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Digital Storytelling and Performative Memory: New Approaches to the Literary Geography of the Postcolonial City

Abstract

Drawing on the outcomes of *Walkways and Waterways*, a research project exploring the real-time interaction between ‘user-generated’ narratives and urban walking, this chapter argues that digital storytelling can play a fundamental role in the reconceptualization of the digitally-mediated geographies of the postcolonial city. The chapter argues that the interaction between walking and storytelling, incorporating aspects of augmented reality and ludic gameplay, can be considered a new form of performative mapping. In this way, the chapter shows how digital storytelling can make a significant and innovative contribution to the spatial representations of memory, and, through that, engage directly with a deeper need for ‘home’ and ‘belonging’.

Introduction

“But a city is more than a place in space, it is a drama in time.”¹

This chapter argues that a key aspect of digital storytelling is its ability to map the subjective interplay between past and present, what Andreas Huyssen describes as urban palimpsests of “memories of what was there before, imagined alternatives to what there is”². By so doing, the chapter explores the performative possibilities that exists between narrative and urban walking within the mediatized postcolonial city.

From the plague-ridden alleyways of Daniel Defoe’s London in *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) to W. G. Sebald’s haunted cityscapes in *Austerlitz* (2001), literature has been, and remains, a key form through which the city is both represented and understood. This sense that such literature is not only a means of representing cityspace but also a way of making sense of it, of physically instantiating it, is critical to this chapter. As Robert Tally has observed, “the literary cartography produced by works of literature are themselves a means of giving form to the world”³. Such ‘literary cartography’ has focused on how a wide range of texts “change the ways their readers view the world [...] making possible new ways of understanding what is

¹ Patrick Geddes, *Civics: as Applied Sociology* (Boston: Qontro Classic Books, 1905), 6.

² Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 7.

³ Robert T. Tally Jr., *Spatiality* (London: Routledge, 2013), 50.

actually there”.⁴ Simonetta Moro’s use of her Peripatetic Box in New York City, for example, and Elisa Rosenberg’s study of memory and place in Berlin emphasize the active role of the reader, in which “the reading of urban culture texts is integrated with the active exploration of the city”.⁵ It is through this interplay between place, practice and performance that the reader becomes an active generator of knowledge. As Owen Jones and Joanne Garde-Hansen note, our identities within particular places remain “a performative construction/practice in which ongoing memories play a pivotal role”.⁶

This chapter looks specifically at the role that *digital writing* can play within performative practice, exploring digital storytelling as part of what Les Roberts calls the “textualities of space, place and mapping”.⁷ As Gilles Deleuze notes, “writing is a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed”.⁸ It is this sense of ‘becoming’, this relationship between the creative act (the construction of narrative) and the performative engagement with memory that remains the focus of this chapter.

The ‘digital’ is a key part of this exploration. The increasing prevalence of smartphones and wifi-connectivity is fundamentally changing how we interact with the environment around us. Central to understanding this re-configured landscape is an exploration of what Scott McQuire has termed “the heterogeneous spatial regimes of [...] the media city”.⁹ Here, in the media city, a key attribute remains the proliferation of “increasingly mobile, scalable and interactive” technologies.¹⁰ This chapter discusses some of the key characteristics of this new spatial order, the interstitial milieu opened up by the interplay between the physical and the digital. A particular focus will be the degree to which these new ‘spatial regimes’ have changed the way the urban environment is itself experienced. The chapter will argue that there is a growing need for both an individual and a collective ‘remapping’ of this terrain within the postcolonial city. The output of a research project is discussed which has specifically examined the role that digital storytelling can play in this process, both in terms of the creation of textual artefacts,

⁴ Eric Prieto, *Literature, Geography and the Postmodern Poetics of Place* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 9.

⁵ Simonetta Moro, “Peripatetic Box and Personal Mapping: From Studio to Classroom to City” in Les Roberts, ed., *Mapping Cultures: Place, Practice, Performance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 260-79 (p. 277); Elissa Rosenberg, “Walking in the City: Memory and Place”, *The Journal of Architecture* 17.1 (2012), 131-49.

⁶ Joanne Garde-Hansen and Owen Jones, eds, *Geography and Memory: Explorations in Identity, Place and Becoming* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 2.

⁷ Les Roberts, “Mapping Cultures: A Spatial Anthropology” in Les Roberts, ed., *Mapping Cultures: Place, Practice, Performance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1-25 (p. 18).

⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 1.

⁹ Scott McQuire, *The Media City: Media, Architecture and Urban Space* (London: Sage, 2008), 21.

¹⁰ McQuire, *Media City* (note 8), 21.

but also as a means by which the physical journey through cityspace is re-envisioned. This chapter, then, explores how creative writing might be understood as a means of such ‘mapping’, what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari term “an experimentation in contact with the real”.¹¹ In particular, it focuses on digital storytelling’s role within twenty-first century postcolonial cityspace, a place that is witnessing a new hybridity, merging “digital and physical worlds into a new urban form”.¹²

Postcolonial city as smart city

As Claire Chambers and Graham Huggan note, there has been growing academic interest in postcolonial cities over the last twenty years.¹³ In part this has been driven by the increasing prominence of global urbanity. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 2007 was the first time that more than half the world’s population was classed as living in cities; they estimate that by mid-century this will have risen to two thirds.¹⁴ As a consequence of this, cities are also getting bigger and more complex. According to its National Bureau of Statistics, as of 2011, China has 160 cities with a population of over a million. Of these, five have metropolitan areas with more than ten million people. Yet, as the UNFPA recognize, population growth will be greatest in postcolonial towns and cities, predominantly based in Asia and Africa.¹⁵

The term ‘postcolonial city’, of course, is not without controversy. For Chambers and Huggan, the uniqueness of the ‘postcolonial city’ is its intimate connection to both historical colonialism and modern-day migration.¹⁶ Rashini Varma calls postcolonial cities “conjunctural spaces”, “constituted by the tensions and contradictions between global, national and the local concepts and practices of urban space”.¹⁷ Conjunctural space has the verticality of rich and diverse

¹¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 12.

¹² Marcus Foth, Laura Forlano, Christine Satchell and Martin Gibbs, “Preface” in Marcus Foth et al., eds, *From Society Butterfly to Engaged Citizen: Urban Informatics, Social Media, Ubiquitous Computing and Mobile Technology to Support Citizen Engagement* (Massachusetts: MIT, 2011), ix-xvii (p. x).

¹³ Claire Chambers and Graham Huggan, “Reevaluating the Postcolonial City”, *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 17.6 (2015), 783-8 (p. 785).

¹⁴ UNFPA, *State of World Population 2011: People and Possibilities in a World of 7 Billion* (New York: UNFPA, 2011), ii.

¹⁵ UNFPA, *State of World Population 2007: Unleashing the Potential of Urban Growth* (New York: UNFPA, 2007), 6.

¹⁶ Chambers and Huggan, “Reevaluating the Postcolonial City” (note 12), 786.

¹⁷ Rashmi Varma, *The Postcolonial City and its Subjects: London, Nairobi, Bombay* (London: Routledge, 2011), 14.

historical legacies and memory; yet, concurrently, there is also a converse process of erasure, driven by late capitalism's tendency to "eradicate the specificities of place".¹⁸

Central to this discussion is an understanding of the growing relationship between contemporary cityspace and pervasive digital technology. Historically, of course, the growth of the urban environment has always been intimately connected with technology. As important nodes within commercial and communication networks, large towns and cities became the natural site for innovation and adaptation.¹⁹ This has dramatically accelerated with the recent proliferation of digital technology. The term 'smart city' has come to define a cityspace intimately enmeshed with ubiquitous mobile computing. Key here is what has come to be called 'big data', the generation of vast quantities of information with, as Michael Batty notes, "smartness in cities pertaining primarily to the ways in which sensors can generate new data streams in real time with precise geopositioning".²⁰ Although traditionally associated with South Korean, western European and American cities, the digital vistas of the smart city are slowly making an impact in the postcolonial cities of Africa and the Indian subcontinent. Since 2014 India's National Government has followed a policy of what it calls 'smart urbanism', setting itself the challenge of transforming one-hundred cities into networked utopias of the future.²¹ Nairobi and Cape Town are examples of African cities which already have a sophisticated digital infrastructure.

Although transforming the economic and civic functioning of the city, there is increasing recognition that digital technology is also changing the way both individuals and communities experience the environment around them. McQuire uses the term 'media cities' to describe sites where the impact of digital technology is now so great that it offers "a distinctive mode of social experience" whose implications are only slowly coming to be understood.²²

Debate around the nature of this 'social experience' is not without controversy. For writers such as Fredric Jameson, digital technology is perceived to be one of the main factors underpinning what is perceived to be an iniquitous socio-economic reconfiguration of cityspace.²³ Paul Virilio sees a loss of coherence as central here, a growing urban illegibility, a process reinforced by electronic media in the creation of what he calls "accidental,

¹⁸ Varma, *Postcolonial City* (note 16), 14.

¹⁹ Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, its Transformations and its Prospects* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

²⁰ Michael Batty, "Big Data, Smart Cities and City Planning", *Dialogues in Human Geography* 3.3 (2013), 274-9 (p. 276).

²¹ Ayona Datta, "New Urban Utopias of Postcolonial India: 'Entrepreneurial Urbanization' in Dholera Smart City, Gujarat", *Dialogues in Human Geography* 5.1 (2015), 3-22.

²² McQuire, *Media City* (note 8), vi.

²³ Fredric Jameson, "Future City", *New Left Review* 21 May/June (2003), 65-79.

discontinuous and heterogeneous space”.²⁴

Yet, for others, the picture is more complex. In Manuel Castells’ “informational city”, for example, digitization does not simply eradicate existing urban space but combines with it to produce new and meaningful forms and structures.²⁵ McQuire celebrates the “emergence of new spatial ensembles” in the twenty-first century – “augmented reality”, “mixed reality”, “augmented space” – in his own vindication of the smart and media city.²⁶ Martijn de Waal goes further, seeing the smart city as supporting what he calls the “libertarian urban ideal” in which digital media increases individual freedom and choice.²⁷ He argues that digital technology is already intimately entangled in both the form and operation of a city. Citizens exist both physically in terms of their presence out on the street, but also digitally, mediated through online platforms and social media. De Waal argues that cities need to openly embrace this phenomenon, explicitly drawing on how “city dwellers make their lives public on our contemporary ‘stages’ - from the boulevard to Facebook”.²⁸ The smartphone is central here. De Waal places it at the very centre of his technological overhaul of urban living, “an intelligent compass, guiding the city dweller through the bustle and chaos of everyday life”.²⁹ He notes two specific applications for such a tool: “experience markers”, recording urban experiences and then sharing them through social media; and “territory devices”, influencing the experience of a specific urban area.³⁰ In both cases the smartphone operates as “a membrane”, allowing mediation with our urban surroundings while at the same time accessing in real time a digital experience.

What follows in this chapter expands on these ideas and concepts. Specifically, it examines the affordance offered by digital technology in the mediation between narrative, urban walking and memory within postcolonial cityspace. A key focus will be how the practice of walking and digital writing can be brought together, leading to a transformed relationship with the space around us. But first, a more informed analysis of McQuire’s “media cities” needs to be undertaken, examining in particular the epistemological implications of ‘the digital’ on the experience of space within the postcolonial city.

²⁴ Paul Virilio, *The Lost Dimension* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991), 35.

²⁵ Manuel Castells, *The Informational City: Information Technology, Economic Restructuring, and the Urban Regional Process* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 6.

²⁶ McQuire, *Media City* (note 8), 21.

²⁷ Martijn de Waal, *The City as Interface: How New Media are Changing the City* (Rotterdam: nai010 Publishers, 2014), 11.

²⁸ de Waal, *City as Interface* (note 26), 15.

²⁹ de Waal, *City as Interface* (note 26), 9.

³⁰ de Waal, *City as Interface* (note 26), 19.

Relational space

This reconfiguration of urban space by digital technology has led McQuire to adopt the term “relational space”.³¹ Understanding space as a relational category, created by the experience of how objects physically relate to one another, is already well understood within geography.³² However, McQuire uses the term in a more specific way, with a particular focus on the impact that digital technology has on our experience of space. For McQuire, the term ‘relational space’ refers to the contemporary condition in which the usual physical and temporal restraints on social relationships have been removed. A critical feature of relational space is the social primacy assumed by technological speed and almost instantaneous connectivity. “Relational space is the social space created by the contemporary imperative to actively establish social relations ‘on the fly’ [...] in which the global is inextricably imbricated with the face-to-face”.³³ For McQuire, however, the effect of relational space on cityspace is intrinsically ambivalent and contradictory. Although there is de-territorialization and a loss of centre, technology also provides for the creation of new continuities and connections. Yet these new spaces are necessarily other-orientated and heterotopic, in the sense that the technology prioritizes access to other places and people, while leading to a more open and porous ‘here’. While digital networks have allowed the breakdown of spatial limitations, theoretically globalizing the public sphere, they have also facilitated a conversely centripetal phenomenon which has seen the consolidation of economic and political power into fewer and fewer sites, most notably global cities.

This combination of *dispersion* and *concentration* is manifested in the growing dislocation of ‘place’ from ‘space’. McQuire sees these phenomena as major elements behind what he observes as a crisis in terms of both ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ within the contemporary city. By home, he refers to something more than just a single physical place but rather a wider “sense of cultural belonging and existential shelter”.³⁴ In the modern global city, the home has become an interactive node, permanently online, leading to its de-territorialization, blurring the boundaries between place and experience, self and stranger. “In this context, concepts such as distance, proximity and locality [...] take on a range of new meanings”, and the older

³¹ McQuire, *Media City* (note 8), 22.

³² Marina Löw, “The Constitution of Space: The Structuration of Spaces Through the Simultaneity of Effect and Perception”, *European Journal of Social Theory* 11.1 (2008), 25-49 (p. 26).

³³ McQuire, *Media City* (note 8), 23.

³⁴ McQuire, *Media City* (note 8), 7.

geographical question *where is your home?* is replaced by a more postmodern demand: *what is the meaning of home?*³⁵

Critical work on global cities has stressed the unproblematic erasure of historical legacy and their ability to create new forms of flexible citizenship that provide opportunity to challenge existing inequalities.³⁶ And yet the postcolonial city does not have a natural place in this discourse. For Varma, the postcolonial city is overt in its recognition of the ongoing tension between localism and provincialism and the global impact of neo-liberalism. Varma's concept of "conjunctural space" specifically "keeps in play the contestations and articulations between national and global spaces, forms of neo-imperialism and the problem of (universal) citizenship".³⁷

As postcolonial cityspace becomes increasingly mediatized, however, the need to explore the interplay between Varma's 'conjunctural space' and McQuire's 'relational space' becomes pressing. More specifically, there is a need to explore the impact of digital technology on the ongoing contestations and complexities of postcolonial cityspace. This chapter looks at one possible approach, in which urban walking is augmented through the creation of digital narratives, read and created on the fly. In this sense, the chapter examines what might be called hybrid or meta narratives, a storifying that brings together two separate but interrelated elements: the performative narrative of the physical journey and the cognitive engagement with, and creation of, textual narratives.

Storytelling and the city

The relationship between narrative and place is long and complex. As Michael Jaye and Ann Watts, as well as Richard Lehan, have argued, the development of the city has had a profound impact on both the form and structure of the novel;³⁸ indeed, for Peter Turchi, any text can be read metaphorically as a cartographic representation of the world.³⁹ Joseph Miller states that every story without exception "traces out in its course an arrangement of places, dwellings, and

³⁵ McQuire, *Media City* (note 8), 11.

³⁶ For example, see Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

³⁷ Varma, *Postcolonial City* (note 16), 14.

³⁸ Michael Jaye and Ann Watts, eds, *Literature and the American Urban Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981); Richard Lehan, *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

³⁹ Peter Turchi, *Maps of the Imagination: The Writer as Cartographer* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2004).

rooms joined by paths and roads”,⁴⁰ so that a city can be conceptualized as a composite of what Asuncion Azcárate calls “representational human acts”.⁴¹ Edward Relph argued that cities should be understood as representing large-scale desires, designs and acts of human coexistence.⁴² Yingjin Zhang takes this further, stating that the city is “a state of mind, an order of morality, a pattern of attitudes and ritualized behavior, a network of human connections, and a body of customs and traditions inscribed in certain practices and discourses”.⁴³ Here, literature becomes a central facet in the constructed identities of cityspace, and also a means by which the reader’s view of the world can be altered. As Eric Prieto notes, “great works of literature have a performative dimension [...] they help make possible the emergence and establishment of new kinds of places”.⁴⁴ For Prieto the postcolonial city is at the heart of this process. He describes postcolonial space as “*entre-deux*” [in-between], in the way it deviates from established norms. In his study of the postcolonial identities of Martinique and Guadeloupe, Prieto emphasizes their creative energy and willingness to look forward rather than back, to stretch established conventions and expectations in new and exciting ways.⁴⁵

As we have already seen, Varma’s “conjunctural spaces” are characterized by both the richness of their postcolonial legacy but also the global city’s neoliberal urgency to suppress what are perceived to be complex and controversial pasts. This tension between ‘forgetting’ and ‘remembering’ is a key aspect of postcolonial cityspace; it is argued in this chapter that performative digital storytelling can play a small but effective role in ameliorating these tensions and contradictions. As Angharad Saunders has made clear, “geography pervades the content, practice and meaning of creative writing” while William Cronon has famously championed the role of storytelling as a means of engaging with moral and political issues within environmental history, of “judging the consequences of human actions” in a way that, he argued, “objective” academic discourse does not formally allow.⁴⁶ Yet ultimately it is creative writing’s ability to “affect” that Emilie Cameron recognizes as one of its most important characteristics: “the capacity for stories to be practiced in place and to generate

⁴⁰ Joseph Miller, *Topographies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 10.

⁴¹ Asuncion Azcárate, ed., *Cityscapes: World Cities and Their Cultural Industries* (Champaign, Illinois: Common Ground Publishing, 2014) [Kindle File], 150.

⁴² Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976).

⁴³ Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 3-4.

⁴⁴ Prieto, *Postmodern Poetics* (note 3), 9.

⁴⁵ Prieto, *Postmodern Poetics*, (note 3), chapter 6.

⁴⁶ Angharad Saunders, “Literary Geography: Reforging the Connections”, *Progress in Human Geography* 34.4 (2010), 436-52 (p. 436); William Cronon, “A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative”, *The Journal of American History* 78.4 (1992), 1347-76 (p. 1370).

(intersubjective) change”.⁴⁷

This notion of ‘affect’, of the interaction between a text, the writer or reader, and the external environment, is encapsulated in the metaphor of the map. Theorists such as Tally consider both narrative and plot as fundamentally spatial in nature, in which the act of writing is itself a form of mapmaking.⁴⁸ Yet this process of mapping is not a simple method of recording; it is also a transgressive performance, one that deliberately undermines official discourses of place. Deleuze and Guattari note that a map does not “reproduce” or “represent” a territory but instead “constructs” the territory through “performance”.⁴⁹ For Deleuze and Guattari, then, a map is not a physical entity as such, but rather a set of performative relationships, in which the individual and the external environment are brought together in a non-hierarchical, nomadic structure.

The interplay between postcolonial cityspace and individual and collective memory is key. Michel de Certeau famously noted the importance of what he called “verbal relics” – superstitions, myths and legends – the remains of previous stories that have accumulated in a place.⁵⁰ In this way, de Certeau argued that all places are “haunted” by the past; in fact, for de Certeau, “haunted places are the only ones people can live in”.⁵¹ It is this very haunting of space by stories that allows a place to become ‘home’; without them the habitable city becomes annulled.

In his analysis of participatory mapping in Salford, UK, and Cape Town, South Africa, Cassidy notes the importance of community-led “commemorations” of lost working-class districts.⁵² As Lawrence Cassidy observes, his work was explicitly aimed at “reintegrating excluded communities, which are often silenced in official sites of memory”.⁵³ Rosenberg, in her study of the Berlin memorial project, *Places of Remembrance in the Bavarian Quarter*, notes that places remain continually haunted by past meanings and artefacts.⁵⁴ And, as Huyssen has noted in the postcolonial cities of São Paulo, Buenos Aires, Cairo and Mumbai, cultural and collective memory can become highly politicized as a consequence where individual and even collective

⁴⁷ Emilie Cameron, “New Geographies of Story and Storytelling”, *Progress in Human Geography* 36.5 (2012), 573-92 (p. 581).

⁴⁸ Tally, *Spatiality* (note 2), 49.

⁴⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus* (note 10), 12.

⁵⁰ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

⁵¹ de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life* (note 50), 108.

⁵² Lawrence Cassidy, “Salford 7/ District Six. The Use of Participatory Mapping and Material Artefacts in Cultural Memory Projects”, in Les Roberts, ed., *Mapping Cultures: Place, Practice, Performance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 181-98.

⁵³ Cassidy, “Salford 7 / District Six” (note 52), 183.

⁵⁴ Rosenberg, “Walking in the City” (note 4), 131.

memory may not necessarily concur with official or authorized history.⁵⁵

Digital storytelling

“Games are forbidden in the labyrinth”⁵⁶

Although still in its infancy, there is a growing body of international work exploring the creative opportunities afforded by the mediatized city. *Ghosts in the Garden* (2012), *City Strata* (2012) and *I Tweet Dead People* (2012), all funded through REACT (*Research and Enterprise in Arts and Creative Technology*, UK), are just three examples of creative projects that have examined the interplay between digital technology and storytelling. Such projects have tended to fall into discrete areas, such as digital heritage (including *Linking the Chain: A Network for Digital Heritage in Wales*, 2010), narrative and storytelling (*These Pages Fall Like Ash* (2013), for example, by Tom Abba and Duncan Speakman, in which readers are invited to visit certain areas of Bristol, locating digital fragments and uploading their own responses) and historical and spatial exploration, such as *Hackney Hear* (2012), and Bristol’s *Hello Lamp Post* (2013) and *Shadowing* (2014). Adam Koehler analyses how Twitter fiction (such as Rick Moody’s “Some contemporary characters” and Jennifer Egan’s “Black box”) explores what he calls “new ways of understanding craft as a synthesis of readers’ affect and participation in an unfolding narrative”.⁵⁷ And in their exploration of location-based interactive narratives, Jeni Paay and Jesper Kjeldskov note the immersive nature of “augmented reality” when played out across a city.⁵⁸ They end their chapter with a call for further work to be done on the use of “user-generated story content that enable [...] urban citizens to participate in the media content creation side”.⁵⁹

This chapter reports on *Walkways and Waterways*, a digital project that extends the work already discussed. Where users have been able to develop their own content, for example, this has tended to be done in discrete locations such as the District Six Museum in Cape Town,

⁵⁵ Andreas Huyssen, ed., *Other Cities, Other Worlds: Urban Imaginaries in a Globalizing Age* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

⁵⁶ Guy Debord “Ariane en chômage”, in *Potlatch 1955-1957* (Paris: Gerard Lebovici, 1985), 63.

⁵⁷ Adam Koehler, “Digitizing Craft: Creative Writing Studies and New Media: A Proposal”, *College English* 75.4 (2013), 379-97 (p. 387).

⁵⁸ Jeni Paay and Jesper Kjeldskov, “Bjørnetjeneste: Using the City as a Backdrop for Location-based Interactive Narratives”, in Marcus Foth et al., eds, *From Society Butterfly to Engaged Citizen: Urban Informatics, Social Media, Ubiquitous Computing and Mobile Technology to Support Citizen Engagement* (Massachusetts: MIT, 2011), 253-73 (p. 271).

⁵⁹ Paay and Kjeldskov, “Bjørnetjeneste” (note 59), 271.

South Africa.⁶⁰ And where users have been free to roam the city streets, the content has often been written for them (*Ghosts in the Garden*, for example, or the street-based signs used in the Berlin project, *Places of Remembrance in the Bavarian Quarter*). The digital project explored here brings together the user-generated content of the “District Six Museum” project with the spatial exploration of *Places of Remembrance in the Bavarian Quarter*. And by so doing, insights are sought into a new form of mapping, bringing together the performative elements of walking and digital storytelling.

Walkways and Waterways was a collaborative project involving Cardiff Metropolitan University, the University of South Wales and the digital media startup, Fresh Content Creation. The purpose of the project was to explore how creative exploration, mediated through mobile technology, could help users re-explore their own cityspace. An earlier project, “Walking Through Time”, had showed what could be done in terms of the real-time tracking of individuals across the virtual representation of historical maps on smartphones.⁶¹ As Chris Speed states, “being ‘in’ the map and being located on a street that no longer exists offers new methods of understanding our surroundings”.⁶² *Walkways and Waterways* wanted to extend this approach by using Twitter to capture the creative responses of participants as they physically progressed across the city. In that sense, *Walkways and Waterways* was much more focused on the relationship between narrative and walking. More crucially, it also sought to explore this interaction in real-time.

The event itself consisted of a digitally-mediated journey, retracing the last two miles of the Glamorganshire Canal, from Cardiff Castle to Cardiff Bay. The Canal itself fell into ruin soon after the Second World War and has long since been removed. Only memories and topographical scars remain. Retracing it through the centre of the city involved traversing a variety of terrains, including a large modern shopping centre, before finishing at the location of the canal’s old sea lock, beneath a busy flyover.

The event was advertised through social media. Twenty participants attended, ranging from young children to the retired. While the physical journey was led by project members, exploration was digitally augmented by Twitter through which further guidance and information was given to each participant in real-time. The smartphone allowed each participant to upload photographs and commentary to #GlamCan, providing a shareable forum

⁶⁰ Cassidy, “Salford 7 / District Six” (note 52), 192.

⁶¹ Chris Speed, “Walking Through Time: Use of Locative Media to Explore Historical Maps” in Les Roberts, ed., *Mapping Cultures: Place, Practice, Performance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 160-80.

⁶² Speed, “Walking Through Time” (note 62), 177.

through which every individual itinerary could be recorded. Embedded within the walk were twelve “treasures”, forming what was described as a “treasure trail”. In this way, *Waterways and Walkways* experimented with real-time gaming and ‘play’ as a way of enhancing participation and engagement. Tweets sent by the project team prompted participants to both find and then record the next ‘treasure’. Sometimes, as in the case of a marooned paddle post in the subway beneath a dual carriageway, participants were invited to discuss its function. Participants then uploaded their responses to Twitter. Sometimes team members responded to particular replies; occasionally participants themselves would engage in a fleeting online discussion.

Specific directions sent through Twitter guided the participants across the city. Old photographs were tweeted at key locations, asking the participants to compare the existing topography with what was recorded in the photograph. Participants were also encouraged to respond through their own tweets which were then shared across the group. Sometimes these responses were simple factual responses to the questions. At other times a more abstract, creative response was forthcoming that captured the participant’s fleeting emotional responses. And just occasionally, memories suddenly surfaced.

In other situations, the limitations of a tweet (short textual responses limited to 140 characters, including spaces) might be considered unnecessarily restrictive. Yet, out on the street, the brevity and concision imposed by the medium became a strength. Each tweet offered the opportunity to add up to four photographs taken on the smartphone. The tweets therefore gave participants the opportunity to explore the interplay between text and image as they progressed along the path of the canal, a simple yet powerful augmentation of their creative output. Each tweet became part of a single, collective narrative, a real time amalgamation of over twenty stories that each participant could access alongside their own individual record. In the written feedback, one participant called this “cataloguing the joint experience via social media”. It was this “joint experience” that seemed to be a key part of the event’s popularity. When asked what they enjoyed about the event, over half stressed its communality: “companionship of other walkers”; “meeting new people”; and “enjoyable group experience”. Yet, for almost all the participants, the event’s success had also been the way it had encouraged them to see the city in a new way: “looking at the city in a different light”; “seeing things that I’ve passed every day but not noticed”; and, perhaps more interestingly, “going back in time”.⁶³

Clearly, the smartphone was able to support the event in a number of ways that a more

⁶³ See the project website <<https://waterandwalk.wordpress.com/>>.

traditional format could not. First, the technology allowed real-time mapping across the city using the phone's global positioning system (GPS), recalling de Waal's notion of an 'intelligent compass'. GPS ensured that the position of each participant was always known in relation to the surrounding cityspace, thereby providing a physical mapping of each individual journey. Second, it provided a means of geographically triggering audio, video and images, augmenting the physical experience of the contemporary city with historical photographs, records and testimony. In *Waterways and Walkways*, stories emerged on Twitter but they were also generated verbally as the participants moved along the route. At one point, beside the extant post of an old crane, one of the participants began to sing a sea shanty, evoking the life of the stevedores and bargemen who had worked on the canal. By the end of the journey the participants had engaged with each other both physically and digitally, remapping their relationship to the spaces of the city and its citizens.

Conclusion

In her discussion of the postcolonial city, Varma notes the need to engage with the multiple spatialities of "conjunctural space", a site redolent with tensions and contradictions for those who live there. In her exploration of these issues, Varma "invites the reader to a series of walks" across three postcolonial cities.⁶⁴ These walks are subjective journeys into the textual world of postcolonial fictions, a process she labels "mapping/reading/walking".⁶⁵ For Varma, this interrelation between fictional text and cityspace is a critical node of engagement, "in which the world and the text come together", making visible those tensions and issues inherent within postcolonial space.⁶⁶

Walkways and Waterways can be understood as an extension of Varma's subjective journeys. Central to this has been an exploration of how digital technology can be used to enhance our engagement with cityspace. The chapter has argued that the development of mobile technology and ubiquitous wi-fi connectivity offers a unique opportunity to enhance our experience of the spaces around us through the blending of storytelling and physical exploration. Key here is de Certeau's comprehension of walking itself as a form of storytelling. For de Certeau, the city is a story created by the spatial practices of its citizens, their physical movement through space.

⁶⁴ Varma, *Postcolonial City* (note 16), 34.

⁶⁵ Varma, *Postcolonial City* (note 16), 31.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

De Certeau used the term “walking rhetorics” to describe this process, whereby “the act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language”.⁶⁷

At the heart of this ‘storytelling’ is how inhabitants of cityspace engage with ‘memory’. Michael Sheringham states that “a city is a memory machine”, and, for de Certeau too, the city is built on what is no longer there.⁶⁸ Engaging with these legacies is both a social and cultural imperative; Huyssen notes that we need recognition of both past *and* future to properly engage with what she calls “our political, social, and cultural dissatisfactions with the present state of the world”.⁶⁹

And yet, at the heart of neoliberalism, is a profound disregard to any notion of ‘the past’. Sassen’s ‘global cities’ are characterized by their rejection of the past as a contentious or contested legacy; a rejection that also plays out across the physical spaces of the city.⁷⁰ Such sites of twenty-first century modernity stand in direct contrast to Varma’s postcolonial cities, urban centres where the complexities of memory and cityspace is more readily embraced. If cities are the stories we tell ourselves and the itineraries we take across the cityscape, then this chapter has argued that postcolonial cityspace calls for a more radical understanding of ‘participation’, embracing new ways of storytelling, new ways of making sense of “conjunctural space”. As Karen Till notes on the politics of memory in Berlin, “places are not only continuously interpreted; they are haunted by past structures of meaning and material presences from other times and lives”.⁷¹ In this sense we are always amongst the ruins of what has gone before, both physical space but also human memory. It is digital media’s ability to reconnect these two phenomena, to re-map memory with the lost physical places of our cityscapes, that remains one of its strongest features. The mobility of the smartphone through a wi-fi enabled cityspace is critical here, as is the ability to engage with multimedia, including sound and image. Social media platforms, such as Twitter, facilitate the real-time sharing of content while the GPS function allows real-time location positioning, but also the geo-spatial tagging of content. This facilitates the physical walking of a journey (a traditional spatial mapping) but also the geo-spatial mapping of emotion, thought and memory. The storytelling emerges both from these individualized fragments but also through their aggregation on social media. *Walkways and Waterways* is therefore an initial step in the exploration of what might

⁶⁷ de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life* (note 50), 97.

⁶⁸ Michael Sheringham, “Archiving”, in Michael Beaumont and Gregory Dart, eds, *Restless Cities* (London: Verso, 2010), 1-17 (p. 10).

⁶⁹ Huyssen, *Present Pasts* (note 56), 6.

⁷⁰ Sassen, *Global City* (note 36).

⁷¹ Karen Till, *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics and Place* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 9.

be understood as a new hybridity in mapping, a mapping that begins to explore Deleuze and Guattari's performative relationship between the physical journey and the real-time construction of stories.