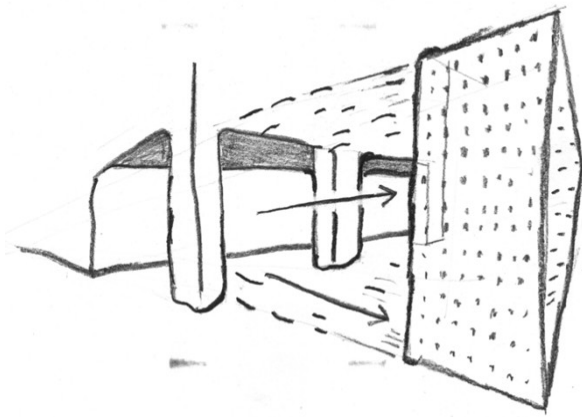


Figure 120: False Openness: Surgical Removal, photos and illustration by author

I pretend to promise you limited access/shelter yet refuse you.

I no longer know my mind. Parts of me have been surgically removed.

I am no longer aware of my 'unequivocal' domain, identified by pale paving.



*Figure 121: False Openness: After Surgery, photo by author*

More False Openness.

Hollowed out: lobotomy. Sly enclosure: attached without my consent or awareness.

Lobotomy: A once perfectly integrated solid is hollowed out by removing internal volumes.

Matching drain cover: a proxy/warning. A prohibited (impossible/impassable) 'side' access.

Its paved pathway lures but finally greets visitors with an implacable 'no.'





*Figure 122: False Openness: An Implacable 'No', photos by author*



*Figure 123: False Openness: An Implacable 'No', photo by author*



*Figure 124: Wormlike False Welcome, photo by author*

Vegetation gives mixed messages. While the entrance is cordial, even inviting, wormlike hedges (fig. 124), all but embracing the dwelling within – save for the gap they leave to entice you within - threaten to encircle you with a welcome seemingly so warm, so enthusiastic, it suffocates; a trap which literally strangles the unwary visitor by pressing the visitor's throat unless he dies.



## Equivocation

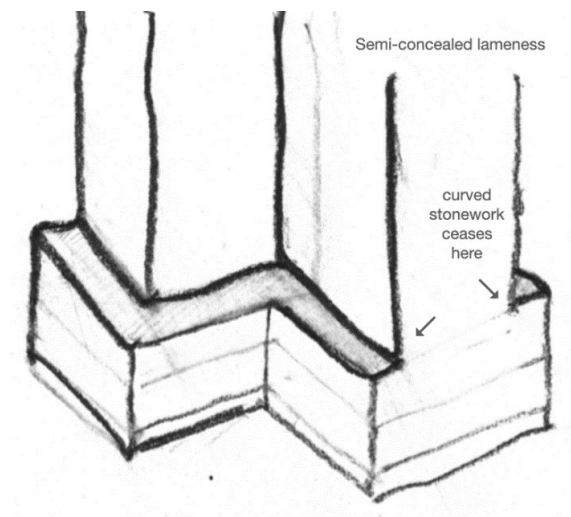


Figure 125: *Equivocation, photos and illustration by Author*

## Semi-concealed Lameness

Curved stonework ceases here. Curved sill abuts wall. White 'square' flags uncertainty. Does wall STOP, or ARREST the sill? Or does the sill PENETRATE the wall to continue within?





*Figure 126: Arrestation or Penetration? photo by author*

Pushing its best face forward, a protruding central wing (fig. 126) consumes volume from the (now diminished / shrunken) 'body' of what had originally been the main building. The wing grows at the expense of what it feeds on. Rude health. Overfed excrescence.

A wasteful, extravagant confluence of strictly angled conversations (fig. 127). Dominant protrusions. No part hears the other parts. Aggression.



*Figure 127: Dominant Protrusion, photo by author*



*Figure 128: Dominant Protrusions, photo by author*

Two almost ‘compatible’ roofs (figs. 126-128) hold back from joining, from sealing their connection, fusing their identities. Unwilling to compromise, and fiercely independent, they remain insistently apart, separated. But mutual resentment piles up between them conspicuously. A messy suppuration – a kind of efflorescence – disowned by both, now tenuously connects the roofs. But because this resentment is covert it is denatured and manifests merely as formless detritus – impossible to recognise as anger and hostility

materialised. This, turned to mere dead leaves, spills innocuously from their almost-juncture and, mutually disowned, falls silently to the ground. While both share equal responsibility, their dogged separateness and enduring, shared suspicion keep both parties in a state of mutually hostile ‘denial’.



*Figure 129: Resisting, photo 1 by author*



*Figure 130: Resisting photo 2 by author*

## **Windowless**

Blindness and muteness (self-inflicted). Has no intention of developing, yielding, or listening. It is severely ‘pathologically defended’ and has become a dangerous, windowless presence, forever alert to danger.





*Figure 131: Emotional Pain, photo by author*

Rejection sensitive dysphoria (RSD) is when you experience severe emotional pain because of a failure or feeling rejected. This condition is linked to ADHD and experts suspect it happens due to differences in brain structure. Those differences mean your brain can't regulate rejection-related emotions and behaviours, making them much more intense.

intense mood swings that you manage to hide from others

suppressing feelings of anger or denying that you feel angry

withdrawing when you're upset

avoiding talking to others who have upset you and cutting them off instead

blaming yourself whenever there's a conflict

persistent feelings of guilt and shame

having a "thin skin" and taking things personally

feeling like you're a burden to others

people-pleasing, even at a cost to yourself

social anxiety and self-isolation.

fear of being alone, yet pushing people away at the same time<sup>390</sup>

### **Towards a Cemetery**

In deep shade, the large field distances the ‘vale of death’ from residential areas, the dead from the living. The living are in darkness.



*Figure 132: Darkness Beckons, photo by author*

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<sup>390</sup> *Borderline Personality Disorder* (no date) *healthline.com* accessed: <https://www.healthline.com/health/quiet-bpd#symptoms>

The accounts making up the body of this chapter are attempts to evoke and meld together the feelings, associations, and sensations I experienced in my visits to Netherne. There is also a certain ‘madness’ in the way the tone of voice of these accounts. This ‘tone’ was unconsciously adopted and is an alienated ‘voice’ expressing the strangeness that a place may have, especially when explored as intensely as Netherne has been. But from these accounts - that test how so resonant a place might be evoked - other kinds of knowledge emerge. And it is these ‘other kinds’ which resolve (for me) what ‘Navigating Netherne’ has ultimately been about. Yes, places undoubtedly ‘have’ (or evoke) feelings but these feelings can only be ‘navigated’ if they are distinguished or grouped, at least broadly. Such differentiation is needed if we are going to appreciate the crucial role that language plays in how we experience place.

Many of the preceding accounts involve ‘emotional’ readings where empathy and imagined feelings of confusion, suffering, and an unfeeling, almost autistic alienation influence how Netherne is experienced. Previously, struggling to differentiate emotion from affect, I decided that affect would refer less to the emotions that we endow places with, and rather more to the ways a place might strike us (e.g., threatening, oppressive, sinister, tranquil, etc.), some of which may more properly be described as ‘atmospheres’ (which are researched elsewhere (e.g. Böhme, 2020; Griffero, 2016). But places, and particularly architecture, seem to engage us physically. It is as if we are reading the form of a building via identifying its configuration with how we feel parts of our own body (what I have described previously as ‘somatic identification’); sensing an architectural structure’s balance, weight, tension, inclines, precarity, angularity, fragility, robustness, poise, etc. by associating how we feel these same qualities in our bodies. Moreover, from observing Netherne assiduously, and writing about it, I notice that the words we reach for and habitually use to describe buildings are (inevitably)

drawn from the vocabulary – and especially the verbs – derived from our own embodied experience (perhaps we may say that our embodied-identification with buildings is, in the deepest sense, a kind of ‘personification’). For, not only do buildings ‘lean’ but columns ‘sit’, windows ‘break’ a surface / a wall and sometimes, extending vertically, ‘break through’ a horizontal cornice to terminate in an arch (a ‘serliana’), decorative plaster coving is ‘interrupted’ when it ‘meets’ an adjoining right-angled wall, the rusticated brickwork on the pilasters of Netherne’s lodge feel as if ‘muscle’, a roofed awning ‘cowers’ beneath a larger overhanging roof, etc. Some of the words I instance (mainly verbs) are used more often than others, but *all* carry a clear sense of bodily identification, as do also, for instance, ‘clash’, ‘vie’, ‘hold’, ‘spread’, ‘support’, etc. In some way, we ‘activate’ buildings using the words we habitually use to describe them. They become protagonists.

I believed that when I set off on this research journey – this ‘psychogeography’ – I was hoping to answer why and how a certain class of buildings ‘meant’ so much to me. In my opening chapter I affirm that I ‘knew’ that in visiting the remains of Netherne asylum ‘I was also revisiting childhood’ and ‘searching for something without quite knowing what’ but intuiting that the asylum held some special ‘meaning’ for me. At that point I imagined that I was looking at how I (and others) map emotionally intense memories onto place and how such mapping may help navigate the nostalgia and feelings that places stand for. I did not anticipate that in pondering this matter I would be obliged to begin modestly mapping out the very different varieties of feelings we bring to architecture and with which we read it, taking me where I least expected. This is the value of research!





## Chapter 7: Conclusions

### 7.1 Conclusions

Are the feelings we typically and involuntarily associate with place (and tend blithely to trivialise as ‘involuntarily subjective projection’) nothing more than transient, meaningless moods and states of mind? As ‘meaningful’, say, as suspected changes of weather are to the couch potato who glancing out of the window says ‘yeah man, guess it looks like rain...’.

In this project, such unreflective dismissal, denying the richness of *actual* experience, is opposed by a more generous account – one which understands spatial experiences, as encounters, as ‘deals’ – or even better, ‘relationships’ (Buber 1970<sup>391</sup>) – *actively* brought into being *between* subject and place via mutual dialogue and a shared dynamic<sup>392</sup>.

Notwithstanding its methodological ambiguity, Psychogeography may seem to offer an appropriate framework for exploring such reactions to place. And although some practitioners frankly claim emotion as psychically *intrinsic* to place, recently ‘academic’ psychogeographic analysis eschews such debatable metaphysic. Instead, place is approached more drily, more *evidentially*. But here’s the caveat: contemporary academicized psychogeography, in using ‘place’ to (1) prove, or ‘illustrate’, overarching ideological perspectives, or to (2) confirm or ‘explain’ a researcher’s pre-existing *assumptions* and *sentiments*, or to (3) demonstrate that we need the ‘human’ to understand place (rather than acknowledging we can instrumentalise ‘place’ to understand the human<sup>393</sup>) risks thwarting the experiential complexity of the *encounter*.

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<sup>391</sup> See ‘postscript’ at conclusion of this chapter.

<sup>392</sup> Froeyman (2014:18) speculates that a ‘Buberian’ historiography would involve as much a ‘*personal and existential*’ relation as a cognitive one’.

<sup>393</sup> Perhaps where contemporary human geography’s covert infatuation with psychogeography kicks in.

Pains have been taken to show how our interactions with (and readings of) place may be guided, jolted, subverted, and ultimately enriched by having inventive narratives interact with place – precisely *because* conscientiously reading ideological or personally-held positions *into* place risks depriving place of its own manifold potential meanings, denying what place alone may have the power to stimulate. I argue in effect for ‘emotional empiricism’ – remaining open to what we feel in a place, and the potential insights, including perceptions, our feelings may enable. This points arguably to a variety of ‘psychogeography’ better defined as perverse, or ‘resistant’, reading of place; *resisting* our utterly characteristic failure to engage wholly with place – emotionally, and corporeally (Merleau-Ponty, 2012); *resisting* a place’s deathlike spell of familiarity in order to be able to unlock its interpretational potential – its polyvalence, emotional richness, ambiguity, and genuine embodied strangeness<sup>394</sup>. Place (as has long been recognised) may, after all, be more powerfully influential than it suits us to recognise<sup>395</sup>.

My case study, Netherne, poignant and complex, provides many opportunities for levels of recognition. It is a place of contradiction – its history, richly layered; its institutional architecture, ambitious, commanding, majestic (but also pointlessly overbearing – and redundant) – confident Edwardian architectural tropes masking the unease of imperial decline and of reason’s failure to address the very condition it was applied to dominate: madness – foreign, incommensurable; its ‘idyllic seclusion’, a place of convenient concealment, easy

<sup>394</sup> Arguably, all deep (or close) reading of place is ‘resistant’, for place too often pass for mere background, a distant locus, disconnected from the business, pleasure, suffering that unfolds there.

<sup>395</sup> It is of interest, for instance, that numerous rabbinical commentators (with the exception of Ibn Ezra) take ‘the place’ (in ‘Jacob came to the place.’ Genesis 28:11) to be no less than a synonym for *God*. For more, see:

<https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/164178?lang=bi>

<https://aish.com/baruch-hamakom/>

neglect, and hopelessness – and its legacy of suffering now buried behind that very English, façade of middle-class stability and normality: affluent English village-life (the tropes of Hine’s Edwardian architecture live on wanly in the silly detailing of its contemporary houses). Above all, in my encounters with Netherne, it is appropriate to acknowledge that two keys (or ‘registers’), prompted by Netherne’s history and architecture – infinite sadness and madness – have unlocked just some of the many possible readings of Netherne’s sprawling domain.

Using ‘improbable’ narratives to disrupt habitual, non-reflective encounters is to acknowledge that places constitute *opportunities* – where ‘narratives’, taking the form of stories, descriptions, explanations, metaphors, allegories, associations, or digressions, may actively exploit and expand a place’s potential meanings. Attentiveness to our surroundings can challenge, sharpen, and deepen our awareness of what we feel, and therefore of who, and *where*, we are. Moses’s awareness of place was transformed when informed by God that he stands upon sacred ground (Exodus 3:1-15). Arguably, we all stand upon sacred ground. Yet we overlook place; relating to it habitually, we stifle its many *potential* meanings. What we unthinkingly assume to be ‘meaningful’ about our surroundings can be fruitfully contrasted with aspects of place that whisper to us incoherently. I doubt that neon-lit ‘ultimate’<sup>396</sup> definitive meanings of place exist, but surely an infinity of unexplored meanings await our discovery.

It is clear that a building may be approached historically or stylistically, evaluated as cultural symbol, appraised for its functionality, condemned for worsening our surroundings, etc., but it can also be approached *emotionally*; what it *feels like* to be near or within that place - how

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<sup>396</sup> Philosopher, J. L. Austin (1911-1960) said that ‘the truth, when found, is likely to be complicated, low key, and undramatic’ (Rowe, 2023).

its architecture *affects* us. I propose that we may choose *which* emotional perspective on place to adopt (and to be also ‘empirical’ about our emotional responses to place). As mentioned, I have, for several reasons, opted to explore Netherne under the ‘dark star’ of sadness – I need not have. We are each free to rehearse a multiplicity of emotional responses to place;<sup>397</sup> exercising such freedom empowers us to *re-appropriate* the very space we all share, which, by right, belongs to us all (Singley 2019:9).

Throughout this enquiry, I have been acutely aware that commonly-used terminologies – feeling, emotion, affect, psychogeography – are infuriatingly vague and continue to deserve further exploration. Moreover, I acknowledge that endeavouring to use ‘psychogeography’ while simultaneously critiquing it poses inevitable problems. Additionally, as the introduction announces, the relationship between feeling and interpretation is fraught, as is the connection between interpretation and narrative (all interpretations have narrative-like rhetorical power). Not least, there has been a concern about how best to situate *creative* interpretations of place and mood within the context of theoretical and historical discussion. I have attempted to resolve this concern by considering *all materials* included within this project as having emotional / affective valences.

This thesis has aimed to answer questions regarding the relationship between place and feeling and how what is known about place influences perceptions of and feelings about it. In

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<sup>397</sup> This contrasts with the metaphorization of place beloved of the Romantics where poets tend to read personal messages into nature. In his ‘Boat Stealing’ passage in Wordsworth’s ‘Prelude’ (1799 & 1850) the poet gives natural surroundings the role of the poet’s conscience.

response to these questions, CHAPTER ONE orients the argument towards the relative lack of scholarship concerning this experiential conundrum, contextualising my interest in it by drawing on personal experiences of a certain institutional typology. It builds on work concerning affective perspectives of place by contemporary geographers and provides a rationale for selecting Netherne Asylum as the case study for this project. In addition, it refers to the acknowledged perplexity concerning the narrativizing of architecture, as well as a scarcity of similar emotional experiences of places in autoethnographic literature. It references voices from several disciplines, including geography, art-history, narratology, psychology, phenomenology, and even theology to activate the enquiry. Chapter One also summarises the broad aims of this research and explains the methods and methodologies I have used in pursuing it, while also flagging up some of the inherent complications of simultaneously utilising and critiquing its principal methodology, Psychogeography.

To uncover the narratives and the dominant meanings relating to Netherne and what makes it ‘effectively distinct’, CHAPTER TWO explores the general history of the mental institution, tracing its trajectory with a particular interest in how the mentally ill were treated and the motives and worldviews involved. It notes that earlier responses to the mad were informed by religious outlooks seemingly favouring pity and benevolence, mandating that the mad be provided with benign protection. It notes that the advent of the Enlightenment and the hubristic pretensions based on acquiring scientific knowledge made organising the mad the principal method for ‘treating’ them. Relacing empathy, this age’s dominant methods - control, education, discipline, and pragmatism - became the staple of state or local-authority-sponsored custodial institutions.

CHAPTER THREE explores the evolution of architectural typologies emerging in the new 19th century field of asylum design. It discusses the design, layout, and style of Netherne,

situating these in the context of the architect's own opinions and beliefs, noting that interrogating madness itself is conspicuously absent from the architect's expressed priorities, notwithstanding his own 'therapeutically' oriented agenda. It also notes the intensely engineered, highly taxonomic architectural approaches to housing, feeding, and controlling the mad. It questions whether the task of 'organising' the mad 'substituted' the difficult challenge of understanding the mad, asking whether, in the absence of such understanding, asylum planning inadvertently reflected that madness it was architecturally representing. Chapter Three frames, above all, 19th-century asylum design as 'therapeutic architecture' where the asylum environment is envisaged as a treatment source. It notes the correspondence between therapeutic architecture – which aspires to evoke mood – and psychogeography – which seeks to *identify and locate* mood.

Taking the asylum as its epoch's best possible interpretation of madness (and architecture as invariably interpretative), CHAPTER FOUR explores the interpretation of architecture by examining several types of interpretation influencing recent architectural discourse. In connection with this, it asks whether emotional and affective responses to buildings may also be considered 'interpretative' and, if they are, whether psychogeography is then an interpretative methodology.

CHAPTER FIVE examines in detail a dominant topic and the dominant methodology of this thesis: psychogeography. In introducing the psycho-geographical method (as a methodological approach to be used for the empirical research), it explores how this apparently 'subjective' method may be traced via its emergence from psychotherapeutic/Freudian ideas, and its kinship with psychoanalysis's negative hermeneutic (Scott-Baumann 2009). It explores the surrealists' interest in aimless wandering and chance (encounters) and surrealism's 'epistemological wager', implicit in its artistic campaign to undermine and



destabilise meaning. It explores instances of attributing (sometimes inexplicable) moods to place in surrealist novels by Breton and Aragon. It indicates the importance of narrativization (of place) to what will eventually become ‘psychogeography’. It charts the appropriation of psycho-geographic techniques by the Situationists, who give ‘psychogeography’ its name and who frame it as a quasi- or pseudo-scientific practice replete with a method (the *dérive*) to assist the practitioner to encounter the mood of place. This chapter considers the provocative confusion surrounding psychogeography as methodology and looks to clarify psychogeography’s ambiguous status by exploring six contemporary studies which deploy psychogeography: five by academics and one where a high-school teacher using psychogeography to augment her students’ affective sensibility to their urban environment. This chapter asks whether, in these examples, psychogeography is used for empirical emotional research or as primarily an ‘evidence-finding’ tool supporting an overarching ideological perspective. In analysing these studies, it also asks implicitly whether psychogeography is a *de facto* methodology and whether it is suited to confirming emotionally-led observations or rather to producing ‘new’ (affective) knowledge about places.

CHAPTER SIX provides a thematic introduction to the ‘sad and mad’ psychogeographical observations appearing later in the same chapter, providing an account of the geology and local history of Netherne, and referencing the *genius loci* (‘spirit of place’) – mythological in nature, but now co-opted by both phenomenology and psychogeography to suggest those underlying ‘forces’ conceivably expressing themselves via a place’s mood.

The largest part of CHAPTER SIX exhaustively reworks discussions rehearsed in the preceding chapters, but does so as narratives (Butler-Kisber 2018). The narratives, embodying a range of moods, are an empirical approach and effectively respond

performatively to the key concern I posed at the outset, i.e. what we feel about place relates to how it is perceived, and vice versa. The narrative is the paradigmatic exemplar capable of connecting themes previously discussed: history, empathy, emotion, interpretation, and so on. This material analysis uses an embodied, immersive methodology that enables an understanding of a place where meanings and emotions compete for dominance. It also contributes empirically to studies on the lived experience of a place by exploring the meanings a location has and can evoke. I have shown that meanings accumulate and prompt their own multiplication.

Secondly, this thesis's contribution is conceptual in that its focus on the importance of emotional and affective apprehension has extended our understanding of the potential plethora and mutability of architectural 'meaning'.

Thirdly, I contribute to the literature on psychogeography and place by developing a methodology which augments psychogeography by using it autoethnographically to make complex 'ficto-critical' (Frichot, Stead 2022) narratives out of places from sensory, embodied, and emotionally inflected observational methods. I have also adjusted my method by incorporating a 'dialogic' approach (Buber 1970) where a place is 'addressed' to elicit its 'response', and have born in mind Bruner's insight that 'identity' – in this case, of buildings and places – is the story these tell (Bruner 1990, McAdams 1997, Butler-Kisber 2018: Chap. 5). Through applying this mixed methodology, I have been able to observe how a place is sensed and experienced, its inherent instability, and the underlying fragility of atmosphere and of self, in ways that would have been impossible without personal engagement, self-interrogation, and emotional investment.

I have also contributed to understanding psychogeography through appraising its current uses. I have shown that current academic work deploying psychogeography tends to do so as a framework for citing ‘evidence’ that will confirm a pre-existing ideological position (and not (which I favour) as a way of uncovering new knowledge). I also critique the contemporary use of ‘psychogeography’ methodologically: it fails to justify interviewees being asked how a place ‘feels’ and fails to question the reliability of interviewees’ answers (casual, vague, and shallow) or the rigour of the questions posed to them.

Additionally, I have contributed to the debate on the experience of place by proposing specific meanings that differentiate emotion from kinds of affect. Emotions are sentiments that we invest places with, whereas affects are sensations attributed to place and the somatic identifications that occur with a place (where place seems to ‘reach’ out to us).<sup>398</sup>

### **7.1.1 Evaluations**

Some of the methodological advantages that I have benefitted from are also limitations. The extreme mutability of mood is noted, as is this project’s dependence on purely imaginative reinterpretations of place, which conform to no obvious criteria. Netherne’s experience on different days depended on varying intensities and atmospheres. The ‘idiosyncratic’ voice apparent in narratives in Chapter Seven emerged spontaneously from the sense of derangement engendered by Netherne and the style of observations recorded and seems unconsciously to owe something to the writings of W.G. Sebald. Using narratives, I show that feelings, especially where pain and suffering prevail, may, with the addition of an idiosyncratic and ludic logic, be used to tell a tale of a place where buildings and surroundings become, or speak, as *protagonists*.

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<sup>398</sup> See previous discussions, pp 28, and 358-359.

### 7.1.2 Avenues For Further Research

Regarding the asylum, many visual representations exist (films and photographs), offering opportunities to research the imagery of the asylum that inevitably influences our conceptualisations of madness. Further research could also explore the kinds of experience I have focussed on, but regarding a far less emotionally encumbered and ‘ordinary’ location, places of less intrinsic interest, potentially more abstract, formal, and where there is more likely a paucity of associative narratives. For example, research could be undertaken on experiencing a place from an entirely fixed position (Andy Warhol’s film, ‘Empire State’, comes to mind). Research focusing on the roles of descriptive language and narrative in experiencing a place is probably of greater interest. The inevitably anthropomorphic or somatically identified language has been mentioned in the conclusion of the previous chapter.

Psychogeography as practice and methodology deserves further research. If it is indeed a methodology, this requires further definition. Regarding the history of ideas, possible connections between the surrealists’ interest in the emotional valence of place, the emergence of phenomenology, and *its* emphasis on *experiencing* place deserve further research.

Although largely outside the remit of this project, it may be worth exploring the affinity recent and current phenomenologically influenced philosophical research into the ‘atmosphere’ (Griffero, Schmitz, Böhme, et al.) has with certain psychogeographic currents. Beyond the confines of this project, but noted, is the need for further research into the relationship between the origins of psychogeography and its interest in the mood-generating power of place with the Romantics and the so-called ‘romantic fallacy’.

Last (but not least), this thesis observes our deep-seated need and the inherent difficulties of interpreting the material world, to ‘make sense’ of it, identify and name its perplexing

phenomena, and know how we feel about them. This area, this hermeneutical *blind spot*, merits further research as it seems that this entire subject area has far-reaching implications for theology, how we respond to art, how we attach meaning to ‘chance’ occurrences, and so on.<sup>399</sup>

### 7.1.3 A Poet and a Deadly Banquet

Frances Yates introduces her book on the art of memory with a story from classical Greece about a professional poet, Simonides of Ceos (c 556- 468 BCE), engaged in entertaining his employer and guests (Yates 1966:17). Simonides is interrupted ‘mid-panegyric’, by a messenger requesting he step outside the banquet for a moment as ‘someone’ wishes to speak to him. Complying, Simonides steps out but finds no one. While he wonders who and where the mysterious would-be interlocutor is, the entire banqueting-hall roof caves in, killing everyone beneath it, host and guests alike. Having miraculously escaped the disaster, Simonides, who can recall perfectly where each of the victims was sitting, helps bereaved families identify and ritually honour their dead.<sup>400</sup> This impressive feat of memory leads to Simonides being credited inventor of a so-called ‘art’ of memory: the art of training the mind to remember many phenomena in an ordered manner through conscientiously correlating them with specific physical places. Centuries later, Roman statesman and philosopher, Cicero (106-43 BCE), writes that, to develop memory ‘it is necessary to store images in places, so that the order of the places will preserve the order of things’<sup>401</sup> (in her history of this mnemotechnique, Yates explores its subsequent philosophical and mystical developments). This

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<sup>399</sup> See Ginzburg 2013, but also postmodern novel ‘The Crying of Lot 49’ (Pynchon, T. 1966), and the writings of Chassidic Rabbi, Tzoddok HaCohen.

<sup>400</sup> The confluence here of death, memory and forgetting merits further exploration but this is beyond the scope of the current work

<sup>401</sup> Cicero De oratore, 11, lxxxvi, 351-4 (cited, Yates (1966))

curious chapter of intellectual history need not detain us in detail, but it does illustrate how we use buildings, and images of buildings, not only to shelter ourselves but as homes for much else too, for memories, and feelings. As Bachelard (Bachelard 2010) observes, buildings populate our imaginations; we give them many roles because of the profound and complex significance they have for us.

Throughout this project, I have pondered the association of feelings with the place, aware that my reflections have been primarily concerned with *buildings*, not with the natural features of landscape, which are arguable, more typically the province of classical aesthetics whose task it is to interrogate the beautiful, the sublime (and perhaps the picturesque)<sup>402</sup>. We could perhaps also add the uncanny<sup>403</sup> to this list of categories which, thanks in particular to Freud and his essay on the subject, continues to haunt us. However, the importance of the ‘uncanny’ – ‘frightening because it is *not* known and familiar’ (Freud 2017:220) – to postmodern aesthetics makes it a bridge to those more variegated and existentially problematic feelings which I have sought to locate<sup>404</sup> and to ‘place’, which affects our perceptions and our manner of describing them. Perhaps the built environment is a more appropriate concomitant of our feelings than the natural landscape.

This project makes it apparent that in exploring such feelings, a *need* exists (as with mnemonics) to allocate feelings to place (appositely, Jane Rendell notes Freud’s frequent use of architectural imagery in his geographical evocations of the mind<sup>405</sup>). Does our possibly less

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<sup>402</sup> Böhme (2020) - (and perhaps the picturesque), and the atmosphere in general, i.e. the aura

<sup>403</sup> E.g. Vidler (1987)

<sup>404</sup> Wright p19 (1999) (cited by Rendell (2017)) Literary critic, Elizabeth Wright, writes of the uncanny that it acts as ‘a challenge to representation’ as instead of seeing the world as ‘ready-made’ it encourages to understand the world as a place of flux where it is in a constant process of ‘construction, destruction, and reconstruction’

<sup>405</sup> Rendell (2017)

emotionally dyslexic age, perhaps ready to distinguish finer shades of feeling, need to externalise them and lay them out geographically? Does use places to navigate feelings ('specialising feelings through linking them to places) make feelings more navigable? I don't know.

Even as I write this, Hine's contrasting horizontal lines, which stripe the ward blocks of Netherne, come to mind. Decorating a façade in such a manner is unexceptional, but when seen at Netherne – and *because* this is Netherne – suggests a strange sort of psychiatric 'plimsol' line balefully hinting at the precarious depths these serrated ward blocks, weighed down by the distress they contained, risk sinking to. Lines that run parallel to the earth beneath, precariously close, and to which all must sooner or later return.

Buildings draw us intellectually but also psychologically and effectively. Architecture is unavoidably the context of human life,' writes Juhani Pallasmaa (Havik 2014), and their enormous importance to us makes their interpretative potential almost infinite. The manifold significances buildings can express seemingly do not need to relate either to the intentions of their architects or to the uses such buildings have been put to. Their prodigious interpretability, so readily metaphorized, clearly has little strictly to do with deciphering the 'language' of architecture previously discussed. As Andrew Shanken reminds us (Shanken 2012), 'the move to see the built environment in purely linguistic terms is now dated.'

So, where does this leave psychogeography? Should the affective exploration of a building be considered 'psychogeography'? In the terms in which Debord and colleagues couch psychogeography, this seems unlikely. At its inception, 'psychogeography' was a self-evidently ironic, ludic formulation. Although the Situationists<sup>406</sup> claimed psychogeography

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<sup>406</sup> Bell (1987) – 'In the 1950s and 1960s, the S.I. developed the first explosive aesthetic politics since the surrealist experiments of the twenties. It was an "aesthetic" strategy in the sense that its opposition was raised on

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was a nascent science<sup>407</sup> with methods of acquiring new knowledge about the moods of place precipitates mood, how this was to be achieved was never explained. Possibly, merely suggesting that place have emotional valences, was to (1) endow an otherwise hostile urban environment with exciting affective potential, and to (2) threaten conventional meanings of place<sup>408</sup>. Psychogeography provocatively privileged emotion or mood over ‘meaning’ – or better still: *replaced meaning with mood*. This challenged accepted hierarchies of meaning by undermining what places ‘meant’, how they were to be perceived, and experienced. The Situationist’ subversion even undermined ‘method’ (a theme Deleuze later picks up<sup>409</sup>). Situationist psychogeography, utilising the *dérive*, *détournement*, and incorporating dada-like anti-methods, embracing chance and serendipity, effectively ridiculed psychogeography – their own ‘research methodology’ – by transforming it into play and adventure. (Situationist psychogeography encouraged places and street maps to be read unconventionally and imaginatively, to being mis-read). That there is no extant substantial documented Situationist research<sup>410</sup> regarding the moods of specific places, reinforces the suspicion that their psychogeography was provocation<sup>411</sup>). Literal claims for the seriousness of Situationist psychogeography are further undermined by their having so precipitously dropped it from the terrain proposed by consumer capitalism itself, the terrain of the commodity and of reified daily experience. A pessimistic critique would abandon history to the frozen dialectic of consumerism, which is believed to arrest politics in a spectacular tableau of material abundance. But the S.I. celebrated the prospect of sustained opposition in all its forms. If a revolution of production is no longer in reach, one can begin with a revolution of consumption. The premise: politics is in part the problem of the use or reading of objects. The program: the reign of the spectacular commodity may be combatted by the intentional misrecognition of exchange values’.

<sup>407</sup> Although relating psychogeography to sociological research (especially by Lefebvre) requires further debate.

<sup>408</sup> A kind of authentic unreason against an artificial hegemonic reason

<sup>409</sup> Deleuze (1983:10) ‘Method in general is a means by which we avoid going to a particular place, or by which we maintain the means of escaping from it’.

<sup>410</sup> A notable exception is Khatib (1996)

their subsequent, overtly politicised, activist programmes. But they launched the idea of making make mood the *meaning* of place<sup>412</sup>, and this enduring formulation has informed my research. And not just mine. If the Situationists' suggested that certain buildings and locations were possessed of an intrinsic atmospheric power, ignored or suppressed by convention, psychogeography, or something similar, has been used by contemporary geographers, albeit augmenting it with theory, 'to plumb the ineffable, to get at the social and emotional context of our encounter with the material world' (Shanken 2012).

Notwithstanding the Situationists' well-documented scorn for art, the *idea* of psychogeography hints at revolutionising the everyday by reframing *life itself* as the *prima materia* for creative undertakings. Using creativity to challenge the oppression which robs the everyday of festive delirium (and which is an authentic meaning of creativity) is mirrored in *Notes Written One Day in the French Countryside* by Lefebvre (Lefebvre 2014:221-247), who shared the Situationists' disquiet that life-affirming creativity had been syphoned off from everyday life, and become sole preserve of a bourgeois economic culturalism, making everyday life 'Manichean' (Lefebvre 2014:127). Lefebvre and the Situationists' goal was to

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<sup>411</sup>and that the significance the Situationists attached to it was less in any 'knowledge' its 'research' would yield than in the tenor of the gesture itself (in this, resembling the infamously, non-existent, 'secret' Hamburg Thesis Hayes (2017:29) suggests that 'The 'Hamburg Theses' in their absence are the perfect and absolute Situationist "document", impossible to find and thus beyond the travails of recuperation. Indeed, even my efforts at outlining their import still leave them beyond such a fate, beyond the reach of all the collectors and intellectual undertakers, unwitting or not, whose hobbies and obsessions are just so many symptoms of an era in which 'the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own.'

<sup>412</sup> This insight has been developed avidly by some contemporary geographers and philosophers (Böhme, Griffero, Schmitz, et al.) and may suggest new routes psychogeography may take.

repair life by ‘perceiv[ing] the eternal in the transitory’ (Lefebvre 2014:127). Appositely, Lefebvre adds in the same passage that Baudelaire was the ‘first writer to eulogize mental illness’. Now, this reads like a programme for creativity. Situationist psychogeography, in urging us to ‘re-read’ the environment in a primarily affective manner, seems tantamount to aestheticizing our experience of reality – asking us to be aware of what it *feels* like, not what it *means*. Notwithstanding the unmistakable confrontational tonality of situationist-influenced slogans like ‘Beneath the paving stones - the beach!’<sup>413</sup> (Sous les pavés, la plage) and ‘Beauty is in the street’ (La beauté est dans la rue) such sentiments point also to the mutability of reality; that what we think we *know*, invariably conceals something else (film-maker Patrick Keiller, influenced by the Situationists’ psychogeography refers to ‘seeing somewhere as somewhere else’).<sup>414</sup> With psychogeography the Situationists were not solely subverting a hierarchy of meaning by prioritising affect as our main purchase on reality, they were challenging the stability of meaning *per se*. Beyond surrealist libidinization of images the Situationists wanted to problematise meaning itself; détournement effectively put meaning up for grabs.

The emotional context of our encounter with the material world? In my affective exploration of Netherne I have resisted suggestions that either meaning or affect is intrinsic to places, as if inscribed there. This is not to say that, like many, I don’t *experience* places as if feelings are intrinsic to them. I do. I walk down a road, it feels oppressive, and I can pretty much explain why too. But I mistrust my explanation. It is provisional. Moreover, I know that the

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<sup>413</sup> Orangina-Schweppes co-opted this slogan to promote its ‘Oasis’ drink: see Oasis, *Sous les pépins, la plage*, Oasis Fruit, <http://www.oasisbefruit.com>, For the ‘récupération’ of these slogans by advertisers see Baggett (2014: 44-45)

<sup>414</sup> Keiller (2013)

stories I tell myself about a place, or am told about it, can rapidly change my feelings about it.

When I discussed resistant reading, I mentioned I was drawn to it *not* because reading places against the grain could somehow unveil them for what they really were, but because reading subversively or resistantly meant establishing a *relationship* specific to that text, that place, rather taking one ‘prepared earlier’ off the shelf. The *resistant hermeneutic strategies* Bell mentions<sup>415</sup> regarding ‘Robinson Crusoe’ (1719)<sup>416</sup>, are not only about textual polyvalence, but about how ‘different states of mind, body, and affect’ influence the manner in which a text – or building(s) - will impact a person, and while resistant readings may represent a politicised negative hermeneutic they may also enable a person to embrace a text’s and a building’s intrinsic ambiguity and, in so doing, draw from these the *rewards* of aberrant readings and fruitful (wilful, or otherwise) misinterpretation – or, I might add, even an abundance of meanings.

## Postscript (Buber)

Froeyman (2014:12-13) translates the often-cited ‘tree’ passage from Buber’s ‘I and Thou’ as follows: *‘I am looking at a tree. I can take it up as an image, a steep, rising pillar that collides with the light, or spiritizing green, pervaded with soft fragments of blueish grey in the background. I can see it as movement: the flowing veins of a sticky core of wood, the sucking roots, the breathing leaves, an endless relation with the earth and the sky, and the dark process of growing itself. I can categorize it as a species, and look at it as an example of a*

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<sup>415</sup>Bell (2021) describes a range of *resistant hermeneutic strategies* across nineteenth-century communities, including by emigrants and convicts to polar explorers and troops in the First World War

<sup>416</sup> Crusoe figures repeatedly as a figure or trope of psychogeographical significance (Coverley and Patrick

*kind, according to the way it lives and is structured. I can detach myself to such an extent from the concrete shape of the tree, that I only see him as an expression of general laws of nature. Laws that consist of opposing forces which gradually come to an equilibrium, or laws that determine how chemical agents mix and separate. I can let it volatilize itself in the eternity of numbers. In all of this, the tree is still an object to me, and has a place, a time and a structure. However, it might also occur, through a combination of will and mercy, that I look at the tree again, and that I am drawn into a relation with it. Then, it is not an object anymore. I have been pervaded by the power of exclusiveness. In this, I do not have to forget any of the ways in which I was looking at the tree before. I do not have to blind myself in order to see, and there is no knowledge that I should be ignorant of. On the contrary: everything that I have mentioned , image, movement, number, is intimately united and connected.'*

## Appendix

Asylums designed by G. T. Hine<sup>417</sup>

<b>1875-80</b>	Nottingham Borough Asylum	Mapperley Asylum	Mapperley, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire	Closed in the early 1990s. Now housing.
<b>1887-93</b>	Claybury Asylum (5th LCC)	Claybury Asylum	Claybury, Redbridge, London	Converted to Repton Park luxury housing.
<b>1889-90</b>	Nottingham Borough Asylum (Extensions)	Mapperley Asylum	Mapperley, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire	Closed early 1990s. Now housing.
<b>1890</b>	Dorset County (2nd) Asylum (Extensions)	Herrison Asylum	Herrison, Dorchester, Dorset	Converted to housing.
<b>1891-95</b>	Sunderland Borough Asylum	Cherry Knowle Asylum	Cherry Knowle, Ryhope, Sunderland	Derelict. To be demolished.
<b>1893</b>	Middlesex County (3rd) Asylum (Additions)	Banstead Asylum	Banstead, Banstead, Surrey	Totally demolished.
<b>1893</b>	Isle Of Wight County Asylum (Completion)	Whitecroft Asylum	Whitecroft, Newport, Isle of Wight	Being converted to housing.

<sup>417</sup> <http://www.simoncornwell.com/urbex/misc/arch.htm>

<b>1897-02</b>	Lincolnshire County (Kesteven) Asylum	Rauceby Asylum	Rauceby, Sleaford, Lincolnshire	Closed 1997. Being converted to housing.
<b>1898</b>	London County Asylum	Bexley Asylum	Bexley, Dartford, Kent	Demolished.
<b>1898</b>	Berkshire Asylum (Extensions)	Fairmile Asylum	Fairmile, Cholsey, Oxfordshire	Closed 2003. Derelict.
<b>1900</b>	Herts County Asylum	Hill End Asylum	Hill End, St. Alban's, Hertfordshire	Demolished.
<b>1900</b>	Asylum for the Lunatic Poor	Purdysburn Hospital	Purdysburn, Belfast, Ireland	Built on the colony plan for 1500 patients. Still open.
<b>1901</b>	Somerset And Bath County Asylum	Mendip Asylum	Mendip, Wells, Somerset	Converted to housing.
<b>1901-02</b>	Horton Asylum (11th LCC)	Horton Asylum	Horton Asylum, Epsom, Surrey	Some demolished, rest being converted to housing.
<b>1901-03</b>	East Sussex Asylum	Hellingly Asylum	Hellingly, Hellingly, East Sussex	Derelict.



<b>1901-07</b>	Worcestershire County (2nd) Asylum	Barnsley Hall	Barnsley Hall, Bromsgrove, Birmingham	Mostly demolished.
<b>1901-09</b>	Surrey County Asylum	Netherne Asylum	Netherne, Hooley, Surrey	Converted to housing.
<b>1903-07</b>	Long Grove Asylum (10th LCC)	Long Grove Asylum	Long Grove Hospital, Epsom, Surrey	Converted to housing.
<b>1912</b>	Hampshire County (2nd) Asylum	Park Prewett Asylum	Park Prewett, Sherbourne, Hampshire	Some demolished, some being converted.
<b>1912</b>	Gateshead Borough Lunatic Asylum	St. Mary's Asylum	North Saltwick, Northumberland	Derelict. To be demolished.

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