

Landscapes of Loss: Revaluing Labour, Remaking Community

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NOTE: The Mid-Career Fellowship application form may have been updated since this proposal was submitted.

Abstract

This project explores what happens to communities when once thriving mills, offering employment to company villages, are closed down and demolished. It approaches this deindustrialised landscape as a site of trauma and loss. It brings together psychoanalysis, cultural geography and non-representational theory to develop a photography project of hand gestures used in noisy mills, as a way of healing and rebuilding communities. It aims to develop interdisciplinary, creative approaches to the real-life problems of post-industrial areas where communities are eroded or divided and argues for care provision and healing opportunities.

It expands on my earlier ethnography of Bailliff Bridge's carpet factory in West Yorkshire, which was demolished in 2002 (Taylor, 2019a). I examined how ageing ex-workers and residents responded to spatial change by using innovative 'walk and talk' tours (Carpiano, 2009) and by gathering photographs and objects (industrial machinery, retrieved mill bricks). My proposed project aims to investigate the importance of these photographs/objects to examine the creative potential of nostalgia as a response to loss in late-modernity (Keightley and Pickering, 2012). Drawing on photographic motifs and ex-worker knowledge, artist Catherine Bertola will make large scale photographs depicting the hand gestures, used to communicate and make carpets, to be displayed along the perimeter fences where Clifton Mill once stood, making visible the once hidden, now lost labour of this site.

The research hopes to re-bind the damaged tissues of a community, so that older respondents begin to develop affective ties with newcomers who now reside in housing developments around the once-mill. By deepening an understanding of why photographs are so important to respondents, this project will empirically test out the positive reclamation of nostalgia as an emotion that helps people cope with loss. My work will argue that psychotherapeutic care should be offered to communities experiencing catastrophic spatial and communal loss.

The Research Idea *The innovative thesis of the project*

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Background *Current research reference points and their limitations*

In her work on trauma in an ex-industrial steelworks, Walkerdine (2010) draws on the psychoanalytic notion of a ruptured 'containing skin' to describe a community which once felt full and alive to one characterized by emptiness and death. Walkerdine's work

does not look at the effects of demolition. I found that when the spatial contours of a village disappear, people no longer feel communally 'held together'.

More worryingly, the village was described as a 'dormitory' rather than a 'place that makes carpets' and new housing has brought, 'non Bailliff Bridgers' – people who lack an understanding of a village proud to produce fine woven carpets. Threatened by 'outsiders', these ageing respondents (65-100) are not using 'bridging capital' (Puttnam, 2000) to broker relationships with newcomers. Bemoaning the loss of a physical village, digital technologies and social media were viewed as a lack of investment in village areas where social relationships might develop. 'Ruination' is an historical and social process (Mah, 2012). Now post-industrial, like countless villages and towns in Britain, USA, Russia and beyond, Bailliff Bridge harbours a festering real-life problem: deep social divisions require urgent measures.

The difficulties workers experience in the transition from industrial production such as steel and shipbuilding to neo-liberal service industries has been documented (Mah, 2012; Walkerdine and Jimenez, 2012). Less attention has been paid to how older people – bereft of affective communal ties, skills of making which conferred self and communal value and a physical village – age well in a post-industrial landscape.

The Focus *How the research provides a fresh approach to real-life problems*

Focus groups in 'Landscapes of Loss' discussed nostalgic memories of Firths as a paternalistic, 'family feel' workplace that provided a 'whole way of life' through corporate social activities and sports clubs. The felt lack of place among respondents heightened the need to treasure photographs (most pre-digital). Nostalgia has faced negative criticism (Frow, 1997). To unlock why photographs matter to the people of the study I aim to use Keightley and Pickering's (2012) concept of 'mnemonic imagination' which re-evaluates reflective elements of nostalgia as a creative response to loss.

Photographic literature on de-industrialization charts a visual history of the changing nature of work (Pahl, 1984; Harper, 2001). Some represent the dignity and pride in production (Hedges and Beynon, 1982). Yet there is a paucity of work on how ex-workers interact creatively with photographs that form their emotional 'memoryscape' (Basu, 2013).

Visual images enable us to see the spatial dimension of work, 'how work was done, how it was valued and portrayed' (Strangleman, 2012). In a move to re-animate photographs of carpet-making, the artist draws on the skills of the workers by capturing the oft-repeated hand gestures they required as makers and communicators in the chain of production. Photographs will be taken showing ex-workers and newcomers as subjects recollecting these actions. They will be displayed on the fences on the tract of undeveloped land where Clifton Mill stood at the heart of the village before demolition. The aim is to re-build community through project involvement and by audiencing these public art works.

Theory & Methodology *What conceptual innovation the research is aiming at, and how different disciplinary inputs will interact in empirical inquiry – specific methodological examples are often helpful for non-specialist readers*

Counter to the theorization of ruins as aesthetic, sensuous sites (Edensor, 2005), expressed in the dereliction tourism of art photography, the project focuses on the everyday elements of post-industrial lived experience. It creates a unique blend of theory to examine how people construct and are constructed by a landscape of memory and loss. Arguing that the psychoanalytic notion of 'containment anxiety' hold explanatory power for understanding the trauma of spatial and communal loss (Walkerdine, 2010), it uses mobile methods and non-representational theory (Krajina et. al., 2014; Lorimer, 2005), attendant to haptic, aromatic and atmospheric memories, to research spatial and emotional issues when buildings are pulled down and people feel anxiety in open or built-over demolished spaces (Walkerdine, 2010). Bailliff Bridge, provides a real-life setting to test out the conceptual insights from memory studies to reclaim nostalgia as a healing mechanism for coping with loss (Keightley and Pickering, 2012). Set within this theoretical approach, it draws on the cultural history of hand gestures that - from the sign language used by the deaf to Indian Kathak dance - powerfully convey meaning meaning and emotion. I know of no study to date which conjoins photography about how work was done through collaboration with ex-workers and an artist to re-animate work gestures as a means to re-value lost skills and labour. It is methodologically innovative because it brings people together via movement and conversation through photographic motifs, memories and remembered skills to create public art at the site of the research.

This project is a 'multi-sited' ethnographic study (Basu, 2013) drawing on geographical sites, oral testimony, objects, embodied memories and gestures. The award enables a

focus on photographs as a means of prompting 'synaesthetic and kinaesthetic effects' for respondent recall (Edensor, 2005). In phase one, qualitative interviews about everyday remembering practices will focus on what photographs of working life in Bailliff Bridge mean to ex-workers and residents. Analysis of data using these methods will test out both reflective and restorative forms of nostalgia to unlock their creative potential.

Of particular interest to the artist are the embodied elements of the making process as recorded in the photographs – the way the hands use fine motor skills to handle the weight, feel and material of carpet at different stages of production. In phase two, I will work with the artist to further collaborate with ex-workers of varied skill (weaving, setting, creeling) and newcomers. Two workshops will bring them together to share and pass on the knowledge of how they used their hands in the factory. Respondents will be asked to remember and re-enact hand gestures from their daily carpet-making routines. Like learning a dance the gestures and movements would be passed on like a piece of choreography, opening up a wider conversation about the factory and history of place.

Ethical considerations – confidentiality, the right to withdraw - will be put in place to protect older potentially vulnerable respondents who are asked to recall personal memories in the research processes.

Work Plan *How the work will be organised over the award period and what outputs are intended.*

I am applying for a year's award to conduct research about photographs, hand gestures and carpet-making. My book monograph proposal 'Spectres of Loss: nostalgia and art in an ex-industrial carpet village' is currently being considered by Manchester University Press. This will be achieved in five phases:

1/ September 1st- October 31st 2020

Phase 1 empirical research: qualitative interviews about everyday remembering practices using photographs. *Following government guidelines on C-19, these face to face interviews will be conducted with social distancing in place.* Write C1 'Introduction' Permission for displaying large scale photographs sought.

2/ November 1st – 31st December 2020

Phase 2 empirical research: photographic workshops with Catherine Bertola, ex-workers and newcomers to ascertain 'me-mowing' and carpet-making skills. *With reference to C-19 guidelines a venue will be sought where 2 m social distancing and a

one way system for entrance and exit points are available.* Analysis of Phase 1 data. The artist will work on photographic production of the large scale images.

3/ January 1st – February 28th 2021

Analysis of Phase 2 data. Write C2 'Personal Journeys: Understanding Deindustrial Lives.' Catherine Bertola will perform a photo-shoot with the respondents. *The artist will ensure she has a lens that is powerful enough to ensure that the photo-shoot takes place at a safe distance.*

4/ March 1st- May 31st 2021

Write 'C4: Nostalgia as a creative response to loss.' Post-production of the photographs. Technicians will measure and inspect the site for installation. *Installers will ensure safe working is per C-19 guidelines for construction workers.* Contact local press and social media about the project and unveiling of the photographs.

5/ June 1st- August 31st 2021

Photographs installed at site of Clifton Mill. Participant observation and fieldnotes about local reaction and reception. *A virtual tour of the site will be produced and added to the Landscapes of Loss website so that people who are shielding/ vulnerable with an interest can access it.* Write C5 'Legacies of Loss' Deliver the book to MUP publishers.

Outputs:

Community art project

Research monograph

Outcome *What further steps and what longer-term outcome are envisaged.*

The project is concerned with outcomes both inside and outside the boundaries of academia. The award will be used for the research and delivery of a community project that hopes to re-build a village broken and divided by the process of de-industrialisation. Its wider aim is to provide a potential working model for healing affective communal ties for those living within 'ruined' post-industrial sites in international settings such as the USA, Russia and beyond.

The photographs leave an important legacy which requires dissemination so that others can learn from them. I will seek further funding to:

1/ curate an exhibition of the collected photographs (500 photographs, circa. 1880-2013) and objects to be curated at Halifax Central Library.

2/ develop a suite of digital resources. This would include a co-collaborative website modelled on the Pararchive project Yarn developed at Leeds University. Designed in conjunction with community users it promotes co-creation so that people can, 'take ownership of cultural resources' and, 'use them in their own commemorations of difficult events and as a basis for developing their own collective histories' (Popple, S. and Mutibwa, D., 2016). Designed for the community of ex-workers and residents it affords control to those who wish to contribute to blogs, produce reflective pieces of writing, short stories and links to social media in a digital open space.

3/ produce a short YouTube video publicising the research to extend the reach of the project beyond academia to other communities of interest.

Ethics Statement *Any measures required for ethical conduct of the research.*

It is standard practice that all research receives ethical scrutiny and clearance by all staff affiliated at Leeds Beckett University. We will therefore make an application to the ethics committee. The following standard ethical issues are germane to the project:

The participants will be informed of the aims, research question, methods and requirements of the research and told they can withdraw from the project at any stage. Confidentiality and anonymity of respondents will be respected, and all engagement will be undertaken in a sensitive manner to protect older potentially vulnerable respondents who are asked to recall personal memories in the research process.

Participant consent will be sought to: record and transcribe the research encounters; photograph and film respondents and use their images for public display; disseminate the research findings through the artistic outputs, at academic conferences and public lecture series and publish the findings in international journals and in a research monograph. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the place where the research took place and the identity of the people who took part in the study. Permissions will be sought to use personal and acquired photographs of working and social life of Firth's Carpets and Bailliff Bridge for the purposes of the research.