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# Empty Spaces

Perspectives on emptiness in modern history

Edited by Courtney J. Campbell, Allegra Giovine  
and Jennifer Keating





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# Introduction

## Confronting emptiness in history

*Courtney J. Campbell, Allegra Giovine and Jennifer Keating*

*‘There is no such thing as an empty space on a map.’<sup>1</sup>*

Emptiness is a challenging concept: slippery in definition and elastic in meaning. It implies a total lack of content: people, buildings, objects or markings on a map. In the abstract, emptiness equals nothingness, a perfect void. Yet when one thinks of places on the globe that one might associate with being empty – the Gobi or Sahara deserts, the depths of the Pacific ocean – it is quickly evident that none is truly devoid of everything. The most cursory survey of these two expanses would reveal an array of contents: mineral deposits, complex eco-systems, transitory forms of life, migrants and long-standing patterns of circulation and movement. Even the ultimate vacuum – the cosmos – is full of planets, stars, asteroids, debris and space junk. Yet these contents do not necessarily contradict a palpable identification of emptiness. In this sense, emptiness is inherently relational, defined as much by what does not fill or is expected to fill a space as by what is in fact there.

Emptiness is therefore less the result of site-specific quantitative assessment and more something perceived through comparison with other places. Empty sites appear emptier than elsewhere, containing fewer people, fewer signs of life, fewer traces of human activity. As a state, emptiness necessarily invokes what is *not* present; it is in some ways a condition of absence. It thus follows that as emptiness is a matter of perception, it is a highly subjective phenomenon, dependent to a large extent on who is doing the observing and what the subject expects to find. What is devoid of objects or meaning to one person or group might very well be ‘full’ to another. Taking this one step further, emptiness is thus deeply rooted in how places are imagined and, as will be shown in this volume, a potent

<sup>1</sup> J. B. Harley, ‘Silences and secrecy: the hidden agenda of cartography in early modern Europe’, *Imago Mundi*, xl (1988), 57–76, at p. 71.

tool in the articulation of power between individuals and collectives. With this in mind, emptiness cannot be accepted at face value; it is by no means an objective state. As Brian Harley suggests in the epigraph above, absences – in his case, literally blank spaces on early modern European maps – must be subject to historical investigation and critical analysis.

This examination of emptiness can be situated within a long trend towards the study of spatial history. While there is a tendency to speak of a twenty-first century ‘spatial turn’ in history, spatial history finds its roots in a much deeper past. Cumulatively, these efforts have radically altered an older, Cartesian conception of space which first placed emphasis on the stability and timelessness of places and landscapes and then in the nineteenth century subordinated space to time in contemporary thought.<sup>2</sup> The gradual re-evaluation of space as a critical concept in understanding the world around us began in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when scholars around the globe contributed to the growing field of human geography, studying the effects of geography and environment on culture. They tied concepts from the hard sciences, like biomes and ecosystems, to cultural phenomena, but still thought of spaces as bounded and stable.<sup>3</sup> It was only from the late 1970s and 1980s onwards that historians and geographers, influenced by discourse analysis and studies in postmodernism, began to think of spaces as social constructs in constant transformation.<sup>4</sup> These spaces gain meaning, in line with Henri Lefebvre’s definition, through ‘spatial practice’ (how we move within and around space), ‘representations of space’ (architectural plans, city plans and maps) and ‘representational space’ (symbolic associations with geographic spaces). In this way, spaces, our use of them, their representations and other symbolic

<sup>2</sup> For a useful overview, see B. Warf and S. Arias, *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (London, 2008). Historicism, for instance, with its focus on stages of development, gave little to no importance to space as a category of analysis.

<sup>3</sup> See C. J. Campbell, ‘Space, place, and scale: human geography and spatial history in *Past and Present*’, *Past & Present*, ccxxxix (2018), 23–45, at p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> This body of literature is immense. Some well-known starting points include J. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1994); M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, Calif., 1984); M. Foucault, ‘Of other spaces’, *Diacritics*, xvi (1986), 22–7; H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (Oxford, 1991); Y. Tuan, *Space and Place: the Perspective of Experience* (London, 1977). For additional historiographical information on the spatial turn and spatial history, see P. Hubbard, ‘Space/place’, in *Cultural Geography: a Critical Dictionary of Key Concepts*, ed. D. Atkinson et al. (London, 2005), pp. 41–8; N. Thrift, ‘Space: the fundamental stuff of geography’, in *Key Concepts in Geography*, ed. S. L. Holloway, S. P. Rice and G. Valentine (London, 2003), pp. 95–107; *A Feminist Glossary of Human Geography*, ed. L. McDowell and J. P. Sharp (London, 2014); R. White, ‘What is spatial history?’ (Stanford, Calif., 2010) <<https://web.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/site/pub.php?id=29>> [accessed 25 June 2018].

associations change over time. While the meaning of ‘emptiness’ varies in this volume according to chapter and sources, the meaning of ‘space’ and ‘place’ remains fairly established throughout: in line with Lefebvre, this volume also conceives of space as socially produced and consumed. Further, the chapters in this volume tend to recognize a ‘thirdspace’ – that is, space that consists of multiple real and imagined, concrete and abstract facets.<sup>5</sup> Space, then, is a social construct in constant transformation.<sup>6</sup>

What scholars now call the spatial turn refers to ‘the perception that social change can no longer be satisfactorily explained without a re-conceptualization of categories relative to the spatial component of social life’.<sup>7</sup> While many scholars have limited their discussions of the spatial turn to methodological questions inspired by the use of geographic information system (GIS) technologies for the study of human geography and history, this volume is more concerned with how spatial meaning is constructed, how emptiness is represented and for what purposes and ends. In this way we agree with Karl Schlögel’s assessment that ‘being and time’ are no longer enough to explain human existence and Martina Löw’s urging for scholars to move beyond the idea of space as a container or *a priori* reality (that is, as absolute space) and towards an understanding of space as a condition that results from social processes.<sup>8</sup>

Nonetheless, within the expanding literature on space and history, little is said of the role that emptiness serves or the processes by which it is produced. An explanation of why this might be can be found in Lefebvre’s own commentary on his work: having introduced the notion that space was actively produced, he admitted that speaking of space in this way ‘sounds bizarre, so great is the sway still held by the idea that empty space is prior to whatever ends up filling it’.<sup>9</sup> While Lefebvre’s thoughts on the social production of space have since become largely normalized in scholarship, the bulk of research continues to explore the work done in the production and construction of spaces: the act of ‘filling’ space with meaning. Almost implicitly, this has meant that most studies look in the opposite direction to emptiness and, correspondingly, very little research explores the social and cultural practices used to create or maintain conditions of emptiness.

<sup>5</sup> E. W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 56–7.

<sup>6</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space*.

<sup>7</sup> M. Löw, ‘O *spatial turn*: para uma sociologia do espaço’, *Tempo Social*, xxv (2013), 17–34, at p. 17. Translations are by the editors.

<sup>8</sup> K. Schlögel, *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit: Über Zivilisationsgeschichte und Geopolitik* (Munich, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p. 15.

Thus while many scholars continue to concentrate on the spatial evolution of borders and populated landscapes in a historical sense, we also consider emptiness or ‘nothingness’ to be equal components in the fabric of real and imagined space, subject to, and created by, very similar sets of physical and discursive activities as other types of space. Just like other spatial realms, emptiness can never be a neutral stage on which human activity plays out: like ‘wilderness’ or ‘wild nature’, it is not a ‘natural’ state; neither is it simply a precursor to being ‘filled’ with objects, people, imagination or value.<sup>10</sup> In short, we argue that spaces which are considered empty and devoid of content are just as important to the social production of space and landscape as those which are remembered, celebrated or memorialized. While some historians have detailed the place of seemingly empty spaces within national narratives (consider, for example, the work of Cynthia Radding on the US–Mexican borderlands, Richard White on the American west and Willard Sunderland on the Russian grasslands)<sup>11</sup> and others have historicized emptiness as a concept in natural and religious philosophy (for example, work on early modern experimental vacuums by Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer and on the role of emptiness in the creation of ‘oriental philosophy’ by Urs App),<sup>12</sup> this volume engages with the use of empty spaces in the construction of historical narratives writ large, including, but also beyond, the national. Emptiness is not the lack of physical or imaginative content, but rather a condition that grants value to the modern spaces discussed in this volume.

As shown above, with only a little work it is not difficult to uncover that these places – like Harley’s maps – are not empty, but in many ways full of both life and meaning. In this book we aim to excavate the myths and illusions of emptiness. If emptiness is the result of social perceptions, then probing this constructed illusion offers access to a wider set of historical ideas about nation, empire, community and self: the thought processes, self-perceptions and world-views of those who form and sustain the idea. In

<sup>10</sup> W. Cronon, ‘The trouble with wilderness: or, getting back to the wrong nature’, *Environmental History*, i (1996), 7–28.

<sup>11</sup> C. Radding, *Landscapes of Power and Identity: Comparative Histories in the Sonoran Desert and the Forests of Amazonia from Colony to Republic* (Durham, N.C. and London, 2005); R. White, *It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own’: a History of the American West* (London, 1991); W. Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2004). D. Davis’s recent study on arid lands does move beyond a national perspective: D. K. Davis, *The Arid Lands: History, Power, Knowledge* (Cambridge, Mass., 2016).

<sup>12</sup> S. Shapin and S. Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton, N.J., 1985); U. App, *The Cult of Emptiness: the Western Discovery of Buddhist Thought and the Invention of Oriental Philosophy* (Kyoto, 2012).

other words, examining places conceived of as empty allows us to uncover the purpose of these constructions, given that geographical imaginations exist to advance certain political, social and economic agendas.<sup>13</sup> In the end, these contemplations of emptiness reveal a particularly modern discomfort with unused, unknown or uncontrollable spaces. Empty spaces, then, are not just voids or the contemplation thereof, but are sites that shed light on the anxieties and possibilities of modernity. We do not, therefore, seek to fix a specific meaning to emptiness, but to consider the plurality of meanings attached to the concept and, in turn, what they can reveal about past and contemporary societies and individuals.

The chapters in this book approach empty spaces around the world and throughout the modern period through a variety of related disciplines, ranging from national, imperial and local history to cultural studies, art history, architecture and urban design and archaeology. While varied in methodology, the chapters presented here all focus explicitly on the purported emptiness of physical sites: air-, ocean-, rural-, suburban- and city-scapes, in either material or representational form; and, in so doing, explore the identification, construction and use of emptiness by a variety of individual, group and state actors as a specific spatial practice. They examine emptiness as the product of representational practice and of material activity – in other words, as the outcome of *both* imaginative and physical work. Just as Jacques Lacan's work on the gaze has had particular impact on the way historians have succeeded in incorporating regimes of sight into research on contemporary understandings of other places, so here almost all of the chapters engage with literal or metaphorical sight as a property that underpins the spatial practice and representation of emptiness.<sup>14</sup> At times this is done in very direct fashion, via visual representations of empty spaces including fine art, film, newspaper cartography and posters. In other instances, the idea of a 'national', 'colonial', 'archaeological' or 'scientific' gaze that informs the imaginative processes of envisioning space underpins the commentary. Taken together, the chapters underscore the extent to which emptiness is historically contingent – the product of the interaction

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., D. Cosgrove, *Geography and Vision: Seeing, Imagining and Representing the World* (London, 2008); D. Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Oxford, 1994); D. Harvey, 'Between space and time: reflections on the geographical imagination', in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, lxxx (1990), 418–34; *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives on Place and Space*, ed. E. Hirsch and M. O'Hanlon (Oxford, 1995); K. G. Morrissey, *Mental Territories: Mapping the Inland Empire* (Ithaca, 1997); E. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London, 1993).

<sup>14</sup> J. Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. A. Sheridan (London, 1977).

of different sets of ideas or gazes which change according to time and place. They contribute to our understanding of national and imperial narratives of territorial and social identity. They also show how notions of emptiness are employed to make statements about social isolation, to critique dominant ideologies of capitalism and neoliberalism and to uncover conflicting ideas of value and appropriation. They reveal how ideas about empty spaces insinuate fear of the unknown and provide an imagined vacuum to be filled with the hope of modern technologies. Emptiness, in this way, becomes a cipher for broader projects of self-, collective-, national- and imperial-fashioning and is, therefore, deeply implicated in our economic, political and social systems.

We also learn through the chapters in this volume that emptiness in the social imagination is connected not simply to an absence of the usual 'content' of life – buildings, people, objects and so forth, but also to a lack of, or disruption to, more abstract qualities that we usually observe in our surroundings. A number of the chapters discuss the temporal aspect of emptiness, when the usual passage of time is suspended or distorted (a desert, a post-apocalyptic scene, a megalithic monument on a modern housing estate), thus resulting in places that are seen as being somehow 'out of time'. Here, emptiness bears some of the characteristics of 'heterotopias' or 'heterotopic spaces': sites such as a prison or museum that disrupt the surrounding 'real' world by virtue of their inversion of the usual mess and jumble of life to produce perfect and meticulous utopian spaces.<sup>15</sup> Just as heterotopias are 'slices of time', isolated from the traditional passage of time in reality, so the chapters explore how emptiness produces a similarly disruptive effect on temporal patterns. Both empty and heterotopic sites 'make difference' from their surroundings as they appear curiously 'in place and out of place', yet the former are most often seen as far from the perfection that the latter embody.<sup>16</sup> These chapters invite us to ruminate on the relationship between time and space in the modern period and the role that emptiness has played in creating the perception of places in past, present and future. These reflections on emptiness remind us that the

<sup>15</sup> In his 1967 lecture 'Des espaces autres', Foucault characterized heterotopias as 'something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be formed within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted'. Parts of the lecture were later reprinted as M. Foucault, 'Of other spaces' (see fn 4). Principle four of the 'principles of heterotopia' outlines that heterotopic sites are often linked with 'slices in time', acting as a break from 'traditional time' (p. 26). For a recent discussion of the concept and a detailed bibliography, see P. Johnson, 'The geographies of heterotopia', *Geography Compass*, vii (2013), 790–803.

<sup>16</sup> Johnson, 'Geographies of heterotopia', p. 797.



post-modern, pre-modern and modern are not mutually exclusive, but can connect, combine and contribute to processes of hybridization, exclusion and modernization.<sup>17</sup> The volume therefore contributes to a broader understanding of emptiness as existing not simply on a spatial but also a temporal scale. While the temporality of emptiness is not the focus of this volume, we hope the chapters here lay the foundation for future study.

This collection deals explicitly with the modern age from the nineteenth century onwards. As the chapters here suggest, narratives of the empty have gained additional currency and use in the modern age, allowing emptiness to take on a particular resonance that it may not have had in the past. Such developments are linked more broadly to the changing ways in which time and space were experienced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, connected, as Stephen Kern and others have demonstrated, to technologies such as the land survey, photography, new forms of travel and communication and the global standardization of time.<sup>18</sup> We suggest that the value of emptiness is heightened in the modern age, not simply by technologies that made empty spaces more readily visible, traversable and controllable, but also by some of the key processes and ideologies that span the modern world. The industrial city emerges as an important site for the identification and negotiation of empty space, both within urban zones and as a contrast to the relative emptiness of more remote locations, as do land-, sea- and air-scapes in the narratives of high imperialism, burgeoning nationalism and twentieth-century capitalism. In turn, this sets up a tension between attempts to ‘overcome’ or ‘make productive’ empty spaces and efforts to preserve or highlight emptiness, themselves very often rooted in the experience of life specific to the modern age (social isolation and the anxiety associated with unknown, abandoned or unused spaces).<sup>19</sup> Empty spaces, then, become a lens, metaphor, foil, or tool for working through the anxieties of modernity – in the words of Anthony Vidler, the ‘[f]ear, anxiety, estrangement, and their psychological counterparts, anxiety[,] neuroses, and phobias ... intimately linked to the aesthetics of space throughout

<sup>17</sup> See N. García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, trans. C. L. Chiappari and S. L. López (Minneapolis, Minn., 2005).

<sup>18</sup> S. Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983). See also D. Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus: Technological Change and Industrial Development in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present* (Cambridge, 1969); V. Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time: 1870–1950* (Cambridge, Mass., 2015); J. C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, Conn., 1998); R. Wenzlhuemer, *Connecting the Nineteenth-Century World: the Telegraph and Globalization* (Cambridge, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> See M. Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: the Experience of Modernity* (London, 1982).

the modern period'.<sup>20</sup> Just as for Linda Nochlin the anxiety of modernity is expressed through fragmentation (in her case, of representations of the human body), so is it also expressed through representations of emptiness or voids – an anxious metaphor deployed by individuals, communities, societies and states around the world for the desire to understand, control and maintain the unknown, unused, uncontrollable or unimaginable spaces that inconvenience the spread of imperialism, nationalism, capitalism, neoliberalism and multinational corporations.<sup>21</sup> That said, while the meaning of emptiness is painted with the brush of modernity, we do not propose that emptiness is a uniquely modern phenomenon, but simply that it acquires heightened value in the modern age; quite clearly more work remains to be done on histories of emptiness in the pre-modern period.

Any exploration of emptiness could have multiple starting points. In this collection, we have chosen to open the volume with four chapters that examine specific land-, sea- and air-scapes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, each of which discusses the ways in which conceptions of emptiness contributed to regional, national and imperial narratives of territorial identity, nation-building and conquest. From this cohesive base, the second half of the collection is more cross-disciplinary in nature, incorporating related disciplines of art history, cultural studies, urban planning and archaeology. While maintaining a continued focus on the use and implications of emptiness, these chapters allow the conversation to broaden out, examining the role of space in acts of self-fashioning, in critiques of tradition and modernity and in using and reimagining the past. Emptiness in these chapters becomes a useful category to cut across traditionally separated disciplines and sub-fields and underscores not simply the ongoing relevance of spatial inquiry to a range of academic scholarship, but the fruitfulness of exploring a historical condition from different methodological perspectives.

Opening the volume, Kevin James explores tropes of barrenness and abundance in the late Victorian Connemara landscape. Centred on a rural hotel that acted as a base both for tourists and for social investigators and

<sup>20</sup> A. Vidler, *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001), p. 1. For an analysis of the link between empty urban commons and anxiety, particularly in the form of agoraphobia, see K. Milun, *Pathologies of Modern Space: Empty Space, Urban Anxiety, and the Recovery of the Public Self* (London, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> L. Nochlin, *The Body in Pieces: the Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity* (New York, 1995). On the multinational corporation as the new motor that drives the pursuit of capital, replacing the nation, see M. Santos, *Por otra globalización: del pensamiento único a la cociencia universal* (Bogotá, 2004). Canclini suggests that the 'evasive and unmanageable' (along with imagined) nature of globalization inspires those who deal in it to do so 'through narrations and metaphors' (N. García Canclini, *La globalización imaginada* (Mexico City, 2001 [1999]), p. 11).

rural industrial improvers, the chapter traces the evolution of two competing narratives about the wild landscapes of western Ireland: one which saw the district as characterized by want and privation due to the barrenness, infertile soil and over-population of the local landscape; the other gradually inverting the trope of scarcity to find in the region's remote and rugged nature a haven for sporting tourists. Here James points to the competing ways in which landscape was framed, with emptiness being a source of despair with attempts at 'improvement', and also a cause for celebration and preservation. As tourism lent the region new allure at the beginning of the twentieth century, James demonstrates not only the ways in which notions of emptiness were central to the process by which landscape was recast from unproductive and harsh to stark and alluring, but also that they were central to individual acts of self-fashioning by reform-minded politicians, local inhabitants and visiting tourists.

The obstacles and opportunities of difficult nature are picked up in Jennifer Keating's contribution on the seemingly empty desert drylands of colonial Central Asia. Here, too, Russian colonists and administrators found in the challenging landscapes a reason to 'improve' empty nature through irrigation and settlement. Yet just as James points to multiple attitudes to the wild environment of Ireland, so, too, Keating frames emptiness as having no fixed value. While studies of imperial history most frequently reference the labelling of land as 'empty' as a simple precursor to colonial appropriation, here Keating explores the instability of desert landscapes, pointing to the perceived and real threat that they posed to travellers, settlers, communities and infrastructure in the form of aridity, erosion, mirages and disorientation. The desert challenged just as much as it enabled the narratives and actions of Russian imperialists.

Efforts to 'overcome' difficult geographies perceived as empty also form the basis of Leonie Schuster's chapter on aviation in early twentieth-century Brazil. Shifting the focus from landscape to airspace, she suggests that the first distance flights, particularly those of Edu Chaves in 1912, contributed to the physical and symbolic integration of Brazilian national territory, not simply by allowing previously 'empty' airspace to be conquered, but by connecting the densely populated coast with the sparsely inhabited interior, seen by urban elites as 'empty' and lacking national content. Chaves's flights, framed in the press as a continuation of the *bandeirantes'* conquest of the Brazilian hinterland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, served as a symbolic means of unifying geographically disconnected territory, couched in both national and imperial rhetoric.

Developing the visual depiction of emptiness discussed by Schuster in relation to cartography, Tricia Cusack explores the visual qualities of

seascapes in Empire Marketing Board (EMB) posters of the 1920s and 1930s. Serving the EMB's mission to increase trade between Britain and its overseas empire, Cusack argues that these posters also sought to foster imperial ideology and did so through their presentation of the ocean as a benign passageway. While reminders of the dangers of the empty sea remained in their imagery, EMB posters simultaneously sought to minimize these fearful elements by reducing the vastness of the ocean, emphasizing the impregnability of the ocean liner and placing the viewer securely behind the ship's railing. Through these visual representations EMB posters effectively connected the empire's territorial bounties and invited viewers to take part in the imperial voyage.

Explored across land, sea and air in these opening four chapters, emptiness thus emerges as a critical component in thinking about region, nation and empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Described and discussed in the media, written reports, travel accounts, maps, posters and so forth, emptiness rooted in difficult-to-traverse or inhospitable nature served the agenda of a variety of imperial and national projects: a spatial device used to rationalize attempts to 'improve' or 'unify' territory. At the same time, irrespective of the relative success of these socio-political projects, the deployment of notions of emptiness provides intriguing insight into the subjectivities of those framing the land as empty, casting imperial, local and national actors as improvers, reformers and controllers of difficult nature.

The remainder of the volume draws on a wider range of disciplinary methodologies to expand our understanding of emptiness, especially its temporal and affective dimensions. The practice of visually depicting, and thus creating, emptiness runs through chapters 5 and 6, with empty urban and suburban landscapes as a cipher for dislocation, both in a personal sense from a wider group, from society or social norms; and in a temporal sense from the 'normal' run of time. In her chapter on Edward Hopper's paintings of Paris in the early twentieth century, Emily Burns turns our attention to the fine arts and the 'great American vacuist's' early experimentation with the portrayal of empty, alienated urban spaces. Guiding us deftly through technical aspects of Hopper's paintings, Burns exposes the tension between figure and place that denies a harmonious whole to the foreign capital. The removal of human figures, for example in Hopper's repeated paintings of the Louvre, disrupts the temporality of naturalistic scenes, giving them a modernist effect. Burns suggests that the seeming emptiness of Hopper's Paris is, in fact, carefully constructed and acts as both a claim to cultural and artistic solitude and as a symbol of anxieties about the then fraught practice of artistic study abroad and of French artistic hegemony. In this

sense, emptiness is a form of artistic argument through which Hopper is able to make certain claims about himself and the wider art world.

Aesthetic uses of emptiness to project latent anxieties and convey altered temporalities are shown in a different medium in the following chapter by Martin Walter. Taking two contemporary TV series, *The Walking Dead* and *Survivors*, as his primary objects of inquiry out of a much wider landscape of post-apocalyptic fiction, Walter shows how the recent revival of this genre relies on the appropriation of empty and fragmented spaces which feature in discourses of security and bodily integrity and promote the ideology of neoliberal late capitalism in Western societies. In contrast to Burns's focus on the relationship between the individual and the perception of emptiness, here Walter explores the ways in which collectives conceive of the rural and urban environments of the post-apocalypse, where previously familiar sites such as a family home, a supermarket or a farm unnerve by their emptiness. He suggests that the visual representation of abandoned spaces is used as a means to comment on anxieties surrounding consumerism, late capitalism and neoliberalism. As in Burns's exploration of Hopper's Paris paintings, here estrangement forms a critical component of the visual depiction of emptiness, with empty spaces indicative of both an alienation from social norms that have been shattered by the apocalypse and a temporal disconnection between the 'old' world and that of the post-apocalypse.

Continuing the exploration of the ways in which the passage of time is implicated in the physical practice and representation of emptiness, the final two chapters explore spaces within urban or suburban landscapes that are initially conceived of as unused or vacant and thus empty of activity. The authors examine conflicting values of use, uncovering the temporary and transient activities that fill these spaces with new meaning and thus have the capacity to affect the way in which such sites are conceived in the longer term. The process of the partial appropriation of these sites points again to the unstable qualities of emptiness: simultaneously empty and not empty, depending on perspective. These contestations of the meaning of emptiness are explored first by Krystallia Kamvasinou and Sarah Ann Milne in their study of the temporary use of vacant urban spaces in post-war London. Today's temporary-use initiatives have rich historical precedent, and despite the transience of earlier projects, Kamvasinou and Milne offer a historical lens through which to connect contemporary efforts to those of the 1960s countercultural movement, 1970s community gardening and urban ecology and more recent environmentalism. They show the means by which vacant urban land has been reimaged from a landscape of decline to a 'landscape of potential' in which value is assessed beyond the narrow economic terms of private developers. This creative act of reimagining was first taken up

largely by individual artists and through a series of case studies the authors reveal how efforts to reimagine emptiness gradually became sanctioned through official processes and institutions. Kamvasinou and Milne argue that although temporariness is a feature characteristic of vacant urban lands, this does not inhibit (and, indeed, may encourage) their influence on longer-term processes that shape the urban landscape.

Kenneth Brophy's contribution on prehistoric enclosures embedded in urban landscapes and edgelands draws the volume to a close and, in so doing, brings the perspective of archaeology to the exploration of emptiness. Even more than historians, archaeologists deal with emptiness as a key challenge of their discipline: both the gaps within a historical record that relate to a period thousands of years ago; and the very physical empty spaces of prehistoric monuments, henges and enclosures, often vast in size and revealing very little trace of past life or activity under survey or excavation. Brophy's interest in this chapter is not in prehistory per se, but in the modern uses of these prehistoric 'empty' enclosures. Taking three sites in Scotland with Neolithic associations – places where 'the ancient past intrudes into the contemporary' – he explores the curious positioning of these sites 'out of time', either invisible at ground level or subject to traumatic relocation and reconstruction to serve urban regeneration. Crucially, although these places appear to be empty, due to a lack of activity or found objects from the past, this is far from the case and, just as in the preceding chapter, Brophy tracks the use of these seemingly vacant places for a variety of social and anti-social activities. Observation reveals patterns of social gathering, ceremonies, sport and memorialization, all of which leave little long-standing tangible evidence, just as in prehistory. Examining how these sites are used now also illuminates the challenges that archaeologists face in understanding how these places were used in deep time; and Brophy suggests, in fact, that the enduring idea of Neolithic sites as empty is largely the product of the archaeological gaze and the methods of fieldwork that are used to explore large, ancient sites. As he summarizes, emptiness is 'often simply an illusion caused by the processes we use to look at the past' – thus implicating not only historical actors in the production and maintenance of emptiness, but also present-day investigators of that history.

In drawing together this volume, and as a basis from which our explorations have proceeded, we find common ground with Harley and Lefebvre's suggestions that objective emptiness does not exist. Harley's caution that 'there is no such thing as an empty space on a map' and Lefebvre's urging that 'space is never empty' have underpinned our conceptualization

of emptiness as being the very opposite of neutral space.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, rather than dismissing emptiness as an empirical fallacy, confronting the *subjective*, perceived existence of emptiness in history reveals sites as compelling as those spaces that have been interrogated as ‘filled in’ with content, value, activities and things. The work put into constructing and maintaining emptiness, both physical and figurative, points to the fact that emptiness is a condition that results from a complex mix of socio-historical processes. In turn, emptiness is a critical component not simply in spatial histories, but also in broader studies of imperialism, nationhood, self-fashioning and economic development across the modern era. Thus while the slipperiness of definition may make empty spaces methodologically challenging to explore, it is precisely the malleability of emptiness that has lent it such value to a range of actors in the recent past. Absences should not cause us to look elsewhere, but to look closer.

<sup>22</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, p. 154.

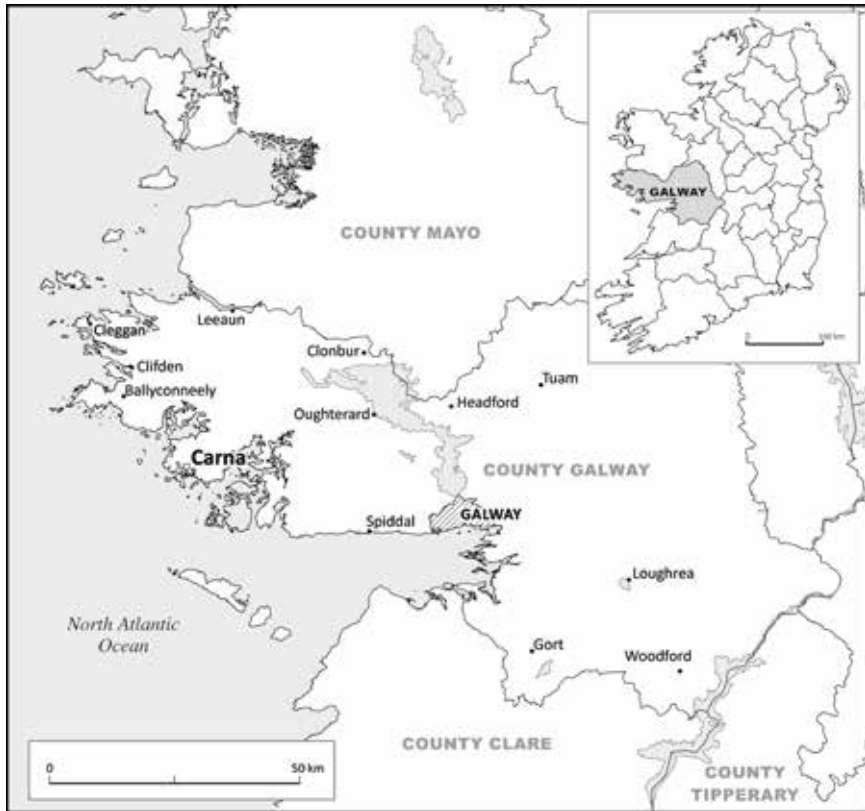


Figure 1.1. Map of Galway, with map of Ireland inset.  
Created by Marie Puddister, University of Guelph.



# I. ‘Take my advice, go to Mongan’s Hotel’: barrenness and abundance in the late Victorian Connemara landscape\*

*Kevin J. James*

Commenting on his stay at Mongan’s Hotel, in Carna, Co. Galway, in an August 1892 entry in the hotel’s visitors’ book, an English guest, Fred Scott, remarked that he had enjoyed ‘several visits’ to the hostelry; he recorded ‘uniform excellence’ and proprietors Martin and Honoria Mongan’s ‘personal kindness and attention’. This was ‘not the least of the charms of a stay with them’.<sup>1</sup> Their enterprise, in the western, largely Irish-speaking district of Connemara, Scott wrote, ‘deserves success + this, under present conditions, is certain to be achieved in full measure’. Following Scott’s name were others in his travelling party. The entry, which inaugurates the surviving Mongan’s Hotel visitors’ book, strays little from the tone, style and structure of subsequent inscriptions. These entries hew closely to a template extolling the hotel and praising the cuisine,<sup>2</sup> the attentiveness of the hotelkeepers<sup>3</sup> and the expansive sporting opportunities in the district’s fields, lakes, rivers and coast. Only the weather figures as a destabilizing element in guests’ fulsome inscriptions; and even then its caprices elicited ambivalent responses, simultaneously heightening the narrative of adventure and emphasizing the warmth enjoyed within the hostelry’s walls. As one traveller commented in 1895: ‘Have been here for a week for shooting, but incessant gales and rain have been very much against it. Found a fair

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<sup>1</sup> Special Collections, National University of Ireland – Galway, Mongan’s Hotel Book, Carna, ‘Original in the possession of Mr. M. Mylote, Carna’ [hereafter ‘Mongan’s Hotel Book’], p. 1. The copy of the book is occasionally illegible, especially dates, in which case it is noted in the reference.

<sup>2</sup> Mongan’s Hotel Book, 20 Dec. 1893.

<sup>3</sup> Mongan’s Hotel Book, 14 Aug. 1896 and 15 Aug. 1896.

K. J. James, “‘Take my advice, go to Mongan’s Hotel’: barrenness and abundance in the late Victorian Connemara landscape”, in *Empty Spaces: perspectives on emptiness in modern history*, ed. C. J. Campbell, A. Giovine and J. Keating (London, 2019), pp. 15–32. License: CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0.

number of snipes in certain places. Everyone very obliging and attentive'.<sup>4</sup> As this entry suggests, at Mongan's Hotel, food and hospitality, in contrast to the inclemency of climate, were as reliable as they were peerless. Craggy terrain, winding rivers and bracing weather defined a landscape with abundant opportunities for hunting, shooting and angling. The desolate terrain and formidable elements interwove with Mongan's Hotel's homely welcome to produce a distinctive narrative of an alluring place. Barrenness begat challenge, which in turn accentuated the prize of capture in fields and waters. The adventurous sporting tourist was rewarded in part because of, rather than despite, the visitations of mother nature. And the hotel figured as a beacon of civility and civilization in this narrative of a remote, rugged landscape. Indeed, one party staying over in May and June 1895 remarked in the book that '[t]he hotel is the very best we have seen out of Dublin, and for comfort, good cooking + general management could scarcely be improved' – a sentiment endorsed by a guest on 1 December 1896 who wrote: 'This I must say without any exception is the nicest + most comfortable Country Hotel I was Ever in'.

This chorus of fulsome endorsement is evident in similar books that lay open for perusal and inscription at hostelries throughout the United Kingdom and beyond.<sup>5</sup> A distinctive literary culture surrounded them, marked by whimsical illustration, mannered prose and effusive poetry. Combined, they constituted generic conventions of the 'hotel album' and emplaced it within popular imagination as a site of literary excess and a source of bemusement for the reader.<sup>6</sup> It was a species of the album genre – a bound codex with blank pages inviting inscription, defined by its initial 'emptiness'. This 'empty' and 'open book' was in fact no *tabula rasa*, but a volume with significant generic and material affordances that shaped the interwoven accounts of space, self and sociability. Textually, the narrative was collectively created through an aggregation of inscriptions – through processes of social authorship as empty pages were progressively filled. The

<sup>4</sup> Mongan's Hotel Book, Dec. 1895. Inscription dates, rather than page numbers, are cited in these notes.

<sup>5</sup> There is a growing literature analysing visitors' books as travel texts in the United Kingdom and continental Europe in the 19th century. See A. Durie, 'Tracking tourism: visitors' books and their value', *Scottish Archives*, xvii (2011), 73–84; R. Singer, 'Leisure, refuge and solidarity: messages in visitors' books as microforms of travel writing', *Studies in Travel Writing*, xx (2016), 392–408; K. James, "'A British social institution": the visitors' book and hotel culture in Victorian Britain and Ireland', *Journeys*, xiii (2012), 42–69; K. Michalkiewicz and P. Vincent, 'Victorians in the Alps: a case study of Zermatt's hotel guest books and registers', in *Britain and the Narration of Travel in the Nineteenth Century: Texts, Images, Objects*, ed. K. Hill (Farnham, 2016), pp. 75–90.

<sup>6</sup> James, "'A British social institution"'.

album became a technological device used to build social coherence and to generate, rather than simply record, a particular landscape. Mongan's Hotel's book, with its tight focus on leisure and sport and high praise for nature's yields, implicitly rebutted narratives of want and privation that underpinned other contemporary, printed accounts of Carna in which the condition of the district's inhabitants was attributed to the barren harvests of the land and sea and the absence of programmes and agents of improvement. Those tropes coloured evocative printed accounts and were measured in detailed statistical surveys of the landscape and its resources. These accounts stressed the barrenness of the district and linked its remoteness and infertile soil to population congestion and deep poverty. In the social economy of improvement, there was an alarming disequilibrium between the capacity of the soil and the coast on one hand and the needs of its population on the other. In contrast, legions of travellers over many years used the lens of active leisure – those who 'had excellent sport and the Devil's own blasting round Connemara' while enjoying 'the feeding and routine of the hotel', as one inscriber enthused<sup>7</sup> – to invert this trope of scarcity. Over time, as efforts to increase the district's prosperity failed, this inscription triumphed: the district's harshness became its chief attraction as terrain described as simultaneously barren of resources and teeming with peasants became a site ripe for the sporting tourist seeking to leave the beaten track.

### *The voices of the visitors' book*

Travellers leafed through and filled the pages of the hotel's visitors' book with inscriptions extolling Mongan's Hotel's satiating food and drink, knowledgeable guides and sturdy boats. Their entries were interlaced as comfortably and complementarily as the guests themselves intermingled over a warm fire, good fare and fine ale after a day of invigorating sport in field and stream. If the thematic and rhetorical coherence of the inscriptions in the visitors' book was marked – and its fulsome, often florid, tone was familiar to the reader of many Victorian hotel albums – features of this particular volume deviate from generic conventions in notable respects. They underscore how inscribers followed codes that were interwoven with acts of reading and also how conditions peculiar to the hotel and the locality influenced the narrative that was shaped through the book. One striking feature is the relative absence of impromptu poetry. Such verses often filled the pages of the late Victorian visitors' book (here only a few short verses appear, including one hackneyed effort from 16 December 1896 beginning, 'A tip to the sportsman: who not feeling well | just take the first

<sup>7</sup> Mongan's Hotel Book, December, 2 Feb. 1897.

train for Mongan's Hotel'). The dialogic structure of some books, which was reflected in scribal 'conversations' that saw pages filled non-sequentially as guests responded to earlier entries by penning marginal annotations on the same page, also yields here to a much more sequential series of inscriptions. Perhaps it is due to the nature of the hostelry – its markedly small scale (beginning as a five-bedded inn, with a wing added in the 1890s) and the culture of intimate, familiar superintendence. Or maybe it is the tendency of inscriptions to bear striking structural and thematic relation to surrounding material, as inscribers perused the album and produced entries that corresponded to what they had already read in it, either unconsciously or studiously hewing to thematic and structural parameters set by fellow visitors. Many of these inscribers were united both in purpose and in profile: they were sporting travellers who shared not only a lodging in Carna, but also a socio-economic status, visiting from Dublin and other parts of Ireland. They hailed from Britain, too, and often their stays were lengthy, stretching over a fortnight in late summer and December and January – prime seasons in the sporting calendar.<sup>8</sup> Their album entries hint at a gentle competition as they enumerated each day's success, measured by the size of bag and number of fish captured from coast and stream; their inscriptions also affirm their status as leisure travellers.



Figure 1.2. Mongan's Hotel, Carna, Co. Galway, n.d.  
Courtesy of The Historical Picture Archive.

<sup>8</sup> Mongan's Hotel Book, 30 Jan. 1896.

If the mark of the much-derided versifier is light in this album, sporting tourists are ubiquitous within the book's pages, inhabiting them as energetic narrators of days in the field and stream.<sup>9</sup> To them, mother nature played a critical part in defining success: a 'challenging' landscape became not an obstacle, but a precondition, to sporting accomplishment. Resistance to the elements while gamely overcoming stubborn wind and lashing rain was rewarded by rod and rifle and calculated proudly in their visitor-book counts of curlew, snipe, woodcock, duck and teal. Shooters might find wild fowl, golden plover and hares. Anglers reported reeling in stocks of brown and white trout, as well as sea fish.<sup>10</sup> As they took pen in hand, they propounded a narrative of sporting success and hospitality. And as they filled the empty pages with interweaving narratives of landscape and sociability, they engaged in the simultaneous social fashioning of self and space.

### *Tropes of bounty and barrenness*

As much as topography inspired visitors' book accounts of the satisfactions of sporting challenge and arduous conditions that were gamely overcome, other people employed alternative outlets and devices to narrate a different relationship to another landscape. They lamented nature's barrenness on Ireland's western shores and pledged themselves to the cause of the district's improvement as they calculated a disequilibrium between the population and the resources available to sustain them. Mongan's Hotel was located in the heart of a village in a populous district. Situated in a seaboard parish relying heavily on kelp-harvesting for income,<sup>11</sup> many observers found considerable poverty there, in part due to the village's heavy dependence on, and the vagaries of, the kelp market in the 1880s. Carna consequently became a focus of intense philanthropic activity and a synecdoche for western Irish poverty: a putatively precarious balance of resources to population earned it the formal designation of 'congested' when the Congested Districts Board

<sup>9</sup> Mongan's Hotel Book, 1 Jan. 1894; 31 Aug. 1894; 19 Oct. – 3 Nov. 1896.

<sup>10</sup> While such sport predominated among hotel visitors, and was the subject matter of the majority of inscriptions in the 1890s, other guests staying in June 1897 recorded cycling and pleasure boating (see Mongan's Hotel Book, undated, June 1897) and enjoyed the wild scenery of western Connemara. For an excellent comparative study of sporting tourism, see A. J. Durie, 'Sporting tourism flowers – the development from c.1780 of grouse and golf as visitor attractions in Scotland and Ireland', *Jour. Tourism History*, v (2013), 131–45.

<sup>11</sup> Trinity College Dublin, department of early printed books, Congested Districts Board for Ireland: Baseline Reports, 'Congested Districts Board for Ireland, County of Galway – Union of Clifden. Report of Major Rutledge-Fair, inspector, district of Carna', 1892 (hereafter 'CDB Report, Carna'); in this report it was noted that 360 families, constituting one-third of the district's population, were employed in the kelp industry (p. 1).

(CDB) came into being in 1891.<sup>12</sup> This designation encoded disequilibrium between the fertility of land and sea and the capacity for subsistence and proposed an inverse relationship between the two, the district being at once too empty (bereft of productive resources) and too full (teeming with peasants). The CDB 'baseline report' for the district described a population nine-tenths of whom hugged the coastline, whose smallholdings supported mixed oats and potato cultivation.<sup>13</sup> The region also became a site where an expansive philanthropic enterprise was enacted from the late 1880s. These programmatic efforts at improvement must be understood in relation to the competing ways in which landscape and nature were framed. One narrative emphasized how an observable, calculable scarcity of natural endowments conspired against subsistence and stability. Another narrative, propounded in the visitors' book, found in the bleak terrain a form of authentication for the sporting tourist's adventures. Both were mobilized to support different forms of intervention and engagement with the landscape that deeply implicated Mongan's Hotel – as a site from which the sporting tourist set forth, was nourished and found repose and as a place that leading social investigators and rural industrial improvers made their base on their forays into the district.

Even if the contents of his inaugural entry in the hotel visitors' book were effusive, Fred Scott's 1892 entry reveals how a construction of emptiness was propounded through the idiom of improvement. On the first page, scribbled in his hand in the top right-hand corner of the lined sheet, Scott identified his affiliations with the 'Carna Industrial Fund' and the 'Connemara Industries Co., Ltd.' – bodies on which he served as honorary secretary. By the time Scott penned this entry, the fund and company were inscribing over-population and resource scarcity on the landscape in a wide textual field as they generated reports, delivered testimony before commissions and publicized initiatives to render a bleak terrain productive through their intervention. They contended that commercial acumen and philanthropic energies in far-away Manchester, in alliance with local actors and the state-supported CDB, could develop the district's infrastructure and throw open its scenic charms to tourists, 'filling' the void which fuelled poverty there.

Scott's endeavours were embedded within a dense urban voluntary and philanthropic network in Manchester and located within a coherent late Victorian civic Reform ideology – one that promoted intervention in,

<sup>12</sup> C. Breathneach, *The Congested Districts Board of Ireland, 1891–1923: Poverty and Development in the West of Ireland* (Dublin, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> 'CDB Report, Carna', p. 1.

and reorganization of, the environment and advocated proactive measures consistent with (and indeed complementary to) capitalist development to promote social and economic improvement. An accountant and son of a leading Manchester Liberal, Scott advocated schemes to improve urban air quality.<sup>14</sup> He was also deeply engaged in other literary, cultural and statistical groups.<sup>15</sup> He served as secretary to the Manchester and Salford Sanitary Association, the National Church Reform Union and the Manchester and Salford Noxious Vapours Abatement Association.<sup>16</sup> Promoting rural Irish industrial development was consistent with the mindset of mid to late Victorian Manchester reform politics, which extended its reading of the noxious urban landscape and associated distress to a critical and rational analysis of the improvement of rural Ireland. It rendered this rural landscape calculable – subject to computation and, through it, to improvement.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, rural Ireland's improvement through energetic, organized intervention was a corollary to the urban investigation and reform efforts in which Fred Scott was intimately involved.<sup>18</sup>

Scott's interest in alleviating Irish poverty may have tapped a personal and civic disposition to mobilize for the cause of social reform, but it was spurred by emotive reports that appeared in the pages of the *Manchester Guardian* in late 1887.<sup>19</sup> In contrast with a visitors'-book landscape produced largely by leisure visitors, these press accounts were authored during the

<sup>14</sup> *Manchester Courier*, 8 Feb. 1907.

<sup>15</sup> *Manchester Courier*, 25 Jan. 1908.

<sup>16</sup> M. E. Rose, 'Culture, philanthropy and the Manchester middle classes', in *City, Class and Culture: Studies of Social Policy and Cultural Production in Victorian Manchester*, ed. A. J. Kidd and K. W. Roberts (Manchester, 1985), pp. 103–17, at p. 103. For a review of Fred Scott's energetic campaigns against pollution and the ambivalent reception accorded the abatement of 'noxious vapours' at a time when the smokestack was viewed as an icon of industrial progress, see S. Mosley, *The Chimney of the World: a History of Smoke Pollution in Victorian and Edwardian Manchester* (Cambridge, 2001). Some key findings of this study are summarized in S. Mosley, 'Public perceptions of smoke pollution in Victorian Manchester', in *Smoke and Mirrors: the Politics and Culture of Air Pollution*, ed. E. M. DuPuis (New York and London, 2004), pp. 51–76. See also H. L. Platt, "'The invisible evil': noxious vapor and public health in Manchester during the age of industry', in DuPuis, *Smoke and Mirrors*, pp. 27–50. Platt expands his analysis in comparative perspective in *Shock Cities: the Environmental Transformation and Reform of Manchester and Chicago* (Chicago, Ill. and London, 2005). A broad British perspective is offered in P. Thorsheim, *Inventing Pollution: Coal, Smoke, and Culture in Britain since 1800* (Athens, Oh., 2006). Scott also played prominent roles in the Hospital Sunday and Saturday Fund and the Red Cross Society (*Manchester Courier*, 14 Nov., 18 Dec. 1908).

<sup>17</sup> See Breathneach, *Congested Districts Board*.

<sup>18</sup> See A. Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty: Working-Class Culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900–39* (Buckingham and Philadelphia, Pa., 1992), pp. 14–20.

<sup>19</sup> *Tuam Herald*, 23 March 1889; e.g., *Manchester Guardian*, 23 Nov. 1887.

course of purposeful investigative ‘tours’, usually undertaken by special correspondents whose evaluations were then circulated widely through the press. Whereas hotel album-inscription was a specific act of personal and social fashioning with a limited audience that rarely extended beyond the hostelry’s walls, press publication had different polemical objectives, particularly in the *Manchester Guardian*, a champion of middle-class reform politics.<sup>20</sup> In dramatic and evocative portrayals of the landscape, its correspondent portrayed Carna’s soil as rugged, rocky and infertile, incapable of supporting even subsistence activity. Writers who collaborated in producing this assessment of rural Ireland, and those who supplied them with testimony on the ground, were simultaneously self-fashioning as keen observers of rural social life and relations, as interpreters of the roots of the locality’s misfortune and as interlocutors between the rural Irish west and Britain. And their initial efforts had particular salience at a moment in time when the island of Ireland’s status within the United Kingdom was contested – in between the two bitter home-rule debates that resulted in defeat for Liberal home-rule bills in 1886 and 1893 and the Tory articulation of an alternative vision that would diminish support for home rule through a programme of systematic investment in, and improvement of, Ireland’s infrastructure and industries. Tourism was touted as an agent of prosperity and reconciliation that would transcend party divisions and draw the ‘sister isles’ closer together.

In 1888 and 1889 deputations from Manchester visited Carna to explore opportunities to develop cottage industries and the fishing economy there.<sup>21</sup> At Easter 1888, on the invitation of the energetic Carna priest T. J. ‘Father Tom’ Flannery, Fred Scott joined the prominent Liberal and Manchester councillor J. W. Southern and his wife, the cloth agent and leading civic figure T. C. Abbott and a correspondent for the *Freeman’s Journal*, on a visit to the district.<sup>22</sup> At Carna, where the delegation stayed for several days, it was greeted with a huge bonfire and the burning of tar-barrels.<sup>23</sup> Upon returning to Manchester, at a meeting in July 1888 chaired by the mayor and in the presence of Scott and the Irish home-industries champion Alice Hart (who embraced ‘hand and village industries’ as a means of development befitting the district’s meagre resources), Flannery invoked bleakness to describe the prospects of his parishioners – some 750 families – as being ‘perhaps the

<sup>20</sup> For a succinct discussion of the *Manchester Guardian* within the context of the English provincial press, see A. Walker, ‘The development of the provincial press in England c.1780–1914: an overview’, *Journalism Studies*, viii (2006), 373–86.

<sup>21</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 18 Apr. 1889.

<sup>22</sup> *Tuam Herald*, 23 March 1889; *Manchester Guardian*, 4 Apr. 1888.

<sup>23</sup> *Tuam Herald*, 23 March 1889.



poorest community in the world'.<sup>24</sup> The public meeting, whose proceedings were minutely recorded in the press, took action to remedy their plight. Their solution was extensive commercial development and expanded cottage manufacture which sought to tap 'native' skill and preserve the domestic rural milieu as a site of production. A formal body was established to 'raise a fund for the purpose of providing instruction for the people in improved methods of knitting, weaving, & c., and also in industries previously unknown in the district'.<sup>25</sup> The limited-liability company, with capital of £1,000, would provide implements for the advancement of commerce. The president of the new 'Carna Industrial Fund' was the distinguished chemist and Liberal MP Sir Henry E. Roscoe. Fred Scott was honorary secretary. Initially, £200 was raised to support a commercial network linking Carna producers to new markets. It would collaborate with the newly formed 'Connemara Industries Company, Limited'. The limited-liability company was established to conduct trade for those engaged in the fund's activities<sup>26</sup> and place on a sound commercial footing those cottage industries for which the Carna Industrial Fund had sponsored training.<sup>27</sup> It initially secured the services of a London smallware merchant to employ female labour to produce knitted children's underclothing and other work.<sup>28</sup> Scott signalled his unflagging interest in this venture through frequent voyages across the Irish Sea. To him, the plight of the rural Irish cottier was a barometer of wider problems connected to uneven industrial development in the UK. Their amelioration rested not only on home rule, but also on support from centres of capital and commerce in the sister isle. He championed these links during the 'several visits' he referenced in his 1892 visitor-book entry and during many more that followed the date of that inscription, even as the Carna industrial development movement that he so energetically spearheaded disavowed any position on the question of home rule.<sup>29</sup>

How do we reconcile the two contemporaneous narratives of space –

<sup>24</sup> *Tuam Herald*, 28 July 1888.

<sup>25</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 25 July 1889.

<sup>26</sup> *Manchester Courier*, 3 Aug. 1889.

<sup>27</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 17 Jan. 1889.

<sup>28</sup> *Tuam Herald*, 23 March 1889.

<sup>29</sup> The chairman was the eminent chemist and radical Liberal Sir Henry Roscoe, whose parliamentary victory in 1885 helped to secure the Liberals' toehold in Manchester at a time when Irish nationalists were being mobilized against the party. Then, following William Ewart Gladstone's embrace of home rule, Roscoe fended off anti-home rule challengers in two subsequent re-elections before losing in 1895 to the Liberal Unionist the Marquess of Lorne. Roscoe was mindful of the deep divisions occasioned by Gladstone's support for home rule and the failure of the 1886 Home Rule Bill. For a discussion of the dynamics of Liberal politics at local and national levels during the realignment of Liberals occasioned by

one in which emptiness and barrenness are sources of adventure and the other in which they are signals of privation – and explain Scott’s exposition of both landscapes, in two textual fields? The interplay between these two tropes is one of the most intriguing features of the visitors’ book. They rest on different assumptions about the relationship between the landscapes and its uses and users – and the degree of intervention, development or conservation that they require. The visitors’ book promotes Martin Mongan as an assiduous host – a figure whose qualities are filtered through the lens of sporting tourists drawn from far afield. But other sources reveal his broader roles within the local economy which drew him into many sectors outside tourism, often acting also as an agent of the state and estate and as an intermediary between local and external actors.<sup>30</sup> Mongan was a major tenant of Dominick B. Leonard in the 1880s<sup>31</sup> and his self-representation, both in private records and in public forums, sometimes elided or downplayed hotel-keeping: in September 1907, offering evidence before the Royal Commission on Congestion in Ireland, Mongan captured the multi-faceted dimensions of his activity in a pithy and revealing reply. He supplied his occupation at the commencement of his evidence: ‘I am a farmer, and I keep a small hotel and shop’.<sup>32</sup>

Mongan, a native Irish-speaker, also helped to mould outsiders’ perspectives on the local community and their evaluation of its privation, as well as its bounties. He was implicated in local governance, in the circulation of money and the extension of credit, as postmaster,

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home rule, see J. R. Moore, *The Transformation of Urban Liberalism: Party Politics and Urban Governance in Late Nineteenth-Century England* (Aldershot, 2006). At the 1889 first annual meeting of the Carna development bodies, Roscoe insisted that the Carna Industrial Fund offered the potential to advance the interests of the ‘sister isle’ by uniting people divided over home rule (*Freeman’s Journal*, 2 Aug. 1889).

<sup>30</sup> In 1897, Mongan was castigated for arriving at Boffin Island with a ‘posse of police’ in his capacity as county cess collector (*Tuam Herald*, 12 June 1897). Mongan also appeared on the wrong side of the law – such as in 1896, when he was fined £100 for not having entered spirits into his stock book (a fine that was reduced by three-quarters with a recommendation for a further £10 reduction to £15) (*Connaught Telegraph*, 23 May 1896).

<sup>31</sup> *Irish Land Commission. Return According to Provinces and Counties of Judicial Rents Fixed by Sub-Commissions and Civil Bill Courts, as Notified to the Irish Land Commission During the Month of June, 1884, Specifying Dates and Amounts Respectively of the Last Increases of Rent Where Ascertained; Also Rents Fixed Upon the Reports of Valuers Appointed by the Irish Land Commission on the Joint Applications of Landlords and Tenants* (Parl. Papers 1884 [C. 4161], lxvi, pp. 82–3).

<sup>32</sup> *Royal Commission on Congestion in Ireland. Appendix to the Tenth Report. Minutes of Evidence (Taken in Counties Galway and Roscommon, 18th September, to 4th October, 1907), and Documents Relating Thereto* (Parl. Papers, 1908 [Cd. 4007], xlii, evidence of Martin Mongan, q. 53937).

shopkeeper, Clifden Union poor-law guardian, barony cess collector and estate agent.<sup>33</sup> He appealed to the Manchester reformers' predilection for calculation, not least in his capacity as shopkeeper, even when rural retailers came under heavy scrutiny and strong criticism for their putative monopolistic grasp on cash and credit. Operating most rapaciously within the system of agricultural credit in rural Ireland, they were castigated as usurious 'gombeen men'. Here, too, another 'absence' – of specie – signified the district's backwardness. In 1892, the 'Report of the Inspector for the Congested Districts Board' described the rhythm of credit among local families: it was extended at Christmas and rose through June, when the kelp and lobster sector allowed the bills to be discharged; in August to December people were able to pay cash for purchases, as cattle and sheep were 'fit for sale'.<sup>34</sup> In general the shopkeepers were adjudged to be 'not too exacting in their demands, so long as they see the people are honestly endeavouring to meet their liabilities. Interest varies from 10 to 20 per cent'.<sup>35</sup> Shopkeeping and deep implication in systems of legal regulation and credit authorized Mongan, in newspaper accounts and before royal commissions, to adopt the language of the accountant in calculating the extent to which agrarian crises had reached families and assess whether the resources of the district could support its population.<sup>36</sup> If the visitors' book reveals it to be a centre of conviviality and leisure, clearly Mongan's eponymous hotel and shop were also a nexus for the administration of the local landed estate and also, through its function as a centre of credit and informal site of barter, for the organization of household economies as they negotiated the vagaries of consecutive, shattering crises.<sup>37</sup> These

<sup>33</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 25 Apr. 1889.

<sup>34</sup> 'CDB Report, Carna', p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> 'CDB Report, Carna', p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> E.g., in 1889 he insisted from direct experience that the number of people receiving relief in the village was declining and the debts owing to him were diminishing, leading him confidently to double credit for 'any of his poor customers' to £10 (*Manchester Guardian*, 25 Apr. 1889). In 1897 Mongan was surveyed by a correspondent to the *Freeman's Journal* to ascertain the extent of privation connected to a bad harvest. He recorded over £3,000 in debts on his books – the worst, he attested, since 1879 – from 195 debts. Correspondence to the *Freeman's Journal* between Dec. 1896 and Jan. 1897 was subsequently published as *Agricultural Depression in Ireland: the Harvest of 1896 with the Reduction in Prices and in Rents since 1881, etc.* (Dublin, 1897); this material appears on p. 42. See also *Royal Commission on Congestion in Ireland*, evidence of Martin Mongan, qq. 54010, 54012, 54013.

<sup>37</sup> Mongan also spearheaded a scheme that linked local peasant kelp-harvesters to external markets through Guernsey, serving as its agent. Mongan had for several years despatched men in his boats to areas around nearby islands where he was a tenant to collect what he claimed was the best kelp-weed in Connemara, which he then sold on (*Royal Commission on Congestion in Ireland*, evidence of Martin Mongan, qq. 53940–54006).

many roles enhanced Mongan's local power and also his status as an intermediary for those who came to Carna – whether to shoot, to fish or to offer their services in lifting the region out of apparent, deep poverty. His eponymous hotel became a site from which these diverse activities, initiatives and narratives of space developed.

***Abundance and poverty: tourist and philanthropic narratives of Carna in the 1890s***

The 1890s – the same decade in which the voices of hotel visitors raised a chorus of praise to Carna's sporting treasure – buttressed the dire appraisal that Carna's inhospitable terrain could not sustain its people. These years coincided with pessimistic assessments from Fred Scott regarding the prospects for the Connemara Industries Company and the Carna Industrial Fund. The fund had lost the offices of its valuable instructor on the ground, May Southern, and its partner, Father Flannery; the prospective subsistence crisis of 1890 had severely curtailed the company's activities and it was failing to turn a profit.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, Scott's accounting acumen was put to good use, albeit for a purpose that would no doubt have disappointed him, when he served as liquidator of the company only a few years later.<sup>39</sup> A potato-harvest failure in 1890 prompted Fred Scott's collaborator, Manchester councillor J. W. Southern, to lament that salutary improvements had been undone. His observations were disseminated in Irish and British newspapers in 1890 and 1891 and strengthened a narrative of a benighted peasantry inhabiting a barren landscape against whom providence conspired. Evaluating local channels of relief in 1890, Southern claimed that Mongan was one of only two district shopkeepers who would 'buy against an unusual demand', thereby providing a channel for food distribution. But Southern doubted that such an enterprise could be achieved, even with sympathetic shopkeepers' acquiescence, on the scale required by this calamity.<sup>40</sup> Poverty returned again in 1897 in the form of a severe swine fever and potato failure<sup>41</sup> and signalled to many observers that despite Manchester's efforts, and those of the state through the CDB, Carna's resources and its population were strikingly and stubbornly imbalanced – obdurately resistant to programmes

<sup>38</sup> 'Memorandum of proposals to the Congested Districts Board on behalf of the Connemara Industries Company (Limited) and the Carna Industrial Fund, by Fred Scott, Hon. Sec. to both', in 'CDB Report, Carna', p. 5; 'Carna Industrial Fund. Report for the two years ending June 30th, 1892', in 'CDB Report, Carna', p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> See The National Archives of the UK, BT 34/555/27498, records relating to the liquidation of Connemara Industries Company, Limited.

<sup>40</sup> *Tuam Herald*, 13 Sept. 1890.

<sup>41</sup> *Agricultural Depression in Ireland*, p. 33.

of improvement, the seeds of which had failed to germinate in its rocky terrain.<sup>42</sup>

Like others, Reverend T. A. Finlay excavated Carna's social ills, located their origins in congestion and speculated that new systems of commercial organization would offer some avenue to improvement. Finlay focused on agrarian organization and made no mention of tourism or, indeed, of the infrastructure that supported it at this time: indeed, the 'grocer's shop' that he described was attached, he pithily wrote, to 'a small squat building dignified by the name "hotel"'.<sup>43</sup> His scepticism echoed other evaluations expressing doubt that such a desolate and isolated district supplied the requisite scenery for tourism to flourish. They offered a much more critical appraisal of the hotel than the one supplied by inscribers in the visitors' book: 'Your Special Correspondent in Ireland' advised a reader that '[t]here is a small inn at Carna making up five beds. But I cannot honestly recommend Carna as a tourist resort. It is a mere jumble of rocks, bog, water, and seaweed. But there is noble scenery at Recess, where also is one of the best of the minor Irish hotels'.<sup>44</sup>

Despite these critical evaluations of barren terrain, the idea of tourism as a vehicle for development began to take hold in the district and it supplied a rhetorical framework within which the landscape was recast from unproductive and harsh to stark and alluring. In so doing, it reproduced many visitors'-book tropes of an essentially challenging but nonetheless inviting and indeed attractive landscape. This focus was nourished by a wider effort at the national level to promote the tourism sector as an engine of economic development and political fraternity.<sup>45</sup> No ancillary of improvement, it became a key rhetorical part of the argument for investment in the rural west in which the region's natural endowments, remoteness and cultural distinctiveness were to be valued and indeed preserved; and suggests the influence of this broader discourse on the evaluations of travellers who found both gratification amidst, and beauty in, Carna's barrenness.

Tropes in the hotel album now became central rhetorical elements in the promotion of the district as a centre of hospitality and enthralling

<sup>42</sup> These initiatives included sponsorship of instruction from Scottish fisherman and the erection of a fishing station near Carna. Even with the shift from the philanthropic-commercial ventures that originated in Manchester to more systematic efforts by the CDB at forestation in Knockboy, some two miles outside the village, and its investment in the fishing sector, such efforts frustrated champions of improvement (*Agricultural Depression in Ireland*, pp. 38–41).

<sup>43</sup> T. A. Finlay, 'The economics of Carna', *New Ireland Review*, ix (1898), 65–77, at p. 66.

<sup>44</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 21 Nov. 1888.

<sup>45</sup> I. Furlong, *Irish Tourism 1880–1980* (Dublin, 2008).

wilderness. Martin Mongan's hotel figured in a flattering appraisal of the Fund and Company's activities in Carna written in 1889 to the editor of the *Manchester Guardian* that echoed many of the comments found in the album that lay open for inspection and inscription within the hotel's walls.<sup>46</sup> English visitors Edwin B. and S. Brownlow Benson touted Carna's tourist potential, praised the hotel and suggested that tourism might be an engine of improvement:

Suffice it to say, we heartily recommend English tourists to pay Carna a visit. Mongan's Hotel at Carna gives most comfortable accommodation, and if there is interest in the people's welfare the parish priest, who knows all in the parish, will show and tell all there is to be known. But more, we saw enough to come to this conclusion, that, whether it be the woollen or the fishing industry, capital and market are needed, and there is scope for both; that, whether Englishmen realise it yet or not, there is a true deep bond of love and gratitude wherever such friendly help is granted in Ireland; that Father Tom and his people in particular are flourishing as compared to what they were, and will yet, please God, flourish the more owing to the outstretched hand of Manchester's wealth and love to them in their time of need.<sup>47</sup>

Rural hostelries such as Mongan's Hotel anchored a new vision of western tourist development that anticipated commercial tourism taking deep root in its rocky soil. To the rural Irish hotel's champions, a hostelry that was conducted on modern lines stood as a beacon of improvement. The only hitch was that in many places the traditional Irish inn was largely not up to snuff – or so many British (and indeed many Irish) travellers complained. The English barrister, travel writer and prominent caravanner J. Harris Stone remarked that Connemara hotels in general lacked amenities. Given the region's many natural beauties and bounties for the angler, improved inns would help to rectify negative assessments of Ireland. The British traveller's gaze was richly informed, through popular culture, by images of the racialized 'dark continent' which offered a foil to the sister isle. At this high point of imperialism, far-flung colonial realms were both more 'discovered' and more securely implanted in the British imagination. Or at least that was Stone's contention when he lamented that 'Africa is getting more popularized than

<sup>46</sup> These appraisals of the Fund and Company were reprinted in a pamphlet entitled *Irish Poverty and English Sympathy: a Story of Industrial Help in Connemara* (Manchester, 1889) – a publication comprising a history of the Fund's inception. The collection drew from the *Manchester Guardian* and featured a profile of the tireless efforts of Father Tom, a prospectus for the new limited company and glowing tributes from Gladstonian Liberal MPs Sir Ughtred Kay-Shuttleworth and Joshua Rowntree. The material referenced in this chapter is drawn from that compilation.

<sup>47</sup> *Irish Poverty and English Sympathy*, p. 26.

many parts of Ireland'.<sup>48</sup> At Carna, Stone found only a 'quiet, comfortable hotel, with old-fashioned enclosed garden, but no view'.<sup>49</sup>

The natural endowments of the district had, for many observers, been the principal constraint on Carna's development. But as early as 1885 Father Tom Flannery mooted that tourism might help to resolve the apparently intractable problem posed by an overabundant population which had not emigrated on a desirable scale. He testified before the Select Committee on Industries that in contrast to those who lived along the tourist track, locals lived 'by the land, by kelp making and by fishing'.<sup>50</sup> An extension of the rail line would benefit not only the fishing sector, but would also diversify the rural economy by promoting tourism. It would provide a boon for that signal of improvement in rural Ireland – the well-managed hotel. There were already several tourist hotels in Connemara, alongside very good trout and salmon to attract the sporting traveller.<sup>51</sup>

As tourism began to figure in plans for Irish rural improvement, nature might not be framed as a limitation on development, or an impediment to progress and prosperity. Rather it might offer a catalyst for a particular kind of recreational development. Carna provided a rugged coast and terrain that would supply triumph to the sporting tourist. Hostile nature, which so conspired against local agrarian livelihoods on a sustainable commercial basis, might befit sport, with its very different framing of the elements. Through this lens a barren landscape was recast as rugged and alluring, its emptiness salutary and relationally defined in terms of coexisting abundance in the field and stream. In August 1888, a correspondent to the *Manchester Guardian*, 'G. E. B.', extolled not only the improvements that had been effected under the aegis of Southern and Scott, but also the tourist sporting attractions of the district: 'If the traveller likes shooting, he has curlews, sandlarks, sea swallows, gulls, and other birds too numerous to mention, not to mention a chance at the seals. If he likes freshwater fishing, he has it here in abundance; and if he likes the sea, for a small sum he can have as much as he cares for'.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>48</sup> J. Harris Stone, *Connemara and the Neighbouring Spots of Beauty and Interest ...* (London, 1906), p. 35.

<sup>49</sup> Stone, *Connemara and the Neighbouring Spots*, p. 50.

<sup>50</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on Industries (Ireland); Together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix* (Parl. Papers, 1884–5 (288), lx, evidence of Father Tom Flannery, q. 12664). The organization of the kelp sector, whose season lasted from May until Sept., had proven especially unsatisfactory, with agents for Scottish firms claiming monopolies over certain sections of coast and thereby setting prices (q. 12970–84).

<sup>51</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on Industries (Ireland)*, evidence of Father Tom Flannery, qq. 12904–18.

<sup>52</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 28 Aug. 1888.

Tourism might harness the district's resources – and exploit the rural realm's natural endowments to a new end: in extolling its potential, both Fr. Tom Flannery and 'G. E. B' foreshadowed fulsome comments found in the pages of the hotel visitors' book for many years. The shooter's small outlay would be rewarded with grouse, partridge, hares and snipe. Success was calculated in relation to the economy of commercial recreation, rather than commercial craft, fishing and farming, and its benefits were correspondingly distributed disproportionately among those in the service of travellers. A writer who had visited the district initially in connection with the business of the Connemara Industries Company, Limited, and in a later visit leading a party of tourists, extolled Carna in the pages of the *Manchester Guardian* in 1892, only two years after the district's potato failure, as a place where the sporting traveller would benefit from comparative isolation, free amid the rocky and remote terrain from the incursion of commercial tourism on a large and destructive scale and liberated from the comparatively high charges levied elsewhere. The tourist would find at Mongan's Hotel 'all the comforts of more pretentious English hostelries at half the cost, and experience, moreover, an amount of kindness and attention of the nature of private hospitality rather than business, which is only to be found in places not spoiled by a constant influx of tourists'.<sup>53</sup>

This positive appraisal of remoteness evoked the gushing visitors'-book tributes of the 1890s. By 1897 a light rail line ran from Galway to Clifden and considerable hotel expansion was underway in the district – at Clifden, Recess and Cashel. At Carna, twelve miles from a railway station, Martin Mongan had expanded his hostelry with a new wing, as sportsmen enjoyed free shooting and fishing over several thousand acres.<sup>54</sup> In 1905 a writer in *The Western People* invoked precisely the same features of the Carna landscape, boasting 'a most beautiful and up-to-date hotel built on the very borders of the Atlantic', that were said once to have irredeemably impeded its improvement when inviting tourists to holiday there: 'The scenery around Carna is something magnificent, so varied and beautiful. Mountain, sea, and rock combine to please the eye. One might say to himself "How strange are the works of Nature? And what were the ideas of an all-wise Providence in forming such a barren and fruitless soil as Connemara?"'.<sup>55</sup>

Beyond its singular natural features, the district offered opportunities for 'those who are anxious to gain a knowledge of the Irish language, and to learn the ways and customs of the Irish peasant'.<sup>56</sup> In this respect, from

<sup>53</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 23 Aug. 1892.

<sup>54</sup> Mongan's Hotel Book, 28 Apr. 1897.

<sup>55</sup> *Western People*, 29 Apr. 1905.

<sup>56</sup> *Western People*, 29 Apr. 1905.



the early twentieth century in particular it was promoted as a site of deep cultural immersion and of ethnographic and anthropological curiosity. As the agrarian economy succumbed to successive periods of distress and Carna rural industrial initiatives championed by Fred Scott floundered, the narrative of Connemara as productive leisure terrain – curious, timeless, still remarkably unfamiliar and culturally distinctive – blended with constructions of a peculiar, challenging, isolated and rugged natural world, lending allure to the district as a place of rugged adventure. It became central to a political project that valorized the district as part of a remote western ‘fringe’ where the heart of undiluted Gaelic culture lay.

### ***Conclusion***

Before and after he left the inaugural inscription in the hotel visitors’ book, Fred Scott was a regular traveller to the district in connection with cottage-industry development and made regular Easter trips across the Irish Sea to inspect the fund and company’s operations.<sup>57</sup> Sometimes he was accompanied by family,<sup>58</sup> on other occasions by his colleagues in the fund and like-minded reformers. The striking mutual instrumentality of the relationship between Scott and Martin Mongan was in stark evidence in 1898 when, during dinner at the hotel, Scott encountered a Bristol guest staying for the ‘excellent shooting’. Upon hearing of plans for an agricultural bank for the district, he wrote a cheque for £10 towards the scheme and consented to be guarantor of £100 to advance it.<sup>59</sup> Spring 1900 saw another encounter between Scott and Mongan. At Whitsuntide, Scott headed a party of visitors to Carna from the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society – a very different purpose to the superintendence over rural industries that had spurred earlier travels. From 1 June to 7 June Scott conducted the party to sites of antiquarian interest before proceeding to Galway, where their tour took in other places of interest in the city and in Connemara, including Lough Corrib, the Aran Islands and Carna.<sup>60</sup> Their stay at Mongan’s Hotel was duly recorded in its visitors’ book, in which Scott inscribed, in conventional language, his party’s high regard for the comforts of the hotel and gratitude for the appreciation of the hospitality that they received.<sup>61</sup>

Both Fred Scott and Martin Mongan outlived the late Victorian era in which press reports and the album supplied diverse narratives of Connemara’s

<sup>57</sup> *Tuam Herald*, 29 Apr. 1893.

<sup>58</sup> *Tuam Herald*, 13 May 1893.

<sup>59</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 7 Jan. 1898.

<sup>60</sup> Proceedings of LCAS, 18 136; *Jour. Royal Soc. of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 1900 (Dublin, 1901), 30.

<sup>61</sup> Mongan’s Hotel Book, June 1900.

attractions, ills and potential. Martin Mongan died in 1921. The *Connaught Tribune* hailed him as a leading figure in the locality – a poor-law guardian for forty-three years,<sup>62</sup> an eloquent Irish speaker and a man whose ‘purse, his time, and his marvellous energy and ability were always unsparingly used in developing his beloved Connemara.’<sup>63</sup> Fred Scott died in 1924.<sup>64</sup> Mongan’s eponymous hotel endured, as did its book, which continued to record the comings and goings of sporting guests and other travellers for several decades after Fred Scott left his first mark there.

In examining how the empty pages of the visitors’ book provided surfaces for acts of self, social and spatial co-construction, it is important to consider how generic conventions of inscription and reading, as well as peculiarly local contexts, combined to produce a narrative that was at once a product of its wider age and of its particular locality. The book captures appraisals of the relationship between people, leisure and space that were configured in starkly different ways when Carna became an epicentre for experimentation, state intervention<sup>65</sup> and philanthropic action. Professor James Long, author of evocative accounts of local poverty and a key figure in efforts to extend relief to Connemara, once noted: ‘There have been many English pilgrims to Carna, and I am not sure that it is not better known to some of the men of Lancashire than to the people of Connemara’.<sup>66</sup> These pilgrims came with a range of motivations, not always neatly divided between philanthropic and recreational (as Scott’s deep engagement in the locality suggest), but increasingly, as they embraced the leisure tour and also the district as a site of the persistence of Irish folk ways, the rhetoric of the visitors’ book was translated into a more public discourse that supplied new ways to calculate the resources of the soil and appraise rural hospitality: ruggedness bequeathed beauty and sporting satisfaction in equal measure and became a precondition for the triumph of the rod and rifle. The neat interweaving of these assessments of barrenness and adventure found expression in a multitude of inscriptions, bound as tightly in rhetorical unison as the pages of the book in which they figure.

<sup>62</sup> He triumphed even in 1920 as Sinn Féin candidates captured all but a handful of the seats in the district.

<sup>63</sup> *Connaught Tribune*, 13 Aug. 1921. Mongan’s wife Honoria Mongan died in 1925. The Mongan family continued to be prominent political figures in the district, with Martin Mongan’s son a T.D. and a stalwart of Cumann na nGaedheal and Fine Gael, as well as a leading figure in the Irish Tourist Association.

<sup>64</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 7 May 1924.

<sup>65</sup> This direction was exemplified by the purchase of the Leonard Estate there by the CDB in 1896 (*Connaught Telegraph*, 1 Aug. 1896).

<sup>66</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 22 July 1898.

## 2. Amid the horrors of nature: ‘dead’ environments at the margins of the Russian empire\*

*Jennifer Keating*

In exploring the mechanisms of imperialism, innumerable historians have demonstrated that colonial powers and imperial actors deployed the idea of empty landscapes as part of a repertoire of power to create *terra nullius*: legally and discursively to dispossess indigenous inhabitants of their land and to justify the (often violent) appropriation of territory. At root, such acts were part of the broader global struggle for control and ownership of terrain, transport corridors and natural and human resources.<sup>1</sup> The dimensions of settler colonialism, and the obvious fallacy underlying claims of ‘empty’, ‘dead’ or ‘pristine’ land, have been examined in geographies as disparate as the American West, North Africa, Australia and Antarctica.<sup>2</sup> Fewer scholars, however, pause to examine critically the idea of emptiness utilized in these contexts.<sup>3</sup> While the assertion that tropes of empty terrain supported colonial policies of land seizure is not in dispute, can we accept the construction and deployment of emptiness so unproblematically? What physical and mental actions went into creating and upholding both

\* My thanks to Charlotte Henze and Alexander Morrison for their comments on a previous draft of this chapter and to my fellow editors Allegra Giovine and Courtney J. Campbell for their perceptive reading of my work. All translations from Russian to English are my own.

<sup>1</sup> A. Sluyter, *Colonialism and Landscape: Postcolonial Theory and Applications* (Oxford, 2002), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> For a selection, see *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity*, ed. T. Banivanua Mar and P. Edmonds (Basingstoke, 2010); *High Places: Cultural Geographies of Mountains, Ice and Science*, ed. D. Cosgrove and V. della Dora (London, 2009); *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. W. Cronon (New York, 1996); D. Davis, *Resurrecting the Granary of Rome: Environmental History and French Colonial Expansion in North Africa* (Athens, Oh., 2007); R. H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860* (Cambridge, 1995); D. Kennedy, *The Last Blank Spaces: Exploring Africa and Australia* (Cambridge, Mass., 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Noteworthy analyses include Banivanua Mar and Edmonds, *Making Settler Colonial Space*; and Kennedy, *The Last Blank Spaces*.

J. Keating, ‘Amid the horrors of nature: “dead” environments at the margins of the Russian empire’, in *Empty Spaces: perspectives on emptiness in modern history*, ed. C. J. Campbell, A. Giovine and J. Keating (London, 2019), pp. 33–57. License: CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0.

the myths and realities of vacant spaces? Exploring in detail the imperial construction of empty terrain reveals that emptiness was understood more ambivalently and with a wider range of subtexts than suggested by the simple narrative of ‘unoccupied’ land directly enabling colonial appropriation.

This chapter discusses Russian responses to the environment of Central Asia from the period of conquest in the 1860s until the collapse of the imperial state in 1917 and focuses on the arid deserts and semi-deserts that composed the bulk of this new addition to empire. Although Russia was no stranger to the acquisition of vast areas of grassland and steppe,<sup>4</sup> these new landscapes of sand dunes and salt flats were, in the eyes of the incomers, not only almost entirely unpopulated but also lacked a recognizable nature. For the most part they were described as being ‘empty, dead and silent’: melancholy, superheated wildernesses dislocated in time and space.<sup>5</sup> The experiences of the travellers, military men, tsarist administrators, botanists, engineers and geographers who witnessed these environments first-hand contributed to the discursive production of landscape as the imperial visitors compared the terrain to a featureless ocean and an alien planet (the premise that deserts were inherently empty was aided by a shared linguistic root between the Russian terms for ‘empty’/‘emptiness’ – *pustoi/pustota* – and for ‘desert’ – *pustynia*).<sup>6</sup> Yet while such accounts could serve as devices to legitimize conquest and render terrain available for Russian settlement, irrigation and crop cultivation, the (partial) appropriation of these desert lands had more complex dimensions. Emptiness did not automatically behave opportunity and improvement: mirages, climate, erosion and aridity all framed and constrained Russian activities. Even by 1914 desert landscapes continued to threaten and undermine the outsiders’ claims to be transforming Central Asia for the better and were a constant reminder of the difficulties of the imperial mission.

This argument sits squarely within the vast body of recent research into spatial and environmental history. Building on the work of spatial theorists including Lefebvre, Foucault and Soja,<sup>7</sup> much scholarship has been devoted

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., D. Moon, *The Plough that Broke the Steppes: Agriculture and Environment on Russia's Grasslands, 1700–1914* (Oxford, 2013); and W. Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2004), pp. 70–1.

<sup>5</sup> A. Nikol'skii, ‘Ust'-Urt’, in *Aziatskaia Rossiia. Illiustrirovannyi geograficheskii sbornik*, ed. A. A. Kruber (Moscow, 1905), pp. 307–15, at p. 310.

<sup>6</sup> See also ‘pushcha’, an impenetrable, dense forest; ‘pustyn’, a hermitage; and ‘pustyr’, wasteland.

<sup>7</sup> H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (Oxford, 1991); E. W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: the Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London, 1989); E. W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford, 1996). For more on this immense field, see M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday*

to recovering landscape and nature as socially constructed products of both physical terrain and of the geographical imagination.<sup>8</sup> Historians of empire have probed the close interconnection between the two, demonstrating the ways in which imperial powers sought to impose their idealized visions onto colonial lands and populations.<sup>9</sup> This has had fruitful application in the recent emergence of studies exploring environmental imaginaries: '[T]he constellation of ideas that groups of humans develop about a given landscape, usually local or regional, that commonly includes assessments about that environment as well as how it came to be in its current state'.<sup>10</sup> Imperial imaginaries came loaded with the presumptions of colonial rule, developing into a form of 'environmental orientalism' that very commonly narrated the environment as degraded, 'strange and defective' and therefore in need of repair or improvement via irrigation, forestation, sedentarization and so forth.<sup>11</sup> Many environmental historians, however, tend to examine *either* the cultural *or* the material dimensions of landscape,<sup>12</sup> despite the exhortations of those who – quite rightly – suggest that the tangible and the discursive environments exist 'in superimposition upon one another'.<sup>13</sup> This chapter considers the cultural and the material as two inseparable components of what constituted the imperial environment. It follows that just as any landscape is the product of mental as well as physical processes, so too was terrain that, according to imperial narratives, was devoid of

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*Life* (Berkeley, Calif., 1984); M. Foucault, 'Of other spaces', *Diacritics*, xvi (1986), 22–7; Y-F. Tuan, *Space and Place: the Perspective of Experience* (London, 1977); B. Warf and S. Arias, *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (New York, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> This includes D. Cosgrove, *Geography and Vision: Seeing, Imagining and Representing the World* (London, 2008); *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*, ed. D. Cosgrove and S. Daniels (Cambridge, 1988); D. Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Oxford, 1994); D. Harvey, 'Between time and space: reflections on the geographical imagination', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, lxxx (1990), 418–34; D. Weiner, 'A death-defying attempt to articulate a coherent definition of environmental history', *Ab Imperio*, iv (2008), 30–50.

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., W. Beinart and L. Hughes, *Environment and Empire* (Oxford, 2007); A. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: the Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900* (New York, 1986); Grove, *Green Imperialism*.

<sup>10</sup> *Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. D. Davis and E. Burke III (Athens, Oh., 2011), p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Davis and Burke, *Environmental Imaginaries*, p. 4. For a particularly instructive example, see Davis, *Resurrecting the Granary of Rome*.

<sup>12</sup> See J. Beattie, E. Melillo and E. O'Gorman, 'Introduction: eco-cultural networks and the British empire, 1837–1945', in *Eco-cultural Networks and the British Empire: New Views on Environmental History*, ed. J. Beattie, E. Melillo and E. O'Gorman (London, 2015), pp. 3–20, at p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> T. Mitchell, 'Afterword', in Davis and Burke, *Environmental Imaginaries*, pp. 265–73, at p. 268 (citing Trumbull).

owners, inhabitants or features. Indeed, the idea of emptiness was deeply embedded in colonial environmental imaginaries which, while varying in specific context and content, bore broadly similar iterations of the 'myth of emptiness' which was crucial to the colonizer's 'model of the world'.<sup>14</sup> Empty space was at root the foundation of colonial ideologies of improvement, existing hand in hand with legal practices to legitimize the annexation, appropriation and physical settlement of territory.

***'Sunk in a mortal swoon': geography and anti-landscape***

Russia's military annexation of Central Asia from the 1860s to 1880s provided the empire with a southern borderland four times the size of France. The new province, the Governor Generalship of Turkestan, was to the imperial eye a potent mixture of opportunity and exoticism populated, according to foreign minister A. M. Gorchakov in 1864, shortly before the capture of Tashkent, by 'semi-savage and itinerant ethnic groups'.<sup>15</sup> This mixed sedentary and nomadic population was to become the focus of Russia's 'civilizing mission' in the region – an activity that became increasingly fraught, introspective and uncertain in the years leading to 1917. Unsurprisingly, Russia's consolidation of its Central Asian possessions took place by and large in urban and suburban population centres, including Tashkent, Samarkand, Andizhan and Namangan, and in the bountiful rural valleys in the east of the region, home to Kazakh and Kirgiz nomads, whose land was progressively expropriated for Russian settlement.

Nevertheless, up to seventy-five per cent of Turkestan's territory consisted of arid or semi-arid landscape, not naturally conducive to settlement or cultivation. These were sparsely populated, scorched environments, so pervasive in the Russian mind as a (derogatory) symbol of Central Asia that the Russian ministry of finance persistently referred to Turkestan as 'the Desert'.<sup>16</sup> Here, this chapter focuses primarily on three regions of these arid drylands: the Ust Yurt plateau, the Kara Kum (Black Sands) and Kizil Kum (Red Sands) deserts. The first, located in the north-west of Turkestan between the Caspian and Aral Seas, consisted of flat, low-lying land formed of clay and limestone, interspersed with salt marshes; the second, stretching to the south as far as the Persian border and east to the Amu-Dar'ia river, was a more varied mixture of salt flats and loamy soils, but with ninety

<sup>14</sup> Sluyter, *Colonialism and Landscape*, p. 190.

<sup>15</sup> 'Gorchakov circular', cited in A. Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: a Multi-Ethnic History* (Harlow, 2001), p. 194.

<sup>16</sup> K. K. Pahlen, *Mission to Turkestan: Being the Memoirs of Count K. K. Pahlen, 1908–1909*, trans. N. Couriss (London, 1964), p. 16.

per cent of its area covered in sand in the form of dunes, knolls or flatter steppe; the third, lying between the Amu-Dar'ia and Syr-Dar'ia rivers, was composed of both sands and firmer steppe terrain.<sup>17</sup> While they contained oases favourable for settlement, in general these areas were more sparsely populated than other local regions – apart from perhaps the mountainous Pamirs – and were largely superheated stretches of land prone to huge temperature fluctuations that could sustain only intermittent and transitory human activity.<sup>18</sup> Much like ice-sheets, mountains and deserts across the globe, these were extreme and inaccessible landscapes, designated by outsiders as 'distant, marginal and difficult'.<sup>19</sup>

Russia's engagement with these zones underscores the complexity of how seemingly empty space was constructed, deployed and understood. Unlike the settled belt of towns and villages that stretched from east to west across central Turkestan, this arid terrain promised little in the way of immediate potential unless spectacular technological advances were made. To the east, where the fertile rural valleys of Semirech'e appeared to be a natural home for incoming peasant settlers, Russian officials were quick to proclaim the 'emptiness' of the land, opening it up to peasant colonization at the expense of local nomads.<sup>20</sup> But in the seemingly 'dead' desert it was more difficult to see what immediate purpose emptiness could serve. Indeed, for most Russians the desert was a place to pass through, trapped between two more valuable poles: the Caspian, with its important trade significance, and

<sup>17</sup> A comprehensive topographical overview can be found in *Turkestanskii krai*, ed. V. I. Masal'skii, in *Rossiiia. Polnoe geograficheskoe opisanie nashego otechestva, nastol'naiia i dorozhnaia kniga dlia russkikh liudei vol. 19*, ed. V. P. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii (hereafter *RPGONO*) (St. Petersburg, 1913), pp. 10–35. See also P. M. Lessar, 'Peski Kara-Kumy', in *Izvestiia Imperatorskogo Russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva* (hereafter *IIRGO*), xx (1884), 113–46; L. S. Berg, 'Formy russkikh pustyn', in I. Val'ter, *Zakony obrazovaniia pustyn' v nastoiashchee i proshloe vremia* (St. Petersburg, 1911), pp. 164–78. In terms of area, the Kara Kum measured some 250,000 square versts (one verst is 0.6629 miles); the Kizil Kum 300,000 and the Ust Yurt plateau over 150,000. The total area of Turkestan was 1,731,090 square versts (including Bukhara and Khiva) (*RPGONO*, p. 343).

<sup>18</sup> Accurate population figures for these outlying regions are difficult to ascertain. Transcaspia – containing the Kara Kum and Ust Yurt – had a far smaller population than any other province of Turkestan and a much smaller population density (only 0.8 people per square verst) (*RPGONO*, p. 345).

<sup>19</sup> Cosgrove and della Dora, *High Places*, p. 14. See D. Davis, *The Arid Lands: History, Power, Knowledge* (Cambridge, Mass., 2016), for an excellent overview of changing attitudes to these difficult arid regions.

<sup>20</sup> D. Brower, 'Kyrgyz nomads and Russian pioneers: colonisation and ethnic conflict in the Turkestan revolt of 1916', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, xlv (1996), 41–53, at p. 45.

Central Asia's oasis urban centres.<sup>21</sup> This liminality was further confirmed with the opening of the Trans-Caspian railway in 1888, connecting the Caspian shoreline with Samarkand in the first instance and by 1906 to the main Russian railway network to the north. While these lines ran in part through the desert, the convenience of the train hurried the passenger through the arid 'horrors of nature', with the sandy vistas unfolding outside the carriage merely a dull precursor to the towns of Tashkent, Samarkand and Bukhara.<sup>22</sup> Even for those with a scientific interest in the desert, it was, with few exceptions, a place to visit and to observe, not to stay.<sup>23</sup> Russians approached from the vantage point of elsewhere. Nevertheless, there soon existed a wealth of written material on these unwelcoming environments, from travellers' tales to the reports of geographers, botanists and soil scientists. Consciously or otherwise, these sources were in conversation with each other: through their writings and activities on the ground, these actors contributed to bringing landscape into being.

According to myriad Russian sources, it was 'difficult to imagine anything more lifeless' than the Central Asian desert.<sup>24</sup> The enormity of the Kara Kum and Kizil Kum and their austere, bleak environment led observers to decry their 'sad, dismal and bleak nature',<sup>25</sup> noting in unison how the sandy expanses were 'uninhabited', 'lifeless', 'deathly',<sup>26</sup> 'waterless wastelands'.<sup>27</sup> Writers often resorted to lively hyperbole to obviate the wearisome dimensions of the 'colourless and godforsaken' landscape.<sup>28</sup> One doctor remarked on his journey across the Kara Kum to Khiva during the campaign in 1873 that the monotony of the terrain was such that 'every place looked exactly like every other, in the way that one egg is the same as another. Being completely cut off from the entire civilised world ... was very much like ... sailing across an immense ocean'.<sup>29</sup> Such impressions were far from uniquely Russian. Curzon offered an evocative picture of a land that inspired an 'impression of sadness, of desolate and hopeless decay, of a continent and life sunk in a mortal swoon'. The stretch of desert between Merv and the Amu-Dar'ia was 'the sorriest waste that ever met the

<sup>21</sup> E. E. Ukhtomskii, *Ot Kalmytskoi stepi do Bukhary* (St. Petersburg, 1891), p. 62.

<sup>22</sup> I. Il'enko, *Zakaspiiskaia oblast'. Ocherk* (Moscow, 1902), p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> For an excellent overview of Russian exploration of Central Asia's deserts, see E. Murzaev, *Vdalekoi Azii. Ocherki po istorii izucheniia Srednei i Tsentral'noi Azii v XIX-XX vekakh* (Moscow, 1956).

<sup>24</sup> *RPGONO*, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> *Zakaspiiskii kraj. Biblioteka dlia shkoli i naroda* (Moscow, 1916), p. 37.

<sup>26</sup> V. N. Skopin, *Sredniaia Aziia i India* (Moscow, 1904), pp. 21, 44.

<sup>27</sup> *Illustrirovannyi putevoditel' po Sredne-Aziatskoi zheleznoi doroge* (Askhabad, 1912), p. 17.

<sup>28</sup> Ukhtomskii, *Ot Kalmytskoi stepi*, p. 38.

<sup>29</sup> *Niva*, xxiii (1873), 358-9.



human eye ... I never saw anything more melancholy than the appearance of this wilderness, and its sickle-shaped dome-like ridges of driven sand with smoky summits'.<sup>30</sup> Even when observing from the safety of a train, visitors narrated their experiences in much the same vein. Passage into the 'menacing, lifeless expanse' of sands gave rise to an immediate sensation of 'loneliness and powerlessness', while only the security of the train carriage could allow one's 'instinctive alarm' to ease.<sup>31</sup>

These desert landscapes were thus places of morbid fascination and Russian depictions very often referenced the conventions of the sublime – sites that awed or terrified in their grandeur or strangeness.<sup>32</sup> Beyond the sublime, Russian constructions of this terrain also leaned towards what David Nye has recently termed 'anti-landscape': environments utterly unfit for human habitation due to desertification, pollution or poisoning. While Nye confined his discussions to anti-landscapes of human making, he noted that similar conditions can also arise from natural phenomena, citing the moon as a prime example.<sup>33</sup> Over one hundred years earlier on the Ust Yurt plateau, a Russian visitor came to a remarkably similar conclusion. Camping outside and noting the 'deathly silence' of the region, he remarked while gazing up at the moon one evening that 'it was only there, on the moon, where there is neither life nor atmosphere' that a true comparison to his surroundings could be found.<sup>34</sup> The plateau was characterized as a sterile, dead wasteland, with neither life nor sound – to all intents and purposes, an empty landscape. Even the Aral Sea, surrounded to the west by the Ust Yurt plateau, was commonly seen as being 'silent, gloomy, uninhabited', 'the younger brother of the noisy and lively Caspian'.<sup>35</sup>

Such claims were made on the basis of what appeared visible – or unseen – to the human eye. Emptiness was understood as a condition of absence: a lack of people, animals, natural features, plants, water and, beyond physical attributes, an absence of colour, sound and time. These landscapes were not, however, empty. Nomads, largely Turkmen and Kazakhs, had fashioned a network of routes, wells and burial sites over many centuries across these

<sup>30</sup> G. Curzon, *Russia in Central Asia in 1889* (London, 1967), pp. 140–1.

<sup>31</sup> Ukhtomskii, *Ot Kalmytskoi stepi*, pp. 61–2.

<sup>32</sup> On the picturesque and sublime, see *The Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, Landscape and Aesthetics since 1770*, ed. S. Copley and P. Garside (Cambridge, 1994); *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. P. Hulme and T. Youngs (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 42–7; B. Stafford, *Voyage into Substance: Art, Science, Nature and the Illustrated Travel Account, 1760–1840* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), pp. 139–62.

<sup>33</sup> D. E. Nye, 'The anti-landscape', in *The Anti-Landscape*, ed. D. E. Nye and S. Elkind (Amsterdam, 2014), pp. 11–28, at p. 15.

<sup>34</sup> Nikol'skii, 'Ust'-Urt', p. 314.

<sup>35</sup> L. Cherskii, 'Ne sudil Bog', *Vokrug sveta*, xxx (1896), 474–5.

drylands. Meanwhile, as those who spent time in the region for research purposes attested, while at first sight the terrain was seemingly empty, on closer inspection it yielded a variety of flora and fauna, including saxaul, grasses, spring flowers, snakes, lizards, scorpions, vultures and spiders.<sup>36</sup> The following discussion examines why and how Russians conceived of these landscapes as exclusively empty and lifeless, suggesting that despite the largely uniform characterization, emptiness was by no means a static concept. Instead, Russian visits to, accounts of and work in the desert produced what one might term an imperial taxonomy of emptiness: while embedded in the imperial psyche as a foundation of the colonial 'improvement' project, understandings of emptiness were also tinged with the imprint of fear, anxiety and confusion.

### ***Improvement and the imperial psyche***

With military conquest the Russian state claimed legal ownership of all land in Turkestan other than *vaqf* property (land belonging to religious or charitable institutions), although in practice property rights in settled regions remained subject to pre-existing Islamic law and custom.<sup>37</sup> Desert territory was thus automatically a state asset, open to exploitation and settlement. In concurrence with this legal delineation went a huge amount of physical and discursive work to own and appropriate territory – actions that were less contested than in settled areas of Turkestan, given the relative under-population of the desert drylands. To facilitate this, the Russian state, via the Appanage Department, the Main Administration of Land Improvement and Management (GUZZ) and the Resettlement Administration, deployed a narrative very similar to that used in other parts of the Russian empire and by other colonial powers in north Africa and Australia, which envisaged colonization as a way of 'banishing emptiness and creating productivity, erasing barbarism and spreading civilization'.<sup>38</sup> Labelling land as empty was thus the first step towards

<sup>36</sup> V. Dubianskii, 'Rastitel'nost' russkikh peschanykh pustyn', in Val'ter, *Zakony obrazovaniia pustyn'*, pp. 179–91; Lessar, 'Peski Kara-Kumy'; A. Nikol'skii, 'Priroda Kizil-Kumov', in Kruber, *Aziatskaia Rossiia*, particularly pp. 219–24.

<sup>37</sup> A. Morrison, 'Amlakdars, khwajas and *mulk* land in the Zarafshan valley after the Russian conquest', in *Explorations in the Social History of Modern Central Asia (19th–early 20th Century)*, ed. P. Sartori (Leiden, 2013), pp. 23–64, at p. 57; 'Turkestan Statute', *Polnoe Sobranie Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii*, 3rd ser., vi, no. 3814, 12 June 1886. On land management in Central Asia more broadly, see the 2010 special issue (vol. xxix) of *Central Asian Survey*; and B. Penati, 'Managing rural landscapes in colonial Turkestan: a view from the margins', in Sartori, *Explorations*, pp. 65–109.

<sup>38</sup> Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field*, p. 94.

imperial reclamation and restitution, whether through watering, planting, building or populating. In turn, territorial 'improvement' was seen as a vindication of imperial superiority. The building of the Trans-Caspian railway, for instance, which crossed a vast sweep of dunes east of the Caspian, had 'opened the way for civilization to reach the most distant part of the populated world'.<sup>39</sup> In the main, this was seen as a triumph over distance and nature, given that 'Russia has built in a country where the soils and climate are considered impossible for the life and activities of cultured man, the last word in civilization – a railway'.<sup>40</sup>

The railway aside, Russian attempts to inscribe their visions for future development onto these landscapes revolved around the management and redistribution of water resources and ranged from the outlandish – proposals to reroute the Amu-Dar'ia river to flow into the Caspian rather than the Aral – to the more measured irrigation of the Hungry Steppe in the Kizil Kum.<sup>41</sup> Many of these schemes have been the subject of detailed scholarly research, but merit a brief synopsis here.<sup>42</sup> The work, which began in earnest in the 1870s, was initially sporadic and often unsuccessful, with the most consequential projects undertaken by Grand Prince N. K. Romanov in the Hungry Steppe involving the re-channelling of water from the Syr-Dar'ia river. By 1897–8, he had completed the Emperor Nicholas I canal, which was taken into state ownership shortly thereafter. It was at this point that more significant efforts overseen directly by the Russian state began under the auspices of GUZZ and the Resettlement Administration. This resulted in particular in concerted work to irrigate up to 45,000 hectares of land in the Hungry Steppe, culminating in the opening of the Romanov Canal in 1913. The gradual irrigation of the land watered by the canal and its tributaries allowed for the incremental growth of Russian peasant villages: in 1914 there totalled eleven such villages in the Hungry Steppe, with a population of around 6,000 souls, compared to around 3,500 settled and nomadic locals. By 1917 the figure had risen to twenty-four settlements.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> I. Ia. Vatslik, *Zakaspiiskaia zheleznaia doroga, ee znachenie i budushchnost'* (St. Petersburg, 1888), p. II.

<sup>40</sup> A. I. Rodzevich, *Ocherk postroiki Zakaspiiskoi voennoi zheleznoi dorogi i ee znachenie dlia russko-sredneaziatskoi promyshlennosti i torgovli* (St. Petersburg, 1891), p. 9.

<sup>41</sup> For a sample of such projects, see A. I. Glukhovskoi, *Amu-Dar'insko-kaspiiskii vodnyi put' i ego znachenie dlia Rossii* (St. Petersburg, 1889); Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv (hereafter RGIA), f. 183, op. 1, d. 68; N. Petrov, *Poiusnitel'naia zapiska k proektu orosheniia I-go uchastka Golodnoi stepi* (St. Petersburg, 1898).

<sup>42</sup> See M. Peterson, *Pipe Dreams: Water and Empire in Central Asia's Aral Sea Basin* (Cambridge, 2019); and J. Obertreis, *Imperial Desert Dreams: Cotton Growing and Irrigation in Central Asia, 1860–1991* (Göttingen, 2017).

<sup>43</sup> 'Khronologicheskie vypiski', in *Golodnaia step' 1867–1917. Istoriia kraia v dokumentakh*, ed. A. V. Stanishevskii (Moscow, 1981), pp. 214–6.

These projects were part of a wider body of geological and hydrographical surveys carried out across the Kara Kum and Kizil Kum, the vast majority of which proceeded from an explicit recognition that while the deserts were 'lifeless' wastelands, this need not be a permanent state and, indeed, had not been so in the past. Engineers and surveyors noted widespread evidence of previous cultivation in the form of long-dried up irrigation canals.<sup>44</sup> In Russian eyes, this, coupled with the known fertility of the desert soils,<sup>45</sup> meant that although the desert in certain places such as the Hungry Steppe currently resembled 'a lifeless void, scorched by the sun and yellowish-grey from withered grasses', it required 'only water for its revival and transformation into a cultivated oasis'.<sup>46</sup> Here, therefore, the condition of emptiness could initiate a transformative narrative of restoration, whereby destitute land could be returned to a more bounteous state. The military engineer M. N. Ermolaev, surveying the eastern Kara Kum in 1906 for a scheme to divert river water from the Amu-Dar'ia to the Merv oasis by means of a canal over 265 miles long, based his project on the claim that 'the wastelands of the Kara Kum steppe are occupied by nobody'.<sup>47</sup> Instead, irrigating over 500,000 hectares of desert land would allow for the cultivation of lucerne and, in particular, cotton, which in turn would reduce Russia's dependence on American imports. In addition to making a detailed topographical survey and taking numerous soil samples, he included in his report to GUZZ's hydrology committee a series of photographs of the 'empty' desert.<sup>48</sup> Images such as these were part of the broader discursive system, which, as Obertreis has noted, played on the idea of emptiness as a means of 'underlin[ing] the current uselessness of the region and the potential opportunity to turn it into an assimilated and settled place in the future'.<sup>49</sup> In turn, this is evidence of a particular imperial vision that produced 'habitats as empty and unimproved' and scanned them for prospects

<sup>44</sup> Glukhovskoi, *Amu-Dar'insko-kaspiiskii vodnyi put'*, p. 2; V. F. Karavaev, *Materialy i issledovaniia k proektu orosheniia Golodnoi i Dal'verzinskoi stepei: Golodnaia step' v ee proshlom i nastoiashchem* (Petrograd, 1914), p. 8; N. Malakhovskii, 'Istoriia orositel'nykh rabot v Turkestanе', *Turkestarskie vedomosti*, xxii (1912), 3.

<sup>45</sup> V. M. Sazonov, *K proektu orosheniia Zakaspiiskoi oblasti* (St. Petersburg, 1912), p. 43.

<sup>46</sup> Karavaev, *Materialy i issledovaniia*, p. 5. Karavaev led the surveying party for Rizenkampf's proposed project to irrigate 500,000 hectares of land in the Hungry Steppe. For details of the plan, see RGIA, f. 432, op. 1, d. 926 and f. 432, op. 1, d. 659.

<sup>47</sup> M. N. Ermolaev, *Propusk vod r. Amu-Dar'i v Mervskii i Tedzhenskii oazisy s tsel'iu orosheniia 516,000 desiatin zemli v vostochnoi chasti Zakaspiiskoi oblasti* (St. Petersburg, 1908), p. 65; and RGIA, f. 427, op. 1, d. 26.

<sup>48</sup> Ermolaev, *Propusk vod r. Amu-Dar'i*, plates on pp. 36–7, 38–9, 40–1, 42–3.

<sup>49</sup> J. Obertreis, "Mertvye" i "kul'turnye" zemli: Diskursy uchenykh i imperskaia politika v Srednei Azii, 1880–e–1991 gg., *Ab Imperio*, iv (2008), 191–231, at p. 200.

and potential.<sup>50</sup> In this sense, surveys and reports were powerful forces acting to frame the terrain of the usually sterile desert as an environment open for improvement. Emptiness was thus a state which could be a precursor to land reclamation: within this inhospitable world lay the potential for economic and social growth, if the Russian state could 'fertilize this vast and hitherto unfertile expanse' to become a more 'useful' and 'productive' land.<sup>51</sup>

Thus the physical survey and description of emptiness was part of a process that saw an alien landscape pass 'from menace to management', much as has been described in the Sahara.<sup>52</sup> The designation of land as empty was a forerunner of direct Russian supervision and active stewardship and thus the physical transformation of this land into productive terrain had huge political significance. Beyond the potential economic advantages of reducing Russian dependence on American cotton, environmental improvement was a gauge against which to measure the progress of mankind and the pre-eminence of imperial power. A commonly accepted view in Russia and beyond was that the collapse of irrigation, and of subsequent productivity, was emblematic of the 'collapse of civilization', a fate to which it was believed pre-colonial Central Asia had succumbed.<sup>53</sup> Facing a land 'presenting the sorry spectacle of a slow death', Russia's role was thus to 'resurrect the grandiose irrigation systems from bygone ages that will give life to these dead lands', to 're-populate [the region]' and to 'regenerate new life'<sup>54</sup> – claims by one state land-surveyor that bore clear echoes of French and British proclamations on Egypt, Algeria and India.<sup>55</sup>

Thus emptiness was closely bound up with vague but potent notions of the demise and rebirth of both land and people, not merely in the sense of general improvement but allied to a specific vision of settler colonialism that was articulated with increasing force in the early 1900s.<sup>56</sup> Those surveying and prospecting the land proposed resettlement in explicitly and exclusively imperial terms. Sazonov, leading an expedition to the southern

<sup>50</sup> M. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London, 1992), p. 61. See also Obertreis, "'Mertvye" i "kul'turnye" zemli', pp. 200–4.

<sup>51</sup> [Annenkov] *Sredniaia Aziia i ee prigodnost' dlia vodvorenii russkio zbizni* (St. Petersburg, 1889), p. 49.

<sup>52</sup> G. R. Trumbull IV, 'Body of work: water and reimagining the Sahara in the era of decolonization', in Davis and Burke, *Environmental Imaginaries*, pp. 87–102, at p. 97.

<sup>53</sup> N. A. Dingel'shtedt, *Opyt izucheniia irrigatsii Turkestanskogo kraia* (St. Petersburg, 1893), p. 293.

<sup>54</sup> Dingel'shtedt, *Opyt izucheniia irrigatsii*, p. 43.

<sup>55</sup> An elegant overview of imperial 'improvement' is provided in Davis, *Arid lands*, chs. 4 and 5.

<sup>56</sup> A. Morrison, 'Peasant settlers and the "civilising mission" in Russian Turkestan, 1865–1917', *Jour. Imperial and Commonwealth History*, xliii (2015), 387–417.

Kara Kum, speculated that once the land had been irrigated it would be critical to attract only those who already had experience of working with crops that required tilling between rows. It followed, he suggested, that the most suitable settlers for Turkestan would be those from the south-western territory, Poltava, Kharkov and other western Russian provinces, along with the northern Caucasus. If 180,000 inhabitants could be resettled in these newly improved desert lands, this population would form a ‘strong core via which Transcaspia, and Turkestan in general, would become more closely merged with Russia’.<sup>57</sup> Views of this type were most forcefully articulated by the head of GUZZ, A. V. Krivoshein, who, following a visit to Turkestan in 1912, lobbied energetically for his vision of a vast swathe of three million hectares of freshly irrigated land, farmed by 1.5 million new Russian settlers.<sup>58</sup> This view intrinsically linked emptiness to subjective questions of value. Emptiness was in effect a commodity, but one in which the currency of potential enabled those surveying the land to claim that its *actual* value lay in inverse proportion to its current worthless state. Krivoshein, addressing the Russian state дума in May 1913 on the allocation of land to new Russian settlers in the Hungry Steppe, noted that when calculating the cost to the state of irrigating land there was ‘no need to factor in the value of the land itself *before* irrigation, as it is lacking almost any vegetation, and because of the complete lack of water, is suitable neither for arable farming nor animal husbandry, and has no value of any kind. Without irrigation, this steppe fully warrants its name, being literally “hungry”’.<sup>59</sup> Thus while emptiness was understood as being economically nugatory, it retained political currency as long as it had potential to be converted into productive gain.

Within the rhetoric of imperialism’s *mission civilisatrice*, emptiness thus served several purposes. Beyond facilitating narratives of improvement, it was a designation of future value and acted as a convenient foil to highlight the reclamation of supposedly degraded land. In the Hungry Steppe, for instance, descriptions of the region sent to prospective new settlers cast the land as a place ‘where formerly human feet rarely trod’, but where ‘there are now cultivated cotton fields, gardens and vegetable patches’.<sup>60</sup> Photographs

<sup>57</sup> Sazonov, *K proektu*, pp. 68–71.

<sup>58</sup> A. V. Krivoshein, *Zapiska Glavnoupravliaiushchego zemleuстроistvom i zemledeliem o poezdke v Turkestanskii krai v 1912 godu* (St. Petersburg, 1912), p. 67. This view was championed by Krivoshein’s staff – see also V. P. Voshchinin, *Ocherki novogo Turkestana. Svet i teni russkoi kolonizatsii* (St. Petersburg, 1914), p. 19.

<sup>59</sup> A. V. Krivoshein, ‘Ob otvode russkim pereselentsam uchastkov oroshaemoi kazennoi zemli v Golodnoi stepi’, in Stanishvskii, *Golodnaia step’ 1867–1917*, pp. 142–53, at p. 147.

<sup>60</sup> *Spravochnaia knizhka dlia khodokov i pereselentsev. Opisanie Syr-Dar’inskogo pereselencheskogo raiona* (Tashkent, 1914), p. 30.

circulated to settlers showed visible evidence of how 'dead land had been revived':<sup>61</sup> images of the Hungry Steppe before irrigation were directly juxtaposed with 'after' shots of villages and fields of crops.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, empty land was a pretext to promote a certain type of racialized settler colonialism. In this sense, land deemed vacant was a cipher for imperial subjectivity: describing the environment as empty, imperialists revealed their own self-conception as all-powerful improvers, managers of human and natural resources as intangible entities to be parcelled, allotted and supervised, in turn revealing the hierarchies of power, presumption and entitlement that underlay the imperial mission.

### *Maritime metaphors and the legibility of space*

Such views presumed the fundamental malleability of nature and landscape. Emptiness was a state conferred by the imperial eye, subject to transformation under colonial rule. Yet as much as emptiness was a category controlled by state actors, deployments of 'wastelands' and 'wilderness' as a precursor to improvement mask a more complex and ambivalent taxonomy of the empty. The fact remained that vast sections of Central Asia's deserts continued to be largely untouched by Russian hands: while surveyors concocted plans, there were numerous financial, technical and legal barriers to their implementation.<sup>63</sup> In many ways this remote and extreme terrain did not readily fit into the imperial logic of emptiness followed by improvement: beyond the fiscal and legal restrictions faced by the state, nature and climate on the frontier were often excessively challenging. Indeed, examining Russian attitudes to emptiness in greater detail, beyond irrigation mania, reveals a different set of anxieties which counterbalanced the more conventional tropes of imperial agency and superiority. The roots of this disquiet lay, this chapter proposes, in the harsh environment of the desert drylands. Russians expressed traditional concerns about the local climate in much the same way as other imperial actors voiced fears about the climate of the tropics. Pahlen, writing on instances of corruption and dereliction of duty in Transcaspia, suggested that it was 'the climate, coupled with the heat and the scorching rays of the sun, [that] is primarily responsible for engendering a state of mental unbalance which results in a breakdown of the will and a general slackening of morale'.<sup>64</sup> On closer

<sup>61</sup> *Turkestanskije vedomosti* (1913), No. 220, 2.

<sup>62</sup> *Spravochnaja knizhka*, plates, pp. 30–1.

<sup>63</sup> These obstacles included the failure to legislate fully for water rights and difficulties in facilitating foreign investment (Peterson, 'Technologies of rule', ch. 3).

<sup>64</sup> Pahlen, *Mission to Turkestan*, p. 156.

inspection, Pahlen's suspicions of climate and nature were echoed in the words of other visitors to the region. Heat and disorientation were perceived as a direct danger to survival and to imperial authority itself; and, in turn, Russian formulations of these environments as empty often served to lessen the land's threat as much as they did to prepare it for improvement.<sup>65</sup>

A case in point is the vocabulary employed by disparate Russians to describe the desert landscapes. Common to almost all visitors' accounts was a maritime metaphor in which terrain was likened to a seascape, a 'rippling sea of shifting sands' stretching as far as the eye could see.<sup>66</sup> Such depictions were by no means a model unique to Russian prose, as expeditions to the steppe from Qajar Iran made similar comparisons,<sup>67</sup> while Curzon observed that Central Asia's sands had 'all the appearance of a sea of troubled waves' and were 'an insidious and implacable enemy'.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, the use of oceanic tropes was a habitual technique employed by explorers of other large, seemingly empty spaces across the world: Livingstone likened parts of Africa to a 'terrestrial sea'.<sup>69</sup> It seems likely that this stylistic device couched the desert in more familiar terms, rendering the scene more imaginable in terms of scale, and alluded to the similarity in how land- and sea-scapes were traversed (navigated using stars, given the lack of fixed points on the horizon). This depiction of land as sea, what Thomas labelled in his discussions of European accounts of Australia as 'elemental transpositioning', had obvious imperial undertones, given that the 'ocean is the one element of the earthly sphere that consistently mimics the expansive neutrality of geometric space'. To European colonizers of the continent, Thomas suggested, 'this neutrality was embodied not only in the homogeneity and expansive qualities of the ocean but also its legal status. Unlike the land, the ocean is devoid of human occupants. Consequently the transfer of a maritime imaginary to the Australian continent had social

<sup>65</sup> For similar British anxieties about the unfathomable nature of Iraq post-1900, see P. Satia, "A rebellion of technology": development, policing and the British Arabian imaginary', in Davis and Burke, *Environmental Imaginaries*, pp. 23–59. Grove also suggests that sublime wildernesses were ultimately constructed as ways of dealing with anxieties about the survival and integrity of the individual and society (Grove, *Green Imperialism*, p. 483).

<sup>66</sup> *Turkestankie vedomosti* (1909), No. 198, 862. See similar comparisons in Il'enko, *Zakaspiiskaia oblast'*, p. 7; and Karavaev, *Materialy i issledovaniia*, p. 5.

<sup>67</sup> A. Khazeni, 'Across the Black Sands and the Red: travel writing, nature and the reclamation of the Eurasian steppe circa 1850', *International Jour. Middle East Studies*, xlii (2010), 591–614, at p. 598.

<sup>68</sup> Curzon, *Russia in Central Asia*, p. 56.

<sup>69</sup> Kennedy, *Last Blank Spaces*, pp. 19–20.



consequences of considerable gravity'.<sup>70</sup> In other words, casting open and empty spaces as ocean could be a means discursively to erase local inhabitants 'with any sovereign claims to the land'.<sup>71</sup>

In the Russian case, the evolution of a common vocabulary linking maritime scenes to empty terrestrial space certainly indirectly played into the imperial appropriation of territory, but equally and more immediately reflected the need to label and classify a threatening landscape. Fear and confusion were embedded in Russian accounts of the desert, as the monotonous terrain and searing heat threatened the very survival of the traveller. In this respect, the majority of those who entered Central Asia were aware of a multitude of abortive attempts to cross the deserts by outsiders, including the unsuccessful attempt of General V. A. Perovskii and a contingent of 5,000 men to reach Khiva in the campaign of 1839–40. Past history and current experience informed the comparison between desert and ocean, with the metaphor conveniently laden with references to the danger of drowning and disorientation posed by the landscape. Just as Curzon noted that the 'bones of many a victim lie trampled fathoms deep under the pitiless tide' of dunes inland from the Caspian shoreline,<sup>72</sup> so Ukhtomskii invoked a similar threat of being buried or drowned as he reflected on the 'walls of sand dunes swaying, threatening to bury [us] in the inaccessible steppe, just like hundreds and thousands of other Europeans who previously tried, weapons in their hands, to disturb the steppe's spellbound repose and calm'.<sup>73</sup> Emptiness thus bore the overlay of past history, with plentiful references to the (sometimes futile) bravery of outsiders who had attempted to cross the deserts, including in the campaigns of conquest in the 1870s. Little was as effective in capturing the morbid surroundings as the photograph, which made visually explicit these environmental dangers. Images often framed a landscape strewn with vertebrae and jaw bones<sup>74</sup> and were also effective in capturing the land's stillness, visualizing a place with 'neither life nor movement'.<sup>75</sup>

Death was a potential, but extreme, outcome of traversing Russia's arid limits. Yet even at its most benign, the desert was a formidable companion, with soaring daytime temperatures of over forty degrees and little in the way of shelter or food. A far more prosaic fear was the sense of disorientation

<sup>70</sup> M. Thomas, *The Artificial Horizon: Imagining the Blue Mountains* (Carlton, 2014), p. 117.

<sup>71</sup> Kennedy, *Last Blank Spaces*, p. 10.

<sup>72</sup> Curzon, *Russia in Central Asia*, p. 68.

<sup>73</sup> Ukhtomskii, *Ot Kalmytskoi stepi*, p. 61.

<sup>74</sup> *RPGONO*, p. 29.

<sup>75</sup> Karavaev, *Materialy i issledovaniia*, pp. 5–6.

inculcated by these environments. Sand, much like ice and snow, offered problems with cognition, vision and perception.<sup>76</sup> The flatness of the Ust-Yurt plateau and, conversely, the undulating dunes of the southern Kara Kum and Kizil Kum offered a vista that induced distinct unease among the visitors. With little in the way of landmarks or natural features, and no certain measure to gauge distance or the passing of time, the visitor could feel almost swallowed by the terrain, described memorably by one Englishman on the way to Khiva as ‘a picture of desolation which wearied, by its utter loneliness, and at the same time appalled by its immensity; a circle of which the centre was everywhere, and the circumference nowhere’.<sup>77</sup> The never-ending quality of these landscapes with no evident outer limits very easily led to both spatial and temporal dislocation and thus proved profoundly disorienting. Russian sources recorded the ease of becoming hopelessly lost and, consequently, the necessity of a dependable local guide with expert knowledge of the landscape and its fixed (but often hidden) points, such as wells.<sup>78</sup>

Climate and terrain thus combined to be a dangerous adversary and the threat of nature’s agency coloured almost all Russian accounts of the region. Guidebooks noted the difficulty of traversing ranges of sand dunes, even on still days, as dunes shifted in the slightest wind. This was a particular problem among the tall dunes inland from the Caspian shoreline, which reached up to fifteen metres in height. Even in a matter of hours the dunes could change their form, size and location, covering the traveller’s tracks and dislocating all sense of direction. As one observer remarked, the sands were ‘a sleeping bear which nobody disturbs’.<sup>79</sup> When the weather worsened, extreme heat, storms and fog made passage all but impossible, with some visitors recording sandstorms so severe that it was ‘impossible to distinguish the location of the sun in the sky’.<sup>80</sup> Accounts of these landscapes were thus encoded with the knowledge of nature’s treacherous dynamism. Numerous visitors noted sightings of mirages, of a ‘miracle on the horizon’ that appeared to be a ‘twinkling lake’ nestling between the sand dunes,<sup>81</sup> of a phenomenon

<sup>76</sup> See Fox on the indecipherable landscapes of Antarctica in ‘Walking in circles: cognition and science in high places’, in Cosgrove and della Dora, *High Places*, pp. 19–29.

<sup>77</sup> F. Burnaby, *A Ride to Khiva: Travels and Adventures in Central Asia* (London, 1882), p. 135.

<sup>78</sup> A. Nikol’skii, ‘Priroda Kizil-Kumov’, pp. 216–27, at p. 225, and Sorokin, ‘Cherez Kara-Kum’, pp. 282–93, at pp. 290–1, both in Kruber, *Aziatskaia Rossiia*.

<sup>79</sup> A. Kaufman and Shevchenko-Krasnogorskii, ‘Po Sredne-aziatskoi zheleznoi doroge’, in Kruber, *Aziatskaia Rossiia*, pp. 160–73, at p. 171.

<sup>80</sup> Kh. V. Gel’mán, ‘Nabliudeniiá nad dvizheniem letuchikh peskov v Khivinskom khanstve’, *IIRGO*, xxvii (1891), 384–415.

<sup>81</sup> Sorokin, ‘Cherez Kara-Kum’, p. 290.

that 'transforms the featureless dismal plain into luscious lakes of water with floating islets of trees'.<sup>82</sup> Such events were recorded not only in the sandier desert climes in the south and west of Transcaspiya, but also on salt flats, the surface of which could be instantaneously transmogrified into 'an enormous lake, the mounds of sand towards the edges like ships, and the shrubs like boats, floating on a lake'.<sup>83</sup> These mirages were another – and perhaps the ultimate – indication of the landscape's ability to deceive and disorientate, offering a rather ironic extension to the metaphorical allusion that likened the desert to an ocean: sometimes it did indeed appear that land and sea had become one.<sup>84</sup> The mirage was a trickster, suggesting an inversion of the popular conception that desert landscapes were empty and devoid of features: it promised something where there was, in fact, nothing, and thus reinforced notions of emptiness when the hollowness of the vision was revealed.

As Russians who ventured into the deserts noted their reliance on guides for expert knowledge, the dangers of the journey, the lack of discernible landmarks and the landscape's propensity for optical trickery, they were in many ways describing terrain that defied order and rationalization, unreadable to the imperial outsider. In this sense, deserts were the antithesis of a controlled or understandable environment such as a system of fields, a forest or a managed eco-system, the type of legible landscape that Scott noted is a 'pre-requisite of appropriation' and a condition critical to the imperial control of territory across the globe.<sup>85</sup> Here, though, there was little regularity, little order, little predictability. It thus follows that to Russians such terrain was profoundly illegible. Fixing terrain as 'empty' was hence in part a way of imposing order, a reaction to the illegibility and uncontrollability of the desert world. Emptiness simplified and standardized: the first step to transforming 'alien' land into legible, knowable landscape. In this sense, comparisons to an empty ocean did reinforce the declarations on vacant and valueless terrain discussed in the previous section. Yet legibility was important on an individual as well as an imperial scale. Rendering the

<sup>82</sup> Curzon, *Russia in Central Asia*, p. 75. For a more scientific take, see Val'ter, *Zakony obrazovaniia pustyn'*, p. 130.

<sup>83</sup> *RPGONO*, p. 22.

<sup>84</sup> On mirages and the breakdown of perception, see K. Yusoff, 'Climates of sight: mistaken visibilities, mirages and "seeing beyond" in Antarctica', in Cosgrove and della Dora, *High Places*, pp. 48–63.

<sup>85</sup> J. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, Conn., 1999), p. 219. See also Banivanua Mar and Edmonds, *Making Settler Colonial Space* on the colonial reorganization of space (p. 3); and Mitchell's analysis of British attempts to make Egypt readable in T. Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley, Calif., 1988).

landscape more knowable and familiar via the trope of emptiness served to lessen the land's threat, shielding the traveller and observer from the potential hazards of difficult nature.

### *The triple threat: sand, salt and wind*

The size and composition of these desert landscapes preoccupied the tsarist scientific community, itself an important upholder of colonial rule through institutions such as the Imperial Russian Geographic Society and Imperial Russian Technical Society. Engineers, hydrologists, geologists and soil scientists – while important members of the imperial quest to reclaim land through surveying, irrigation, building and planting – also approached the desert with a view to understanding the region's geography, geology and eco-systems. Analysing soil, water, sand, climate and flora and fauna, these individuals further complicated and destabilized the notion of emptiness as a means of removing threat and rendering land appropriable.

While scientists and casual explorers alike noted the capricious qualities of the desert with the evidence of the eye, studies that were more quantitative in nature confirmed many of the perplexing characteristics of arid terrain, particularly with regard to the lack of fixity of natural features. Russians had been aware for many decades that the Aral Sea, in parallel with other lakes across Central Asia and Siberia, was gradually reducing in size.<sup>86</sup> Dingel'shtedt, an irrigation and water-law specialist and land assessor for the Ministry of Agriculture, noted that this was an almost indisputable fact, given the combination of extremely high temperatures and a preponderance of dry, northern and north-easterly winds, particularly in the Kizil Kum region, that led to a high rate of evaporation. In this way, formerly watered regions in the Aral basin had now become vast, lifeless wastelands of salt and sand.<sup>87</sup> Yet arriving on the Aral shoreline in 1899, the renowned geographer and ichthyologist Lev Berg made a disconcerting discovery. Fully expecting to find further evidence of the continued desiccation of the lake, he compared a series of maps of the lake shore drafted over the course of the past half-century with his own observations *in situ*.<sup>88</sup> This made for an odd revelation. What had, according to maps from the 1840s, once been islands had become part of the desert shoreline in the 1880s as the lake receded, but now appeared to have been restored to their former status. Berg drew the

<sup>86</sup> E.g., N. Iadrintsev, 'Umen'shenie vod v aralo-kaspiiskoi nizmennosti v predelakh zapadnoi Sibiri', *IIRGO*, xxii (1886), 53–62.

<sup>87</sup> Dingel'shtedt, *Opyt izucheniia irrigatsii*, pp. 8–12.

<sup>88</sup> L. Berg and P. Ignatov, 'O kolebaniikh urovnia ozer Srednei Azii i zapadnoi Sibiri', *IIRGO*, xxxvi (1900), III–25. See also L. S. Berg, *Aral'skoe more. Opyt fiziko-geograficheskoi monografii* (St. Petersburg, 1908).

inescapable conclusion that at some recent point the water level had begun to rise at an accelerating pace, a supposition supported by the testimony of local fishermen. He calculated that since the mid 1880s the water level had risen by over four feet; a result, he speculated, of either tectonic fluctuations or, more probably, climate change, given that the volume of water in the Aral Sea's tributaries had also increased year on year during the 1890s.<sup>89</sup> The unexpected findings underscored the unpredictability of a landscape that could not be accurately cartographically fixed. With the desert and salt flats expanding and receding, apparently unaffected by human activity, 'emptiness' was a state that defied boundaries.

The slippery nature of the landscape posed a wider social and environmental threat. Migratory dunes were more dangerous than simply moving landforms that were disorienting to the traveller. In fact, those who observed the sands closely over time noted that 'in many parts of Central Asia, the sands are slowly devouring villages and flourishing oases. No kind of force can hold back their victorious procession. Even cities become their victims'.<sup>90</sup> The town of Vardanzi, for instance, had been located some forty kilometres north-east of Bukhara until it had been swallowed by the sand in the mid nineteenth century. Similarly, Nikol'skii lamented the sand's corrosive effect on natural features, noting that near Karakul there had until recently been numerous salt lakes, which now had either entirely disappeared or had been reduced to 'tiny puddles'.<sup>91</sup> It was clearly difficult to sustain any level of sophisticated measurement across such a large region, with data incomplete and partially anecdotal, but there is considerable supporting evidence to corroborate these claims. Finding himself trapped in a sandstorm while surveying part of the Kara Kum, the engineer Kh. V. Gel'man undertook detailed observations of Central Asia's drifting sands. His measurements and extrapolated calculations revealed that the sands were moving at a rate of a little over two metres a year, or around two kilometres per millennium, in a south-westerly direction, blown by prevailing winds. Anecdotal evidence appeared to support the theory: speaking to his Turkmen guides, Gel'man learnt of a number of abandoned settlements that had been entirely buried in sand in living memory. The problem was not confined to the past: approaching dunes were now noticeable near the Khivan town of Il'ialla and the Russian town of Petro-Aleksandrovsk.<sup>92</sup> Meanwhile, the scientist and forestry specialist V. Paletskii observed similar occurrences in the Kizil Kum, recording that the

<sup>89</sup> Berg and Ignatov, 'O kolebaniiax urovnia ozer', p. 118.

<sup>90</sup> Nikol'skii, 'Priroda Kizil-Kumov', p. 217.

<sup>91</sup> Nikol'skii, 'Priroda Kizil-Kumov', p. 217.

<sup>92</sup> Gel'man, 'Nabliudeniia', pp. 413–5.

sand dunes around Bukhara were moving at a rate of on average six metres a year to the south,<sup>93</sup> while others, including Dingel'shtedt, were of similar opinion.<sup>94</sup>

Such findings fed into arguments that Central Asia was in a state of rapid desiccation, a condition which meant that 'from year to year the limits of the deserts are extended'.<sup>95</sup> Although debates raged as to whether this was actually a proven case – Berg's findings were published as a rebuttal to Kropotkin's claims, citing rising water levels in the region as evidence of quite the contrary phenomenon<sup>96</sup> – the idea of an ever encroaching desert that threatened to engulf productive land was one that resonated with wider Russian fears of desertification across their European steppes.<sup>97</sup> Drifting sands, very often blown on winds from Central Asia, coupled with problems caused by the over-cultivation of land, threatened to turn parts of the fertile European steppe into desert.<sup>98</sup> Similar instances were observed in Central Asia itself: in western parts of Fergana province, near the villages of Makhram, Pamar and Andarzhan, thousands of hectares of fertile land had recently been reclaimed by wind-blown dunes.<sup>99</sup> The inhabitants of tens of villages in this area suffered a daily battle with the incoming sand, forcing many to relocate to less precariously placed settlements. Inhospitable conditions were recognized as a combination of the prevailing natural weather conditions and of human activity: grazing cattle and uprooting plant cover for fuel or fodder.

In this sense, desert landscapes posed a very significant threat as well as an opportunity. Observation suggested that the sands were growing in area: emptiness was not contained, but rather threatened to expand into more fertile parts of the region. The evident deterioration of terrain thus offered a significant counterbalance to the narrative of progress and reclamation and was a clear component of the desiccation theory that preoccupied scientists and imperial powers across the globe during the nineteenth and twentieth

<sup>93</sup> Val'ter, *Zakony obrazovaniia pustyn'*, pp. 120–4.

<sup>94</sup> Dingel'shtedt, *Opyt izucheniia irrigatsii*, pp. 14–5.

<sup>95</sup> P. A. Kropotkin, 'The desiccation of Eur-Asia', *Geographical Jour.*, xxiii (1904), 722–41, at p. 722.

<sup>96</sup> L. Berg, 'Vysykhayet li Sredniaia Aziia?', *IIRGO*, xli (1905), 507–21.

<sup>97</sup> V. S. Solov'ev, 'Vrag s vostoka', in *Sobranie sochinenii Vladimira Sergeevicha Solov'eva*, ed. S. M. Solov'ev and E. L. Radlov (St. Petersburg, 1914), v. 452–65 (originally published 1892).

<sup>98</sup> See Moon, *Plough that Broke the Steppes*, ch. 5; and D. Moon, 'The debate over climate change in the steppe region in nineteenth-century Russia', *Russian Review*, lxix (2010), 251–75.

<sup>99</sup> *RPGONO*, p. 31.

centuries.<sup>100</sup> The implications of the situation came gradually to condition Russian actions, but without the scale, commitment or success of other well-known plans to combat desertification, such as the French project to reforest the Landes region or British attempts to stabilize the Thar desert in India.<sup>101</sup> At least some Russian scientists, including the geologist V. A. Obruchev, warned of the deleterious effects of increased human activity, advising that serious measures should be taken to increase the cultivation of forested areas across Turkestan, and of scrub coverage in affected localities,<sup>102</sup> while small-scale experiments with afforestation and planting to bind together shifting sands had begun as early as the 1870s. The dimensions of the problem, however, demanded effective, governmental-level support.<sup>103</sup> Faced with the apparent dangers of desertification, the Russian state heeded such advice in piecemeal fashion. In Fergana province, the administration campaigned for inhabitants to cut back on the uprooting of saxaul for fuel. Fines were imposed on illegal wood cutting, including desert plants, while along either side of the Trans-Caspian line a strip of land five versts in width was created as a protected zone where the removal of foliage was prohibited.<sup>104</sup> The railway, being at particular risk of wind-blown sand drifts, was the focus of intense work to stabilize the desert soils – two huge plant nurseries were created at Repetek and Farab stations from which over three million shrubs were planted out along the track.<sup>105</sup> In parallel with these natural shelterbelts to prevent erosion, shields and screens similar to those used to guard against snow drifts in Russia proper were also deployed by the Ministry of Transport.<sup>106</sup> Yet while efforts to hold back the desert along the length of the Trans-Caspian line were not without success, the wider attempt to regulate cutting and grazing rights was largely ineffective.

Beyond the question of whether migrating sands could be contained, the challenges of reforming these empty landscapes were abundantly clear. Even in areas unthreatened by desertification, Russian efforts to build

<sup>100</sup> See, e.g., E. Huntington, *Civilisation and Climate* (New Haven, Conn., 1915); and W. Macdonald, *The Conquest of the Desert* (London, 1914). For more on the zenith of desiccation theory, see Davis, *Arid Lands*, chs. 4 and 5.

<sup>101</sup> Davis, *Arid Lands*, p. 78, pp. 106–10.

<sup>102</sup> V. A. Obruchev, *Peski i stepi Zakaspiiskoi oblasti* (St. Petersburg, 1888), p. 11. See also *RPGONO*, p. 212.

<sup>103</sup> Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii, f. 664, op. 1, d. 6. See similar activities on Russia's European grasslands in Moon, *Plough that Broke the Steppes*, pp. 173–206.

<sup>104</sup> N. Kharin, *Vegetation Degradation in Central Asia under the Impact of Human Activities* (Dordrecht, 2002), pp. 47–8.

<sup>105</sup> RGIA, f. 350, op. 1, d. 277, ll. 26–26 ob.

<sup>106</sup> See RGIA, f. 350, op. 1, d. 277, ll. 8–26 ob for measures including earthworks and shields.

communities and irrigate land in inhospitable environments had unforeseen consequences. In the Hungry Steppe, the limited irrigation of the land was slow and expensive work, while Russian engineers and peasant farmers lacked the skills and experience in irrigation work efficiently to exploit the terrain. Thus, many villagers also faced an ongoing struggle to tame nature's elements. Here, the passage of time revealed the paucity of Russian technical knowledge on irrigation. In 1915 a committee of soil experts and agronomists was formed to deal with problems that had arisen in the irrigated areas of the Hungry Steppe. Particular attention was paid to issues of drainage and salinization, even in the village of Veliko-Alekseevskii, which had been founded only two years previously. Despite the newness of this settlement, irrigated land had already become salinized and therefore unusable, while outbreaks of malaria grew as mosquitos flourished in the poorly-drained soil.<sup>107</sup> A chief engineer at the Ministry of Agriculture, and a leading light in hydro-technical work undertaken in Central Asia both before and after the revolution, confirmed these findings: G. K. Rizenkampf noted the poorly-built and maintained irrigation structures in the north-east of the Hungry Steppe, drawing attention to the silting of drainage canals, the lack of due reinforcement given to the walls and beds of these structures and in places the compromised integrity of the entire irrigation network. As a result, land that had been reclaimed from an infertile wasteland was once again returning to its previous state, with the soils becoming salinated, swampy and malarial, to such an extent that 'a significant number of settlers were forced to give up their land and fields and resettle in other parts of Turkestan'.<sup>108</sup> Similar findings were also reported at the other main site of desert irrigation, the Murgab estate in the Kara Kum.<sup>109</sup>

Such difficulties were not uncommon when European imperial powers attempted to co-opt local technical practices with which they were unfamiliar.<sup>110</sup> Yet these encounters had a significant impact on the ways in which the arid lands of Central Asia were conceived. Over time Russians uncovered the inherent instability of these spaces and in doing so revealed a paradox that lay at the heart of their conceptions of this terrain as

<sup>107</sup> *Turkestanskii vedomosti*, 1915, no. 252, p. 3.

<sup>108</sup> G. K. Rizenkampf, *Problemy orosheniia Turkestana* (Moscow, 1921), p. 42. See also discussions in local agricultural journals about poor soil quality in the Hungry Steppe, e.g. *Turkestanskii zemledelets*, no. 4 (1915), 52–8.

<sup>109</sup> V. A. Vasil'ev, *Ocherk gidrotekhnicheskikh rabot v Murgabskom Gosudarevom imenii* (Petrograd, 1915).

<sup>110</sup> The British in India and Egypt experienced very similar difficulties: see D. Headrick, *The Tentacles of Progress: Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism, 1850–1940* (Oxford, 1988), ch. 6, pp. 171–208.



fundamentally empty: the more the rhetoric of imperialism prefixed these landscapes as vacant voids, the greater the level of incursion into them, for the most part by scientific survey but also by settlers and visitors. Yet the more scientific knowledge and first-hand experience was assembled, the unsteadier the nature of this emptiness became. Russian attempts to control, manage and eventually to transform these environments were inherently precarious, shot through with the constant danger that their activities actively prefigured a return to unmanageable emptiness or, at the very least, that they could do little to hold back the forces of nature.

Such reasoning prompted the introduction of a note of moderation in the usually triumphalist accounts of tsarist imperialists. As Dingel'shtedt remarked rather perceptively, contrary to the standard rhetoric of a gradual but relentless triumph over nature, what Russia faced in Central Asia was instead a 'struggle with nature', a 'war against drought'.<sup>111</sup> While the land assessor placed his faith in the forces of the state, armed with resources, preparation and knowledge, it was abundantly clear that this was not necessarily a war that could be won in all areas. Such modulations of tone offset the usual arrogant confidence of tsarist officials who projected the rapid construction of a large settler colony in Turkestan. By 1914, even Voshchinin, a staunch apologist for colonization in Central Asia, was forced to admit the problems faced by villagers in the region while touring the villages of the Hungry Steppe and beyond. Maintaining a constant and regulated water supply was difficult and unpredictable, while pests, particularly locusts, were a thorny problem that threatened harvests and thus the very survival of peasant enterprises in villages such as Spassk and Dukhovsk.<sup>112</sup> Approaching these villages by car across the 'dead and infertile' steppe, on seeing the silhouette of these settlements in the distance Voshchinin remarked that the sight was 'not a mirage, but the work of the Russian people'.<sup>113</sup> Yet a clear sense of the precariousness of these 'outposts of Russian civilization' ran through his comments: the villages were not a hallucination, but shared some of the mirage's unstable features.

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Even as proponents of settler colonialism expounded the transformation of 'dead' and 'empty' terrain into productive and bountiful land, other

<sup>111</sup> Dingel'shtedt, *Opyt izucheniia irrigatsii*, p. 64.

<sup>112</sup> Voshchinin, *Ocherki novogo Turkestana*, pp. 23–6. Advice on how to recognize and combat such difficulties was often featured in the local agricultural press, e.g., *Turkestanskoe sel'skoe khoziaistvo* nos. 3 and 6 (1914).

<sup>113</sup> Voshchinin, *Ocherki novogo Turkestana*, p. 22.

members of the imperial project were demonstrating that the passage from menace to management was by no means an easy task. In the case of scientists working in the field, evidence suggested that the sands of central and western Turkestan were in fact spreading, raising doubts as to the long-term sustainability of the imperial project. What becomes clear from an exploration of the sources discussed above is that to accept that tropes of emptiness were deployed exclusively as a precursor to improvement is to miss the crucial point that understandings of emptiness were the product of interactions between different sets of ideas: ideas produced by science, by imperial rhetoric, by the evidence of the eye, by the traveller and, above all, by the interaction between these different imaginations and the physical geography of the region.

Emptiness in this sense was thus very much a process rather than an inert state. Such was the quality of the environment that Central Asia's arid terrain was a landscape of hope and opportunity, of science and exploration, but also very much of fear, fantasy, illegibility and confusion. Here the connotations of empty land were far from uniform. On the one hand, political assumptions about the imperial mission facilitated the spread of emptiness as the chief premise upon which actions to appropriate and improve were built. Yet even while tsarist engineers worked to irrigate limited patches of desert, the positive connotations of empty landscape were tempered by a growing awareness of nature's agency in terms of its threat – deceptive or otherwise – both to the individual visitor or settler and to infrastructure and communities. 'Emptiness' had no single fixed value or meaning and overcoming it was not necessarily the one-way, straightforward process of a barren and vacant desert being transformed into a land of opportunity.

Thus if the rhetorical construction and physical survey of empty land were an integral component of the set of assumptions and ideas that constitute Thomas's 'dreamwork of imperialism', whereby landscapes could be rebuilt, modified and managed by the imperial state, emptiness also had the potential to be one of the imperial project's greatest threats.<sup>114</sup> Just as empty land made a convenient foil for Russians to construct future visions for a fertile, blossoming colony, it also acted as a constant reminder of the difficulties of the imperial mission in a landscape that could not be fully tamed. Examining constructions of emptiness in both an imaginative and physical sense thus reveals not only conventional imperial subjectivities, but also the challenges to them: the environment could not always be transformed in the way its interlocutors imagined, and thus emptiness challenged just as much as it

<sup>114</sup> Thomas, *Artificial Horizon*, pp. 42 and 149.

enabled the narratives and actions of imperialists. For this reason, imperial constructions of empty space lay somewhere between avarice and anxiety: reflecting the fear of environmental decline that penetrated much of early twentieth-century global thought as much as the arrogant confidence of colonialism that sought its negation.



### 3. Empty spaces, aviation and the Brazilian nation: the metaphor of conquest in narratives of Edu Chaves's cross-country flights in 1912\*

*Leonie Schuster*

#### **Introduction**

Aircraft provide new ways to traverse space, differing from those of other transport technologies. Taking advantage of the so-called third dimension (or airspace), flying machines can, with seeming ease, overcome what would be obstacles in the natural landscape if they were travelling over ground. With the arrival of the 'air age' at the beginning of the twentieth century in the form of engine-driven and completely steerable airships and aeroplanes, such technological possibilities inspired numerous dreams and visions, nourishing a wide range of spatial imaginations across cultures.<sup>1</sup> In Brazil, from the 1910s onwards aviation was considered a way to deal with the challenging geography and vast spaces of the heartland, which were devoid

\* This chapter is based on part of a doctoral thesis about aviation pioneers and ideas of Brazil and its place in the world between 1900 and 1922, submitted and defended at the Freie Universität Berlin in 2017 (see L. Schuster, *Brasilianische Höhenflüge. Luftfahrtpioniere und Imaginationen von Nation und Welt in Brasilien, 1900–1922* (Stuttgart, 2018)). Special thanks are due to the former Museu de Aeronáutica de Santos and the curator responsible for its collections, Commander Arnaldo Oliveira Maciel, who in 2012 facilitated access to the wonderful collection of the Fundação Santos Dumont, no longer open to the public, and now in charge of the Quarto Comando Aéreo Regional (Cambuci, São Paulo). Thanks to generous authorization from the Centro de Comunicação Social da Aeronáutica it has been possible to reprint the press cutting below (Figure 3.1). I am also grateful to the Biblioteca Nacional, which with its comprehensive digital database (Hemeroteca Digital Brasileira) provides a treasure trove for Brazil-focused historical research. Special thanks also to the organizing committee of the *Empty Spaces* conference and to Tricia Cusack, who helped with the English in this chapter.

<sup>1</sup> For a cross-cultural and cross-epochal survey of dreams of flying in connection with concrete technical developments in the sector of aviation, see W. Behringer and C. Ott-Koptschalijski, *Der Traum vom Fliegen. Zwischen Mythos und Technik* (Frankfurt am Main, 1991). For the contemporaneous perception of an 'air age', see A. B. Van Riper, *Imagining Flight: Aviation and Popular Culture* (College Station, Tex., 2004), p. 1.

L. Schuster, 'Empty spaces, aviation and the Brazilian nation: the metaphor of conquest in narratives of Edu Chaves's cross-country flights in 1912', in *Empty Spaces: perspectives on emptiness in modern history*, ed. C. J. Campbell, A. Giovine and J. Keating (London, 2019), pp. 59–86. License: CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0.

of substantial settlement, infrastructure or state control, and thus perceived as empty by the advocates of nationwide modernization. By contributing to the physical and symbolic integration of the Brazilian territory, aviation became a key component in thinking about the nation.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter, taking Brazil as an example, focuses on the relationship between aviation, empty spaces and the nation. With the publication of Benedict Anderson's influential study on nationalism in 1983, historical scholarship came to understand nations as neither natural nor timeless entities, but rather as 'imagined communities' that have been constructed, challenged, modified or restated by historical actors over time.<sup>3</sup> After transitioning from a Portuguese colony to an independent Brazilian empire in 1822, and then from monarchy to republic in 1889, the young Brazilian republic addressed with fervour the question of the nation. The elite project of nation-building was more than just the pulling together of a culturally and socially heterogeneous population. Struggling with the legacy of the Portuguese empire's strong coastal focus, Brazilian nation builders also strove for the consolidation of their extensive and uneven national territory.<sup>4</sup> As several studies show, the topic of territorial conquest and thus the category of space (rather than 'time' or 'history') have played an important role in contemporaneous Brazilian concepts of the nation.<sup>5</sup>

In this context, the concept of empty spaces – understood as spaces which at certain historical moments, applying varying discursive and representational strategies, were socially constructed and conceived of as

<sup>2</sup> For a concise introduction to the relationship between geography, nation-building and technology in the young Brazilian republic, see J. Wolfe, *Autos and Progress: the Brazilian Search for Modernity* (Oxford and New York, 2010), pp. 4–8.

<sup>3</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York, 2006). For scholarship referring to Latin America, see the review by N. Miller, 'The historiography of nationalism and national identity in Latin America', *Nations and Nationalism*, xii (2006), 201–21, doi: 10.1111/j.1469-8129.2006.00237.x.

<sup>4</sup> For the historical context, see T. E. Skidmore, *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change* (New York, 1999); and E. B. Burns, *A History of Brazil* (New York, 1993). The geographical enormity of Brazil is well depicted in map form in Burns, *A History of Brazil*, p. 14, map 3; also reproduced in Skidmore, *Brazil*, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> See L. L. Oliveira, 'A conquista do espaço: sertão e fronteira no pensamento brasileiro', *História, Ciências, Saúde – Manguinhos*, v (1998), 195–215, doi: 10.1590/S0104-59701998000400011, unpag.; M. Velloso, 'A brasilidade verde-amarela: nacionalismo e regionalismo paulista', *Revista Estudos Históricos*, vi (1993), 89–112 <<http://bibliotecadigital.fgv.br/ojs/index.php/reh/article/view/1952>> [accessed 30 June 2016], at pp. 101, 108–10; S. L. Raimundo, 'Terra conquistada: A pátria de alma bandeirante', *Terra Brasilis [Online]*, ii (2000), 1–11, doi: 10.4000/terrabrasilis.303, at pp. 4–5; S. L. Raimundo, 'Bandeirantismo e identidade nacional. Representações geográficas no Museu Paulista', *Terra Brasilis [Online]*, vi (2004), 1–16, doi: 10.4000/terrabrasilis.375, at p. 2.

vacant – becomes very powerful.<sup>6</sup> Based on narratives arising out of the occasion of the first cross-country flights over Brazilian territory in 1912, this chapter analyses how the process of gradually filling allegedly empty spaces not only with new air routes, but particularly with symbolic meaning, was depicted in press reports and images. The chapter focuses on widely circulating press media originating in the urban centres of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro that, while operating as a voice of the local elite, at the same time adjusted to the expectations of a larger national readership.<sup>7</sup> It argues that the conquest of these supposedly empty spaces by means of aviation was accompanied by a metaphorical framework which related it to myths of colonial conquest. At the same time, this metaphor evoked spatial ideas of the nation that referred to previous moments in Brazilian history. Analysing the correlation of narratives of colonial conquest and contemporary aerial conquest shows how overcoming emptiness, which has been a key idea in Brazilian nation-building, has been reinforced on a symbolic level.

First, it is necessary to reflect upon the relationship between aviation and the idea of empty spaces. What chronological and cultural continuities exist in both the understanding of emptiness and in the ways in which emptiness has been overcome in the imagination via aviation? What factors are specific to the historical timeframe and locality considered here? How are imaginations of empty spaces and the Brazilian nation related and what explains the great importance attached to aviation in Brazil at the beginning of the twentieth century? The second part of this chapter focuses on the aeronautical setting in Brazil between 1910 and 1912 and considers the terms used to refer to flights at that time. Studying how these terms emerged and were applied makes it possible to trace a shift in the Brazilian perception of the spatial dimension of aviation and, consequently, in the national

<sup>6</sup> For a comprehensive survey of historical research on spaces and spatial conceptions throughout history, see S. Rau, *Räume: Konzepte, Wahrnehmungen, Nutzungen* (Frankfurt am Main, 2013). Works on the impact on arts and architecture of the spatial revolution launched by aviation include C. Asendorf, *Super Constellation – Flugzeug und Raumrevolution. Die Wirkung der Luftfahrt auf Kunst und Kultur der Moderne* (Vienna and New York, 1997); and, with a focus on wide-ranging forms of cultural expression, S. Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003). There are also studies on the role of aviation in sparsely populated areas: e.g., B. Jürgens, 'Die Erschließung Südamerikas durch den Luftverkehr' (unpublished Christian-Albrechts-Universität, Kiel, PhD thesis, 1950). In the case of Brazil, Porto presents a history of the 'integration' of the Brazilian (empty) spaces of the interior by means of aviation and emphasizes the concrete process of establishing airlines from 1930 onwards: N. M. L. Porto, *História do Transporte Aéreo no Centro-Oeste Brasileiro, 1930–1960* (Goiânia, 2005). However, the majority of these case studies (in contrast to the present study) do not apply a constructivist perspective to empty spaces.

<sup>7</sup> On the press in Brazil, see the anthology *História da Imprensa no Brasil*, ed. A. L. Martins and T. R. de Luca (São Paulo, 2008).

significance attributed to it. This turning point connects to the national aspiration of overcoming empty spaces on the ground and is strongly linked to the aeronautical activities of the Brazilian airman Eduardo Pacheco Chaves (or Edu Chaves for short (1887–1975)).<sup>8</sup>

The third section turns to Brazilian media coverage in the 1910s in order to examine the metaphorical framework through which empty spaces were constructed. In particular, this section analyses narratives, caricatures and cartographical representations published on the occasion of the first longer-distance flights through Brazilian territory, undertaken by Edu Chaves in 1912. What continuities can be traced between colonial conquest and the ‘conquest of the air’ and how do both relate to empty spaces? By correlating the spatial processes of different historic moments, these textual and pictorial discourses evoke and negotiate the manifold relations between aviation technology, the conception of empty spaces and ideas of the nation. As this chapter shows, not emptiness as such, but rather its overcoming – be it by colonial expeditions or by modern means of aviation – constituted a key idea in Brazilian national discourses at the beginning of the twentieth century. Based on this idea, aviation pioneers such as Edu Chaves were elevated to heroes of the nationalist cause.

### ***Aviation and empty spaces: cross-cultural dimensions and local meanings in Brazil***

In analytical terms, aviation is related to the idea of empty spaces in two ways. The first refers to airspace. Having overcome Aristotelian spatial imaginations which dominated the Christian world view throughout the middle ages, in European spatial conceptions the sky has become conceivable as an endless, three-dimensional, empty space.<sup>9</sup> Starting with the first manned balloon ascents in the eighteenth century, followed by experiments with steerable airships and gliders in the nineteenth century and culminating in the definitive breakthrough of powered flight in the first decade of the twentieth century, the air was conquered little by little – both in terms of physical access and technical and scientific mastery.<sup>10</sup> In

<sup>8</sup> At the time, and thus in the historical sources, spelled *Edu* (with accent, in newspapers also with an inverted comma: *Edu*). In accordance with current orthographical conventions, the following text will use the spelling *Edu* (without the accent).

<sup>9</sup> See M. Wertheim, *Die Himmelstür zum Cyberspace. Eine Geschichte des Raumes von Dante zum Internet*, trans. I. Strasmann (Zürich, 2000), pp. 102–10, 121–4 and 161. An English version is available: M. Wertheim, *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace. A History of Space from Dante to the Internet* (New York, 1999), pp. 99–106, 116–8 and 149.

<sup>10</sup> On the history of the invention of flight, see R. P. Hallion, *Taking Flight: Inventing the Aerial Age from Antiquity through the First World War* (Oxford, 2003).



the words of R. Wohl: 'The sky was no longer a limit, but a frontier to be explored and mastered'.<sup>11</sup>

Human beings and machines thus entered a space initially devoid of them, occupied only by birds and religious and mythological figures. The first step in this process consisted of the development and successful practical implementation of aviation technology. Soon after, based on technological advances, spatial expansion increased: aeroplanes flew higher and further and – taking into account the category of time – faster and for longer. This technical triumph over what was thought of as spatial (or even spatio-temporal) limitations found its linguistic match in the term 'conquest of the air(s)'. The vast extension and power of this phrasing in numerous languages – at least, the Romance and Germanic languages – indicates the cross-cultural dimension of this spatial imagination.<sup>12</sup> The physically unexplored and, for many centuries, technologically uncontrollable airspace hence made the advent of this technology particularly fruitful for spatial readings.

Beyond the cross-epochal and cross-cultural dimension, aviation was, second, linked to the concept of empty spaces in another way, which, depending on local geography, produced varying meanings. Taking advantage of the third dimension, aviation provided the possibility of traversing nearly any type of natural space on the ground – such as wastelands, oceans, forests or mountains – which, contemplated through the increasingly powerful lens of modernity, in many respects seemed to represent emptiness. In so doing, the aeroplane facilitated the connection of remote areas, while minimizing spatial isolation.

<sup>11</sup> R. Wohl, 'Republic of the air', *The Wilson Quarterly*, xvii (1993), 106–17, also <<http://archive.wilsonquarterly.com/essays/republic-air>> [accessed 30 June 2016], at p. 110.

<sup>12</sup> For instance, Portuguese: innumerable references for 'conquista do ar' in published titles (e.g., Anon., *A conquista do ar pelo aeronauta brasileiro Santos-Dumont* (Paris, 1901), available as a facs. with commentary in H. L. de Barros, *Santos-Dumont e a Invenção do Vôo* (Rio de Janeiro, 2003), pp. 141–80), musical pieces (e.g., E. das Neves, 'A conquista do ar' (1902), in Barros, *Santos-Dumont e a Invenção do Vôo*, pp. 66–7), and journal articles (e.g., 'Navegacao aerea', *Brazil-Ferro-Carril*, 15 Aug. 1913, p. 351); English: 'conquest of the air', in the title of several works dating from the 1910s and 1920s (for an overview search the *HathiTrust Digital Library* <<https://www.hathitrust.org>> [accessed 30 June 2016]); German: 'Die Eroberung der Luft' or 'Die Eroberung der Lüfte' (e.g., 'Die Eroberung der Luft. Ein Kerbelgespräch des Kalendermannes', in *Koseritz' Deutscher Volkskalender für Brasilien auf das Jahr 1910* (Porto Alegre, 1909 [?], pp. 165–80); French: 'La conquete des airs' or 'la conquete de l'air' (e.g., as the title for Roger de la Fresnaye's painting *La conquête de l'air* (1913) <<http://www.moma.org/collection/works/79181?locale=de>> [accessed 30 June 2016]). See also a newspaper article about Wilbur Wright's flight in 1908 with the headline and a postcard with the title 'La conquete de l'air', both reproduced in R. Wohl, *A Passion for Wings. Aviation and the Western Imagination, 1908–1918* (New Haven, Conn., 1994), p. 272 (Fig. 321) and p. 258 (Fig. 312).

To understand the great significance attributed to aviation in Brazil at the beginning of the century, it is necessary to consider the perceptions of national space predominant at that time. In the eyes of many Brazilian intellectuals, geographically, demographically and socially Brazil contained an internal opposition between the densely populated coastal region that faced Europe (the 'litoral') and the sparsely inhabited heartland ('sertão' or interior) that lacked immediate links to national urban centres and the north Atlantic world and thus access to what Brazilian elites of the time considered the embodiment of 'civilization'.<sup>13</sup> These interior spaces appeared to urban observers as a huge gap that ought to be filled with knowledge, (non-indigenous) settlement and infrastructure. As a consequence, geologists, engineers, the military and scientists explored the hinterland and, while creating the basis for further action, they reinforced this bipolar spatial understanding and the conception of the 'sertão' as a counter-image to the desired notion of what the nation (at least in their perspective) should be like. Closely tied to the European paradigm of progress, which Brazilian elites strove to translate to Brazil, the 'sertão' was more than a geographic category. It was largely conceived of as a dominion of ignorance, a space not yet filled up by colonization and 'civilization'. In sum, it was understood as an expansive, multifaceted empty space devoid of national content.<sup>14</sup>

This division into 'two Brazils'<sup>15</sup> became apparent not least in the condition of the transportation infrastructure. Unlike other physically large nations in the hemisphere, at the beginning of the twentieth century Brazil lacked a nation-wide transportation network.<sup>16</sup> As was true for several Latin American nations, the Brazilian railway network was not at all extensive

<sup>13</sup> In 1900 almost 84% of the Brazilian population lived in the two coastal areas in the south-east and the north-east. Most state capitals bordered on the sea ('Exhibit 4-4. Distribution of Brazilian population by major regions, 1772-1991' and running text in Skidmore, *Brazil*, p. 79).

<sup>14</sup> N. T. Lima, *Um Sertão chamado Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, 1999) and Oliveira, 'A conquista do espaço'. In *Os sertões* (1902) (English: *Rebellion in the backlands*, trans. S. Putnam (Chicago, Ill. and London, 2010)), E. da Cunha depicted the vast lands in the Brazilian interior as a void, a gap, a blank space to be filled, in short, as an empty space (e.g., the chapter 'Terra ignota', pp. 9-11; c.f. Oliveira, 'A conquista do espaço'). In this foundational text of the nation E. da Cunha pleaded for the transformation of the totality of the territory into a national space (Oliveira, 'A conquista do espaço').

<sup>15</sup> For the contemporary concept of 'two Brazils', see Skidmore, *Brazil*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>16</sup> Wolfe, *Autos and Progress*, pp. 5-6, gives an overview of existing transport networks in the US, Canada and Mexico at that time. On the relatively dense railway network in the central and northern part of Argentina, see the maps in *Nueva Historia del Ferrocarril en la Argentina. 150 Años de Política Ferroviaria*, ed. M. J. López and J. E. Waddell (Buenos Aires, 2007), pp. 54, 101.

– at least compared to those of Europe and North America.<sup>17</sup> In addition, according to J. Wolfe, the incoherent and coastal-centred railroads ‘did more to connect coffee regions to their ports than to unify the nation’.<sup>18</sup> Hence, their construction was driven more by external export interests than by the internal criterion of national territorial unification. For a long time automobile travel faced similar problems. Most roads connected big cities with their surrounding areas, but few existed to link main cities to one another or even the interior to the coast. The first viable motor route between São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro was constructed in the 1920s; larger connections into the interior were built only in the 1950s.<sup>19</sup> River navigation could only partially compensate for the lack of connections and insufficient access to the hinterlands, as the course and navigability of the rivers depended on topographical conditions and seasonal water levels. Water routes alongside the coast (and its prolongation to Europe) were the only ones that were well developed.<sup>20</sup>

Faced with infrastructural deficiencies on the one hand and economic and geopolitical challenges on the other, Brazilian politicians deemed the social and geographical division to be an obstacle to national cohesion and raised voices in favour of an ‘integration’ of the national territory, to be accomplished by governmental action. Among other measures, this

<sup>17</sup> On the comparative view on the length of worldwide rail networks, see ‘Table 4.5. World railroad mileage, by continent, 1840–1945 (in thousands of miles)’, in S. C. Topik and A. Wells, ‘Commodity chains in a global economy’, in *A World Connecting. 1870–1945*, ed. E. S. Rosenberg (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 593–812, at p. 643. According to the numbers given there, in 1910 Latin America (including Mexico) boasted 60,700 miles (9.5%) of the worldwide rail networks compared to 212,100 miles (33.3 %) in Europe including Russia and 265,800 kilometres (41.5%) in North America.

<sup>18</sup> Wolfe, *Autos and Progress*, p. 7. The relationship between Brazil’s export economy and the unconnected transportation network is recapped by Wolfe, *Autos and Progress*, pp. 5–7 and J. L. A. Natal, ‘Transporte, ocupação do espaço e desenvolvimento capitalista no Brasil: historia e perspectivas’ (unpublished Universidade Estadual de Campinas PhD thesis, 1991) <<http://www.bibliotecadigital.unicamp.br/document/?code=vtls000037113>> [accessed 30 June 2016], pp. 57–60, 62–3, 68. On the construction of railway lines in Brazil since the second half of the 19th century, see Natal, ‘Transporte’, pp. 54–7, 73–4.

<sup>19</sup> Wolfe, *Autos and Progress*, pp. 5 and 30. On the history of automobilism and road-building in Brazil, see Wolfe, *Autos and Progress*, pp. 11, 27, 33–8.

<sup>20</sup> There are no broad recent studies on river navigation in Brazil. A good overview is given by R. S. B. dos Santos, ‘Aspectos da hidrografia brasileira’, *Revista Brasileira de Geografia*, xxiv (1962), 327–76 <[http://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/periodicos/115/rbg\\_1962\\_v24\\_n3.pdf](http://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/periodicos/115/rbg_1962_v24_n3.pdf)> [accessed 30 June 2016], at pp. 362–6. Further indications can be found in N. G. Reis Filho, ‘Urbanização e modernidade: entre o passado e o futuro (1808–1945)’, in *Viagem Incompleta: A Experiência Brasileira (1500–2000): A Grande Transação*, ed. C. G. Mota (São Paulo, 2000), pp. 83–118, at pp. 95–6. On the coastal water routes, see Burns, *A History of Brazil*, pp. 59–60.

nationalist project would aim at the construction of a nationwide transport system that would allow the vast spaces of the interior to be entered and populated while also incorporating them into the national economy and guaranteeing their military control.<sup>21</sup> What the telegraph had recently made possible for communication, the aeroplane promised for transportation.<sup>22</sup>

In the aeroplane, whose spatial range was not greatly complicated or limited by natural topography (and in that respect it differed significantly from other modern transport technologies like automobiles or railways), political elites saw the possibility of quickly unifying the immense, geographically disconnected territory.<sup>23</sup> More than a concrete means of transportation, the aeroplane, which in many parts of the world was considered a symbol of modernity, would not only overcome geographical separation, but also bring these remote regions into contact with 'progress' and pave the way for further processes of colonization and 'civilization'.<sup>24</sup> In other words, in the eyes of Brazilian elites aviation was a suitable solution for dealing with empty spaces on the ground and, by so doing, for addressing the question of the geographically and culturally (as yet un-) unified nation.

The extensive territory that, due to topographic, demographic and economic conditions, had not yet been opened up and, at different levels, was conceived of as inaccessible and empty by the advocates of a nationwide modernization offers an explanation of why aviation became particularly relevant for Brazil (and, to a lesser degree, also for other Latin-American nations facing similar challenges).<sup>25</sup> One significant aspect of the national importance attributed to

<sup>21</sup> On the topic and idea of 'national integration' (Portuguese: 'integração nacional') in Brazilian history from the 19th century onwards, see Natal, 'Transporte', pp. 48–52 and 69–74; and D. M. de Sá, M. R. Sá and N. T. Lima, 'Telegraphs and an inventory of the territory of Brazil: the scientific work of the Rondon Commission (1907–1915)', *História, Ciências, Saúde – Manguinhos*, xv (2008), 779–811 <[http://www.scielo.br/pdf/hcsm/v15n3/en\\_11.pdf](http://www.scielo.br/pdf/hcsm/v15n3/en_11.pdf)> [accessed 30 June 2016], at pp. 781–3.

<sup>22</sup> On the significance of the telegraph in Brazilian nation-building, see T. A. Diacon, *Stringing Together a Nation. Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon and the Construction of a Modern Brazil, 1906–1930* (Durham, N.C. 2004); as well as de Sá, Sá and Lima, 'Telegraphs and an inventory of the territory of Brazil'.

<sup>23</sup> Porto, *História do Transporte Aéreo*, p. 29.

<sup>24</sup> On the aeroplane and aviation as symbols of modernity, see Van Riper, *Imagining Flight*, pp. 6, 12–3; and Wohl, *A Passion for Wings*. On the role of modern technologies as precursors of further development in Brazil's hinterlands, see Natal, 'Transporte', p. 61; and Porto, *História do Transporte Aéreo*, p. 159.

<sup>25</sup> For a case study on Peru, see W. Hiatt, *The Rarefied Air of the Modern. Airplanes and Technological Modernity in the Andes* (New York, 2016). On the use of the aeroplane as a solution for unsolved transport problems in South America and the relationship between the conditions of terrestrial transport and the implementation of airlines on the subcontinent, see Jürgens, 'Die Erschliessung Südamerikas', pp. 1–3, 123–7.

aviation in Brazil stems, therefore, from the way aviation technology promised to deal with seemingly empty spaces on the ground.

***Aeronautical context and aviation terminology in Brazil, 1910–12: from the conquest of the airspace to overcoming empty spaces on the ground***

The two fundamental links between aviation and the idea of empty spaces – that is, the conquest of empty airspace and the possibility of overcoming spaces conceived of as empty on the ground – are more than retrospective analytical classifications. Rather, these temporally overlapping and consecutive processes were perceived and defined conceptually by contemporaries, as the first years of aviation history in Brazil and the related terminology show.

On 8 January 1910 two São Paulo newspapers printed the same headline: ‘Aviation in São Paulo’, referring to what was probably the first motorized flight not only in this town, but also in the country and on the subcontinent.<sup>26</sup> With this success, Brazil as a location (or at least its urban centres) was transformed from an audience who until then primarily participated in air technology from a distance to an arena within which modern flight technology was developed or at least applied. Many attempts at flying followed, along with dozens of commercial shows with ‘sensational’ flights performed mainly by foreign (for the most part European and North American) pilots in local horse-racing venues in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo and thus embedded in the tradition of spectator sport and spectacle.<sup>27</sup> Both the flying experiments and the public demonstrations were meaningful less in terms of their flight performance and more in terms of the procurement of technological equipment and for being the ‘first’ to present the new technology in Brazilian localities.

<sup>26</sup> Original title: ‘A aviação em S. Paulo’ (*O Estado de S. Paulo*, 8 Jan. 1910, p. 7); all translations of Portuguese quotations – unless otherwise specified – are provided by the author. The same headline is found in *Correio Paulistano*, 8 Jan. 1910, p. 2. Both articles are reproduced and transcribed in S. Alexandria and S. Nogueira, 1910. *O Primeiro Voo do Brasil* (São Paulo, 2010), pp. 80–3, 84–6. On the history of Sensaud de Lavaud’s first flight on 7 Jan. 1910, see the same volume.

<sup>27</sup> On the early venues for flight performances, see T. A. de Souza Vicente, ‘O Campo dos Afonsos e o amanhecer da aviação no Rio de Janeiro: análise dos artigos na revista Careta 1911–1914’, *Revista da UNIFA*, xxv (2012), 92–100 <[https://www.unifa.aer.mil.br/site/novo\\_portal/revista/31/31\\_edicao\\_2\\_2012.pdf](https://www.unifa.aer.mil.br/site/novo_portal/revista/31/31_edicao_2_2012.pdf)> [accessed 30 June 2016], at p. 96; Alexandria and Nogueira, 1910, pp. 96–7; Instituto Histórico-Cultural da Aeronáutica, *História Geral da Aeronáutica Brasileira* (4 vols., Belo Horizonte and Rio de Janeiro, 1988–2005), i: *Dos Primórdios até 1920*, pp. 365–6. On aeronautical activities in Brazil from 1910 onwards, see Instituto Histórico-Cultural da Aeronáutica, *História Geral*, i. 368–70, 376–7; for Rio de Janeiro, see Souza Vicente ‘Campo dos Afonsos’.

Early flights were aimed, simply, at taking off from the ground (and maybe looping a loop or flying over parts of the city), but not at traversing large distances. Consequently, aeroplanes took off and landed at the same place. Technically and physically they conquered the empty space of the air – or at least tried to<sup>28</sup> – but could not be related to the conquest of empty spaces on the ground. This principally vertical orientation is reflected in the terms contemporaries adopted to describe this type of aeronautical event. In addition to concepts that refer to the objective of testing<sup>29</sup> or demonstrating the technology,<sup>30</sup> or to the competitive character,<sup>31</sup> there are numerous expressions like ‘ascent’ (‘subida’),<sup>32</sup> ‘(high) altitude flights’ (‘vôos de altitude’<sup>33</sup> / ‘vôos de altura’<sup>34</sup> / ‘vôos em altura’<sup>35</sup>) and ‘ascensions’ (‘ascensões’)<sup>36</sup> that express the vertical trajectory defined by the aeroplanes.

The quality of – and also terms for – aeronautical activities changed with Edu Chaves. Simultaneously, this turning point underscored a new, strongly national significance for aviation. In 1912 the Brazilian airman performed one of the first longer-distance flights across Brazilian territory. For his debut on 9 March 1912, together with the French pilot Roland Garros, he managed a distance of about thirty miles in a direct flight from the coastal town of Santos to his hometown, São Paulo. A few weeks later, on 28 April 1912, he planned to fly in two stages from São Paulo to the capital Rio de Janeiro – a revolutionary distance of more than 220 miles. In the headlines of newspaper articles about Chaves’s flights between these important urban

<sup>28</sup> In the beginning of aviation, successfully taking off from the ground was by no means a given. The frustration caused by the flop of the first announced demonstrations of flight in Rio de Janeiro comes across in the cynical title ‘Aviation on the sand’ (‘Aviação na Areia’). Instead of through airspace, more than once the aircraft moved merely on the sand (read: on the ground) (*Careta*, 31 Dec. 1910, p. 7 and *Careta*, 7 Jan. 1911, p. 3).

<sup>29</sup> Like ‘experiencias’ (‘experiences’) or ‘tentativas’ (‘attempts’). Due to the scope of this chapter only a few examples of these concepts and those cited below are given. On ‘experiencia’, see ‘Balões e aeroplanos’, *Brazil-Ferro-Carril*, Feb. 1911, p. 11; on ‘tentativa’, see ‘Um domingo de aviação’, *O Malho*, 31 Dec. 1910, p. 15.

<sup>30</sup> Like ‘demonstrações’ (‘demonstrations’), ‘evoluções’ (‘evolutions’), ‘espectáculos’ (‘spectacle’) or ‘vôos de fantasia’ (‘fantasy flights’). On ‘demonstrações’, see ‘Progressos da aviação’, *O Malho*, 25 Nov. 1911, p. 44; on ‘evoluções’, see ‘Aviação no Rio de Janeiro’, *O Malho*, 27 Jan. 1912, p. 51; on ‘espectaculo’, see ‘Balões e aeroplanos’, *Brazil-Ferro-Carril*, Feb. 1911, p. 11; on ‘vôos de fantasia’, see the headline ‘Garros effectua no Prado Fluminense lindos vôos de fantasia’, *Gazeta de Noticias*, 12 Jan. 1912, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> Like ‘prova’ (‘contest’) (cf. the headline ‘As provas de hoje’, *Gazeta de Noticias*, 18 Jan. 1912, p. 3).

<sup>32</sup> Cf. caption in ‘Semana de aviação no Rio de Janeiro’, *O Malho*, 20 Jan. 1912, p. 22.

<sup>33</sup> ‘A aviação no Rio’, *Jornal do Brasil*, 18 Jan. 1912, p. 9.

<sup>34</sup> ‘A aviação no Rio’, *Jornal do Brasil*, 4 March 1911, p. 6.

<sup>35</sup> ‘A primeira semana de aviação no Rio’, *Gazeta de Noticias*, 18 Jan. 1912, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> ‘Aeronautica’, *Brazil-Ferro-Carril*, March 1911, p. 14.

centres a term emerged, borrowed from English, which had hardly appeared so far in Brazilian reports of local aeronautical events. In the words of his contemporaries, Chaves performed a ‘raid’<sup>37</sup> from Santos to São Paulo and then again from São Paulo to Rio de Janeiro – even though he did not actually make it to Rio de Janeiro (Chaves crashed into the sea in a coastal town some sixty miles from the capital and, for the time being, the rest of the venture was cancelled).<sup>38</sup>

The Brazilian use of ‘raid’ reflects not only linguistic cosmopolitanism in aeronautics but also a new spatial understanding of flight that emphasized its horizontal dimension. At the beginning of the twentieth century, in Brazil as in France and elsewhere, this anglicism was first used in the context of military or sporting activities marked by the achievement of certain distances.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, the first Brazilian cross-country drives went down in the history of automobilism as ‘raids’.<sup>40</sup> In accordance with present-day Brazilian definitions, analogically, in the area of aviation ‘raid’ designated a flight over a certain distance with pioneering or competitive characteristics.<sup>41</sup> This in turn reinforces Wohl’s suggestion with reference to European aviation history, namely that the the first

<sup>37</sup> In Brazilian sources the term mostly appears in italics and/or quotation marks. On Santos-São Paulo, see ‘Um novo raid de Edú Chaves’, *A Tribuna*, 9 March 1912, unpag.; on São Paulo-Rio de Janeiro, see ‘O maior “raid” da America do Sul’, *Gazeta de Noticias*, 29 Apr. 1912, p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> Chaves lost orientation, took a detour and ran out of fuel. As a result, he crashed into the bay of Mangaratiba. See Instituto Histórico-Cultural da Aeronáutica, *História Geral*, i. 382–3 and the contemporary news coverage (e.g., ‘O vôo de Edú Chaves’, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 1 May 1912, p. 1). This chapter follows the contemporary terminology and refers to this flight as ‘raid São Paulo – Rio de Janeiro’, since the spatial imaginations, national dreams and visions focused on here stem to a greater degree from the intended rather than the actual route. It is worth noting that two years later, on 5 July 1914, Chaves was the first to accomplish a non-stop flight between São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. statistical analysis of the archival database of the journal *O Estado de S. Paulo*. The 76 matches for the search term ‘raid’ between 1900 and 1909 refer for the most part to announcements for military (infantry) and sporting activities (automobilism, riding) <<http://acervo.estadao.com.br/procura/#!/raid/Acervo/acervo/1/1900/>> [accessed 30 June 2016]. From an etymological point of view, the component of overcoming distances is still present in the related English words ‘road’ or ‘to ride’ (‘Raide’, in A. Houaiss, M. de Salles Villar and F. M. de Mello Franco, *Dicionário Houaiss da Língua Portuguesa* (Rio de Janeiro, 2001), p. 2378). For the use of the term ‘raid’ at that time in France, see Wohl, *A Passion for Wings*, p. 294.

<sup>40</sup> Brazil’s first important car ‘raid’ took place in 1908 (Wolfe, *Autos and Progress*, p. 29).

<sup>41</sup> Cf. the entries ‘Raide’ in the following relevant Brazilian dictionaries: G. Teixeira, M. F. da Costa and S. P. da Silva, *Grande Dicionário da Língua Portuguesa* (Porto, 2004), p. 1294; and Houaiss, Salles Villar and de Mello Franco, *Dicionário Houaiss da Língua Portuguesa*, p. 2378. In accordance with modern orthography the word is usually spelled ‘reide’ or

(air) raids corresponded to the ‘creation of an aeronautical variant on a theme already developed by explorers, bicyclists, motor-car drivers, and balloonists – but one that was especially suited to the new technology of aviation’.<sup>42</sup>

From 1910 onwards the use of the term ‘raid’ increased greatly within Brazilian news coverage concerning aviation,<sup>43</sup> suggesting that this was more than a temporary fashion. Rather, the use of the term ‘raid’ reflects a change in the application of aviation technology and, along with it, the meanings associated with aviation, especially with regard to the ‘integration’ of the national territory. Whereas a simple ‘flight’ or ‘ascension’ could only be related to the empty space of the air, a ‘raid’ that travelled some distance and explored new routes went beyond that, dealing simultaneously with spaces on the ground, part of which were conceived of as empty in the Brazilian understanding of the time.

According to an examination of Brazilian contemporary press coverage, the use of the term ‘raid’ as a designation for domestic flight activities set in with, and was thus strongly linked to, aeronautical ventures carried out by Edu Chaves.<sup>44</sup> Even if earlier flights, like the forty-eight-kilometre flight over Rio de Janeiro’s Guanabara Bay undertaken by the French pilot Edmond Plauchut on 22 October 1911,<sup>45</sup> went down in national aviation

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‘raide’, even though nowadays the term is rarely applied. The contemporary Brazilian use of the term meets the western understanding of ‘raid’ as a ‘flight between two well-known points of reference, usually major cities, that had never been successfully completed before’ (Wohl, *A Passion for Wings*, p. 66).

<sup>42</sup> Wohl, *A Passion for Wings*, pp. 65–6.

<sup>43</sup> See, e.g., the occurrences of the term in articles in the newspaper *O Estado de S. Paulo*. The decade 1910–19, with its 228 matches, marks an indisputable peak <<http://acervo.estadao.com.br/procura/#/raid/Acervo/acervo/1/1910/>> [accessed 30 June 2016].

<sup>44</sup> A spot-check on the chronology of the Brazilian use of the term ‘raid’ for aviation matters was carried out using available Brazilian newspaper databases and making a selection of those media that guaranteed the best digital search capability through optical character recognition and thus a low error rate. In both the newspapers *O Estado de S. Paulo* and *A Noite* and the magazine *Fon-Fon*, the term ‘raid’ (with reference to the field of aviation) appeared first in 1910 and 1911 respectively and referred to flight activities in foreign countries (Argentina, the US or European countries). All these publications first used the term ‘raid’ to refer to domestic flight activities with Edu Chaves’s flight from São Paulo to Rio de Janeiro in 1912. See the archival database of *O Estado de S. Paulo* <<http://acervo.estadao.com.br/procura/#/raid/Acervo/acervo/1/1910/>> [accessed 30 June 2016]; and the database of the Biblioteca Nacional <<http://memoria.bn.br>> [accessed 30 June 2016]. The close correlation in timing between the three publications suggests a similar chronology in the use of the term in other Brazilian media.

<sup>45</sup> This first short-distance flight in Brazil and other flights from Rio de Janeiro to several surrounding towns carried out in Jan. 1912 by Garros and other foreign pilots are cited in Instituto Histórico-Cultural da Aeronáutica, *História Geral*, i. 372–4, 377.



history as the ‘first raid off/in Brazil’,<sup>46</sup> this expression is not evident in contemporary newspaper reports.<sup>47</sup> Rather, this flight was referred to as an ‘aviation contest’<sup>48</sup> or simply as a ‘flight’.<sup>49</sup> Hence it is the new horizontal dimension of flight, the overcoming of (great) distances, the revolutionized relationship between aviation and (partially supposedly empty) spaces on the ground – brought to perfection by Edu Chaves – that was expressed in the term ‘raid’.

***Edu Chaves – ‘bandeirante of the air(s)’: the colonial and aeronautical conquest of empty spaces***

*The metaphor of conquest in Brazilian aviation narratives*

The dual relationship between aviation and empty spaces is reflected not only in contemporary terms adopted to denote aeronautical activities but also within a more complex metaphorical framework. Referring to the spatial dimensions of flight, Brazilian narratives recalled myths of colonial conquest. In a variety of sources dating from the first decades of the twentieth century, aviation as a tool for dealing with allegedly empty spaces both in the air and on the ground was represented as a continuation of the colonial conquest of other kinds of historical empty spaces.

This link to the past was established not only by the ambiguous term ‘conquest’ but, above all, in the way aviation pioneers and their ventures (or better *adventures*) were depicted and constructed as heroic. This becomes evident in the caption to an illustration that shows Chaves flying over coastal mountains: ‘... he broke the record for audacity in this type of sport, doing the crossing from S. Paulo to Rio through seas *no man had ever sailed before* and above inhospitable lands and precipices and very dangerous mountain ranges’.<sup>50</sup> The caption quotes the Portuguese national

<sup>46</sup> Cf. the image caption ‘Fig. 97 – Plauchut realiza o 1º reide do Brasil ...’, in Instituto Histórico-Cultural da Aeronáutica, *História Geral*, i. 373; and the quotation ‘o voo de Plauchut ... foi o primeiro *raid* no Brasil’ (italics in original), in Souza Vicente, ‘Campo dos Afonsos’, p. 95.

<sup>47</sup> The database of Biblioteca Nacional (<<http://memoria.bn.br>> [accessed 30 June 2016]) includes the most important press organs of the time. However, there was no positive result for Rio de Janeiro’s press for the time frame in question and the search term ‘Plauchut raid’.

<sup>48</sup> Portuguese: ‘curso de aviação’ or ‘prova de aviação’ (‘O curso de aviação ...’, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 23 Oct. 1911, p. 2).

<sup>49</sup> Portuguese: ‘vôo’ (‘Uma prova de aviação no Rio de Janeiro’, *O Malho*, 28 Oct. 1911, p. 15).

<sup>50</sup> In Portuguese: ‘bateu o *record* da audacia nesse genero de *sport*, fazendo a travessia de S. Paulo ao Rio por mares *nunca dantes navegados* e por cima de terras inhospitas e de precipicios e serras perigosissimas’ (italics in original) (A. Storni, ‘Salada da Semana’, *O Malho*, 4 May 1912, p. 27).

epic poem *The Lusíads* by the Portuguese poet Luís de Camões, who once sang of the Portuguese sailors who found new routes through other empty spaces, namely the ‘seas no man had ever sailed before’,<sup>51</sup> and finally arrived in Brazil. As the caricaturist of the humorous magazine *O Malho* insinuates with a twinkle in his eye, the audacious Edu Chaves not only penetrated aerial oceans and conquered an aeronautical ‘New World’, but also hazarded the consequences of involuntarily crashing into the sea. In a double sense Chaves was depicted as a heroic combatant and thus as a worthy successor to those epic figures of colonial conquest.

However, the caption relates Edu Chaves not only to maritime conquest but also to the heroic overcoming of natural obstacles on the ground, namely inhospitable lands, precipices and mountain ranges. Adopting colonialist and imperialist ways of seeing space for specifically national purposes, Brazilian discourses of the 1910s compared aeronautical achievements less with the conquest of the Atlantic Ocean or the ‘New World’ by Iberian seafarers than with subsequent internal colonization. In so doing, these narratives were embedded within a more national than transatlantic or (neo-) colonial framework. More precisely, by depicting Chaves as a ‘*bandeirante* of the air(s)’<sup>52</sup> newspapers and poems recalled the seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century conquest of the wastelands of the Brazilian (and former Portuguese-American) interior carried out by armed expedition troops (in hindsight named ‘*bandeirantes*’) that set off from the São Paulo region into the hinterlands on the hunt for Indian slaves and precious metals.<sup>53</sup>

### *Unexplored, unmapped, inaccessible and unmastered spaces*

The continuity between those historic actors and the Brazilian pilot was primarily based on imaginations of space, predominant not in the era of the

<sup>51</sup> In Portuguese: ‘Por mares nunca dantes navegados’ (L. de Camões, *Os Lusíadas* (Lisboa, 1644 [1572]), Canto I). For the English translation, see L. V. de Camões, *The Lusíads*, trans. W. C. Atkinson (London, 2007).

<sup>52</sup> In Portuguese: ‘bandeirante do ar’ or ‘bandeirante dos ares’. The evidence for ‘bandeirante do ar’ includes: title of an illustration: ‘O Bandeirante do Ar’ (B. Coelho, ‘O Voador’, *Jornal do Brasil*, 5 May 1912, p. 7); newspaper article naming him ‘Bandeirante do ar’ (‘A aviação no Brasil. Uma entrevista com Edu’ Chaves’, [*Jornal de Notícias*, March 1913], unpag.); on ‘bandeirante dos ares’ see, e.g., ‘O Centro dos Chronistas Sportivos, offereceu, hontem, um almoço a Edú Chaves’, *Gazeta de Notícias*, 6 May 1912, p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> B. Weinstein, ‘Racializing regional difference: São Paulo versus Brazil, 1932’, in *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America*, ed. N. P. Appelbaum, A. S. Macpherson and K. A. Roseblatt (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2003), pp. 237–62, at p. 244; and Skidmore, *Brazil*, pp. 9–10. The term is only documented from the 18th century onwards, when the peak of *bandeirantes*’ activity had already been reached (R. L. de Souza, ‘A mitologia bandeirante: construção e sentidos’, *História Social*, xiii (2007), 151–71 <<http://www.ifch.unicamp.br/ojs/index.php/rhs/article/view/215>> [accessed 30 June 2016], at p. 152).

*bandeirantes*' ventures but rather at the time of Chaves's flights. In nineteenth- and twentieth-century national historiography, the *bandeirantes* were raised to the status of heroes for having entered the unexplored and unmapped interior of the continent. By so doing, they had not only enabled the occupation of these allegedly empty spaces but also expanded the effective borders of Brazilian territory.<sup>54</sup> Of course, these spaces were not empty at all – if they had been, the *bandeirantes* would not have searched for indigenous slaves there.<sup>55</sup> However, in terms of colonial occupation and cartographic knowledge they – at least retrospectively – appeared as nothingness. Calling on emptiness as a common trope of colonial occupation, especially in relation to interior hinterlands,<sup>56</sup> these spaces were written into national historical narratives as devoid of national content, made Brazilian by the *bandeirantes*' conquest.

With his flights through Brazilian aeronautical no-man's-land Edu Chaves conquered a space which, like that traversed by the *bandeirantes*, could also be depicted as empty. Lacking any kind of navigational instruments except for a compass, he depended on terrestrial maps and points of reference on the ground, such as railway tracks, towns and the coastline.<sup>57</sup> In addition, as no one had flown through these spaces before there was no existing knowledge from which he could benefit. Furthermore, the territory was devoid of prepared landing strips.<sup>58</sup> Both Edu Chaves and the historical

<sup>54</sup> Oliveira, 'A conquista do espaço'. For the construction of the *bandeirante* mythology between 1870 and 1940 in historiography, literature, arts, commemorative culture and museology, see Souza, 'A mitologia bandeirante'; Raimundo, 'Bandeirantismo e identidade nacional'; A. C. Ferreira, *A Epopéia Bandeirante: Letrados, Instituições, Invenção Histórica (1870–1940)* (São Paulo, 2002); E. D. G. de Oliveira, 'Instituições, arte e o mito bandeirante: uma contribuição de Benedito Calixto', *Seculum – Revista de História*, xix (2008), 127–48 <<http://periodicos.ufpb.br/ojs/index.php/srh/article/view/11411/6525>> [accessed 30 June 2016].

<sup>55</sup> Souza points out that the space to be conquered could only be conceived of as empty because its former indigenous inhabitants (and their enslavement by the *bandeirantes*) found no place in the *bandeirantes* mythology (Souza, 'A mitologia bandeirante', p. 157).

<sup>56</sup> With regard to African and Australian hinterlands, see D. Kennedy, *The Last Blank Spaces. Exploring Africa and Australia* (Berlin and Cambridge, 2013).

<sup>57</sup> On the history of aerial navigation, see S. Fehr, 'Unsichtbare Verkehrswege. Vom Sichtflug der Pioniere zum internationalen Luftstrassensystem', *Wege und Geschichte*, ii (2011), 35–40 <[http://www.researchgate.net/publication/236462344\\_Unsichtbare\\_Verkehrswege.\\_Vom\\_Sichtflug\\_der\\_Pioniere\\_zum\\_internationalen\\_Luftstrassensystem](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/236462344_Unsichtbare_Verkehrswege._Vom_Sichtflug_der_Pioniere_zum_internationalen_Luftstrassensystem)> [accessed 30 June 2016]. Hints at the conditions of navigation during Edu's flight are found in several articles, e.g., Vol-Taire [Leal de Souza], 'Almanach das Glorias. Eduardo Chaves', *Careta*, 19 Apr. 1913, p. 11.

<sup>58</sup> Only at the end of 1912, with the establishment of national aviation schools, were airfields *sui generis* built up, such as the Campo dos Afonsos near Rio de Janeiro, used to this day by the Brazilian air force (Souza Vicente, 'Campo dos Afonsos').



Figure 3.1. Alfredo Storni, 'Casos da semana', *O Malho*, 16 March 1912, p. 28 (Collection *Fundação Santos Dumont*/former *Museu de Aeronáutica de Santos*).

*bandeirantes* thus entered spaces conceived of as formerly unexplored, as empty spaces.

The space overcome by Edu Chaves was characterized as empty in another respect, one closely linked to the perception of national territory prevalent at that time. The challenges of national topography become apparent in a 1912 illustration that depicts Chaves's flight from Santos to São Paulo (Figure 3.1).<sup>59</sup>

The representation of the three-dimensional relief with toponyms of Santos, São Paulo and Cubatão, visualized as viewed from a great height, is influenced not only by cartography but also by an aerial perspective of terrestrial space.<sup>60</sup> Like many other illustrated responses to Chaves's flights, it is made up of two basic topographical elements: the coast on one hand and the abysmal rocky mountains of the *Serra do Mar* and the São Paulo Plateau on the other.<sup>61</sup> Both the flight from Santos to São Paulo and the flight from São Paulo to Rio de Janeiro had to pass over the coastal mountains (*Serra do Mar*).

<sup>59</sup> A. Storni, 'Casos da semana', *O Malho*, 16 March 1912, p. 28.

<sup>60</sup> See 'Perspective/Panoramic map', in *Cartographical Innovations: An International Handbook of Mapping Terms to 1900*, ed. H. M. Wallis and A. H. Robinson (Tring, 1987), pp. 41–3.

<sup>61</sup> On other illustrated responses to Chaves's flights, see A. Storni, 'Salada da Semana', *O Malho*, 4 May 1912, p. 27; Voltolino [J. P. L. Lemmi], 'O Vôo do Edú', *O Pirralho*, 5 May 1912, p. 11.

Unlike what is suggested by the image of Chaves sailing sovereignly through the clear sky, the crossing of the precipitous *Serra do Mar* by aeroplane was a challenge due to constant fog patches over the mountain forests and changing weather conditions.<sup>62</sup> In press coverage it was referred to as a ‘risky crossing’<sup>63</sup> and Chaves was labelled a ‘brave’ or ‘audacious’ pilot for completing it.<sup>64</sup> Both the historical *bandeirantes* and their aeronautical derivatives thus exhibited audacity, considered a necessary condition for penetrating unexplored territories and defying nature.<sup>65</sup> Hence not just the topographical obstacles but particularly their heroic overcoming by the audacious Chaves recalled the historical *bandeirantes*.

The illustration depicts the coastal mountains as an impermeable dividing wall. Even if railway and automobile transport systems crossing the *Serra* were constructed in the nineteenth century, they were not plotted on the image.<sup>66</sup> In other words, by exaggerating the facts the caricature represents the space that had been traversed by Edu Chaves as inaccessible, owing both to topographical obstacles and the apparent lack of transportation infrastructure. While abundant in environmental components and full of material challenges, when referring to technology the predominant narrative and representation of the national natural spaces was one of emptiness. Falling back on existing imaginaries of tropical nature, which emphasized its inherent risks and threats, the *Serra* was presented as adverse to the

<sup>62</sup> ‘O maior “raid” da America do Sul. De S. Paulo ao Rio de Janeiro’, *Gazeta de Noticias*, 29 Apr. 1912, p. 1; and ‘O maior “raid” da America do Sul’, *Gazeta de Noticias*, 30 Apr. 1912, p. 1. On the difficulties, see Instituto Histórico-Cultural da Aeronáutica, *História Geral*, i. 379.

<sup>63</sup> There are numerous examples and wordings. For ‘arriscada travessia’, see ‘Um novo raid de Edú Chaves’, *A Tribuna*, 9 March 1912 (for the flight Santos – São Paulo); as a variation also ‘arriscadissimo raid S. Paulo – Rio’ (‘A aviação no Brazil’, *O Malho*, 4 May 1912, p. 12 (for the *raid* São Paulo – Rio de Janeiro)).

<sup>64</sup> There are several examples and variations to express this idea. The most common term is ‘intrepido’, e.g., ‘O Homem do Dia’, *Gazeta de Noticias*, 3 May 1912, p. 3.

<sup>65</sup> de Oliveira, ‘Instituições, arte e o mito bandeirante’, pp. 144–5. On the discursive link between audacity and the triumph over nature, see ‘A aviação no Brasil. Raid S. Paulo – Rio’, *O Estado de S. Paulo*, 7 May 1912, p. 2; J. do Amaral Neddermeyer, ‘Voando’, *São Paulo*, 7 May 1910 [1912?].

<sup>66</sup> From as early as colonial times, trails and mule tracks with indigenous origins connected the coastal region with the high plains. Transportation was facilitated for carts and carriages and later automobiles by a road constructed in the 1840s. From 1867 onwards a railway line linked Santos with São Paulo (Reis Filho, ‘Urbanização e modernidade’, pp. 94–5; and M. E. Austregésilo, ‘Estudo sôbre alguns tipos de transporte no Brasil Colonial’, *Revista de História*, i (1950), 495–516, doi: 10.11606/issn.2316-9141.v1i4p495-516, at pp. 500, 509–13).

desired process of ‘civilization’.<sup>67</sup> To be transformed by man and machine, the *Serra* and, by extension, Brazilian nature were depicted under the perspective of deficiency. Presenting topographical obstacles as untouched natural features lacking human mastery and, in this sense, as empty spaces, the caricature alluded to the call for ‘national integration’, complicated by local topography.<sup>68</sup>

Consistent with the national dimension of the challenge to achieve territorial ‘integration’, the cartoon’s solution is also inserted into a national framework. Pictured without his French colleague Roland Garros, who joined him on this flight, Chaves, the aeroplane carrying his name and the oversized Brazilian flag powerfully symbolize the new national hope found in aviation. Followed by a rising star, Chaves symbolically announces a promising future for the nation. It is thus the empty space and, moreover, its heroic overcoming by means of aviation that conferred national significance on Brazilian aviation pioneers like Edu Chaves. Taken as a whole, the illustration highlights the national significance of Chaves’s flight, and of aviation in general, in surmounting topographical obstacles on the ground which were regarded as spaces devoid of infrastructure and human domination and which therefore represented a barrier to ‘national integration’.

#### *‘Route-spaces’ and their cartographic representation*

Like the *bandeirantes*, Edu Chaves not only entered into but also moved through – and over – empty spaces. In this sense, the representation of what Rau in her attempt to systematize spatial formations calls ‘route-spaces’ or ‘itinerary-spaces’<sup>69</sup> is a significant element of visual discourses accompanying the news coverage of Chaves’s pioneering flight from São Paulo to Rio de Janeiro. This becomes evident in many large-size cartographic representations published in contemporary newspaper reports.<sup>70</sup> More than mere illustrations or true pictures of a geographic

<sup>67</sup> For different imaginations of nature in Brazilian traditions of thought, see Oliveira, ‘A conquista do espaço’.

<sup>68</sup> For the impediments in the construction of telegraph lines due to the challenging terrain, see Diacon, *Stringing Together a Nation*, pp. 9, 16.

<sup>69</sup> In German: ‘Wege-Räume’ (Rau, *Räume*, p. 143).

<sup>70</sup> The maps analysed here are published with the following newspaper reports: ‘O maior “raid” da America do Sul. De S. Paulo ao Rio de Janeiro’, *Gazeta de Noticias*, 29 Apr. 1912, p. 1 (see Figure 3.2); ‘O maior “raid” da America do Sul’, *Gazeta de Noticias*, 30 Apr. 1912, p. 1 (see Figure 3.3); ‘O maior “raid” da America do Sul’, *Gazeta de Noticias*, 1 May 1912, p. 1 (see Figure 3.4); ‘O vôo S. Paulo-Rio. 548 kilometros em aeroplano’, *A Imprensa*, 30 Apr. 1912, p. 1 (see Figure 3.5); ‘O grande acontecimento do dia. Hoje o aviador Eduardo Chaves

AVIAÇÃO NO BRASIL

# O maior "raid" da America do Sul

## De S. Paulo ao Rio de Janeiro

O aviador Eduardo Chaves partiu de S. Paulo, de Prado da Mooca, às 10 1/2 horas do dia de hontem. — A's 12 h. 20 minutos, passou sobre Pindamonhangaba. — Atterrou em Guaratinguetá, de onde partiu á 1 hora da tarde. — A's 3 horas e 40 minutos passou pela Barra do Pirahy

**NÃO CHEGOU AO RIO — ONDE ESTA' O AVIADOR CHAVES ?**

A ANCIEDADADE AQUI E EM S. PAULO

### Os nossos telegrammas

Percorso seguido pelo aviador brasileiro EDU CHAVES, entre S. Paulo e Rio de Janeiro.

490 KS.



(A linha pontuada indica o itinerario provavel seguido pelo aviador Edu Chaves)

**PARTIDA:** S. Paulo — às 10/30 a. m. — Mogi das Cruzes — 100 metros de altura, às 11 h. a. m. — Taubaté — vôo calmo — 10/40 a. m. — Pindamonhangaba — calmo, altura elevadissima, às 12/20 a. m. (500 metros) — Guaratinguetá — (ATELARISSAGE) — 4/10 p. m.

Lorena — Passou pouco depois das 2 h. p. m. — Barra do Pirahy — (PASSAGEM) — às 4/45 p. m.

Passou a Serra a uma altura de 300 metros.

**DELEM** às 5. h. p. m.

Figure 3.2. 'O maior "raid" da America do Sul. De S. Paulo ao Rio de Janeiro', *Gazeta de Noticias*, 29 Apr. 1912, p. 1 (Collection *Hemeroteca Digital Brasileira/Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brasil*, <<http://memoria.bn.br>> [accessed 30 June 2016]).

territory drawn to scale, they can be understood, like cartography, as ‘interpretation or representation’<sup>71</sup> of space, as ‘graphic texts’<sup>72</sup> or a ‘system of signs’<sup>73</sup> that reveal – and also shape – the perception of space prevailing at that time. While we cannot know how these maps were actually received by the public, both the selection of featured items and the modes of their representation unfold spatial concepts shared by both the mapper and the intended readers of the images.<sup>74</sup>

The message inherent in these maps can be decoded by focusing mainly on two features, the first being the map section, which, in nearly all examples, corresponds to the territory flown over (Figures 3.2, 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6) or at least a segment of it (Figure 3.3). This is true both for maps designed specifically for this occasion (in particular Figures 3.3 and 3.4) and for those reliant on existing templates. Thus, in a cartographic representation of Chaves’s flight based on a map of the Brazilian railroad network the original representation was reduced to the relevant parts, as determined by the territory crossed by Edu Chaves (Figure 3.2).<sup>75</sup>

Just as the territory that was flown over defines the map section, the air route, plotted as a line (or a broken line), constitutes, second, a special element of the cartographic representation. Chaves’s route through airspace, in reality invisible, becomes cartographically visualized through its relationship to terrestrial space.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, the line symbol representing the air route is the only cartographic symbol explained in some image captions, conferring even more significance on it.

Some maps do not completely correspond to the conventional northern orientation of western maps.<sup>77</sup> Rather, they place the north-west at the top of the map, assuring a custom-fit and central position of the air route in the

realiza o vôo de São Paulo ao Rio’, *A Imprensa*, 27 Apr. 1912, p. 1 (see Figure 3.6).

<sup>71</sup> J. Dym and K. Offen, ‘Introduction’, in *Mapping Latin America*, ed. J. Dym and K. Offen (Chicago, Ill. and London, 2011), pp. 1–18, at p. 8 (emphasis in original). See also pp. 6–7 for a more extensive understanding of maps.

<sup>72</sup> Dym and Offen, ‘Introduction’, p. 1.

<sup>73</sup> In German: ‘Zeichensystem’ (Rau, *Räume*, p. 127).

<sup>74</sup> U. Schneider, *Die Macht der Karten. Eine Geschichte der Kartographie vom Mittelalter bis heute* (Darmstadt, 2004), pp. 7–9. See also Dym and Offen, ‘Introduction’, pp. 3, 8, 14.

<sup>75</sup> The original template map of the railroad network is titled ‘As linhas da ‘Central do Brasil’ em 1898’ and reproduced in IBGE / CNG, *I Centenário das ferrovias brasileiras* (Rio de Janeiro, 1954), p. 30 <<http://vfco.brazilia.jor.br/ferrovias/mapas/1898redeEFCB.shtml>> [accessed 30 June 2016].

<sup>76</sup> Unlike road or railway networks but like sea traffic, aeroplanes – at least in the early days of aviation – did not require fixed routes. For this reason flight routes varied, were nearly infinite and not continuously visible (Jürgens, ‘Die Erschliessung Südamerikas’, p. 2; Fehr, ‘Unsichtbare Verkehrswege’, pp. 37–9).

<sup>77</sup> See ‘Orientation’, in Wallis and Robinson, *Cartographical Innovations*, pp. 196–9.



A AVIAÇÃO NO BRASIL

# O maior «raid» da America do Sul

EDU' CHAVES PARTE DE S. PAULO ATRAVESSA O ESTADO DO RIO E ENTRA NO DISTRICTO FEDERAL

**¿Teria o aviador perdido o rumo do ponto do seu destino?**

A FALTA DE NOTICIAS HONTEM  
A INCERTEZA DAS INFORMAÇÕES

Edú em Belém? — Edú em Sant'Anna? — Em Ribeirão das Lages? — Em Itaguahy? — Cahido no mar em Mangaratiba?

A «Gazeta» envia «reporters» á Serra do M r, a Santa Cruz, a Paracamby

**ÂNCIEDADE EM S. PAULO**

**Edú está em Mangaratiba, salvo!**      A «Gazeta de Noticias» vai ao encontro do bravo aviador

O vôo de Edú Chaves—Carta topographica organizada pela «Gazeta»—A linha pontilhada indica a trajetoria possível de Edú—O aviador esteve desorientado na região de S. João Marcos, Itaguahy, Itacurua e Mangaratiba, em cujas costas naufragou, salvando-se a nado.

Figure 3.3. 'O maior "raid" da America do Sul', *Gazeta de Noticias*, 30 Apr. 1912, p. 1 (Collection *Hemeroteca Digital Brasileira/Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brasil*, <<http://memoria.bn.br>> [accessed 30 June 2016]).



Figure 3.4. ‘O maior “raid” da America do Sul’, *Gazeta de Noticias*, 1 May 1912, p. 1 (Collection *Hemeroteca Digital Brasileira/Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brasil*, <<http://memoria.bn.br>> [accessed 30 June 2016]).

cartographic image (especially Figures 3.4 and 3.6).<sup>78</sup> Another map achieves the same effect by assembling two separate map sections of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in a disjointed way, as if the route proceeded on a horizontal (and not diagonal) line. The cut surface, which becomes evident in the disjointed latitudes, is covered by the pilot’s portrait (Figure 3.5).

Both the map section and the representation of the air route emphasized the momentum of movement through space achieved by Chaves, following the tradition of the *bandeirantes*, and the horizontal dimension of the flight. Readers of the image could therefore not only keep track of Chaves’s flight geographically, but also figuratively capture its significance in overcoming (empty) spaces on the ground.

These visual messages are supplemented by textual and graphic elements pertaining to the same journalistic material. A headline indicates the distance covered in the flight from São Paulo to Rio, exceeding many times that of flights undertaken in Brazil until then. Through the gracing of the corresponding map with Chaves’s portrait, the author of this achievement becomes visible at a single glance (while the photo simultaneously conceals the collage technique mentioned above) (Figure 3.5). Text blocks name localities on the route whose toponyms, on the corresponding map, are highlighted by underlining (Figure 3.2). This double textual and visual accentuation of locations flown over by Chaves reminded the reader that the cross-country flight did not take place in a ‘vacuum’ but connected to and passed over earthly spaces.

<sup>78</sup> This explains why the toponyms in Figure 3.4 appear not on a horizontal but on a diagonal alignment. Apparently, the template map was south-north-oriented. For a similar choice of orientation for the purpose of centring in a 19th-century railway map, see Dym and Offen, ‘Introduction’, pp. 1–2.

Furthermore, the text block indicates respective times of landing or flight over the named places. The intersection of the categories ‘space’ and ‘time’, of little relevance in the *bandeirantes* discourse, reflects the transformation in perceptions of time and space caused by the acceleration in transport and communication technology at the turn of the century. With the advent of railways, steamships, the telegraph and finally aviation, distances seemed to become smaller as they could be traversed in less time.<sup>79</sup> As the perception of shrinking space not only referred to centres like São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, which seemed to come closer to each other, but also involved the seemingly shrinking empty spaces in between, it became doubly relevant for Brazil.

Matching the cartographical representation – whether intentionally or not – the headline of one article is divided into two parts (Figure 3.6). The



Figure 3.5. ‘O vôo S. Paulo-Rio. 548 kilometros em aeroplano’, *A Imprensa*, 30 Apr. 1912, p. 1 (Collection *Hemeroteca Digital Brasileira/Fundação Biblioteca Nacional – Brasil*, <<http://memoria.bn.br>> [accessed 30 June 2016]).

<sup>79</sup> D. Harvey called that transformation ‘time-space-compression’ (D. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: an Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford, 1990)); S. Kern uses the concept of ‘simultaneity’ (Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*). In his study Kern gives various examples of technologies from railway to telegraph to steamship and aeroplane that fostered this changing perception.

left hand box – corresponding to the past in chronological timelines, but also to the west in cartography – informs the reader about the departure in São Paulo, while the box on the right – like Rio de Janeiro’s position on the map or the future on a timeline – forecasts the arrival. The connection between these two economically, politically and culturally significant Brazilian cities, facilitated and accelerated by the use of the aeroplane, is emphasized by this double (carto-)graphical highlighting of departure and arrival points.

Different techniques of representation thus emphasized the accelerated overcoming of a revolutionarily large distance, the connection between different places on the route and, in particular, the point of departure and arrival, as well as movement through the increasingly shrinking space in between. By filling up the allegedly empty spaces not only with air routes but also with aeronautical knowledge, Chaves took the first – mainly symbolic – steps towards ‘national integration’. In short, (carto-)graphical and textual elements expressed the idea of a nation that succeeded in overcoming, exploring and dominating empty spaces and united the national space by means of aviation.

#### *Itineraria and cartographical technique*

Maps featuring the air route chosen by Chaves, plotted as a (broken) line, recall one of the oldest existing map types, the *itinerarium* or ‘route map’.<sup>80</sup> *Itineraria*, which represent determined connections between several localities by a certain means of transport, often supplemented by the corresponding distances between them, were ubiquitous in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Brazilian cartography.<sup>81</sup> The cartographic production of this kind of map, mostly displaying footpaths and waterways into the interior, reflected knowledge about access routes into the backlands and thus power over a sparsely populated and peripheral space, disputed between the Spanish and Portuguese crowns.<sup>82</sup> By the second half of the

<sup>80</sup> On the *itineraria*, see ‘Route Map’, in Wallis and Robinson, *Cartographical innovations*, pp. 57–8.

<sup>81</sup> See, e.g., the following maps: ‘Intinerário [*sic*] de São Paulo à Cuyabá’ (1838); ‘Mapa das Capitanias de Mato Grosso, Goiás e São Paulo em que se notam os caminhos de São Paulo para Cuiabá’ (1853); ‘Carta do Continente das Capitanias de Mato Grosso, de Goiás e de S. Paulo, com huma configuração de todos os rios, e serras, com os dois caminhos de S. Paulo para Cuyaba, hum pelas margens dos rios, outro por terra’ (1764) (*Leituras Cartográficas Históricas e Contemporâneas*, ed. R. Bertani and A. M. Claro (São Paulo, 2003), pp. 56, 60, 64).

<sup>82</sup> On the significance of cartography in the process of colonization and conquest, see Bertani and Claro, *Leituras cartográficas históricas e contemporâneas*, p. 10. On the role of cartographic production in the context of border disputes between Portuguese and Spanish

**O GRANDE ACONTECIMENTO DO DIA**

**Hoje o aviador Eduardo Chaves realiza o vôo de São Paulo ao Rio**

**Partiu pela manhã do Parque Antartica**

**Fará aterrissagem depois das 2 horas da tarde no Jockey Club**

Por telegrammas particulares a seus amigos depois, o jovem aviador patriótico Edu Chaves comunicou que parte hoje no seu aparelho "Bleriot", da capital paulista com destino a esta capital.

É a realização do grande vôo São Paulo-Rio de Janeiro, empreendido pelo aviação pioneira do ar, noticiada há muitos dias, diferentes vezes, pel'*A Imprensa*.

Edu Chaves levantará o vôo do Parque

almo vôo pelo valle da Parahyba, entre as serras do Mar e da Mantiqueira.

Entre os telegrammas que hontem vimos destacaremos o recebido pelo distinto moço sr. Antonio Pinheiro Machado, cujo teor é o seguinte:

"S. Paulo, 26. — Antonio Pinheiro Machado. — São amolliu aeroplano. — Peço avisar Jockey-Club que aterro no seu campo. — Obrigado. — Abraço—Edu".

É opportuno recordarmos que Edu



**Os dois traçados do vôo de hoje**  
**O aviador seguirá o traçado pelas cruzes na parte superior da gravura.**

Figure 3.6. 'O grande acontecimento do dia. Hoje o aviador Eduardo Chaves realiza o vôo de São Paulo ao Rio', *A Imprensa*, 27 Apr. 1912, p. 1 (Collection *Hemeroteca Digital Brasileira/Fundação Biblioteca Nacional* – Brasil, <<http://memoria.bn.br>> [accessed 30 June 2016]).

nineteenth century, cartographic representations of railway lines and roads, and thus territorial exploration and exploitation by means of transport technologies, were given priority.<sup>83</sup> The renaissance of this type of map in relation to aeronautical ventures thus evoked questions regarding the conquest of empty spaces throughout Brazilian history. Building on this legacy, the cartographic representations presented here were more than just a means of spatial orientation that visualized the route covered and the space traversed by Chaves. Rather, they were expressions and symbols of the Brazilian aspiration not only to overcome empty spaces but also to increase geographic knowledge, power and control over national territory by means of aviation.

All in all, the cartographic representations of Chaves's flight expressed the relationship between aviation and empty terrestrial spaces on a dual scale. On the one hand, they emphasized the movement through space achieved by Chaves following the tradition of the *bandeirantes* and thus captured the significance of Chaves's cross-country flight in overcoming empty spaces and connecting places on the ground. On the other, the technique and method of mapping as well as the special map type used here (the *itinerarium*) recalled the history of the conquest of the Brazilian interior by the *bandeirantes* and subsequent expeditions into and explorations of the hinterlands. In so doing, such images were suggestive of the future contribution of aviation to 'national integration'.

### **Conclusion**

With its glimpse into Brazilian aviation narratives and representations, this chapter expands the limited study of empty spaces. From its very beginning, aviation fostered a variety of spatial imaginations that, unlike those evoked by other transportation technologies, referred to both terrestrial and aerial space. In this context the idea of emptiness carried cross-cultural as well as local meanings. On the one hand, the airspace, thought of as devoid of human beings and machines, appeared as an object to be conquered in

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America in the 18th and 19th centuries, see Bertani and Claro, *Leituras cartográficas históricas e contemporâneas*, p. 11; and L. Trigo, Fundação Biblioteca Nacional and Safra Instituto Cultural, *Biblioteca Nacional* (São Paulo, 2004), p. 277. For the numerous maps produced on the occasion of border negotiations with Spanish-America in the 18th and 19th centuries, see 'Mapa dos Confins do Brasil ...' (1749) and 'Carta do Império do Brasil' (1875) (Trigo et al., *Biblioteca Nacional*, pp. 284–5).

<sup>83</sup> A. G. Costa, 'Dos roteiros de todos os sinais da costa até a carta geral: um projeto de cartografia e os mapas da América portuguesa e do Brasil Império', in *Roteiro Prático de Cartografia: da América Portuguesa ao Brasil Império*, ed. A. G. Costa (Belo Horizonte, 2007), pp. 83–224, at p. 175.

terms of physical access and technical mastery, cross-culturally referred to as the 'conquest of the air'. On the other hand, in the eyes of Brazilian elites of the time aviation was seen as a fitting solution for dealing with allegedly empty spaces on the ground and thus for responding to calls for 'national integration'. Hence, not emptiness as such but rather its aeronautical conquest constituted a key idea in spatial imaginations and national discourses prevalent in Brazil in the first decades of the twentieth century.

These imaginations and aspirations were closely linked to Edu Chaves's pioneering flights through Brazilian territory undertaken in 1912. This becomes evident not only in the increasing use of the term 'raid' for local aeronautical activities, a word that emphasized the new horizontal dimension of distance flight that had been put into practice in definitive fashion by Chaves, but also in the metaphorical framework that correlated Chaves's distance flights with historical processes of spatial conquest. The continuity between the seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century expedition troops that set out into the hinterlands (*bandeirantes*) and their aeronautical derivative Chaves ('*bandeirante* of the air'), was primarily based on the strong link between the category of space and concepts of the nation. Hence at the beginning of the twentieth century both the *bandeirantes* and Chaves were raised to the status of national heroes for having accessed spaces conceived of as (formerly) unexplored and empty and for having fostered the 'integration' of the national territory by doing so.

As shown in this chapter, in twentieth-century Brazilian aviation narratives the concept of empty spaces was defined mainly on three interlinked levels. First, it was perceived as a topographical and geographical category, referring to the obstacles of the natural terrain such as the coastal mountains and to the vast spaces of the Brazilian backlands ('sertão' or interior), both assumed to be easily traversed and thus mastered by means of aviation. Closely linked to these perceptions of the national territory, empty spaces were, second, considered inaccessible in terms of a lack of transportation infrastructure, a problem to be remedied by gradually filling them with air routes. Correlating these aeronautical measures initiated by Edu Chaves with the *bandeirantes'* conquest of Brazil's frontier regions, empty spaces, or rather the overcoming of them, appeared, third, as a recurring theme in Brazilian history, defining the Brazilian nation. Analogous to the contemporaneous understanding of empty spaces as a counterpoint to the desired image of the nation, those who engaged with this emptiness – not only the *bandeirantes* but also aviation pioneers like Chaves – were elevated to the status of national heroes.

Constituting not only a transportation medium that accessed unexplored or inaccessible territories, but also a symbol of heroic human mastery over

topographical obstacles and nature, aviation served as both a medium and a symbol in the nation's endeavour to deal with its supposedly empty spaces. Hardly surprisingly, these imaginings of the Brazilian nation, brought together by means of aviation, were illustrated and expressed in particular by cartographic representations. Since the era of colonial conquest cartography had been used to demonstrate spatial conquest, territorial unity and the production of knowledge about the (colonial or later national) Brazilian territory. Cartography thus constituted a crucial medium through which to symbolize the first steps towards mastering empty spaces in terms of the production of aeronautical knowledge as well as the insertion of air routes.

Chaves's accomplishments were just the beginning of a larger project. It was not until the late 1920s that regular air routes through the whole national territory were opened up. They would foster further settlement, economic integration and state control, and would thus break down the perceived emptiness of the hinterland to a certain extent. Notwithstanding this, in defeating the obstacle of the coastal mountains and accomplishing his revolutionary longer-distance flights, Chaves took the first steps towards mastering emptiness. By so doing, his flights inspired and restored powerful imaginations and visions related to the spatial dimensions of the national territory. Empty spaces not only gained visibility on maps and illustrations, for instance, but were also reinforced on a symbolic level. Hence, while on the one hand Chaves's flights can be considered the basis for further aeronautical penetration of spaces conceived of as empty, on the other, narratives relating to his flights nourished and perpetuated the very idea of emptiness. Concrete steps to deal with empty spaces and the symbolic representation of emptiness were thus two sides of the same coin that can be reconstructed by reading aviation narratives. This double-edged relationship to emptiness constitutes the key to understanding the crucial significance attributed to aviation pioneers like Edu Chaves and to aviation in general within Brazilian nation-building in the first decades of the twentieth century.



## 4. Looking over the ship railings: the colonial voyage and the empty ocean in Empire Marketing Board posters

*Tricia Cusack*

### **Introduction**

Apart from studies of the Atlantic slave trade, humanities scholars, whether geographers, historians, or art historians, have traditionally paid relatively little attention to the space of the ocean.<sup>1</sup> However, this is beginning to change: a ‘new thalassology’ (from *thálassa* [sea]) since the 1990s has been recasting a geographical and cultural history of the sea.<sup>2</sup> Although recent art has explored marine themes,<sup>3</sup> there have been few critical studies of visual art relating to the ocean.<sup>4</sup> This chapter considers how ocean-space was represented in British Empire Marketing Board posters of the 1920s. It examines how shipboard life was shaped and imagined in relation to

<sup>1</sup> For studies of the Atlantic slave trade, see M. Rediker, *The Slave Ship: a Human History* (London, 2007); H. S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge, 2010); J. Walvin, *Crossings: Africa, the Americas and the Atlantic Slave Trade* (London, 2013). For many authors the space of the slave ship is more salient than the space of the ocean.

<sup>2</sup> P. Horden and N. Purcell, ‘The Mediterranean and “the new thalassology”’, *American Hist. R.*, cxi (2006), 722–40, at p. 723; S. Mentz, *At the Bottom of Shakespeare’s Ocean* (London, 2009), p. xi; Mentz gives the derivation as *thalassos* but the correct term is *thálassa*. Recent studies of ocean space include P. E. Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean* (Cambridge, 2001); B. Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concepts and Contours* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005); K. Wigen, ‘Introduction’, in *Seascapes: Maritime Histories, Littoral Cultures, and Transoceanic Exchanges*, ed. J. H. Bentley, R. Bridenthal and Kären Wigen (Honolulu, Haw., 2007), pp. 1–18; J. Mack, *The Sea: a Cultural History* (London, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> For contemporary art of the sea, see *The Power of the Sea: Making Waves in British Art 1790–2014*, ed. J. Kerr and C. Payne (Bristol, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> For exceptions, see, e.g.: B. Smith, *Imagining the Pacific: in the Wake of the Cook Voyages* (Carlton, 1992); C. Payne, *Where the Sea Meets the Land: Artists on the Coast in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Bristol, 2007); G. Quilley, *Empire to Nation: Art, History and the Visualization of Maritime Britain 1768–1829* (New Haven, Conn. and London, 2011); *Art and Identity at the Water’s Edge*, ed. T. Cusack (Abingdon, 2016); *Framing the Ocean 1700 to the Present: Envisaging the Sea as Social Space*, ed. T. Cusack (Abingdon, 2016).

T. Cusack, ‘Looking over the ship railings: the colonial voyage and the empty ocean in Empire Marketing Board posters’, in *Empty Spaces: perspectives on emptiness in modern history*, ed. C. J. Campbell, A. Giovine and J. Keating (London, 2019), pp. 87–110. License: CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0.

the constitution of an 'empty' ocean and how such representations contributed to the board's imperial propaganda. The ocean had not always been pictured as 'empty'. For example, European maps of the sixteenth century envisaged the surrounding seas as inhabited by fearsome monsters. However, from the seventeenth century such creatures were replaced by a modern grid depicting a featureless emptiness, an effect enhanced later when the ocean was coloured uniformly blue.<sup>5</sup> Such imagery has reinforced the idea of the sea as empty; and western conceptions of the ocean have subsequently portrayed it as predominantly empty space, hence a space available for exploration and appropriation. This chapter suggests that Empire Marketing Board posters contributed to such representations of the 'empty ocean' and that this conception enabled an 'imagined geography' of empire to be drawn upon it.

This chapter focuses on a minority of Empire Marketing Board posters that represented the colonial voyage of settlers, administrators and others to and from Britain's imperial territories. In the 1920s large, modern ocean liners were built for the long journey to the east. However, even an advanced modern ship constituted a precariously placed perch on the vast emptiness of the sea. If the ocean surface appeared empty, the depths remained threatening, with unknown predators and the possibility of sinking and drowning. During the recent world war the oceans had again been filled with monsters – the submarines which came up from below and sank thousands of ships, including the passenger liner *Lusitania*, which was torpedoed in 1915, killing over a thousand people. The sea held fearful memories.

In contrast to the frightening vacancy of the ocean, the modern passenger ship therefore had to be regarded as a place of order and safety. The new liners offered interior living spaces that mimicked the familiarity, security and traditionalism of a country house or club. Empire Marketing Board posters mitigated the terrifying spectacle of the empty ocean by featuring a confident upper-class family which might have emerged from such an interior. This family was located on the promenade deck, safely contained by railings and with an outlook across the water to land. In Empire Marketing Board posters, therefore, the ocean is constructed as empty and exploitable, but the fearful aspects of its emptiness are visually minimized, enabling the colonial voyage to appear safe, manageable and attractive.

<sup>5</sup> Steinberg, *Social Construction of the Ocean*, pp. 105, 114.

### *The empty ocean*

Western conceptions of space have shifted since the latter part of the twentieth century, especially with regard to landscape. In the new scientific geography of the 1960s, space was treated as ‘an abstract dimension ... in which human activities ... took place. ... Space was quite literally a nothingness, a simple surface for action’.<sup>6</sup> This perspective began to be questioned from the 1970s by a view that space was not a fixed, given entity; rather, ideas of space were socially constructed. For example, the Marxist philosopher, Henri Lefebvre argued in 1974 that space should be regarded as actively ‘produced’ rather than as a pre-existing, inert container, noting that ‘[t]o speak of “producing space” sounds bizarre, so great is the sway still held by the idea that empty space is prior to whatever ends up filling it’.<sup>7</sup> As Christopher Tilley concluded, ‘the meanings of space always involve a subjective dimension and cannot be understood apart from the symbolically constructed lifeworlds of social actors’.<sup>8</sup> Tilley further proposed that western capitalist space had been characterized by emptiness, becoming ‘desanctified’ and ‘infinitely open’ and that ‘[o]nce stripped of sedimented human meanings ... the landscape becomes a surface or volume like any other, open for exploitation and everywhere homogeneous ... It becomes ... something to be controlled and used’.<sup>9</sup> Not unlike Tilley’s empty landscape of capitalism, the ocean has also been conceived of as an empty and homogenous surface, available for exploitation and control, but the route to such thinking may have been a little different. Although landscape spaces (actual or depicted) have increasingly been theorized as social productions,<sup>10</sup> the ocean has generally continued to be seen as an archetypal ‘empty space’ or natural void, a blank arena foreign to the land. John Gillis, for example, has argued that the sea remains an alien and neglected space.<sup>11</sup> Miles Ogborn commented that ‘[g]eography has long been landlocked’,<sup>12</sup> while Philip E. Steinberg claimed that the ocean has been elided from ‘historical discourse’.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>6</sup> C. Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths and Monuments* (Oxford, 1994), p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (Oxford, 1991 [1974]), p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> Tilley, *Phenomenology of Landscape*, pp. 10–11.

<sup>9</sup> Tilley, *Phenomenology of Landscape*, pp. 20–1.

<sup>10</sup> See S. Daniels, *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States* (Cambridge, 1993).

<sup>11</sup> J. R. Gillis, *The Human Shore: Seacoasts in History* (Chicago, Ill. and London, 2012), pp. 7, 13, 149.

<sup>12</sup> M. Ogborn, ‘Review of P. E. Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean* (CUP 2001)’, *Progress in Human Geography*, xxvi (2002), 849–51, at p. 849.

<sup>13</sup> H. K. Van Tilburg, ‘Review of P. E. Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean* (CUP 2001)’, *Jour. of World History*, xv (2004), 88–90, at p. 89.

Western visualizations of empire in the modern period have tended to overlook the ocean, or depict it as simply passive or negative space. The history of oceanic cartography, for example, was about delineating coastlines and islands. The Atlantic ocean moved from a marginal to a central position on maps, between America and Europe, but it 'seemed to have been defined negatively, as that which was not land'.<sup>14</sup> From the eighteenth century, artists were commissioned to accompany overseas voyages of discovery. They produced hundreds of drawings of coastlines, weather, peoples and plants, but the ocean itself was not of interest.<sup>15</sup> The predominant themes of much colonial art included botany, ethnographic portraits of natives, portraits of the colonizers, hunting and landscape.<sup>16</sup> When the ocean appeared in art, it was generally along the coast with a focus on the shore, or the passive backdrop for scenes of battle or shipwreck.

The ocean has, therefore, continued to be viewed as an empty space or void, although some of its human history, such as narratives of the Atlantic slave trade, has lately been reclaimed. This chapter proposes that Empire Marketing Board seascapes helped to produce the ocean as empty space. This served two functions: for the fictive colonial voyager, the sea was constituted simply as the benign passageway to an imperial territory; and by the same token, in looking out across that ocean space, the voyager also commanded it.

### *Marketing the empire*

The Empire Marketing Board was founded in 1926 by a Conservative government in order to enhance Britain's trade with its empire amid post-war economic depression. The British empire in the 1920s included a quarter of the world's land surface and a quarter of its population and Britain was the most powerful maritime nation in the world.<sup>17</sup> However, the director of the Imperial Institute, William Furse, speaking in 1931 on the issue of inter-imperial trade, maintained that trade in the British empire had been slow

<sup>14</sup> C. Lois, 'From *Mare Tenebrorum* to Atlantic ocean: a cartographical biography (1470–1900)', in Cusack, *Framing the Ocean*, pp. 23–36, at pp. 25, 30–3.

<sup>15</sup> Cusack, *Framing the Ocean*, p. 7; Smith, *Imagining the Pacific*, pp. 43–7.

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., *Visions of Empire: Voyages, Botany, and Representations of Nature*, ed. D. P. Miller and P. H. Reill (Cambridge, 1996); J. R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualisation of the British Empire* (London, 1997); B. F. Tobin, *Picturing Imperial Power: Colonial Subjects in Eighteenth-Century British Painting* (Durham, N.C. and London, 1999); B. Douglas, 'Art as ethno-historical test: science, representation and indigenous presence in eighteenth and nineteenth century oceanic voyage literature', in *Double Vision: Art Histories and Colonial Histories in the Pacific*, ed. N. Thomas and D. Losche (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 65–99; W. Beinart and L. Hughes, *Environment and Empire* (Oxford, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> A. Jackson, *The British Empire: a Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2013), p. 12.

to develop because of people's ignorance of the Dominions and colonies and a lack of curiosity.<sup>18</sup> The Empire Marketing Board aimed to foster imperial trade and to enhance people's curiosity about and knowledge of the empire.<sup>19</sup> There was also perhaps a need to burnish the image of the British empire following World War I and the notorious massacre of Indian protestors at Amritsar by the British Indian Army in April 1919.<sup>20</sup>

The Empire Marketing Board was a 'constitutional oddity', with a civil service staff and members including representatives from India, the Dominions and opposition parties.<sup>21</sup> It included Frank Pick, who was creating a modern image for London Underground through a proliferation of posters commissioned from talented artists; and William Crawford, head of a major advertising agency and an early student of consumer psychology.<sup>22</sup> In May 1926, Stephen Tallents, then imperial secretary for Northern Ireland, was invited by Leopold Amery, secretary of state for the colonies and chair of the Empire Marketing Board, to take the post of secretary to the new board, with nearly one million pounds per annum anticipated for publicity.<sup>23</sup> Amery later explained that the aim was 'to sell ... the idea of Empire production and purchase, of the Empire as a co-operative venture', not 'to glorify [its] power or ... wealth'.<sup>24</sup> However,

<sup>18</sup> W. Furse, 'Some aspects of inter-imperial trade', *Jour. Royal Society of Arts*, lxxix (1931) 488–98, at p. 496. In 1926, some territories had been granted Dominion status, while others remained colonies.

<sup>19</sup> W. Elliot, 'The work of the Empire Marketing Board', *Jour. Royal Society of Arts*, lxxix (1931), 736–48, at p. 738.

<sup>20</sup> See D. Sayer, 'British reaction to the Amritsar massacre 1919–1920', *Past & Present*, cxxxii (May 1991), 130–64; N. Lloyd, *The Amritsar Massacre: the Untold Story of One Fateful Day* (London, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Furse, 'Some aspects of inter-imperial trade', p. 493; S. Constantine, "'Bringing the empire alive": the Empire Marketing Board and imperial propaganda, 1926–33', in *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, ed. J. M. MacKenzie (Manchester, 1986), pp. 192–231, at p. 198; S. Constantine, *Buy and Build: the Advertising Posters of the Empire Marketing Board* (London, 1986), p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> P. J. Atkins, 'Food and the Empire Marketing Board in Britain, 1926–1933', 8th Symposium of the ICREFH [International Commission for Research into European Food History] (Prague, 2003), p. 10 (a shorter version was published as P. J. Atkins, 'The Empire Marketing Board', in *The diffusion of food culture in Europe from the late eighteenth century to the present day*, ed. D. J. Oddy and L. Petráňová (Prague, 2005), pp. 248–55); 'Frank Pick: design patron (1878–1941): designing modern Britain' <<http://design.designmuseum.org/design/frank-pick>> [accessed 14 Sept. 2015]. Pick chaired the poster sub-committee (Constantine, 'Bringing the empire alive', p. 211).

<sup>23</sup> S. Tallents, 'Advertising and public relations to-day', *Jour. Royal Society of Arts*, civ (1955), 94–107, at p. 95; 'Death of Sir Stephen Tallents', *Jour. Royal Society of Arts*, cvi (1958), 810–2, at p. 810.

<sup>24</sup> Leo Amery, quoted in P. M. Taylor, *The Projection of Britain: British Overseas Publicity and Propaganda 1919–1939* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 104.

Tallents believed that England undersold itself: 'No civilised country can today afford to neglect the projection of its national personality'.<sup>25</sup> Tallents found that advertising was generally disregarded by government officials and that 'publicity was regarded with a mixture of contempt and fear by my colleagues in the Government Service'.<sup>26</sup> He had been impressed by a saying of Crawford's that '[n]o one knows anything about advertising'.<sup>27</sup> Tallents's obituary praised him as 'one of the first men in public service to realize the positive influence of advertising ... as an instrument of official policy, and to develop its creative possibilities'.<sup>28</sup>

The Board launched various publicity ventures, one of the most visible being its poster campaign. Posters had become a practical medium of advertising from the later nineteenth century.<sup>29</sup> In Britain by the 1920s and 1930s they were used by large organizations such as the General Post Office, London Underground and the various railway companies, as well as by the Empire Marketing Board. Like Crawford and Pick, Tallents considered that successful posters must be designed by artists, believing that 'publicity, to be fully effective, must appeal not only to the intelligence but also to the imagination, and that this end is most surely achieved by the enlistment of artists'.<sup>30</sup> However, artists' designs were monitored to ensure the correct message was conveyed.<sup>31</sup>

Between 1926 and 1933, when the Empire Marketing Board was closed, hundreds of posters designed by artists were displayed nationwide on large oak-framed hoardings (or billboards), as well as shown on a smaller scale in shop windows.<sup>32</sup> The sole audience until 1930 was the British public; later, the British public remained the main audience but some publicity abroad was agreed.<sup>33</sup> Key artists commissioned by the Empire Marketing Board included MacDonald Gill and Charles Pears, who were among those from

<sup>25</sup> Stephen Tallents ('The projection of England', 1932), quoted in Taylor, *The Projection of Britain*, p. 111. In his pamphlet 'The projection of England', Tallents's suggested topics for projection were nationalistic, including monarchy, navy and 'Trooping the Colour' (J. M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: the Manipulation of British Public Opinion 1880-1960* (Manchester, 1986), p. 84).

<sup>26</sup> Tallents, 'Advertising and public relations to-day', p. 96.

<sup>27</sup> Tallents, 'Advertising and public relations to-day', p. 96.

<sup>28</sup> 'Death of Sir Stephen Tallents', p. 811.

<sup>29</sup> This was enabled partly through the development of lithographic techniques over the 19th century.

<sup>30</sup> Tallents, 'Advertising and public relations to-day', p. 102; Constantine, 'Bringing the empire alive', pp. 203-4.

<sup>31</sup> M. Horton, *Empire Marketing Board Posters* (London, 2010) (unpag.).

<sup>32</sup> Elliot, 'The work of the Empire Marketing Board', p. 738.

<sup>33</sup> Taylor, *The Projection of Britain*, p. 104.

whom Pick had earlier commissioned posters for London Underground.<sup>34</sup> The hoardings themselves were artfully organized. They were placed all over the country in 'carefully-selected stations'<sup>35</sup> and distinctively sited apart from commercial advertisements. Posters were normally grouped in a recognizable format of five, with two vertical, normally carrying lettering, and the other three horizontal and pictorial, all under a general caption.<sup>36</sup> This arrangement meant that the larger posters could be almost free of written text and, especially as they were designed by artists, they seemed more like art than advertisement. This gave the posters the advantage of appearing to be purely aesthetic images, so disguising the imperial ideologies they carried.

### ***A propaganda organization?***

Empire Marketing Board posters were reproduced for classroom use in various sizes and new poster sets were sent to headteachers on the Board's list, which by 1932 included 26,000 schools.<sup>37</sup> Writing on behalf of the Empire Marketing Board in the Geographical Association's journal *Geography*, A. C. Mason claimed: 'It is no part of the EMB's policy to use the schools for propaganda, but it has been felt that the interest of the public in Empire products, and the consequent voluntary goodwill which it is the Board's object to further, can be aroused and fostered by a presentation of interesting and informative pictures',<sup>38</sup>

In contrast, Stephen Constantine has argued that 'the EMB was ... rightly identified in public and political eyes as a propaganda organization'.<sup>39</sup> In his study of propaganda and the British empire, John MacKenzie characterized propaganda as 'the transmission of ideas and values from one person, or groups of persons, to another, with the specific intention of influencing the recipients' attitudes in such a way that the interests of its authors will be enhanced'.<sup>40</sup> On this definition, the Empire Marketing Board posters were clearly conveying propaganda. However, the public may rather have

<sup>34</sup> Commissioned by Pick, Gill designed a celebrated pictorial map for London Underground in 1914 called 'Wonderground'. Pears designed posters for London Underground and various other railway companies as well as for the EMB.

<sup>35</sup> The earl of Crawford and Balcarres, 'The preservation of the countryside', *Jour. Royal Society of Arts*, lxxix (1931), 661-74, at p. 664.

<sup>36</sup> Central and outer posters usually measured 1½ m. by 1 m. and the two narrower ones 0.6 m. by 1 m.

<sup>37</sup> A. C. Mason, 'EMB material for teachers of geography', *Geography*, xvii (1932), 225-8, at p. 226.

<sup>38</sup> Mason, 'EMB material', p. 226.

<sup>39</sup> Constantine, 'Bringing the empire alive', p. 200.

<sup>40</sup> MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, p. 3.

perceived them, in Mason's terms, as 'interesting and informative'. For example, as Constantine's own research made clear, the materials offered free to schools were readily received and apparently taken at face value. One teacher wrote to the Board: 'Your posters have been a god-send ... They vivify ... the very impression we wish our pupils to receive with respect to the ... potentialities of our Empire'.<sup>41</sup> The *London Teacher* stated: 'Most teachers agree that the EMB posters have been an excellent visual aid to the teaching of geography'.<sup>42</sup> At a Schoolboys' Own exhibition in 1929, the Board continued its efforts by supplying 26,000 small reproductions of MacDonald Gill's poster *Highways of Empire*.<sup>43</sup>

In line with Amery's theme of co-operative harmony, Empire Marketing Board posters endeavoured to present the empire as a happy unity, with mutual benefits for Britain and its lands. In Melanie Horton's view, the posters were designed to make British people 'Empire-conscious consumers by encouraging them to see the Empire as an ethical concern'.<sup>44</sup> The British flag and other national symbols make only occasional appearances, as in Hugh Williams's poster *Empire Marketing*. Here, Williams jauntily transforms the lines and colours of the Union Jack into red and white roads and blue harbours, all occupied with road and sea transport, a metaphor for the busy imperial centre.<sup>45</sup> However, other posters carried a more overtly racialized message of British superiority, for instance where white overseers are depicted as dominant in scale and/or attitude.<sup>46</sup>

As well as the stated aims of increasing trade and enhancing knowledge of the empire, the Empire Marketing Board therefore fostered imperial ideology. While it has been debated whether Britain had an identifiable imperialist ideology,<sup>47</sup> Stephen Howe concluded that '[e]mpire depended, in the sphere of ideology, on ideas about difference, and usually on a belief in superiority ... By about 1900 ... the most powerful notions were cultural,

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Constantine, 'Bringing the empire alive', p. 213.

<sup>42</sup> *London Teacher* (Dec. 1928), quoted in Constantine, 'Bringing the empire alive', p. 213.

<sup>43</sup> Constantine, *Buy and Build*, p. 11.

<sup>44</sup> Horton, *Empire Marketing Board Posters* (unpag.).

<sup>45</sup> See Manchester Art Gallery Collections <<http://manchesterartgallery.org/collections/search/?collections-search=empire+marketing+board>> [accessed 24 Sept. 2015].

<sup>46</sup> E.g. in *Empire Tobacco from Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland* (1930) by A. P. Allinson an affable but dominant white male figure chats to a small black boy, while adult Africans harvest in the background. In two further posters by Allinson, *East African Transport – Old Style* and *East African Transport – New Style*, the British are depicted as dominant agents of modernization (Manchester Art Gallery Collections <<http://manchesterartgallery.org/collections/search/?collections-search=empire+marketing+board>> [accessed 24 Sept. 2015]).

<sup>47</sup> S. Howe, 'Empire and ideology', in *The British Empire: Themes and Perspectives*, ed. S. Stockwell (Oxford, 2008), pp. 157–76, at p. 157.



civilizational, and ... racial'.<sup>48</sup> It has been argued that through such means as advertising, which must include the work of the Empire Marketing Board, the empire permeated British culture, producing 'an inchoate but powerful imperial mind-set'.<sup>49</sup>

### *Highways of empire*

Empire Marketing Board posters that represented the colonial voyage imaginatively transported settlers and administrators from their home country to a smoothly accessed imperial territory. Tallents recalled commissioning MacDonal Gill, architect, muralist and graphic artist, to produce the first Empire Marketing Board poster, the map *Highways of Empire*, which was designed in 1927 and displayed that year as a giant hoarding measuring six by three metres.<sup>50</sup> As J. B. Harley observed, '[m]aps were used to legitimize the reality of conquest and empire'.<sup>51</sup> Gill's poster located Britain at the centre of a map that marked out the empire in red. It showed lines of communication across the oceans, commanding sea passages radiating from the imperial centre to the colonies. Horton suggested that '[t]he world's oceans connected different parts of Britain's Empire, and their expanses drew attention to its full extent'.<sup>52</sup>

However, Empire Marketing Board posters did not so much draw attention to the extent of the oceans, but rather tended to minimize their vastness. Gill's map used a mode of projection that expanded the land mass, enlarging Canada and India, for example, and squeezed the ocean, shrinking the relative size of the intervening seas (Figure 4.1). This focus on the imperial territories and on reducing the expanse of the oceans between them is reinforced by Gill's jaunty graphics. On a decorative scroll in mid-ocean, Gill places the following quotation from Alexander Pope:

And seas but join the  
regions they divide.<sup>53</sup>

The regions here are the British colonial territories and the seas joining them are Britain's highways. A jokey sea-monster bears another scroll that makes this global ownership explicit:

<sup>48</sup> Howe, 'Empire and ideology', p. 166.

<sup>49</sup> Jackson, *The British Empire* p. 5.

<sup>50</sup> Atkins, 'Food and the Empire Marketing Board', p. 10; this consisted of 48 sheets.

<sup>51</sup> J. B. Harley: *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography*, ed. P. Laxton (Baltimore, Md. and London, 2001), p. 57.

<sup>52</sup> Horton, *Empire Marketing Board Posters* (unpag.).

<sup>53</sup> Line 398 of Pope's poem 'Windsor Forest' (1713).



Figure 4.1. MacDonald Gill, *Highways of Empire*, poster, Empire Marketing Board, 1927. Reproduced by kind permission of the Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa.

Far as breeze can bear  
the billows foam.  
Survey our Empire and  
behold our home.<sup>54</sup>

One version of Gill's map has an expansive gloss below the image, addressed to the public and useful for schools (Figure 4.1). Here, Gill explains the problem of map projection and says that his *Highways of Empire* takes a novel approach: '[It] shows the world as it would appear from an aeroplane so high above London that the pilot saw the continents stretched out beneath him. He would thus be given a vivid idea of how the British Empire is scattered in relation to the Home Country'.

Gill's ocean, containing sea-monsters, is not depicted as empty, but Gill confides to his public: 'To us these beasts are jokes, but to the Englishmen, who blazed the first trails along the highways of Empire, they would have seemed as real as a cow in a Devonshire meadow'.<sup>55</sup> His public share the knowledge that such creatures are not to be taken seriously and that the modern ocean map is emptied of them. Gill's *Highways of Empire* map and his accompanying notes seem intended to reassure viewers about the ownership, homeliness and accessibility of Britain's oceanic empire.

The 'empire's highways', clearly marked in Gill's map, suggest speedy and efficient travel to the colonies.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, from the nineteenth century the empire may have been viewed less as 'an empire of commerce and the sea', as it was in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and more as 'a territorial empire of conquest and settlement'.<sup>57</sup> Steinberg argued that in the industrial capitalist period, economic activity focused on investment in 'specific production and consumption sites' rather than on 'circulation across space'. As these sites were generally on land, 'the deep sea became defined as a great void, idealized as outside society ... an empty surface between the terrestrial places that "mattered"'.<sup>58</sup> By the 1920s the imperial territories, rather than the sea itself, may have become the primary focus. Indeed, the colonial voyager did not necessarily want to be aware of crossing the oceans.

<sup>54</sup> From Lord Byron, *The Corsair* (1814), Canto i. Stanza 1.

<sup>55</sup> From MacDonald Gill's written text below his image of *Highways of Empire* (1927): see Figure 4.1.

<sup>56</sup> Early 20th-century posters advertising travel by aeroplanes and zeppelins similarly tended to close up the skies and the ocean to make journeys seem faster and safer and scarcely out of sight of land. They achieved a territorialization of space which might be compared to the imperial highways of the ocean and conquered empty spaces on the ground as well as in the air (Leonie Schuster and author in conversation, Apr. 2015).

<sup>57</sup> Jackson, *The British Empire*, p. 14.

<sup>58</sup> Steinberg, *Social Construction of the Ocean*, p. 208.

### *'Gigantic floating hotels'*

In the 1920s and 1930s liners voyaged to and from Europe and its colonies 'like a commuter service'<sup>59</sup> and it was the "citizens of empire", the colonial administrators, civil servants, and settlers who filled the berths on ships bound for ... Bombay ... and other faraway places'.<sup>60</sup> The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O) constructed four 'express steamers' for the Indian colonial service.<sup>61</sup> The *Viceroy of India* built in Glasgow for P&O, which entered the London-Suez-Bombay service in 1929, was designed for nearly 700 passengers, 415 first class and 258 second class. As it was Board policy to avoid advertising specific companies,<sup>62</sup> the vessels referenced in Empire Marketing Board posters might represent any or all of these ships.

Contemporary poster images of passenger liners (Figure 4.2) emphasized their technological modernity and their impregnability.<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, the ship was vulnerable amid the vastness of the sea. Michel Foucault described the ship as 'a piece of floating space, a placeless place ... that is self-enclosed and, at the same time, delivered over to the boundless expanse of the ocean'.<sup>64</sup> The ocean lacks the visual markers commonly found in landscapes, even deserts. It particularly lacks the components of landscape that Jay Appleton termed 'prospect' and 'refuge' – viewing places and hiding places – and which Appleton found recurrent in landscape painting.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, beneath this empty surface lay unknown depths and terrors. In this alien environment, exposed to the bleak emptiness of mid ocean, the ship is in such insecure circumstances that it needs, on the contrary, to appear to be a self-contained world, a space of order and regulation – shipshape. The voyage must invoke protected, home-like spaces, forgetful of the immensity of the sea. Roland Barthes has argued that '[the ship] is ... the emblem of closure. An inclination for ships always means the joy of perfectly enclosing oneself ... To like ships is first and foremost to like a house ... since it is

<sup>59</sup> C. Deakes, *A Postcard History of the Passenger Liner* (Barnsley, 2012 [2005]), p. 13.

<sup>60</sup> W. H. Miller, Jr., *Picture History of British Ocean Liners 1900 to the Present* (Mineola, N.Y., 2001), p. 1.

<sup>61</sup> The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company (P&O) acquired a royal charter in 1840 <<http://www.poheritage.com/our-history/company-guides/peninsular-and-oriental-steam-navigation-company/NextPage?pageIndex=0>> [accessed 10 Apr. 2016].

<sup>62</sup> Constantine, *Buy and Build*, p. 12.

<sup>63</sup> There are numerous examples (see e.g., G. Cadringer and A. Massey, *Ocean Liner Posters* (Woodbridge, 2011), pp. 72–3, 94–5).

<sup>64</sup> M. Foucault, 'Different spaces', in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984*, ed. J. D. Faubion (3 vols., London, 2000), ii, 175–85, at pp. 184–5.

<sup>65</sup> J. Appleton, *The Symbolism of Habitat: an Interpretation of Landscape in the Arts* (Seattle, Wash., 1990), pp. 25–7.



Figure 4.2. W. McDowell, *Mauritania*, poster, Cunard, c.1920, from the collection of Gabrielle Cadringer.

unremittingly closed, and not at all vague sailings into the unknown: a ship is a habitat before being a means of transport'.<sup>66</sup>

The interiors of contemporary passenger liners had an interesting inverse relationship to their exteriors and, in turn, to the empty oceans surrounding them. Le Corbusier's modernist manifesto of 1923 (*Vers une Architecture*) celebrated the ship as the pinnacle of modernist design. However, the interior of the ocean liner did not conform to modernist ideals. Modernist design was unpopular for built structures in 1920s England, as it did not suit a demand for reassuring solidity and homely comfort, met by using traditional materials and designs. Ship interiors similarly were intended to provide a reassuringly comfortable, even luxurious refuge from the seas. The modern vessel *Viceroy of India* was furnished in first class with panelled walls, Persian rugs and antiques and equipped with fireplaces (Figure 4.3).<sup>67</sup> Indeed, William Miller suggested that '[t]he general decorative idea in first class aboard colonial liners such as the *Viceroy of India* was that passengers never left their London club or home in the English countryside'.<sup>68</sup> A poster for Cunard (c.1914) (Figure 4.4) showing a section through the interior of the ocean liner *Aquitania* illustrates its subdivision into public rooms designed and furnished like a country house, with most of the passengers, aside from a few visible on the promenade decks, facing inwards. Arthur Davis, a British architect who had designed the public spaces of the *Aquitania*, commented in 1922 that when he had questioned his employer as to why a ship did not look like a ship inside, he was told: '[T]he people who use these ships are not pirates, they do not dance hornpipes ... and the one thing they want to forget when they are on the vessel is that they are on a ship at all ... If we could ... get people to enjoy the sea, it would be a ... good thing; but all we can do, as things are, is to give them gigantic floating hotels'.<sup>69</sup> Curiously, contemporary posters illustrating those comforting ship interiors were uncommon, perhaps because the idea of a voyage was best advertised in the first instance by demonstrating the technological power of the modern liner.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>66</sup> R. Barthes, *Mythologies* (London, 1973 [1957]), p. 66.

<sup>67</sup> The relative speed of flying provided another reason why the ocean liner needed to be luxurious, so the sea passage might offer comfort if not speed. Gill notes on his poster *Highways of Empire* that '[a]ir routes are bringing India within five days of us' and his map includes a little biplane drawn overhead.

<sup>68</sup> Miller, *Picture History of British Ocean Liners*, p. 35.

<sup>69</sup> Arthur Davis (1922), quoted in G. Piouffre, *First Class: Legendary Ocean Liner Voyages Around the World*, trans. B. Mellor (New York, 2009), p. 118. The *Aquitania* sailed from Liverpool via Gibraltar to Bombay in the 1920s.

<sup>70</sup> Deakes commented that scenes of shipboard life were 'strangely avoided by most lines' (Deakes, *A Postcard History*, p. 23). This was also the case with postcards (Deakes, *A Postcard History*, p. 24).



Figure 4.3. First class smoking room, *Viceroy of India*, designed by Hon. Elsie MacKay, photograph, 1929. © Stewart Bale, reproduced by kind permission of P&O Heritage Collection.

### *The family cruise*

Following Gill's map, subsequent posters in the *Highways of Empire* series, *Suez Canal*, *Gibraltar* and *Bombay*, all designed by the artist Charles Pears, were displayed in 1928 under the caption *The Empire's Highway to India*.<sup>71</sup> These invited viewers to participate in an imaginary voyage, whether they were potential settlers and colonial administrators or armchair travellers. Pears painted maritime subjects in oils and water-colour; and he had served as an officer in the Royal Marines and an official war artist in World War I. His painting was praised by Ezra Pound in 1919 as 'the work of a man who has seen the sea'.<sup>72</sup> Pears also worked as a travel-writer and illustrator

<sup>71</sup> *Suez Canal*, *Gibraltar* and *Bombay* are all to be found in the collection of Manchester Art Gallery (216 posters, including some repeats) (Manchester Art Gallery Collections <<http://manchesterartgallery.org/collections/search/?collections-search=empire+marketing+board>> [accessed 24 Sept. 2015]).

<sup>72</sup> Ezra Pound, under the pseudonym B. H. Dias (1919), quoted in 'The Modernist Journals Project: Charles Pears 1873–1958' <<http://www.brown.edu/Departments/MCM/>>



Figure 4.4. Section through ocean liner, *Aquitania*, poster, Cunard, c.1914. From the collection of Gabrielle Cadringer.



and had illustrated thirty volumes of Charles Dickens's works (1912–8).<sup>73</sup> In addition to his familiarity with the ocean, Pears was adept at depicting human figures with minimal clues to indicate their status and character, which made him an ideal poster artist. His depictions of ocean travel played a dynamic part in what Horton described as the Empire Marketing Board's 'unfolding story of the sights ... of the Empire ... Posters on the street provided passers-by with a visual tour of the Empire, sometimes even positioning them as someone actually travelling within it'.<sup>74</sup> For example, *Suez Canal* gives the viewer a privileged location on the ship's bridge as it navigates the canal.

In Pears's posters *Gibraltar* (Figure 4.5) and *Bombay* (Figure 4.6), the voyage is evoked by bringing a family group of passengers onto the promenade deck of their 'floating hotel'. Viewers of these posters are positioned to identify with a white, upper-class, nuclear family – mother, father and child, the present or potential citizens of empire. The inclusion of a child matches the marketing interventions of the Empire Marketing Board which helped induct schoolchildren as future colonists.

In both posters the deck, edged by modern railings,<sup>75</sup> acts as both prospect and refuge: a viewing-point and a place of retreat from the sea. In each scene the potential danger of the surrounding sea is signalled by a lifebelt hung on the rail, but the threat is simultaneously negated by this tidy sign of the ship's safety procedures. The family is safely contained by the railings and the male figure in *Gibraltar* even has his back turned, exposed to the ocean. From their vantage point the passengers can look out across the empty space of the ocean to a passing or destined imperial landscape. Jonathan Smith has noted how 'a landscape [whether painted or actual] situates its spectator in an Olympian position, and it rewards its spectator with the pleasures of distance and detachment and the personal inconsequence of all that they survey'.<sup>76</sup> Pears's posters situate the pictured figures, and indeed the fictive viewer, in a similarly Olympian position, detached and without need to act.

The relaxed demeanour of the passengers depicted in *Gibraltar* gives the scene the air of a holiday cruise. The sight of a British warship on patrol

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people/scholes/MJPstuff/24bNew/Pears/Pears.html> [accessed 15 Sept. 2015]. Pears was also an official war artist in the Second World War and president of the Society of Marine Artists.

<sup>73</sup> Pears's illustrated books included *From the Thames to the Seine* (1910) and *From the Thames to the Netherlands: a Voyage in the Waterways of Zealand and down the Belgian Coast* (1914).

<sup>74</sup> Horton, *Empire Marketing Board Posters* (unpag.).

<sup>75</sup> The clean line of the railings and functional lifebelt belong to the ship's modern exterior.

<sup>76</sup> J. Smith, 'The lie that blinds: destabilizing the text of landscape', in *Place/Culture/Representation*, ed. J. Duncan and D. Ley (London, 1993), pp. 78–92, at pp. 78–9.



Figure 4.5. Charles Pears, *Gibraltar: The Empire's Highway to India*, poster, Empire Marketing Board, 1928. © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.



Figure 4.6. Charles Pears, *Bombay: The Empire's Highway to India*, poster, Empire Marketing Board, 1928. © Manchester City Galleries.

across the water has the effect only of enhancing security and, like Gill's map, of claiming the seas for the empire. In *Bombay* the little family is preparing to disembark and all three figures have their attention fixed on the land across the ocean, where scudding yachts promise recreation and a safe harbour. The female figure, fashionably dressed and relaxed with hands in jacket pockets, recalls the elegant women shown shopping, or drinking tea, in other Empire Marketing Board posters.<sup>77</sup> She also recalls the fashionable young women used in contemporary advertisements for the seaside, although etiquette dictated that passengers on deck be properly attired, regardless of climate.<sup>78</sup> The male figure wears a topi, alluding both to the tropical climate of their destination and marking the familiar uniform of the colonial master. His ready suitcase alludes to the land where the ship will be safely docked. The viewer of the posters, like the depicted figures, regards the ocean from behind the ship railings, experiencing a vicarious sense of imperial adventure as they look across to a new land, but also a sense of security, protected from the unpredictable span of the sea.

In designing *Gibraltar* and *Bombay* Pears may have drawn upon pre-war posters executed for specific shipping lines which similarly focused on the pleasure and security of life on deck as a privileged passenger, while underplaying the agency of the sea. A poster of about 1900 for the Belgian-American Red Star Line depicts a woman reclining in her deck-chair shaded by a parasol; beyond the railings, the sea is uniformly blocked in blue, like a map, the only feature being another liner steaming by. In a poster of 1907, Red Star included a woman looking over the ship railings holding a small pair of binoculars – like opera glasses – again ready to catch the spectacle of another ship. The only feature of the intervening sea is the watery shadow of the passing vessel. A poster for South Atlantic United Carriers (Figure 4.7), published the year before *Gibraltar* and *Bombay*, employs a similar theme, with a well-dressed couple standing either side of a lifebelt on the railings, the man inspecting a passing liner through small binoculars across a pale-apricot, featureless sea.

### *'The empire is your garden'*

Despite its island status and maritime history, Britain, along with other western countries, has tended to focus less on the idea of 'man' as a sailor

<sup>77</sup> E.g. *Drinking Empire Grown Tea* (n.d.) <<http://manchesterartgallery.org/collections/search/collection/?id=1935.637>> [accessed Feb. 2017].

<sup>78</sup> Conditions on board for passages across the Indian Ocean and Red Sea before forms of air conditioning were uncomfortable, with daytime temperatures inside reaching over 100 degrees (Miller, *Picture History of British Ocean Liners*, p. 33).



Figure 4.7. *Brésil-Plata*, poster, South Atlantic Chargeurs Réunis, c.1928. From the collection of Gabrielle Cadringer.

than as a gardener.<sup>79</sup> This was especially so in the 1920s and 1930s, when great value was placed on Britain's rural landscape, so much so that addresses by Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin were 'littered with respectful eulogies to the English countryside and the sons of the soil'.<sup>80</sup> An Empire Marketing Board poster of 1928 by Harold Sandys Williamson depicts John Bull emerging from a fruit shop where a bold notice in the shop window advises customers that '[t]he Empire is Your Garden'.<sup>81</sup> Many Empire Marketing Board posters evoked the imperial territories by depicting their produce in scenes of lush vegetation, abundant growth and co-operative harvesting, fostering the idea of the empire as a productive garden, even an exotic extension of the English garden.<sup>82</sup> This idea again glossed over the vast ocean space between Britain and its overseas territories.

### *The 'full' sea*

In contrast to the construct of the empty ocean, the sea could be depicted as 'full' and energized when the propaganda purpose required it. As well as overseas harvests, Empire Marketing Board posters advertised produce from the metropole. In Pears's *There's all the health of the sea in fish* (1931) (Figure 4.8), the sea has quite different connotations to those of passive emptiness.<sup>83</sup> These British waters are not empty, but full of health-giving fish. The sea is not a neutral presence here, but invigorating, as well as rough and hazardous. The poster depicts a trawler surging through heavy, grey-green seas, the men well wrapped in waterproofs and occupied with nets. It represents a brave venture by the British fishermen who set out to face the unpredictable dangers of the open seas, not a safe and comfortable cruise to the colonies across smooth waters.

<sup>79</sup> See Gillis, *The Human Shore*.

<sup>80</sup> J. Black, *The British Seaborne Empire* (London, 2004), p. 364. Baldwin was Conservative prime minister from 1923 to 1929 and from 1935 to 1937.

<sup>81</sup> See no title, Manchester Art Gallery Collections <<http://manchesterartgallery.org/collections/search/collection/?id=1935.759>> [accessed Feb. 2017].

<sup>82</sup> E.g., pastoral images such as Edgar Ainsworth's *The Market Garden of the Tropics – Malayan Pineapples* (1931) (Manchester Art Gallery Collections <<http://manchesterartgallery.org/collections/search/?collections-search=empire+marketing+board>> [accessed 24 Sept. 2015]). For a discussion of the idea of the English garden as a model and metaphor for the British empire and the role of Empire Marketing Board posters in such constructions, see T. Cusack, "'The empire is your garden': cottage imagery and nationalism in England and Ireland (c.1880–c.1940)", in *Genius Loci: National and Regional in Architecture; between History and Practice*, ed. C. Popescu and I. Teodorescu (Bucharest, 2002), pp. 48–51, at p. 51.

<sup>83</sup> *There's All the Health of the Sea in Fish* is found in Manchester Art Gallery Collections <<http://manchesterartgallery.org/collections/search/collection/?id=1935.744>> [accessed 5 Apr. 2019].



Figure 4.8. Charles Pears, *There's All the Health of the Sea in Fish: Caught by British Fishermen*, poster, Empire Marketing Board, 1931. © Manchester City Galleries.

### *Redeeming the empire*

The Empire Marketing Board was terminated in 1933 when tariff protection was introduced, a preferred option for the Dominions.<sup>84</sup> Its posters had been admired by both critics and the public. Pears's images of faraway cruises offered something aspirational, even material for day-dreaming, as viewers were invited to share in an adventurous imperial identity. Gill's *Highways of Empire* map was especially popular and an enthused passer-by wrote of it: 'I cannot help being struck by the magnificent map of the world ... I must have one; if you can't [supply it] I think I shall strip the hoarding'.<sup>85</sup> Gill, typically, ornamented his map with playful vignettes of the Greek gods of the four winds.<sup>86</sup> His style also allowed a blip on the eve of the unveiling of his map to be easily remedied. At the Imperial Conference of 1926, where it was to be 'the principal item of a meagre display of publicity material ... in the rooms of the Royal Academy', it was noticed that Gill had placed polar bears at the South Pole, an error likely to be picked up by at least the prime minister of New Zealand. At Tallents's suggestion, this was resolved

<sup>84</sup> Constantine, 'Bringing the empire alive', p. 220.

<sup>85</sup> Quoted in Atkins, 'Food and the Empire Marketing Board', p. 11.

<sup>86</sup> Gill produced a number of world maps centred on Britain and edged with entertaining vignettes, such as his map of mail steamship routes for the GPO in 1937.

by inserting a speech bubble asking, 'Where are we?'.<sup>87</sup> The *Daily Telegraph* reported of Gill's map that '[t]he instant effect is to rivet the attention and closer study reveals a mass of detail ... so full of humour and instruction that it is no wonder that the police have already had to exhort people to "move along please"'.<sup>88</sup>

The Board's displays were praised even by the president of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England, the earl of Crawford and Balcarres, when he addressed the unsightly spread of insensitive advertising in a paper to the Royal Society of Arts in 1931. He regarded the posters, which he said were a daily sight on the Empire Marketing Board hoardings, as '[a] considered scheme of advertising, displayed in carefully-selected stations, always designed in a dignified and artistic manner ... one has to stand up against them to appreciate what they say, but as far as ... posters are concerned nothing could be better'.<sup>89</sup>

Perhaps the most significant legacy of the Empire Marketing Board poster campaign was a rehabilitation of imperial ideology through the means of art. For example, Furse in 1931 commented that the Empire Marketing Board had 'done much to make many of our people Empire-minded';<sup>90</sup> and Professor J. Coatman in the same year observed that '[i]n this country the Empire Marketing Board had clearly made the Empire ... good news ... There had been built up a corpus of imperial opinion and sentiment'.<sup>91</sup> The *Times* in 1934 concluded that through the Empire Marketing Board '[w]ords and symbols which had become tainted by unfortunate association were redeemed by art'.<sup>92</sup> The poster art of Gill and Pears was undoubtedly able to redeem the idea of empire exactly because its audience could regard it as art; that is, as engaging and entertaining but untainted by politics. The *Highways of Empire* posters made the sea into a benign connector of imperial territories by obliterating uncomfortable historical memories and by neutralizing associations of danger at sea. These posters helped to bring the empire nearer to Britain by closing up and glossing over the empty space of the ocean, an emptiness that otherwise might have induced fear

<sup>87</sup> Tallents, 'Advertising and public relations to-day', p. 96. On Gill's map the exact words uttered by the polar bear are: 'Why are we here? We belong to the North Pole!' (see Figure 4.1).

<sup>88</sup> 'Marketing the Empire', University of Brighton, A Digital Resource (2011) <<http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/projects/macdonald-gill/max-gill/section-6-marketing-the-empire>> [accessed 22 Jan. 2019].

<sup>89</sup> Earl of Crawford, 'The preservation of the countryside', p. 664.

<sup>90</sup> Furse, 'Some aspects of inter-imperial trade', p. 493.

<sup>91</sup> Professor J. Coatman, in the discussion of Elliot's paper: Elliot, 'The work of the Empire Marketing Board', p. 747.

<sup>92</sup> Quoted in Constantine, 'Bringing the empire alive', p. 217.

in the colonial voyager. The colonial voyage was presented as a family cruise, adventurous but safe, carefree and ethically commendable. Empire Marketing Board posters therefore created and reflected what Edward Said has termed an 'imaginative geography' of empire.<sup>93</sup> The depicted emptiness of the ocean was an elite construction, much like the 'empty landscapes' so often claimed and occupied by colonizers. The fictive colonial voyager not only looks out over the empty ocean towards land, but commands that space; as Gill's sea-borne message prompts:

Survey our empire and  
behold our home.<sup>94</sup>

Empire Marketing Board images allowed Britain to take symbolic control of the ocean's highways, while its fearful aspects were visually minimized for British spectators by the artfulness of Gill's mapping and Pears's depictions of a holiday cruise. The ocean was constructed as a benign passageway to imperial territories, occluding alternative narratives of the colonial voyage.<sup>95</sup> Whether potential passengers or armchair travellers, viewers could participate in an imaginary voyage that placed them at the heart of the imperial project.

<sup>93</sup> Edward Said introduced the term 'imaginative geography' in his discussion of the west's construction of the east in E. W. Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1991 [1978]), pp. 57, 71. This was possibly the first use of the term (Ryan, *Picturing Empire*, p. 25).

<sup>94</sup> From Lord Byron, *The Corsair* (1814), Canto i. Stanza 1.

<sup>95</sup> E.g., the stories of those below deck.



## 5. Spectral figures: Edward Hopper's empty Paris\*

*Emily C. Burns*

Two main interests emerge within Edward Hopper's representations of Paris. The artist frequently depicted the architecture of the urban landscape and the River Seine, usually in oil on various supports. He also made detailed watercolour and pencil drawings on paper of the denizens of Parisian life, seated at café tables or standing mid-step. Sketched against a blank background, these detailed, and sometimes caricatured, representations of a single figure or group of figures seem placeless. Peculiarly, these two approaches rarely overlap.<sup>1</sup> The oils depict architecture that is monumental in comparison with figures, which, if they are present at all, are relegated to miniscule dashes of pigment, while the sketches and watercolours evacuate any sense of a setting with a lack of ground line against the white paper.<sup>2</sup>

What accounts for this clear division between place and people and the artist's refusal to combine them, leaving the viewer with a city perpetually

\* All the accession numbers in the footnotes refer to objects in the Hopper collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, which holds almost all of Hopper's Paris paintings and sketches. This chapter was presented at a seminar at the InTRu research group at the University of François Rabelais in Tours and in a public lecture at the Bibliothèque américaine de Nancy. I am grateful for feedback from these presentations, especially from France Nerlich, Jean-Baptiste Minnaert, Christophe Morin, André Kaenel and Claudine Armand. I am also grateful for feedback from Noelle Paulson, Veerle Thielemans, Katherine Bourguignon, Beth Colleary, Jennifer Keating, Courtney Campbell, Allegra Giovine and for copy-edits from Michelle Mandarino. Thanks to Claudia Gerbracht, Jason Philips and David Miller at the Whitney Museum of American Art for taking a few hours to enable me to view many of Hopper's Paris paintings in storage.

<sup>1</sup> *Le Bistro* (70.1187) and *Le Soir Bleu* (70.1208) are two exceptions that combine figures and setting, but both of these were painted in New York City as memories of the artist's time in Paris. In *Le Bistro* the figures are placed to the far left side of the composition and seem in tension with the bridge scene at right (L. Goodrich, 'Notes on Paris oils seen at Hopper's studio, 4/21/47', Whitney Museum of American Art Archives, Edward and Josephine Hopper Research Collection (hereafter Hopper Research Collection), 4.044, p. 2). Hopper's later etchings, such as *Street in Paris* (1915–18, 70.1071), also combine figures and setting and a few of his more finished pencil drawings also place the figures within the street.

<sup>2</sup> On these drawings, which will not be discussed in this chapter, see C. Foster, 'Hopper in Paris and *Soir Bleu*', in *Hopper Drawing*, exh. cat. (New York, 2013), pp. 66–91.

E. C. Burns, 'Spectral figures: Edward Hopper's empty Paris', in *Empty Spaces: perspectives on emptiness in modern history*, ed. C. J. Campbell, A. Giovine and J. Keating (London, 2019), pp. 111–32. License: CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0.



Figure 5.1. Postcard of the Rue Auber, Paris, from Edward Hopper to Nyack, c.1906. The postcard is held by the The Sanborn Hopper Archive at the Whitney Museum of American Art; image of postcard as reproduced here is from the author's personal collection.

incomplete? The oil paintings offer greater ambivalence and ambiguity than the Paris he describes in letters to his mother, with its vibrant urban life where 'the streets ... are alive from morning until night'.<sup>3</sup> Such crowds are depicted in a postcard he mailed depicting an aerial view taken from the top of the Palais Garnier and showing the rue Auber populated with people and carriages (Figure 5.1). To his mother, Hopper described the ways in which the city forms a 'harmonious whole',<sup>4</sup> but he denies this completeness within his art.

The existing scholarship on Hopper's Paris paintings manifests a tension between assumptions of straightforward mimeticism and interpretations of his paintings as deliberately and self-consciously designed constructions.<sup>5</sup> A careful look at the paintings offers support for both readings. Hopper

<sup>3</sup> Hopper to his mother, 23 Nov. 1906 (Hopper Research Collection, 4.008, General Correspondence Earliest). On this tension between the artist's paintings and commentary, see E. Hankins, 'Edward Hopper: the Paris years', *American Art Review*, xv (Feb. 2003), 168–73, at p. 172.

<sup>4</sup> Hopper to his mother, 30 Oct. 1906 (Hopper Research Collection, 4.008, General Correspondence Earliest).

<sup>5</sup> At one end of the spectrum, art critic Brian O'Doherty summarized: 'In Paris, he painted what was immediately accessible to observation' (B. O'Doherty, 'The Hopper bequest at the Whitney', *Art in America*, lix (Summer 1971), 68–9, 72, at p. 72. Hopper's

experimented with naturalism and embraced the impressionist strategies of painting loosely to capture momentary qualities of light and the movement of wind through trees. These qualities draw the viewer into scenes of modern Paris. But his paintings also suggest extended grounding in space, architectonic study, carefully structured compositions and improbable depopulation. The lack of inhabitants jars any sense of the familiar and projects an imaginary city that is empty. These impossibly empty representations create a sense of the uncanny for the viewer, who, without a bustling crowd to join, has no place to enter or exit the compositions. Hopper's compositional strategies reinforce the separation between the viewer and his urban scenes. In these qualities, his paintings are not readily confused with typical French impressionist approaches to depicting Paris and lack the instantaneity implied by Claude Monet's canonical *Boulevard de Capucines* (1873–4; Nelson Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Mo.) or Camille Pissarro's paintings of crowded central Paris from the early years of the twentieth century.

This chapter considers the role of emptiness in a selection of Hopper's Paris paintings. Critics and art historians have commented that these paintings, made early in his career, predict his later interest in empty urban and rural landscapes as 'the great American vacuist', but tend not to probe them further to consider the implications of these unoccupied spaces, especially in the context of a young artist seeking to construct his individual artistic project.<sup>6</sup> Instead of treating him independently of his contemporaries as a quintessential American artist, this chapter places Hopper in the context of American art study in Paris and in the midst of fractious dialogues about

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biographer Gail Levin explained that Hopper chose not to paint outdoors during the early parts of his stay due to poor weather, yet this does not investigate the artist's insistence on tightly framed solitary scenes (G. Levin, *Edward Hopper: a Catalogue Raisonné* (4 vols., New York, 1995), i. 46; and G. Levin, *Edward Hopper: an Intimate Biography* (New York, 1995), p. 55). In a more interpretive vein, the art historian Richard Brettell has summed up Hopper's Paris paintings as 'des poèmes visuels de l'enfermement où abondent des escaliers vertigineux, des angles morts, des rues en impasse, des ponts massif et écrasants ... Le Paris de Hopper est sombre, menaçant et vide, c'est une prison de pierre ou de plâtre sans habitant' (R. Brettell, 'Comment Edward Hopper devint en France un peintre américain', in R. Brettell and E. Darragon, *Edward Hopper: Les années parisiennes 1906–1910*, exh. cat. (Giverny, 2004), pp. 24–86, at p. 34).

<sup>6</sup> J. W. L., 'Early Hopper: paintings before 1915', *Art News*, xxxix (1 Feb. 1941), p. 13. Similar comments can be found in C. Betsky, 'Edward Hopper: a re-view', *Harvard Advocate* (Summer 1972), p. 34; S. Burrey, 'Edward Hopper: the emptying spaces', *Art Digest* (1 Apr. 1955), at pp. 8–10, 33; E. A. Jewell, 'Early art shown of Edward Hopper: youthful zest and foretaste of later development seen in Parisian work, 1906–7', *New York Times*, 11 Jan. 1941, p. 48; and 'Edward Hopper at Rehn's', *New York World-Telegram*, 11 Jan. 1945 (unpaginated clipping, Hopper Research Collection, 2.035).

artistic influence and the relationship between modernity and tradition. Between the end of the American civil war and the start of World War I, thousands of American painters sought training in various Paris art institutions.<sup>7</sup> US artists sought to gain prestige and patronage by adopting French academic practice, which was well received by wealthy American buyers.<sup>8</sup> Yet the successful absorption of French models incited concerns among some US critics that there was nothing unique about American art. Some journalists chided artists to seek a nativist style that rejected foreign influences. For example, the critic Ellis T. Clarke complained in 1900 that American art was 'little more than French art with American trimmings'.<sup>9</sup> Hopper's decision to study in Paris and the paintings he produced there were part of this cultural conversation about Franco-American artistic exchange. He was simultaneously engaging with and rejecting narratives of artistic influence. By looking closely at Hopper's paintings of his Paris lodgings and of the monumental building of the Louvre, this chapter interprets the trope of emptiness as a visual argument for physical, cultural and artistic solitude that seeks to cut the threads of artistic tradition to which he responded.

These aesthetics and the tension created for the viewer not only anticipate Hopper's later work, but also suggest his artistic disavowal of tradition.<sup>10</sup> In his Paris paintings Hopper uses empty urban spaces as a modernist strategy. His representations of the Parisian built environment play with presence and absence through their lack of figures and tension between the still architecture and dynamic river and trees. The few examples in which Hopper combines figures and setting bring the underlying anxieties of an American artist working in Paris to the surface. Such drawings enhance the charged character of the emptiness in his other paintings. Significantly, these sketches present objects of desire that are rendered visible, but perpetually inaccessible, as the artist's body remains implied but invisible to the viewer. In this anxious merging of figure and place, the challenges and possibilities of a young American artist in Paris come to the fore.

<sup>7</sup> On the practice of American art study in Paris, see L. Fink, *American Art at the Nineteenth-Century Paris Salons* (Washington D.C., 1990); K. Adler, E. Hirshler, and H. Weinberg, *Americans in Paris, 1860–1900*, exh. cat. (London, 2006); and H. Weinberg, *The Lure of Paris: Nineteenth-Century American Painters and their French Teachers* (New York, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> On the market for French academic painting in America, see D. E. McIntosh, 'New York's favorite pictures in the 1870s', *Magazine Antiques*, clxv (Apr. 2004), 114–23. On the later US market for French modern art, see M. Fidell-Beaufort, 'The American art trade and French painting at the end of the 19th century', *Van Gogh Museum Jour.* (2000), 101–8.

<sup>9</sup> E. T. Clarke, 'Alien element in American art', *Brush and Pencil*, vii (Oct. 1900), 35–47, at p. 37.

<sup>10</sup> On Hopper's modernism, see L. Nochlin, 'Edward Hopper and the imagery of alienation', *Art Journal*, xli (June 1981), 136–41.

Figure 5.2. Edward Hopper, *Stairway at 48 rue de Lille, Paris*, 1906, oil on wood, 12 7/8 × 9 5/16 in. (32.7 × 23.7 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Josephine N. Hopper Bequest (70.1295)



***Constructing solitude: charged emptiness in Hopper's Parisian home***

Hopper made three extended trips to Paris at the beginning of his career, but then never returned. After six years of art study in the United States with William Merritt Chase, Robert Henri and Kenneth Hayes Miller, he went to Europe.<sup>11</sup> He stayed in Paris for his longest stretch from October 1906 until August 1907 aged twenty-four; and then returned from March to August 1909 and during the summer of 1910.<sup>12</sup> His family found lodging in advance of his arrival in a small Christian pension, the Église Baptiste at 48 rue de Lille.<sup>13</sup> While in Paris he produced about forty-two paintings, some watercolour illustrations and dozens of drawings in two sketchbooks.

<sup>11</sup> Levin, *Edward Hopper*, i. 41–5.

<sup>12</sup> On this period, see esp. Levin, *Edward Hopper: a Catalogue Raisonné*; Brettell, 'Comment Edward Hopper devint'; Hankins, 'Edward Hopper: the Paris years'; S. Nicholas, 'The third dimension: Hopper's European influences', in *Edward Hopper*, ed. C. E. Foster (Milan, 2009), pp. 61–7; and G. Levin, 'Edward Hopper: Francophile', *Arts Magazine*, liii (June 1979), 114–21.

<sup>13</sup> Brettell, 'Comment Edward Hopper devint', p. 30. Hopper also sent a postcard to his

Hopper's first four oil paintings in Paris, made in 1906, depict his immediate surroundings at or near 48 rue de Lille. All are devoid of human figures.<sup>14</sup> In *Stairway at 48 rue de Lille, Paris* (Figure 5.2), Hopper places the viewer against the wall on a tightly spiralled staircase. Looking up, one can see a floor of the building, but the door is shut and vision blocked by a large red box next to the balustrade. Hopper creates a sense of unsteadiness with the lines of white that construct perspective on the risers of the staircase; as they move towards the bottom of the picture they are more loosely painted and more dramatically angled. This shift in the spacing of the risers places the viewer on a particularly vertiginous staircase. This compositional structure freezes the viewer in place, without a point of access by going up. The darkness and void in the background prohibit a downward exit.

Similarly in *Interior Courtyard at 48 rue de Lille, Paris* (Figure 5.3), Hopper depicts an enclosed courtyard that offers the viewer no easy path into or around the composition. A doorway to the left is shrouded in shadow and the window that faces the viewer is opaque. All that one can see through the panes are white curtains and Hopper's scraggly brushstrokes only tease at giving the viewer more visual information about what lies within.<sup>15</sup> The radical angle created between the side of the building at the left and the wall with the single window in front again leaves the viewer without a point of exit.

These representations of the solitary spaces at Hopper's lodging construct the artist's claim to separation from existing artistic communities. By the 1870s, when American art study in Paris became common, structures to ease the transition to foreign life, such as artists' clubs and shared colonies within the geography of Paris, were put into place.<sup>16</sup> Hopper seems to have been at most a tangential part of this community. He spent time with other American artists in Paris, writing to his mother on 9 November 1906, 'I have met a number of people that I know' and listing Patrick Henry Bruce among them. But he never exhibited at the American Art Association of

mother depicting the church (Hopper Research Collection, 4.008, General Correspondence Earliest).

<sup>14</sup> The two paintings which will not be discussed here but are also relevant are *View across Interior Courtyard at 48 rue de Lille, Paris* (70.1307) and *Paris Street* (70.1296).

<sup>15</sup> On the theme of the window in Hopper's later painting, see J. A. Ward, *American Silences: the Realism of James Agee, Walker Evans and Edward Hopper* (Baton Rouge, 1985), pp. 182–92.

<sup>16</sup> E. Burns, 'Revising Bohemia: the American artist colony in Paris, 1890–1914', in *Foreign Artists and Communities in Modern Paris, 1870–1914: Strangers in Paradise*, ed. K. Carter and S. Waller (Aldershot, 2015), pp. 186–209; and E. Burns, 'Puritan Parisians: American art students in late nineteenth-century Paris', in *A Seamless Web: Transatlantic Art in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. C. L. May and M. Wardle (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2014), pp. 123–46.

Figure 5.3. Edward Hopper, *Interior Courtyard at 48 rue de Lille, Paris*, 1906, oil on composition board, 13 × 9 1/4 in. (33 × 23.5 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Josephine N. Hopper Bequest (70.1304).



Paris and seems not to have attended their regular events.<sup>17</sup> Unlike most of the other American art students during this period, who either attempted entry at the *École des Beaux-Arts* or paid for classes at the *Académie Julian* or the *Académie Colarossi*, Hopper did not seek any formal training in Paris. Also, no records suggest that Hopper ever submitted paintings for consideration at the annual salons, marking an atypical avoidance of a central goal of most American art students studying in Paris, even in the early twentieth century.

<sup>17</sup> Hopper to his mother, 9 Nov. 1906 (Hopper Research Collection, 4.008, General Correspondence Earliest). He also wrote about spending time with other Americans in Paris on 18 May 1909 (Hopper Research Collection, 4.008, General Correspondence Earliest). Levin suggested that, given his location in Paris and his social circle, he must have seen American Art Association of Paris exhibitions, even if he did not participate in them (Levin, *Edward Hopper: an Intimate Biography*, pp. 59–60).

In evading these typical spaces, and in making paintings that emphasize emptiness and solitude, Hopper makes a visual argument for his artistic individuality which insists upon his resistance to art study as well as tradition. This effect parallels his later comments: during the Frank Rehn Galleries exhibition of the Paris paintings in 1941, he informed the art historian Lloyd Goodrich that 'in Paris he did not study in any art school, but painted on his own'.<sup>18</sup> Scholars have absorbed the artist's claims to personal isolation that seem to exist in direct relationship with the emptiness of his paintings.<sup>19</sup> The art historian Richard Brettell has suggested, for example, that the isolation of foreign study invited the lonely artist to become an 'observateur-détaché' depicting 'isolement'.<sup>20</sup> Yet reading such a one-to-one relationship between biography and painting denies the intentionality and constructed nature of these representations.

Indeed, Hopper's time in Paris was by no means solitary, in spite of letters to his parents that describe his introverted explorations of the foreign capital. In addition to occasional circulation within the American artist community in Paris, biographers have recounted his relationships in Paris with a British woman named Enid Saies and with an American woman named Alta Hilsdale.<sup>21</sup> One of Hopper's rare drawings of his Paris lodging that combine figure and place heightens the charged emptiness of Hopper's lodging paintings. The sketch includes an enigmatic depiction of a nude standing beside bed linens at an open window across the courtyard (Figure 5.4). The identity of this woman is unknown, though she bears a vague resemblance to Saies, who also lodged at the pension at 48 rue de Lille. It is also possible that the drawing represents artistic fantasy rather than a posed scene. But the drawing is significant, not only because it anticipates Hopper's later representations of solitary nude women framed by empty architectural spaces.<sup>22</sup> In its combination of figure and space, it manifests underlying tensions in his other paintings of his lodging. The scene simultaneously reveals and hides the woman, who is placed at the far side of the composition in a gaping window and separated from the rest of the scene by a harsh diagonal of the architecture. She gazes back at the artist, her arm on her neck, but only the bedclothes project from

<sup>18</sup> L. Goodrich, 'Notes on conversation with Edward Hopper, 4/21/47' (Hopper Research Collection, 4.044), p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> *My Dear Mr. Hopper*, ed. E. T. Colleary (New Haven, Conn. and London, 2013), pp. 17, 19–20, n. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Brettell, 'Comment Edward Hopper devint', pp. 27, 44.

<sup>21</sup> On Saies, see Levin, *Edward Hopper: an Intimate Biography*, pp. 68–9. Hilsdale's letters to Hopper have been reprinted in Colleary, *My Dear Mr. Hopper*.

<sup>22</sup> See *Summer Interior* (1909; 70.1197); and *A Woman in the Sun* (1961; 84.31).





Figure 5.4. Edward Hopper, *Sketch of Paris Courtyard at 48 rue de Lille with Nude*, c.1907, fabricated chalk, graphite pencil and grey wash on paper, 19 7/8 x 14 7/8 in (50.5 x 37.8 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Josephine N. Hopper Bequest (70.1342)

her balcony into the artist's space. She is visually available to the viewer, but rendered unreachable across the empty air shaft, further blocked by the balcony railing at the lower right that grounds the viewer outside the composition. These added biographical details and the tensions that bubble to the surface in this mysterious sketch remind the observer that the emptiness of Hopper's paintings of his lodging is carefully constructed. They should not, therefore, be understood as mere replications of his vision or experience. The deliberate isolation – disavowed only by a single sketch – reveals an artist at work to construct his physical and artistic separation.

### *The Louvre as spectre*

Even as he tried to eschew connections with his contemporaries, both geographically and artistically, Hopper's painting style reveals his experimentation with the loose brushwork and the often high-keyed colours of impressionism. Furthermore, he followed in the footsteps of many other French and American artists in his series of paintings of the Louvre. Yet the emptiness in these paintings marks his deliberate rejection of those traditions. Of Hopper's approximately forty-two paintings of Paris, nine represent the monumental structure of the Louvre, his most repeated Parisian subject.<sup>23</sup> Most of the series depict the Pavillon de Flore from the embankment below the left bank, next to the Pont Royal. This location was only a few minutes' walk from Hopper's boarding house on the rue de Lille. While this structure was certainly not a new artistic subject, Hopper's approaches subtly varied from those of his contemporaries and indicate his use of compositional space and emptiness to imagine his Paris experience and relationship with tradition.<sup>24</sup>

This structure was a complex cultural icon that moderated between tradition and modernity. From a nationalist perspective, the Pavillon de Flore symbolized French resilience: it was the only part of the Palais des Tuileries that was reconstructed after a fire during the Franco-Prussian war in 1871 destroyed the palace.<sup>25</sup> After the war ended and the site was renovated, it briefly held the collections of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs.

<sup>23</sup> These are reproduced in Levin, *Edward Hopper: a Catalogue Raisonné*, iii. 65–90, 95–104; O-127-O-159, O-164-O-174.

<sup>24</sup> Other American artists who depicted the Louvre in their Paris paintings include Henry Bacon, *Lady in a Boat* (1872, Terra Foundation for American Art); and Robert Henri, *The Louvre* (1899, private collection; reproduced in Weinberg, *The Lure of Paris*, p. 81).

<sup>25</sup> C. Aulanier, *Le Pavillon de Flore* (Paris, 1971), pp. 7, 91–2. The architect Hector Lefuel renovated the structure between 1864 and 1868 and added many sculptures. The Palais des Tuileries was destroyed in 1871 and not rebuilt, except for the Pavillon de Flore. The north structure, the Pavillon de Marsan, was built to match the Pavillon de Flore between 1874 and

From 1879 until about 1910 it acted as the administrative seat for various departments of the Third Republic, particularly those overseeing French colonies.<sup>26</sup>

Though this part of the monumental building was not an art exhibition space during the period of Hopper's visits to Paris, American tourist materials treated it as part of the larger institution of the Louvre.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, when Hopper exhibited his Paris paintings in the United States between 1908 and 1920 their titles were often listed in the catalogues simply as 'the Louvre'. The museum signalled French academic artistic tradition and cultural legacy in the objects it exhibited from its opening to the public in 1793.<sup>28</sup> For many art students in Paris the structure of the Louvre reminded them of the weight of tradition.<sup>29</sup> But the structure also invited debate about contemporary art display. In addition to the icons of art history held in the Louvre, the Tuileries was also the site for temporary buildings that held some of the early Salon des Indépendants exhibitions. In this way the site also became related to more experimental artistic practices. It simultaneously implied artistic past and present.

While the fanatic rite of passage of foreign study in Paris, with the objects in the Louvre as a central model, continued until the start of World War I, by the early twentieth century many American artists and critics expressed scepticism about the overt role of French art in shaping American art. They concomitantly called for a more nationally driven artistic practice.

1879.

<sup>26</sup> Aulanier, *Le Pavillon de Flore*, pp. 93–8. The decision to move the government administrative offices from the Pavillon de Flore was made in 1902, but the transfer to the Louvre museum space was not made until 1910 (Aulanier, *Le Pavillon de Flore*, p. 98).

<sup>27</sup> B. Eastman and F. Mayer, *Paris, 1900: the American Guide to City and Exposition* (New York, 1899), pp. 132–3. The Pavillon de Flore is not mentioned by name in this guidebook. A contemporaneous French guidebook mentions it specifically by name and also notes its current administrative use (C. de Tours, *Vingt Jours à Paris pendant l'Exposition Universelle de 1900* (Paris, 1900), pp. 66, 136, 159, 163, 178, 188, 190).

<sup>28</sup> A. McLellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Politics and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 7; Fink, *American Art at the Nineteenth-Century Paris Salons*, p. 292, n. 24. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries national policy held that paintings acquired by the French government for the Luxembourg Museum would be transferred to the collection of the Louvre upon the artist's death. Therefore state acquisition of paintings by a living artist was key to his or her hope for an artistic legacy and recognition (L. Alary, 'L'Art vivant avant l'art moderne. Le Musée du Luxembourg, premier essai de muséographie pour "l'art vivant" en France', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, xlii (Apr.–June 1995), 219–39).

<sup>29</sup> On the Louvre in the American imagination, see E. Kennedy, 'American artists and the Louvre: an enduring legacy', in *American Artists and the Louvre*, ed. E. Kennedy and O. Meslay, exh. cat (Chicago, Ill., 2006), pp. 72–91.



Figure 5.5. Edward Hopper, *Le Louvre et la Seine*, 1907, oil on canvas, 23 5/8 × 28 5/8 in. (60 × 72.7 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Josephine N. Hopper Bequest (70.1186).

Hopper's travels to Paris, which took place three times between 1906 and 1910, occurred during the tail end of these conversations as New York City increasingly took on importance as an international modernist art centre. In the context of debates about nationalism and art, Hopper's paintings of the Louvre underscore the tensions between emulation and innovation.

His paintings, letters and postcards trace his complicated relationship with this structure and with artistic tradition. In one of his early impressionistic studies, *The Louvre and the Seine* (Figure 5.5) of 1907, Hopper places the structure at the upper centre of the composition, at the pinnacle of a pyramid created by the river and the wash boats that are moored at the left.<sup>30</sup> When it was shown in 1941 at Rehn Galleries in New York, one critic

<sup>30</sup> In *Les Lavoirs à Pont-Royal* (70.1247) the structure of the Louvre is entirely cropped out at the right side of the composition; and in *Louvre and Boat Landing* (70.1249) the colourful boat landing seems more the subject of the painting than the almost hidden structure of the Louvre in the background.

announced this as 'the first canvas Hopper painted out of doors'.<sup>31</sup> It is one of the few paintings from the period that are signed and dated and he includes the word 'Paris' below his name, following a common practice of foreign artists working in the city. The picture seems to celebrate its place of origin, yet several aspects of the composition, colour and light distance the viewer from the Louvre. Its bright pastel colours invite the viewer to squint at the glare of the light, which is the brightest on the side of the Pavillon de Flore. The dashes of white brushstrokes and impasto serve almost to erase the façade and the sculptures that were added when the site was renovated in the late nineteenth century are hidden. Furthermore, Hopper blockades access to the structure by placing the viewer on the embankment implied by the pink triangle at the left of the composition. Our view of the building is partially obstructed by the large barges, which fully occlude the Pont Royal, which would otherwise provide access to the site across the river. As in Hopper's paintings of his lodging, the viewer is marooned alone in this position. Hopper builds a tension between the imposing architectonic structure of the Louvre and the dynamism of the water lapping up to the edge of the barges, doubling back upon itself in white foam. The pink tones visually connect building, river and embankment, linking the monumental time of the durable structure with the ephemerality of nature's motion and light. With a lack of figures and a lack of grounding in space, these temporalities – history and nature – avoid a sense of human time. They construct a viewer who is solitary, isolated and a unique observer of this tension.

The Louvre paintings of French impressionist Camille Pissarro, who also painted from a similar perspective in 1903, show a different relationship with the Louvre, suggesting Hopper's distinctive project.<sup>32</sup> Both artists shared this subject as a series and Hopper may have known Pissarro's paintings from an exhibition in New York in 1904.<sup>33</sup> Yet the differences in their approaches result in distinct visual arguments. In Pissarro's painting *The Pont Royal and the Pavillon de Flore* (1903; Petit Palais, Paris), individual figures are generally implied in traffic across the bridge, whereas Hopper's *The Louvre and the Seine* is devoid of human presence. While Hopper's grounding is

<sup>31</sup> 'The early roots of Edward Hopper's art', *Art Digest*, xv (Jan. 1941), 13.

<sup>32</sup> Levin also makes this comparison, but does not discuss the important differences between the two approaches to the same subject. See Levin, *Edward Hopper: a Catalogue Raisonné*, i, 51.

<sup>33</sup> H. G. Stephens, 'Camille Pissarro, impressionist', *Brush and Pencil*, xiii (March 1904), 411–35, at pp. 411–9, 421–3, 425–35. On Pissarro's Louvre series, see R. Brettell and J. Pissarro, *The Impressionist and the City: Pissarro's Series Paintings*, exh. cat. (New Haven, Conn., 1992), pp. 103–4, 112–7, 123–6, 159.

on the embankment, Pissarro's viewer has a more egalitarian relationship with the building because his panoramic view allows a more domineering look at the Pavillon de Flore. Pissarro's grounding is on the Quai Voltaire up above the embankment where Hopper places his viewer. Therefore the viewer can look down upon the barges that block Hopper's view in *The Louvre and the Seine* and across at the Pavillon with visual mastery. Pissarro's Pavillon is also smaller within the scale of the canvas. He creates an open composition in which the Pavillon sits casually within the city around it, whereas in Hopper's depiction the scene is flattened and claustrophobic. In Pissarro's painting the Pont Royal serves as a direct compositional conduit for the viewer to the museum. Hopper blocks the bridge as an access point to the building entirely in *The Louvre and the Seine*.<sup>34</sup> Pissarro minimizes the foliage on the tree next to the Pavillon. In other paintings, such as *Le Pavillon de Flore* (1909; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York), Hopper chooses a compositional positioning to emphasize that foliage and allows it to shroud the Pavillon's structure. The only movement in Hopper's painting is created through the light strokes that give the sense of the trees lightly quivering in the breeze and the tiny corner of reflection in the Seine. These glints of movement whisper to an unseen embodied eye, with his long look up at the building punctured by momentary light and air. Though the building is more clearly articulated in this painting, which dates to two years after *The Louvre and the Seine*, its architectonic qualities make it no more accessible because of the compositional space. Compared with Hopper's broad, flat strokes that emphasize the shape of the architecture, Pissarro's brushstrokes are circular, as characteristic of impressionism. This distinction suggests the limited utility of the moniker of impressionism for Hopper's paintings. Hopper has further tightened the scene so that the viewer has no embankment upon which to stand and lowers the Pavillon so that it seems closer and still more menacing to the viewer.

Perhaps most ominous of all is Hopper's thickly painted *Louvre in a Thunderstorm* (Figure 5.6), in which the building is almost as dark as

<sup>34</sup> In *The Pont Royal* (70.1223) Hopper does include the bridge and dabs to refer to figures, but the figures and omnibus are minuscule compared with the building. Furthermore, as he avoids depicting shadows, Hopper's bridge across the river seems to be flattened along a single plane parallel to the right bank instead of perpendicular to it, further denying the viewer across the river access to the site. *Après-midi de juin* (1907; 70.1172) also exhibits this compositional flattening, which transforms the bridge into a parallel to the right bank. Hopper's revision is nicely illustrated in G. Levin, *Hopper's Places* (Berkeley, 1985), p. 152. The scholar Wallace Jackson has also observed Hopper's deliberate blocking of access in *Bridge in Paris* (70.1305) (W. Jackson, 'To look: the scene of the seen in Edward Hopper', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, ciii (Winter 2004), 133–48, at p. 133. On this strategy in Hopper's later paintings see Ward, *American Silences*, p. 177.



Figure 5.6. Edward Hopper, *The Louvre in a Thunderstorm*, 1909, oil on canvas, 29 9/16 x 28 13/16 (59.8 x 73.2 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Josephine N. Hopper Bequest (70.1223).

the black tugboat steam pipe in the lower centre. The brushwork of the foliage along the base of the building almost seems to target the building through the thick parallel lines, as if threatening to swallow up the dark, shadowy structure. The sky swirls tumultuously and unsteadily; and access via the Pont du Carousel at the centre is halted by the dense green foliage that frames the Louvre. Here again Hopper creates a tension between tradition and modernity by pairing the stone structure of the Louvre with the bridge, which had been newly restored with iron in 1906.<sup>35</sup> Hopper provides the viewer with mechanisms of transportation and access, like the bridge and the tugboat at lower right, but freezes the viewer's access in the compositional blocking and the stilled boat. This juxtaposition is enhanced by the relationship between the still historic architecture and the dynamism of the whirring trees and clouds in front of it. In Hopper's paintings of the Louvre the building often appears as a spectre, overshadowing the landscape.

<sup>35</sup> I am grateful to Jean-Baptiste Minnaert for this observation.

It remains ever present, but perpetually inaccessible in the structures of his compositions.

In the same way that Hopper's paintings exhibit a tension between their surface realism and metaphorical depth, the technical aspects of the artist's painting process in Paris reveal him paradoxically adopting and rejecting basic practices. His stylistic experimentation reinforces his ambivalent relationship with the Louvre as an icon of artistic tradition. The art historian Anne Coffin Hanson has observed that Hopper's paintings in Paris were often produced on a white canvas, without the layers of darker ground that he learned to apply while studying with Henri in New York. The bright luminosity that appears in these paintings draws in part from French modernist interventions, such as impressionism and fauvism.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, Hopper replicates a common practice by French romantic artists who painted without an underdrawing on the canvas, layering the compositional elements directly with the brush.<sup>37</sup> With both of these experimental approaches Hopper departs from his artistic training. As Hanson has argued, as Hopper adopts these practices he erases the building blocks of more traditional academic painting. These stylistic approaches enhance his direct engagement, even a face-off, with the Louvre in his Paris paintings, with the museum placed on a literal and figurative blank slate.

Hopper's letters from Paris treat the Louvre as a spectre, always present yet never in complete view. In a postcard of the Gare d'Orsay which he sent to his mother in 1907, Hopper explained that, though not pictured, '[j]ust across the river at the other end of the bridge is the Louvre'.<sup>38</sup> He also noted that from his lodgings the Louvre was nearby: 'I could go a few steps and I'd see the Louvre across the river'.<sup>39</sup> In a postcard of booksellers along the Seine that he sent to the United States (Figure 5.7) the Louvre is subtly present along the skyline in the background. He wrote to his mother: 'I also sent you one last week with a photo of the bookstalls of the way it looks on the river. The building in the background is the Louvre. This Quai is near the rue de Lille,

<sup>36</sup> A. C. Hanson, 'Edward Hopper, American meaning and French craft', *Art Journal*, xli (June 1981), 142–9, at pp. 142–4.

<sup>37</sup> Hanson, 'Edward Hopper', p. 146. On this shift and its signal towards 'fostering originality' for art students, see P. Duro, 'Imitation and authority: the creation of the academic canon in French art, 1648–1870', in *Partisan Canons*, ed. A. Brzyski (Durham, N.C. and London, 2007), pp. 95–113, at p. 109.

<sup>38</sup> Hopper to his mother, 14 Jan. 1907 (Hopper Research Collection, 4.008, General Correspondence Earliest).

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in B. O'Doherty, 'Portrait: Edward Hopper', *Art in America*, lii (Dec. 1964), 68–88, at p. 73.





Figure 5.7. Postcard of the Quai Voltaire booksellers, from Edward Hopper to Nyack, c.1907. Postcard is held by the The Sanborn Hopper Archive at the Whitney Museum of American Art; image of postcard as reproduced here is from the author's personal collection.

only one block away'.<sup>40</sup> In these observations the Louvre is an ever-present part of his artistic experience in Paris, but always peripherally. In his paintings Hopper developed visual strategies, such as compositional blocking, flattening and emptiness, which distanced the viewer from that structure and all that it implied. Through the tropes of solitude and emptiness Hopper sees the voice of tradition – signalled by the Louvre – present but forcefully pushed into the background. He compositionally enacts the metaphorical discourse of achieving an independent art practice in Paris.

The anxiety present in Hopper's paintings of the Louvre comes to a pinnacle in a 1906 illustration, self-titled on the drawing itself *Les Etudiants de Paris* (Figure 5.8). While its combination of text and image implies that the sketch was intended as an illustration, it was not published. As in the drawing of his Parisian courtyard with nude (Figure 5.4), the combination of figure and setting brings to the fore a more overt visual argument and apprehension that are more muted in his oil paintings. Also like the nude sketch, Hopper presents an icon that is simultaneously visible but rendered

<sup>40</sup> Hopper to his mother, 16 Jan. 1907 (Hopper Research Collection, 4.008, General Correspondence Earliest). It was not possible to obtain a high quality image of this postcard or to find an exact replica, so a similar postcard from the same period is reproduced here.



Figure 5.8.  
Edward Hopper,  
*Les Etudiants de  
Paris*, 1906–7,  
watercolour,  
brush and ink,  
and graphite  
pencil on paper,  
19 3/4 × 14 5/8 in.  
(50.2 × 37.1 cm).  
Whitney Museum  
of American  
Art, New York,  
Josephine N.  
Hopper Bequest  
(70.1345).

inaccessible to the viewer. Though there is only one solitary figure, its plural title implies this figure as an archetype or stand-in for the art student in Paris. Hopper depicts the stereotypical melancholy artist-type, wearing a beret, holding a cigarette between his teeth, hands in pockets and looking glum as he shuffles forward. The figure is placed in the blank space of the foreground, without a ground line, as typical in Hopper's sketches of Parisian types. Yet, unlike most of Hopper's Paris sketches, a setting is provided through a framed scene behind the figure which locates him along the left bank of the Seine on the Quai Voltaire, just above the same embankment from which Hopper painted the Louvre. With the frame, which appears almost as a picture within a picture, Hopper's drawing bears compositional resemblance to the illustrations he produced for an unpublished edition of Victor Hugo's poems, *L'Année terrible* (1872), in which figures are placed

against a framed background.<sup>41</sup> In the scene that is the backdrop for *Les Etudiants de Paris* book stalls are visible, as in the postcard Hopper sent to his mother from Paris (Figure 5.7), and two figures wearing bowler hats stand at the far right, perhaps in the process of haggling about a book, though one appears to gawk at the skyline where again the dominant figure of the Pavillon de Flore is paramount. Yet, while it shadows him, the structure is entirely inaccessible to the artist, who occupies an altogether different plane continually parallel to, but never intersecting with, the one behind him. In this, the Louvre becomes an impossible dream, like the bridges that do not effectively convey figures to the structure (Figures 5.5, 5.6). This image anticipates the anxieties that Hopper works out in the oils of the Louvre; one can imagine Hopper as this art student, absent but imagined in the paintings looking up from the embankment at the monumental and meaning-laden, but unreachable, structure.

### ***The spectre of influence in American painting***

Although they occupy an important place in his early oeuvre, Hopper's Paris paintings were not successful when he exhibited them in the United States.<sup>42</sup> By the time the paintings were shown in the years before World War I, American tastes had shifted from embracing French artistic subjects and styles to celebrating representations of American landscapes and cityscapes, particularly the New York scenes of the Ashcan School.<sup>43</sup> For example, when *The Louvre and the Seine* (Figure 5.5) was exhibited in March 1908 in New York City at the Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings by Contemporary American Artists, a review entitled 'One step nearer to a national art' did not mention these foreign paintings at all.<sup>44</sup> Compared with the paintings of the Ashcan artists, such as John Sloan and George Luks, which featured vibrant crowds in their urban settings, Hopper's Paris paintings seem particularly empty. Yet Hopper continued to show these

<sup>41</sup> On this series, see G. Levin, *Edward Hopper as Illustrator* (New York, 1979), p. 28.

<sup>42</sup> The paintings were not publically exhibited in France until the 2004 exhibition at the Musée d'art américain in Giverny; and not in Paris until the 2012 exhibition at the Grand Palais (D. Ottinger et al., *Hopper*, exh. cat. (Paris, 2012), pp. 22–8, 89–101, 108–13).

<sup>43</sup> See Levin, *Edward Hopper: a Catalogue Raisonné*, i. 2; and W. Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915–1935* (Berkeley, Calif., 1999).

<sup>44</sup> 'One step nearer to a national art', *New York American*, 10 March 1908, p. 8. See also Levin, *Edward Hopper: a Catalogue Raisonné*, i. 50; and Levin, *Edward Hopper: an Intimate Biography*, p. 75. The other Paris paintings included in this exhibition were *Le Pont des Arts* (1907; 70.1181) and *Le Parc de Saint Cloud* (70.1180). *Le Louvre et la Seine* was shown again at the Exhibition of Independent Artists in Apr. 1910 and suffered the same critical silence. See G. Levin, *Edward Hopper: the Art and the Artist*, exh. cat. (New York, 1980), p. 27; and Levin, *Edward Hopper: an Intimate Biography*, p. 81.

paintings until his first one-man exhibition in 1920 at the Whitney Studio Club, in which eleven of the sixteen paintings came from the artist's time in Paris and were listed for the first time with French titles.<sup>45</sup> After this exhibition, however, the paintings largely remained in his studio for the rest of his life, with the exception of a well-reviewed exhibition of an already canonized Hopper 'early work' at the Rehn Galleries in New York in 1941.

Later in his career, Hopper expressed worry about French artistic hegemony in the United States, in part in his insistence to the art historian Lloyd Goodrich and others that France held no influence over him.<sup>46</sup> Yet he acknowledges this overarching influence in a comment in 1927 in an essay about Sloan in which he celebrated 'emerging certain artists of originality and intelligence who are no longer content to be citizens of the world of art, but believe that now or in the near future American art should be weaned from its French mother'.<sup>47</sup> His comments denigrate art study in Paris; Hopper notes a wider cultural shift in that 'the home-staying painter is beginning to be looked upon with a new and envious respect by his colleague who has unwittingly exchanged his birthright for a cultural equipment that he begins to find of doubtful value'.<sup>48</sup> In this era European study could 'confuse and retard the [artist's] reabsorption into the American'.<sup>49</sup> Since Sloan had not studied in France like Henri and Hopper, he was extolled for his nativist tendencies and rejection of cosmopolitan art practices. Hopper's comments verbalize the imposing power of the French art tradition, as well as the artist's anxiety about them. In the process of celebrating an American art that began 'as the logical growth of the art of one nation from that of another or others' and insisting on the 'native and distinct', Hopper sought to obscure his French sojourns, which were tenuously experienced to begin with.<sup>50</sup> He reiterated this perspective in 1933: 'If an apprenticeship to a master has been necessary, I think we have served it. Any further relation to such a character can only mean humiliation. After all we are not French and never can be and any attempt to be so is to deny our inheritance and try to impose [upon] ourselves a character that can be nothing but a veneer on the surface'.<sup>51</sup> These later comments suggest the overshadowing influence

<sup>45</sup> Levin, *Edward Hopper: an Intimate Biography*, p. 129.

<sup>46</sup> Goodrich, 'Notes on Paris oils'; and L. Goodrich, *Edward Hopper*, exh. cat. (New York, 1971), p. 19. On the 'historical amnesia' about the role of France in American art, see L. M. Fink, 'Reactions to a French role in nineteenth-century American art', in Kennedy and Meslay, *American Artists and the Louvre*, pp. 14–29, at pp. 27–8.

<sup>47</sup> E. Hopper, 'John Sloan and the Philadelphians', *Arts*, xi (Apr. 1927), 169–78, at p. 177.

<sup>48</sup> Hopper, 'John Sloan', p. 169.

<sup>49</sup> Hopper, 'John Sloan', p. 170.

<sup>50</sup> Hopper, 'John Sloan', p. 178.

<sup>51</sup> E. Hopper, 'Notes on painting', in A. H. Barr, *Edward Hopper Retrospective* (New York,

of French artistic practice upon American art, but also Hopper's ambivalent relationship with these traditions. His challenges – verbalized later – are also embedded in the compositions, painting approaches and perspectives of his Paris paintings.

In 1931 fellow artist Guy Pène du Bois chided the American public for forgetting Hopper's Paris studies and for misinterpreting them as direct observations.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, Hopper's paintings of Paris seem insistently to remind the viewer of his artistic interventions, with their thick impasto on stark white canvases, with their careful declarations of solitude, with impossibly empty spaces. The tension that Hopper created between naturalist elements and emptiness unsettles time within the Paris paintings. With waving tree branches and the Seine's currents implying motion, Hopper implies natural time and the phenomenological view of an embodied painter. Yet the empty streets and monumental stone architecture emphasize long historical time. In his depictions of the extended temporality of the *longue durée* and the momentary of nature, human temporality seems evacuated from the equation except as an evasive, solitary, embodied observer who is implied but rarely exposed. The empty streets and combined temporalities draw attention to the non-mimetic quality of his paintings and thus to the artist's act of representation. While the artist does not turn to abstraction, he experiments, as the art historian David Peters Corbett has interpreted of the urban realism of the Camden Town Group, with 'the visual possibilities of painting as fiction'.<sup>53</sup> Hopper's composite characteristics challenge simple mimeticism and deny the realities of urban experience to claim instead an artistic seclusion and a mitigated realism that reach towards modernism.

Hopper's evacuation of either the figures or the setting and his insistence on an incomplete Paris symbolize concerns about the fraught practice of artistic study overseas. By implying solitude in the urban space through paintings of his building and by including an ambivalently overshadowing but inaccessible Louvre in many of his paintings, Hopper subtly addresses the trials of finding a distinctive artistic project among his contemporaries

1933), pp. 17–18; repeated in an oral history interview with Edward Hopper, conducted by J. Morse, 17 June 1959, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution <<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-edward-hopper-11844>> [accessed 5 Sept. 2015].

<sup>52</sup> G. Pène du Bois, 'The American paintings of Edward Hopper', *Creative Arts*, vi (March 1931), 187–91, at p. 191. Du Bois refers specifically to *Le Soir*.

<sup>53</sup> D. P. Corbett, 'City visions: the urban scene in Camden Town Group and Ashcan School painting', in *The Camden Town Group in Context*, ed. H. Bonnett, Y. Holt and J. Mundy (London, 2012) <<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/camden-town-group/david-peters-corbett-city-visions-the-urban-scene-in-camden-town-group-and-ashcan-school-11104351>> [accessed 25 Aug. 2015].

in the midst of anxieties about artistic influence. Alongside compositional blocking, the emptiness of the settings divides the viewer from access to the city by denying the 'harmonious whole'. This functions to create a sense of personal isolation, as the artist hints tenuously at his own solitary presence in the scene. The spectral quality of figures, the Louvre and indeed the artist himself unsettles the viewer. In the context of Franco-American exchange, Hopper uses his experiments with empty spaces to claim an artistic isolation and to develop his modernist intervention. In the process he intervenes in the cultural conversations about the relationship between French tradition and modern American painting. For Hopper, emptiness acts as an artistic argument that declares his isolation from the world and deliberately separates him from the creative trajectories of other artists, past and present.

## 6. Landscapes of loss: the semantics of empty spaces in contemporary post-apocalyptic fiction

*Martin Walter*

### *Introduction*

The world as we know it has been coming to an end for quite a while – at least on screen. With the rising popularity of apocalyptic films in recent years, motion pictures have not only rendered the devastation of western cities a common sight and a recurring cultural representation, but have also established a new fascination with the aesthetics of destruction. Above all it is their visual appeal which mirrors what Susan Sontag, in her essay on post-World War II science-fiction novels and films, labelled a ‘fantasy of living through one’s own death and more, the death of cities, the destruction of humanity itself’.<sup>1</sup> Instead of voicing social criticism, the destruction would offer a strange feeling of release or catharsis; and being confronted with spaces of emptiness plays an important role: ‘The trump card of the end-of-the-world movies – like *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* (1962) – is that great scene with New York or London or Tokyo discovered empty, its entire population annihilated’.<sup>2</sup>

The spatial visualization of disaster, as it is found in representations of the apocalypse, seems to offer a kind of overbearing presence – or what Vivian Sobchack called the ‘concrete “loftiness”’.<sup>3</sup> The cinematic framing of destruction not only turns it into a strange spectacle, but also provides the onlooker with a rearrangement of a spatial and temporal order, as it engages with and comments on the apocalypse’s effects on social formations such as the family or the community. Working as vehicles of violating or subverting a specific social order, representations of the post-apocalypse usually rely on settings that are increasingly depicted as abandoned, fragmented or

<sup>1</sup> S. Sontag, ‘The imagination of disaster’, in *Liquid Metal: The Science Fiction Film Reader*, ed. S. Redmond (New York, 2007), pp. 40–7, at p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> Sontag, ‘The imagination of disaster’, p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> V. Sobchack, ‘Cities on the edge of time: the urban science-fiction film’, in *Alien Zone II: The Spaces of Science Fiction Cinema*, ed. A. Kuhn (London and New York, 1999), pp. 123–46, at p. 132.

disintegrated, at the same time highlighting the idea that they are products of their respective historical context. This is also reflected in the popularity of survivalist themes or lifestyles which have seen a revival in the form of US shows such as *Doomsday Preppers* (2011–4) or the British documentary *Preppers UK 2* (2013), which introduced the audience to images of burning buildings and police vans from the London riots of 2011.<sup>4</sup> Both series conceived an image of the city as a problem-ridden space that needed to be avoided, which is why escaping from the cities to the empty countryside was repeatedly presented as a major objective.

This chapter explores the functional quality of empty spaces in a number of post-apocalyptic representations, arguing that as part of a wider renegotiation of social orders, fragmented and disintegrated urban and rural spaces work as a means to comment critically on contemporary social formations. Hence they also engage with the persistence of capitalist ideology, especially as manifested in modes of thinking and behavioural patterns.

As part of their engagement and coming-to-terms with a changing environment and society ‘after the end’, post-apocalyptic narratives also mirror what are seemingly perceived as threats to their respective contemporary societies as the characters find themselves reconnecting to a time before the apocalypse. This chapter will take into account a variety of source material from popular culture and will look in particular at the appropriation of empty space in post-apocalyptic landscapes. Two contemporary series will serve as case studies: the popular American zombie series *The Walking Dead* (AMC, 2010–) and the British production *Survivors* (BBC, 2008–10). Both series chronicle the lives of a group of survivors in a post-apocalyptic world. Both also feature protagonists that serve as group leaders: the sheriff Rick Grimes in *The Walking Dead* and the matriarch figure Abby Grant in *Survivors*. In *Survivors* a heavy form of influenza (called the ‘European flu’) kills off ninety per cent of the world’s population, while in *The Walking Dead* an unknown pathogen that everybody – for reasons also largely unknown – already carries brings the dead back ‘to life’. Both series follow their respective group as they travel across the country seeking shelter.

After discussing the popularity of the apocalypse theme, this chapter will take a closer look at the representation of urban and rural spaces. It will argue that the motif of journeying through empty landscapes conveys ideological viewpoints on capitalist spaces. These spaces increasingly address both a

<sup>4</sup> ‘Preppers UK Full UK Documentary 2013’, YouTube, 7 June 2013 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wbO3Nyg2HA4>> [accessed 11 Jan. 2016].



‘perturbed familiarity’<sup>5</sup> and discourses of global (in)security. Through the characters’ nomad-like attitude towards space, that is, their specific form of movement through empty and hostile spaces, the underlying ideological tensions of a post-apocalyptic world are increasingly displayed.

On one hand, visualizations of post-apocalyptic *terra incognita* provide the means of producing a new and fragmented spatiality by renegotiating seemingly natural, everyday social practices. On the other hand, narratives of the apocalypse also contribute to the ‘conspiracy against history’ in that ‘they deny what they pretend to explain’.<sup>6</sup> In other words, while the series take the audience to a breaking point where societal norms are seemingly challenged, once the apocalypse has become reality the overall temporal structures of society (and thus arguably also its ideologies) are shown to remain intact.

In this context, references to empty spaces form part of a larger social commentary that historicizes the moral dilemmas of the apocalypse by oscillating between a form of utopian escapism or ‘apocalyptic anticipation’<sup>7</sup> for a better future and a somewhat retrogressive vision of a near future in which the conflicts and contradictions of the present social order are extrapolated. In this sense, the post-apocalypse does not put an end to capitalism but instead demonstrates its adaptability. In the case of their appropriation of spaces, the series seem to showcase the overall power of capitalist structures and absence of a utopian alternative, mirroring the conclusion of Mark Fisher (in reference to Marx’s vampire simile) that ‘capital is an abstract parasite, an insatiable vampire and zombiemaker’.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the apocalypse depicted in these series usually does not represent *the* end of history but *an* end and thus also relies on spaces that still echo a pre-disaster familiarity.

<sup>5</sup> E. Barros-Grela and M. Bobadilla Pérez, ‘Space and children in post-apocalyptic film: *The Road* and *Les temps du loup*’, in *The Child in Post-Apocalyptic Cinema*, ed. D. Olson (Lanham, Md., 2015), pp. 77–90, at p. 82.

<sup>6</sup> E. Gomel, *Postmodern Science Fiction and Temporal Imagination* (London and New York, 2010), p. 120.

<sup>7</sup> E. Vossen. ‘Laid to rest: romance, end of the world sexuality and apocalyptic anticipation in Robert Kirkman’s *The Walking Dead*’, in *Zombies and Sexuality: Essays on Desire and the Living Dead*, ed. S. McGlotten and S. Jones (Jefferson, N.C., 2014), pp. 88–105, at p. 91.

<sup>8</sup> M. Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Ropley, 2009), p. 15. Marx repeatedly drew on the metaphor of the vampire to explore the exploitative nature and characteristic of modern capitalism of transforming matter into commodities by nourishing itself upon labour, ‘by constantly sucking in living labour as its soul, vampire-like’ (K. Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. M. Nicolaus (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 646). Similarly, Fisher connects late capitalism to a monstrous, inhuman world in which, despite its evident flaws, the system continues to operate, only that ‘the living flesh it converts to dead labour is ours, and the zombies it makes are us’ (Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, p. 15).

### *(Un)familiar spaces?*

In recent years both apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narratives have seen a remarkable resurgence in popular culture on and off screen, provoking some commentators to argue that 'they are so common their impact has been lost'.<sup>9</sup> This is not only reflected in the recurring success of the zombie apocalypse in series like *The Walking Dead* (2010–), blockbuster films like *World War Z* (2013) or the *Resident Evil* (1996–) video-game franchise, but also in genre crossovers such as science-fiction films (*Interstellar*, 2015), the western (*The Book of Eli*, 2010), disaster films (*The Day After Tomorrow*, 2004; *2012*, 2009) or dystopian fiction (*The Hunger Games* series, 2012–5). The post-apocalypse has also seen a revival in novels, for example in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), which tells the story of a father and his son as they travel through an empty, corpse-ridden America that has been hit by an unnamed disaster; Justin Cronin's *The Passage* (2010), which takes place in a post-apocalyptic world of vampires; or eco-feminist works such as Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army* (2007), which explores the consequences of climate change in post-oil Britain. What is more, the topic has proven extremely profitable, with Hollywood post-apocalyptic action blockbusters like *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) grossing over \$378 million.<sup>10</sup>

A closer look at the kind of threats and dangers presented in recent fictional depictions leads to a more general question of where these representations are located in contemporary discourses of apocalypticism and how we may make sense of them. While the immense success of films like *Armageddon* (1998) or *Independence Day* (1996) surely reflected society's 'apocalyptic sensibility',<sup>11</sup> the specific danger of a meteor strike, alien invasion (*War of the Worlds*, 2005; *District 9*, 2009; *Falling Skies*, 2011–5) or zombie apocalypse have become so familiar that audiences hardly seem to question them.

This chapter argues that examining the spatiality of these films can open up an understanding of a subtler trend in the representation of the post-apocalypse: locating ideological implications in representations of familiar spaces. It thus aims to highlight the importance of space, arguing that the representation of seemingly unfamiliar threats is rendered familiar through the implementation of empty and fragmented places, thereby reconnecting rather abstract threats to contemporary social formations like the local

<sup>9</sup> A. Billson, 'Enough of the apocalypse films!', *The Telegraph*, 5 July 2013 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/10160886/Enough-of-the-apocalypse-films.html>> [accessed 11 Jan. 2016].

<sup>10</sup> 'Mad Max: Fury Road', *Box Office Mojo* <<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=furyroad.htm>> [accessed 11 Jan. 2016].

<sup>11</sup> E. R. Rosen, *Apocalyptic Transformation: Apocalypse and the Postmodern Imagination* (Lanham, Md., 2008), p. xii.

community. In this regard, contemporary representations of the apocalypse also contribute to larger discourses on the 'war on terror', especially ideas of security,<sup>12</sup> raising questions about the ideological implications of what Engin Isin called 'the neurotic citizen', who, under the doctrine of neoliberalism, 'is incited to make social and cultural investments to eliminate various dangers by calibrating its conduct on the basis of its anxieties and insecurities rather than rationalities'.<sup>13</sup> Neoliberalism, as a political project informed by a revival of economic liberalist ideas, not only encourages a reconceptualization of individual responsibility but, as Isin argued, has also created a model of citizenship that is governed by unease and anxiety and informed by the pursuit of absolute security. This rise of the neurotic citizen ultimately transforms neoliberal ideas of self-responsibility into claimed rights, that is, the subject's right to absolute security and safety – impossible claims, 'because they articulate rights that cannot exist'.<sup>14</sup> In a post-apocalyptic world, empty spaces not only reflect these anxieties but also amplify the neurotic claims for absolute security, most importantly because in a world that has been 'perverted by apocalyptic signs'<sup>15</sup> and contaminated through the threatening character of emptiness, the claim for safety becomes even more illusory.

An assumed *terra incognita* is always already inscribed with elements of a recent historical past, always already mapped with what has come before. Through their reconstruction of meaning, spaces work as reminders that a reverse process, that is, a return to a previous or a more hostile relationship between people and their environment, is already inscribed upon contemporary society through the use of familiar iconography. While even destroyed cities and abandoned places are thus still able to represent a form of historic continuity as they provide us with a form of recognizable familiarity, their emptiness also reflects an enduring disruption of time and historical order. The preciousness of familiarity is then thwarted by the omnipresent uncanniness of these places.

The apocalypse and Sigmund Freud's idea of the uncanny reveal striking structural similarities. Freud used the term 'uncanny' (German: 'unheimlich', literally 'un-homely') to refer to a situation that is strangely familiar, or to which onlookers feel attracted, but by which they are

<sup>12</sup> A. J. Bellamy, *Security Communities and their Neighbours: Regional Fortresses or Global Integrators?* (Basingstoke and New York, 2004); *Spaces of Security and Insecurity: Geographies of the War on Terror*, ed. A. Ingram and K. Dodds (Farnham, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> E. F. Isin, 'The neurotic citizen', *Citizenship Studies*, viii (2004), 217–35, at p. 223.

<sup>14</sup> Isin, 'The neurotic citizen', p. 233.

<sup>15</sup> Barros-Grela and Bobadilla Pérez, 'Space and children in post-apocalyptic film', p. 82.

repulsed – a phenomenon he called ‘an affair of “reality-testing”’.<sup>16</sup> He argued that uncanniness emerges in periods of transition and, as Nicholas Royle underlined, is often ‘associated with an experience of the threshold, liminality, margins, borders, frontiers’.<sup>17</sup> Through their depiction of seemingly familiar home spaces that have undergone eerie changes, both *The Walking Dead* and *Survivors* highlight the idea that the transformative quality of the apocalypse (re)produces such feelings of reality-testing or situations ‘when “reality” is not “real” [anymore]’.<sup>18</sup> The same feelings of familiarity and security which Freud attributed to the mother’s body<sup>19</sup> become disturbed when the home has been rendered an uncanny space. The following explores the dynamic nature of representational spaces further and works out how the logic of emptiness functions as a means to comment on a changing ideological environment.

### ***The semantics of emptiness***

As a cinematographic feature, emptiness has had a long and continuing history, often contributing to the specific genre conventions of a film. Film noir in particular has extensively relied on empty or abandoned city spaces, such as, for example, the destroyed post-war landscapes of Vienna in *The Third Man* (1949). Moreover, it has also seen a recent revival as part of the ongoing success of post-apocalyptic fiction, such as in the empty city streets of New York City in *I Am Legend* (2009) or the grim landscapes of *The Road*. Drawing particularly on motifs of destruction and decay, the visual aesthetics of emptiness have given a new meaning to empty cities which has also led to an increase in representations of ruins, for example in photography and exhibitions.<sup>20</sup> The industrial city of Detroit and its economic decline have, for instance, become an active canvas for artists on which they inscribe and visualize what has been described as ‘America’s most epic urban failure’,<sup>21</sup> with the city coming ‘to stand for nothing so much as its own emptiness and vulnerability’.<sup>22</sup> Empty spaces, then, not only

<sup>16</sup> S. Freud, quoted in H. Cixous, ‘Fiction and its phantoms: a reading of Freud’s *Das Unheimliche* (The “Uncanny”)', *New Literary History*, vii (1976), 525–48, 619–45, at p. 639.

<sup>17</sup> N. Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester, 2003), p. vii.

<sup>18</sup> M. Germanà and A. Mousoutzanis, ‘Introduction: after the end?’, in *Apocalyptic Discourse in Contemporary Culture: Post-Millennial Perspectives on the End of the World*, ed. M. Germanà and A. Mousoutzanis (New York, 2014), pp. 1–13, at p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Freud, quoted in Cixous, ‘Fiction and its phantoms’, p. 637.

<sup>20</sup> J. Hell and A. Schönle, ‘Introduction’, in *Ruins of Modernity*, ed. J. Hell and A. Schönle (Durham, N.C., 2010), pp. 1–16.

<sup>21</sup> M. Binelli, *The Last Days of Detroit: Motor Cars, Motown and the Collapse of an Industrial Giant* (London, 2013), p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> J. Herron, *AfterCulture: Detroit and the Humiliation of History* (Detroit, Mich., 1993), p. 131.

document the city's painful decline but also mirror what Camilo Vergara has called an 'eerie emptiness'.<sup>23</sup> In the context of urban spaces, emptiness is a familiar and recurring motif, as Dora Apel suggested. Exploring the dynamics of anxiety and sublime beauty that are associated with places of ruin, she argued that post-apocalyptic narratives also 'render our own society as other and encourage us to ask whether the empire of capital represents lasting progress or a road to decline'.<sup>24</sup>

If emptiness has come to be associated with feelings of anxiety or failure and has at the same time become a familiar sight – for example, in the form of empty high streets or abandoned houses – it seems plausible to suggest that images of a post-apocalyptic setting are already 'inscribed' in contemporary discourses of emptiness. In *Living in the End Times* Slavoj Žižek has argued that under the conditions of late capitalism, catastrophe 'is renormalized, perceived as part of the normal run of things, as always already having been possible'.<sup>25</sup> In the wake of the recent 'war on terror' he argued that before 11 September 2001 (or '9/11') the use of torture was 'dismissed as an ethical catastrophe' but that 'once it happened, it retroactively grounded its own possibility, and we immediately got accustomed to it'.<sup>26</sup> Fictional accounts of the apocalypse can also work as reminders that what is presented as a feature of a future society is already an established fact of its extra-textual reality and already present in the form of accepted beliefs and ideologies.

While there is a group dynamic present in many post-apocalyptic narratives, not only does the absence of familiar sights and sounds increase the feeling of unease, but the new spatiality also challenges seemingly natural everyday practices, such as communication between individuals. In the hostile, zombie-ridden environment of *The Walking Dead*, bodily integrity then becomes the primary goal for the group of survivors, as empty city corners, large plains or abandoned buildings become the epitome of risk and danger that may lurk at any and every point.<sup>27</sup>

To a large degree the fragmentary or empty character of spaces symbolizes an omnipresent threat of vulnerability and usually works as a first reminder that the familiarity of spaces has been disturbed. This is apparent in situations

<sup>23</sup> C. J. Vergara and G. Parak, 'Detroit by night: haunting, desolate streetscapes by Camilo José Vergara', *TIME*, 28 Apr. 2014 <<http://time.com/3809052/detroit-by-night-haunting-desolate-streetscapes-by-camilo-jose-vergara/>> [accessed 11 Jan. 2016].

<sup>24</sup> D. Apel, *Beautiful Terrible Ruins: Detroit and the Anxiety of Decline* (New Brunswick, N.J., and London, 2015), p. 152.

<sup>25</sup> S. Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London and New York, 2011 [2010]), p. 328.

<sup>26</sup> S. Žižek, *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle* (London and New York, 2004), p. 63.

<sup>27</sup> A. Kozma, 'Leave it all behind: the post-apocalyptic renunciation of technology in *The Walking Dead*', in *Thinking Dead: What the Zombie Apocalypse Means*, ed. M. Balaji (Lanham, Md., 2013), pp. 141–58, at p. 153.

where the protagonists meet other survivors. Both in *The Walking Dead* and in *Survivors* the immediate danger emanating from abandoned spaces is manifested in the genre conventions as part of which strangers become a possible danger – they are rendered an unfamiliar sight in otherwise empty surroundings. Gordon Coonfield has hinted at the fact that in the largely anonymized space of the city, where people look at their smart phones, meeting strangers is taken for granted ‘as natural, even rational forms of collectivity and social organization’,<sup>28</sup> while historically it was common for face-to-face communities not only to exclude strangers as ‘others’ but also to live in larger isolation. The representation of meeting strangers in these series, then, seemingly reconnects to a historical form of social contact as part of which strangers are not seen as belonging to a suffering collective but are conceived as a threat. Playing around with familiarity leads to feelings of uncanniness in spaces that appear uncontrollable and in which everybody can become a possible danger. Meeting strangers is also symbolic of the post-9/11 notion of ‘the enemy within’.

Both in *The Walking Dead* and *Survivors* the empty and abandoned home works as a symbol of a more general disturbance of order, often visualized through the ritualized performance of returning home – which is rendered a meaningless social practice. When Abby Grant (*Survivors*) awakens in her bedroom, the emptiness and silence of the house at first create an atmosphere of uncanniness. While for a moment the familiarity of the kitchen seems to calm her, she becomes terrified when she finds her husband sitting dead in the living-room chair. Now overwhelmed by panic, she runs outside into the empty street only to find that either her neighbours are dead or their houses are devoid of any living soul, crying out, ‘Oh, God. Please don’t let me be the only one’.<sup>29</sup> Aerial shots of empty city streets also contribute to a disturbance of familiar city scenes. Since in many cases threats are regarded as having originated from the cities, urban spaces are subsequently rendered hostile environments. In *Survivors* this is done by gradually showing how the lights go out as power failures increase, making London seemingly disappear in dead silence. The series thereby not only embodies society’s fears of a ubiquitous yet often unspecific threat but also comments on the idea that in the post-apocalypse – just like in a neoliberal society – the subject has to enhance his own capital and becomes the ‘entrepreneur of himself’.<sup>30</sup> Taking into account that in *The Walking*

<sup>28</sup> G. Coonfield, ‘Perfect strangers: the zombie imaginary and the logic of representation’, in Balaji, *Thinking Dead*, pp. 3–16, at p. 6.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Episode 1’, *Survivors – Series 1*, dir. J. Alexander (BBC, 2009), at 42:18–43:33 [on DVD].

<sup>30</sup> M. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978–1979*, trans. G. Burchell (New York, 2008), p. 226.

*Dead* the threat posed by other humans is equal to, if not more severe than, the danger emanating from the infected, the series takes body politics to another level: by rendering the body an active canvas onto which the neurotic claim for security is projected.

### *Securing the body in urban spaces*

With the ever-present threat of potentially hostile space, *The Walking Dead* and *Survivors* repeatedly reflect discourses about the body, especially the idea of having to secure the body in urban spaces. The imperative of ‘anticipating the catastrophe’ is not only rendered the most important task and subject to a ‘renormalization’, but also actively mapped onto the body, whose integrity, that is, inviolability, becomes the primary goal.

Moreover, in these series, the protagonists are constantly shown ‘conquering’ and making sense of the ruins that surround them. A common reaction can be found in the phenomenon of trying to control urban spaces by using strategies of cocooning – the habit of encapsulating the body – which is again in tune with a more contemporary form of securing the body in everyday life. In *The Walking Dead* it is an SUV that helps the group journeying across the country. Similarly, in *Survivors* the protagonists’ car of choice is a Land Rover – and the characters are not reluctant to emphasize its ‘popularity’ as ‘a post-virus vehicle’,<sup>31</sup> rendering the car a safe, personal space and an embodiment of a ‘portable civilization’.<sup>32</sup>

While in a post-apocalyptic scenario the narrative of course profits from the use of a safe vehicle, its use also challenges the narrative’s own conventions, suggesting that amidst the breakdown of social order there is still a ‘ready-made’ solution to secure the body from the outside world. In the apocalypse, then, the car works as a means of connection to previous notions of safety and security, rendering them ‘automobile-turned-home arrangements’<sup>33</sup> in which an empty and threatening environment can be safely ‘conquered’ – a motif again deeply rooted in American car culture. In the 1977 film adaptation of Roger Zelazny’s novel *Damnation Alley* (1969), a group of survivors are shown driving around post-nuclear American landscapes inhabited by giant scorpions and wrecked by storms in a massive

<sup>31</sup> ‘Episode 3’, *Survivors – Series 2*, dir. D. Evans (BBC, 2010), at 00:06:00–00:06:20 [on DVD].

<sup>32</sup> A. Garnar, ‘Portable civilizations and urban assault vehicles’, *Techné: Jour. Society for Philosophy and Technology*, v (2000), 1–12.

<sup>33</sup> C. Heckman, ‘Roadside “vigil” for the dead: cannibalism, fossil fuels and the American dream’, in *We’re All Infected: Essays on AMC’s ‘The Walking Dead’ and the Fate of the Human*, ed. D. Keetley (Jefferson, N.C., 2014), pp. 95–109, at p. 101. See also J. Urry, ‘The “system” of automobility’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, xxi (2004), 25–39.

twelve-wheel, all-terrain vehicle called a 'Landmaster'. Borrowing heavily from the iconography of road movies, here survival is (rather comically) rendered as a family adventure or road trip in which the apocalypse is nicely 'framed' through the windshield and as part of which the emptiness of the surrounding landscape is presented almost in a panoramic fashion. Yet, the car itself becomes a space of its own, giving the overall impression that it is firmly rooted in a culture of aggression and hostility, as part of which it remains the preferred means of controlling the protagonists' personal environment. The audience thus does not witness a clear break with the pre-apocalyptic order, but instead sees the partial survival of pre-disaster habits and modes of thinking. In some cases these pre-disaster survival tactics reach far back into history, such as when protagonist Daryl Dixon in *The Walking Dead* is shown to be better prepared for the apocalypse thanks to his hunting and tracking skills. The characters' constant movement also adheres to notions of the Guattarian/Deleuzian nomad, roaming through the wilderness. Although the survivors in *The Walking Dead* are occupied with securing their community, the process of turning the new, empty spaces of the apocalypse into safe and sedentary spaces is frequently shown to fail, necessitating a cycle of continual movement. While the migrant's journey usually has a departure and arrival, for Deleuze and Guattari 'the nomad moves on a continuous trajectory where points A and B are merely temporary stops'.<sup>34</sup> This does not mean that the historical process of sedentariness is completely annihilated, but that the audience at least witnesses its temporary reversal, also apparent in the return to a foraging culture and hunting and gathering society. Sedentariness is apparent in the reintroduction of what Deleuze and Guattari called the 'state apparatus' – forms of authority, rules and order. In *The Walking Dead* many of the places are conceived of as gated communities, like the prison, or the fortified town of Woodbury, which is run by the dictator-like figure of the governor, Philip Blake, 'a charismatic, hypocritical and vengeful tyrant'<sup>35</sup> who offers his citizens shelter by using the apocalypse to create an atmosphere of constant terror and fear. While the narrative has the audience believe that the group is constantly escaping the threatening emptiness of the open space – which is mirrored in the fact that these places turn out to be already populated – this circumstance is thwarted by the fact that the group constantly fail to secure these places or to make them a home.

<sup>34</sup> E. Aldea, *Magical Realism and Deleuze: the Indiscernibility of Difference in Postcolonial Literature* (London, 2011), p. 129.

<sup>35</sup> B. A. Patrick, *Zombology: Zombies and the Decline of the West (and Guns)* (London, 2014), p. 137.



Temporarily, then, the series bears overtones of how the appropriation of new and empty spaces is linked to violence and defence<sup>36</sup> and thus implicitly constructs nomadism as a moral yet problematic imperative, ultimately suggesting that mobility is a desired norm and the only road to survival and safety (if only temporary). This is apparent when, in large parts of *The Walking Dead*, the characters are shown returning to their roaming existence.

This type of series also borrows motifs from the repertoire of western iconography, 'especially the wagon train sagas beset by swarms of attacking Indians'.<sup>37</sup> The spaces' significance is, then, also never fixed but usually subject to constant change as the characters move on into the lawlessness of the open space. This organization of the landscape prominently surfaces in the rearranging of social formations and the subsequent conflicts, chiefly because – to stay within the terminology – the nomad opposes the state and becomes 'an example of a successful warrior against all kinds of oppression by any majority and any authoritarian discourse'.<sup>38</sup> This also means that the narrative frequently shows the characters trying to reconnect to a former time, that is, their personal history 'before the events'. Moreover, raising questions of how the body can best be protected in empty spaces, *The Walking Dead* also reflects on issues of surveillance and security culture, especially through the characters' constant monitoring of their environment.

The motif of the journey is not just a convenient means to move the narrative to another setting: it also introduces us to the unfamiliarity of post-apocalyptic space, from which we can then establish a feeling of loss. In both series this is shown by having the group move away from the centre to the surrounding edgelands. Following this 'unwritten law' of apocalyptic fiction, moving to the fringes is commonly seen as a form of securing the body, while urban settlements are often rendered as dangerous places – even if the destructive forces of the apocalypse have largely suspended the logics of an urban-rural dichotomy. At the same time, the motif of the journey also adheres to notions of 'the conquest', as part of which the group are continuously shown to penetrate and appropriate new and empty spaces. The post-apocalypse thereby not only comments on the way society relates to its urban environment, but reconnects the trope of the abandoned city to history. The exodus from the city reverses the rural out-migration and

<sup>36</sup> G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. B. Massumi (London and New York, 2004), p. 420.

<sup>37</sup> G. Desilet, *Screens of Blood: A Critical Approach to Film and Television Violence* (Jefferson, N.C., 2014), p. 171.

<sup>38</sup> S. Pekerman, 'The schizoanalysis of European surveillance films', in *Deleuze and Film*, ed. D. Martin-Jones and W. Brown (Edinburgh, 2012), pp. 121–36, at p. 122.

consequent growth of urban settlements during the age of industrialization and has the characters actively striving for a newly arranged spatiality as part of which the rural countryside takes on new significance. Not only do processes of cocooning turn out to be a problem in the cities, but the survival of the community, and thus civilization, is discursively framed to be connected to the flight from urban surroundings. Initial hopes of reconnecting to familiar surroundings and practices are thus set up to be difficult and disturbing because under the rules of the apocalypse spaces are frequently shown to be emptied of their previous ideological symbolism – a phenomenon that is especially present in the appropriation of spaces of global capitalism.<sup>39</sup>

### ***The ambivalence of empty capitalist spaces***

*The Walking Dead* and *Survivors* hint most prominently at the disturbed character of seemingly everyday habits and their implications for practices of consumption. The representation of empty consumerist places in post-apocalypse narratives renders these places not only eerie but also ambivalent, as it challenges their supposedly primary function. While in everyday life the absence of people and empty cash desks in a supermarket may at least come in handy or represent a 'pleasurable daydream of what a viewer might do should they find themselves free-range in their local mall',<sup>40</sup> in apocalyptic movies and series the absence of people leads to a feeling of unease and explores the logic of public and private places. In a world where resources are rare and people scavenge for food, a supermarket seems to offer a safe haven of supplies and allows the characters to embrace the familiar surroundings of commodity culture. In the British zombie film *28 Days Later* the protagonists discover an empty supermarket and indulge in an extensive shopping tour, like children in a toy store, and also digress from class-related buying behaviour. When the protagonist Jim, a bicycle courier, stands by the drinks counter, picking up a bottle of cheap whiskey, the cab driver Frank responds: 'Put that back. We can't just take any crap'.<sup>41</sup> Instead, he takes a bottle of Lagavulin and reads off the advertising text from the label: 'Single malt. Sixteen years old. Dark, full flavour. Warm, but not

<sup>39</sup> D. Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (London and New York, 2006).

<sup>40</sup> M. Molesworth, 'First person shoppers: consumer ways of seeing in videogames', in *Digital Virtual Consumption*, ed. M. Molesworth and J. Denegri-Knott (New York and London, 2012), pp. 60–75, at p. 61.

<sup>41</sup> *28 Days Later* [DNA Films/British Film Council], dir. Danny Boyle, UK, 2002, at 46:15–00:46:20 [on DVD].

aggressive. Peaty aftertaste'.<sup>42</sup> Despite its comic effect, the emptiness of the place repeatedly serves as a reminder that under the rules of the apocalypse their seemingly 'normal' habit is a relic of the past. What is more, the empty supermarket's full shelves – in a reverse fashion – also briefly explore a kind of utopian fantasy of freedom that consumer culture is able to supply – provided one has the financial means.

The familiar emotional intimacy that characters feel in the practice of 'going shopping' is constantly disturbed. In *Survivors*, when the protagonists arrive at a local supermarket – clearly shown to be a Netto discount supermarket – the familiarity of the place quickly gives way to a sudden moment of shock when, inside the market, a dead body with a sign around his neck saying 'looter' hangs from the ceiling. Outside they are met by a gang led by a man called Dexter who has claimed ownership of the place and subsequently threatens the group:

Dexter: Doing a bit of shopping?

Greg: We needed food and drink.

Dexter: So you thought you'd just steal it?

Greg: What?

Dexter: People have to know this place belongs to us. They need to respect our property. You need to give that back now!<sup>43</sup>

The series employs a now well-known and recurring motif of the post-apocalypse – the fight over resources – that allows for significant social critique. Similarly to the zombie films of George Romero (*Night of the Living Dead*, 1968; *Dawn of the Dead*, 1978), which used the motif of the zombie to mock and satirize American consumerist and capitalist society, *The Walking Dead* and *Survivors* both embrace a more familiar setting of the apocalypse. While in the latter series the global aspect of the plague always lingers in the background – illustrated by the opening credits in which an image of the depopulated earth is seen from space – the series quickly abandons the motif and shifts the focus to a specific locality where, in a somewhat accelerated approach, the inner and outer workings of capitalist society are being restaged and openly displayed, most explicitly when the different groups claim ownership over food supplies.

In *The Walking Dead* the group's desire to escape to a safe haven, home, or a space they can call 'their own', which has the protagonists constantly

<sup>42</sup> Boyle, *28 Days Later*, at 00:46:27–00:46:40.

<sup>43</sup> 'Episode 2', *Survivors – Series 1* [BBC], dir. A. Gunn, 2009, at 00:04:32–00:04:55 [on DVD].

showcasing a nomad-like quality, is rendered a false hope or promise. While the persistence of capitalist behaviour and thinking is apparent in the survival of property, at least for the group 'home' increasingly becomes an outdated concept and dangerous enterprise. When the group find an abandoned-looking prison Rick refers to it as 'a goldmine';<sup>44</sup> however, they soon find out that a group of surviving inmates also claim ownership over it. Here, the aspect of securing the body from the bigger threat becomes more important while the claiming of ownership again alludes to the survival of capitalist structures. The claiming of property is taken to extremes with the introduction of an antagonistic group in season four called 'The Claimers', who live according to the premise that taking goods from others is easier than finding things on their own.

A more general reading of the 'zombifying' effects of capitalism is showcased in the finale of season two that sees the group moving to a farm run by veterinarian Hershel Greene. While his farm represents a form of edgeland, an isolated, almost utopian space embodying pre-industrial forms of labour away from any urban settlement, it is eventually attacked by a massive horde of zombies, so that the remaining survivors have to scatter individually into the surrounding forests before they reunite on a nearby empty highway. Once reunited, Rick Grimes confronts the group with the knowledge that 'we're all infected [...]. Whatever it is, we all carry it'.<sup>45</sup>

The narrative serves as a commentary on the global dynamics of capitalist crises, especially capitalism's adaptability and persistence. If we return to Mark Fisher's reading of capitalism as the 'insatiable vampire and zombiemaker', which argues that zombies come to stand for everything that is wrong with modern capitalism but that capitalism keeps shambling along nonetheless, then capitalism is also rendered a form of internalized structure from which there is no escape: it is zombie-like in that its aesthetics follow the idea that people are left to fight for themselves and – in the case of *The Walking Dead*, in which everybody is already a carrier of the virus – presents this outlook as being without any alternative. Ultimately, then, becoming a zombie is conceptually rendered a form of medicalized condition from which there is no escape. That is, while the series displays the emptiness of capitalism, it simultaneously points out the lack of alternatives. With the group repeatedly struggling with their new self-identity, the series also renders forms of collectivity increasingly problematic in the aftermath of the apocalypse, culminating in the decaying authority of Rick Grimes, who,

<sup>44</sup> 'Seed', *The Walking Dead – The Complete Third Season* [AMC Studios et al.], dir. E. Dickerson, 2013, season 3, episode 1, at 00:17:20–00:18:30 [Blu-ray].

<sup>45</sup> 'Beside the dying fire', *The Walking Dead – The Complete Second Season* [AMC Studios et al.], dir. E. Dickerson, 2012, season 2, episode 13, at 00:32:00–00:32:30 [Blu-ray].

after the group has escaped from the farm into the wilderness, reminds the community that '[i]f you're staying, this isn't a democracy anymore'.<sup>46</sup> The motif of the zombies overrunning the seemingly safe farm is again linked to the perturbation of familiarity in empty spaces and the uncanny persistence of history. Reconnecting to a pastoral-like, bygone age has proven to be illusory if the farm as a 'homely' symbol of peace is suddenly linked to feelings of anxiety. The empty spaces of the surrounding landscapes thus invert the idea of a rural haven or the desire to return to familiar surroundings.<sup>47</sup> This desire is never realized and constantly postponed, mainly because the 'new society' is revealed to be as corrupt as the old. At the same time, the perverted, nomad-like quality of the characters who cannot find peace and have been 'rejected by the established order'<sup>48</sup> offers a critical reading of the neoliberal politics of mobility and migration, that is, their effects on identity-making under globalized hyper-capitalism: *The Walking Dead* and *Survivors* both highlight the persistence of capitalism's social and economic mechanisms, which manifest themselves in the characters' endless roaming of spaces. At the same time, their nomadic existence is symbolic of historic phases of mobility and displacement, most prominently in the protagonists' adherence to a hunter-gatherer lifestyle and the fact that meeting strangers is usually not devoid of violence. On their journey through empty spaces the protagonists not only come to embody the exclusionary logic of migration and the tension between the 'old' social order and the need to adapt to a 'new' world, but also reveal the problematic nature of what it means to live in a state of permanent uncertainty.

### **Conclusion**

While in the context of the larger socio-economic framework we have seen that the abandoned-earth trope may be read as commenting on discourses of security, bodily integrity or the question of systemic alternatives in a post-apocalyptic world, the question remains as to what extent post-apocalyptic fiction may also offer a form of hope. In showcasing the continuous struggle over resources and living space, the series have the audience believe that while to some extent 'those [old] rules don't apply anymore',<sup>49</sup> reconnecting to previous forms of societal living can be an option. This is apparent in

<sup>46</sup> 'Beside the dying fire', at 00:41:00–00:41:40.

<sup>47</sup> Cixous, 'Fiction and its phantoms', p. 620.

<sup>48</sup> E. W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London, 1994), p. 403.

<sup>49</sup> 'Guts', *The Walking Dead – The Complete Second Season*, episode 2, season 1, at 23:00 [Blu-ray]. See also A. Barkman, 'I don't think those rules apply anymore', in *The Walking Dead and Philosophy: Zombie Apocalypse Now*, ed. W. Yuen (Chicago and LaSalle, Ill., 2012), pp. 207–16, at p. 207.

the ways of claiming ownership (over spaces and resources), but also in the nostalgic notions of what it means to belong to a family, group or community.

However, both *The Walking Dead* and *Survivors* reveal the temporary nature of finding hope in their surroundings, especially through reconnecting to elements of social formation that bear a 'pre-apocalypse' nature and by ascribing new meaning to the question of belonging. The motif of hope is, then, consistently attached to specific environments in which the characters either actively produce new spatialities or reconnect to more classic tropes of escapism and security. In *Survivors* rural parts of England repeatedly come to stand for notions of a more traditional trope, that of embodying 'the symbolic status as the idyllic alternative to urban environments'.<sup>50</sup> This means that while empty cities are usually perceived as dangerous, the symbolism of an empty countryside is juxtaposed onto the anxieties and fears of urban settlements. In both series the emptiness of the surrounding countryside and the journeying motif function at least as elements of short-term relief and tranquillity, while the empty road is not exclusively symbolic of post-apocalyptic displacement but may also signify a path to a new and safe future. However, the series frequently allude to the notion that hope is fragile and impermanent. In *Survivors* the group finds temporary shelter in an eco-compound run by the last government minister and antagonist Samantha Willis, who, despite trying to restore order in the form of a provisional government, has people killed for stealing food and hands over convicts to slave labour.

What is more, being confronted with emptiness proves to be an ongoing difficulty leading to a pre-apocalyptic nostalgia, which is linked to earlier social formations that suddenly become deeply desirable, as voiced by Al Sadiq and Sarah Boyer when they overlook the emptiness from a small hill:

Al Sadiq: Never get quite used to it, do you? The emptiness. No-one left.

Sarah Boyer: I think about things differently now everyone's gone. All my girlfriends going on all the time about getting married, having babies, settling down. It all seemed so boring. Now I think ... I'd like to one day. You know ... maybe with someone. Have kids.<sup>51</sup>

Similarly, as in *The Walking Dead*, in which Lori Grimes, Rick's wife, gives birth to her daughter Judith and the offspring symbolizes a new form of hope, elements of the nuclear family and hetero-normative gender

<sup>50</sup> M. Bunce, 'Reproducing rural idylls', in *Country Visions*, ed. P. Cloke (Harlow, 2003), pp. 14–30, at p. 17.

<sup>51</sup> 'Episode 4', *Survivors – Series 2*, at 00:05:42–0:06:40.

roles continue to exist, at least partly, as a social norm amidst the post-apocalypse landscape,<sup>52</sup> most importantly displayed when, in *The Walking Dead*, protecting Lori and the baby in a less than desirable world becomes the habitual quest of the group. Both series also give new signification to emptiness by alluding to the idea that repopulating the earth is a post-apocalyptic imperative.

Moreover, the significance of space is increasingly shown to be directly linked to the idea of bodily security, with the series suggesting that securing a place goes along with securing the body. In *The Walking Dead* rurality can offer a form of short-term escapism from the hostile environment of an Atlanta that was overrun by the infected; however, this idea is later spoiled when the group realizes that everybody is already infected, which also renders the seemingly safe, rural, Georgian countryside a dangerous space. Here the apocalypse quite literally 'reveals' underlying 'truths' about contemporary society and that 'sticking to pre-made ideas will get you killed'.<sup>53</sup> In the wastelands and empty spaces of the post-apocalypse, however, the coming-to-terms with a changed environment is no smooth transition between the old model of social order and the rebuilding of a new world. Rather, it is a constant negotiation of seemingly outdated practices and nostalgic dreams and the quick adaptation to the new, post-apocalyptic milieu. This chapter has shown that empty spaces in post-apocalyptic television series serve to comment on the complex dynamics of spaces under the logic of late capitalism, apparent in the fact that the substantial recreation of order is shown to be increasingly complicated and any alternative ultimately rendered a form of phantasm and uncanny endeavour. Analysis of the series has highlighted that the spatiality of both *The Walking Dead* and *Survivors* not only reveals the ideological implications of what were once familiar spaces, but that emptiness works as a strong commentary that historicizes the dilemmas of a post-apocalyptic environment. Oscillating between a nostalgic wish to return to a bygone age and the survival of pre-disaster modes of thinking, emptiness amplifies the persistence and thus adaptability of capitalist forces and displays their ideological normalization. Amidst the discourse of loss that accompanies the process of rebuilding society, capitalism ultimately remains the dominant symbolic order, complicating the series' inherent hope for a better future and safe home. At the same time, the series' use of emptiness and the characters' nomadic lifestyle render the protagonists powerful examples of the neurotic citizen

<sup>52</sup> C. Hannabach, 'Queering and crippling the end of the world: disability, sex, and race in *The Walking Dead*', in McGlotten and Jones, *Zombies and Sexuality*, pp. 106–22, at p. 109.

<sup>53</sup> B. Kempner, 'The optimism of *The Walking Dead*', in Yuen, *The Walking Dead and Philosophy*, pp. 141–54, at p. 142.

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who is left in a constant state of apprehension and fear and is, in the end, unable to cope with the trials and tribulations of an altered everyday life.



## 7. Surveying the creative use of vacant space in London, c.1945–95\*

*Krystallia Kamvasinou and Sarah Ann Milne*

Some of the best things happen in the unplanned spaces. There is a tribe in Africa, that when they build their houses they always build one room that they have not planned for – and that is where something creative happens. And in a similar way when we made our skip garden, where we’ve now got our kitchen and our café, we didn’t know what was going to be there in that space, it was empty space. So I’m quite interested in that whole designing in empty space, and then in the same way, you could say, actually enabling ourselves to find that empty space within ourselves ... we can come back to zero, creating the conditions for creativity. (Jane Riddiford, Global Generation CEO, 2013)

### *Introduction*

Emptiness does not sit easily within conventional histories of the city. The fields of architecture and urban planning are by definition preoccupied with filling in empty space, transforming the unoccupied into the inhabited, the unproductive into the functional, the empty into the built.<sup>1</sup> Challenging these dominant narratives, this chapter looks at the ‘unofficial’ history

\* This chapter forms part of a research project funded by the Leverhulme Trust focusing on ‘Interim spaces and creative use’ (Oct. 2012–March 2015). The research proposal stemmed from an ongoing interest in alternative uses and readings of vacant land (see K. Kamvasinou, ‘Vague parks: the politics of late twentieth-century urban landscapes’, *Architectural Research Quarterly*, x (2006), 255–62; and K. Kamvasinou, ‘The public value of vacant urban land’, *Municipal Engineer*, clxiv (2011), 157–66). It was, however, propelled forward by (and particularly well-timed with) London’s temporary land-use initiatives in the recession period 2008–12 (some of which were on development sites and paradoxically developer-led). The project investigated a number of present-day initiatives sited on vacant land in London. Conscious of the long history but ephemeral nature and hence scarce documentation of past temporary occupations, the project strategically documented the temporary initiatives through interviews, film, site surveys and photographs.

<sup>1</sup> I. de Solà-Morales Rubio, ‘Terrain vague’, in *Anyplace*, ed. C. C. Davidson (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), pp. 118–23.

K. Kamvasinou and S. A. Milne. ‘Surveying the creative use of vacant space in London, c.1945–95’, in *Empty Spaces: perspectives on emptiness in modern history*, ed. C. J. Campbell, A. Giovine and J. Keating (London, 2019), pp. 151–77. License: CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0.

of empty space in cities. It particularly addresses what, in urban design terms, is called 'vacant land', namely unbuilt-on, leftover or derelict land. In contrast to the perception of 'vacancy' as 'emptiness' to be filled, we take it that, historically, the 'empty space' of vacant land has actually often been full of life, activity and/or busy with natural processes and hence a *landscape of potential*.<sup>2</sup> This potential describes the freedom availed by, and the ability of, vacant land to accommodate informal activities, from walking the dog to creative play, and to offer opportunities for open and social space in densely built urban environments. This potential, however, remains invisible to those who perceive vacant land purely as an economic asset and therefore valuable only insofar as it can be explored to create measurable profit, through built development, rather than for its contribution to green open space or community participation. Vacancy can thus evoke the fear of failure, lack of productivity and waste if one focuses solely on economic value. The chapter contends that it is only when the relative 'emptiness' of these spaces is recognized by a range of citizens and organizations that valuable local transformations will occur. It points to the possibility of shaping the city not only through top-down planning and design action but also through its citizens' smaller acts of change in their local empty spaces.

Current debates in the fields of urban planning and architecture highlight the value of temporary uses of vacant urban land; such uses were promoted during the recent recession in London (c.2008) in order to bring back life to stalled vacant sites. While the recession on one hand acted as a catalyst for releasing private land on temporary leases to community organizations, on the other hand these temporary initiatives were taking place in an environment where collective knowledge of the importance of sustainability and environmental awareness was mainstream. The specific purpose of this chapter is hence to contextualize these contemporary trends against the wider historical background of the temporary uses of vacant urban space and their legacies. The chapter investigates the historical precedents of such initiatives and traces an evolution in perceptions of vacant land, looking at examples from post-war London. We propose a reconsideration of the local value of vacant urban plots, showing how a positive view attuned to the subtleties of such spaces has frequently been placed in opposition to those held by institutions (for example, by local authorities) and by house builders, developers or adjacent landlords in pursuit of profit. Our

<sup>2</sup> K. Kamvasinou, 'Reimagining interim landscapes', in *Emerging Landscapes: Between Production and Representation*, ed. D. Deriu, K. Kamvasinou and E. Shinkle (Farnham, 2014), pp. 147–59, at p. 147.

examples, and the developing trajectories of temporary land use in London, demonstrate a progressive intermingling of these supposed conflicts. In this way the research observes patterns of appropriating empty space through uses which go beyond 'original' meanings or intended uses for vacant sites and identifies temporariness as a characteristic of emptiness in the longer-term urban development cycle.

More specifically, through examples of creative use of vacant urban space that range from artistic workshops to community gardening, the chapter will chart the post-war history of 'emptiness' in London, including the post-war reconstruction years; the 1960s' countercultural projects; the 1970s' post-countercultural community garden movement and the urban ecology turn; and the 1980s' global environmental awareness in the lead up to the 1990s' regeneration boom. Within this historical context we shall analyse five historical precedents from London – some of them truly temporary and others that have managed to endure – as indicative of how 'emptiness' can be a highly negotiable term and deployed for different purposes. Bringing these diverse initiatives together allows an exploration of how the concept of emptiness has increasingly become a point of connection between different local groups, as demonstrated through a growing appreciation of vacant sites as landscapes of potential.

This historical review also connects to wider movements worldwide, particularly those in the United States and Europe, where a direct influence on the London projects can be established. Key emerging themes that provide insights into practices and ideologies relating to 'emptiness' will be discussed and their legacies for contemporary urban projects identified. Taken together, we propose that there has been a historical evolution in how 'empty space' has been discovered, made visible and reimagined in twentieth-century London and highlight its relevance for today's vacant urban spaces.

### ***Conceptualizing empty space in the city***

Positive connotations of empty space have not always been so forthcoming in urban studies as they appear to be at the present time. Terms such as 'urban voids' and 'cracks in the city',<sup>3</sup> utilized in architecture and urban-design literature during the 1980s to 1990s, clearly associated vacant land with the failures of modernism as a movement in city design. Out of this movement sprang a rhetoric which emphasized the rigid separation of land uses and an

<sup>3</sup> A. Loukaitou-Sideris, 'Cracks in the city: addressing the constraints and potentials of urban design', *Jour. Urban Design*, i (1996), 91–103.

inflexible focus on form, often leading to ‘lost space’,<sup>4</sup> ‘wastelands’, ‘wasted space’ and abandoned and dysfunctional urban spaces. In response to these conditions, a key notion, that of ‘terrain vague’,<sup>5</sup> coined by architect and academic Ignasi de Solà-Morales, marked a shift away from earlier negative readings of empty space and instead perceived vacancy as freedom and possibility. It represented an alternative approach to derelict post-industrial landscapes and decommissioned infrastructure works, advocating a sense of continuity rather than elimination and building-over. Notably, Solà-Morales celebrated the indeterminate character of these spaces. This coincided with a period of intense urban regeneration when large-scale projects of revitalization were pushed high on the European agenda, but such schemes were often uncritically delivered in places with special historical conditions of abandonment, such as war-torn areas. What Solà-Morales suggested is that empty spaces, acted upon by informal agencies of change, have lessons for the practice of architecture and urban design that go beyond form-making and the arbitrary imposition of transformations. He proposed that such empty spaces are live representations of time passing and that these passages leave marks on the city which should be acknowledged in expectations for the future.

Developing from the freedom and possibility implied in the theoretical adoption of ‘terrain vague’, recent literature on ‘temporary urbanism’<sup>6</sup> and ‘loose space’,<sup>7</sup> ‘urban wildscapes’<sup>8</sup> and urban agriculture<sup>9</sup> has continued to see the potentiality of vacant land as a container for temporary activities that may influence longer term processes of city shaping. Either formal or informal, temporariness has been noted as a characteristic of such empty space. The environmental and social importance and low management costs of these spaces have also been highlighted. For example, vacant land used for gardening and food-growing seems to follow a cyclical itinerary, supported by the public at times of social and economic crisis but disappearing in affluent times. Laura J. Lawson has termed this movement ‘city bountiful’, pointing to the ‘subtle transformation in how we conceptualize our cities as land resources and social action’ as opposed to the well-known ‘city

<sup>4</sup> R. Trancik, *Finding Lost Space: Theories of Urban Design* (New York, 1986).

<sup>5</sup> Solà-Morales, ‘Terrain vague’.

<sup>6</sup> J. Groth and E. Corijn, ‘Reclaiming urbanity: indeterminate spaces, informal actors and urban agenda setting’, *Urban Studies*, xlii (2005), 503–26.

<sup>7</sup> *Loose Space: Possibility and Diversity in Urban Life*, ed. K. A. Franck and Q. Stevens (Abingdon, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> *Urban Wildscapes*, ed. A. Jorgensen and R. Keenan (Abingdon, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> A. Viljoen, K. Bohn, and J. Howe, *Continuous Productive Urban Landscapes (CPULs): Designing Urban Agriculture for Sustainable Cities* (Oxford, 2005).

beautiful’ movement at the turn of the twentieth century, which aimed at ‘reordering the city through grand plans of physical improvements and reform’.<sup>10</sup> For ‘city bountiful’, vacant land is not considered waste but rather an opportunity for food production and social engagement through the process of gardening. The temporariness associated with vacant land imbues these actions with a further sense of urgency and purpose.

The conceptualization of vacant land as a vessel for temporary experimentation and social engagement, of what could be termed ‘expectant emptiness’, has not always been straightforward. Three decades ago in his book *The Greening of the Cities*, David Nicholson-Lord contended that ‘[t]he tininess of so many sites, testimony to an erosion of the city almost geological in its gradualness, goes some way to explaining the peculiar invisibility of the issues at stake ... It takes imagination ... or a riot to remove the mental cossetting of the metropolitan commuter’.<sup>11</sup> What is important here is the implicit idea of *reimagining* empty space as a creative act. Nicholson-Lord referenced Jane Jacobs’s *The Economy of Cities* as he suggested that innovation occurs most easily in unregulated environments. He extended this line of reasoning to describe the importance of the *perception* of such environments. Typically, for example, the perceptions of a private house-builder and a community arts organization of the same urban site are divergent. For the private house-builder, empty brownfield sites are potential economic assets, but their emptiness is also implicitly complicated, associated with, for instance, contamination, legal-ownership issues and other liabilities.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, an artist, unpreoccupied by such complications, might see empty space as an opportunity for innovation and experimentation. On this basis it is therefore unsurprising that artists were among the quickest to react to the spatial implications of industrial decline in English post-war cities. Indeed, three of our historical precedents<sup>13</sup> represent pioneering community arts organizations willing to engage with communities on tight urban sites and happy to work against the grain of planning regulations and institutional structures. This group in particular, it seems, sparked the discovery and the reimagining of the short-term use of unoccupied city land in the post-war context. Our current conceptualization of empty space in the city owes much to their exploratory contributions.

<sup>10</sup> L. J. Lawson, *City Bountiful: a Century of Community Gardening in America* (Berkeley, Calif., 2005), pp. xv–xvi.

<sup>11</sup> D. Nicholson-Lord, *The Greening of the Cities* (London and New York, 1987), p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Nicholson-Lord, *Greening*, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Action Space (various projects, 1968–78); Meanwhile Gardens (1976–); and Hackney Grove Gardens (1982–c.1996).

### *Methodological framework*

The biggest methodological challenge confronting our study of ‘empty spaces’ is their ephemerality. In most cases the projects we survey in this chapter only lasted for a few days, months or years and are no longer in existence. The transient nature of these urban spaces is accentuated by their situation in a city with a highly mobile population. Oral testimonies to their character are easily lost after a generation, while unassuming references to their existence are covered over by piles of paper documenting far more monumental developments. And yet, despite the fact that they leave few documentary traces and even those often appear precarious and under threat, modest projects on small urban sites are still often locally remembered and, in fact, built upon by present-day initiatives. The longevity of collective memories relating to these short projects, alongside observations of their spatial legacy, substantiate their place in a spectrum of possible uses for such spaces. Contemporary project initiators, interviewed as part of our recent fieldwork in London, frequently made reference to the creative temporary use of vacant spaces in the past.<sup>14</sup> For a number of these present-day initiators, awareness of this history has acted as a source of inspiration and provided a sense of rightful cause, spurred on by connection to a longer-term legacy. This explicit link to the past has implications for reimagining empty space within the context of contemporary city design. Surveying the history of the creative use of vacant space has thus confirmed a well-known trajectory in city regeneration. The reimagining of ‘emptiness’ can be traced from the few charismatic individuals seeing the potential in empty space, usually artists or activists, to wider community involvement and appropriation and finally to the city decision-makers taking stock – and action.

Initially, we used oral accounts of interviewees from present-day projects to locate similar, indicative examples from London’s post-war history. The projects compiled in this chapter have been documented either in publications or by primary-source archival material.<sup>15</sup> The chapter therefore brings to light a number of specific alternative uses of vacant sites, situating them alongside broader narratives of urban change in order to sketch out an ‘unofficial’ history of empty space in post-war London.

<sup>14</sup> E.g., Paul Richens, garden manager from the Skip Garden, London, refers to the legacy of gardening and food-growing during the war and in the immediate post-war years (interview with authors, 3 Dec. 2013). Hamish Liddle, garden club leader from Abbey Gardens, London, refers to the Plaistow Land Grabbers and the Triangle Camp, which inspired the current design of Abbey Gardens (interview with authors, 2 Nov. 2013).

<sup>15</sup> E.g., one of our original contributors mentioned Jerry Cooper of the Hackney Grove Gardens project, whom we subsequently interviewed.

### ***Post-war planning and the rise of countercultural emptiness***

The impact of World War II on both British culture and space has been thoroughly discussed elsewhere, and the spirit of resourcefulness that emerged as a result of these years of dearth is especially important in the context of urban space.<sup>16</sup> Widespread practices of adaptation and flexibility in everyday life appear to have fostered a more sustained and creative use of empty urban space. Temporary use of vacant land had been pivotal to the survival of London during World War II, with initiatives such as *Dig for Victory* fundamental not only in the bolstering of morale but also in the practical provision of food for the nation.<sup>17</sup> However, in the post-war period interest in gardening and digging declined. As the city counted the cost of its bombed sites scattered throughout old housing stock and industrial land, the emphasis instead turned to reconstruction. Most post-war reconstruction in the UK was led by local authorities and in London by the London County Council (LCC, 1889–1965) and later the Greater London Council (GLC, 1965–86). Their policies were initially influenced by radical political ideas with an emphasis on the importance of the public sector rather than philanthropists, leading the processes of reconstruction through the acquisition of land and investment in housing and planning.<sup>18</sup> These policies were implemented using legislation and the power of the state, with land moving to public ownership through compulsory purchase and housing development projects receiving state funding. Despite its public emphasis, planning policy in these years did not always provide for local communities, with many sites lying derelict for decades before temporary appropriation by citizens. Slum clearances led to tensions between communities and the state, without necessarily resulting in better living conditions or housing projects. Sites were ‘cleared’ and ‘emptied’ but not always reconstructed. In fact, geographer Alice Coleman suggested that post-war planning, despite its intensive efforts and massive expenditure, led

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., *The Blitz and Its Legacy: Wartime Destruction to Post-War Reconstruction*, ed. M. Clapson and P. J. Larkham (Farnham, 2013); *Alternative Visions of Post-War Reconstruction: Creating Modern Townscape*, ed. E. Erten, J. Pendlebury and P. J. Larkham (Abingdon, 2015); *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War*, ed. L. Noakes and J. Pattinson (London, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> R. Minns, *Bombers and Mash: the Domestic Front 1939–1945* (London, 1980).

<sup>18</sup> D. Bowie, ‘Working class politics in London and land, planning and housing reform’, paper presented at *Mobilising London’s Housing Histories*, conference at the Institute of Historical Research, University of London, 27–28 June 2013, <<https://www.history.ac.uk/podcasts/mobilising-londons-housing-histories-provision-homes-1850>>. [accessed 5 Jan. 2019]. See also D. Bowie, *The Radical and Socialist Tradition in British Planning – From Puritan Colonies to Garden Cities* (London, 2017).

to the gradual death of inner-city areas in London.<sup>19</sup>

Still characterized by haphazard post-war recovery, the decline of the manufacturing industry and subsequent loss of jobs from the early 1960s led to the progressive emptying of people from inner-city London. Between 1961 and 1981 inner London experienced a population loss of one third – almost one million people. This resulted in an unprecedented ‘freeing of space’.<sup>20</sup> In her study of land-use changes in Britain since World War II, Coleman looked at the inner London borough of Tower Hamlets and found that what she called ‘dead and disturbed space’ had tripled between 1964 and 1977.<sup>21</sup>

However, the early 1960s also gave birth to the environmental movement, with its distinct take on the protection of the planet and the shaping of cities.<sup>22</sup> As George McKay put it in *Radical Gardening*, oblivious to the ‘emptying’ trends in cities, or perhaps because of them, the horti-counterculture of this decade with its ‘articulation of “flower power”’ led to the celebration of the ‘empty space’ of the garden ‘as space of environmental consciousness’.<sup>23</sup> Abundant vacant spaces proved to be fertile test grounds for new gardening and art practices which embodied distinctly environmental ideologies rather than being purely recreational. An emphasis on ‘alternative technology’ resulted in an ‘environmentally-informed’ culture which has since become mainstream: for example, the use of the sun, wind and rivers for energy, or the prioritization of local materials and recycling.<sup>24</sup> Communal living was characteristic of the counterculture movement and interlinked with these practices, especially drawing in art collectives that advocated art in service of a social purpose. ‘Environmental activism’ and ‘sustainable practice’ are hence a clear legacy of these years with echoes in more recent urban projects.<sup>25</sup>

Simultaneously, in 1960s London the ‘Hyde Park Diggers’ were drawing on an alternative legacy from the past in direct reference to San Francisco’s ‘American Diggers’, who had themselves revived the actions of Britain’s seventeenth century ‘Diggers’. Through squatting and cultivating land on St. George’s Hill in Surrey, the earliest ‘diggers’ were radical in their protest

<sup>19</sup> A. Coleman, ‘The death of the inner city: cause and cure’, *The London Journal*, vi (1980), 3–22.

<sup>20</sup> Nicholson-Lord, *Greening*, pp. 2, 3, 5.

<sup>21</sup> Nicholson-Lord, *Greening*, p. 4. See also Coleman, ‘The death of the inner city’.

<sup>22</sup> Nicholson-Lord, *Greening*, p. 38.

<sup>23</sup> G. McKay, *Radical Gardening: Politics, Idealism and Rebellion in the Garden* (London, 2011), p. 106.

<sup>24</sup> McKay, *Radical Gardening*, pp. 110–1.

<sup>25</sup> McKay, *Radical Gardening*, pp. 113–4.



against a land market that increasingly locked local people out of previously common land.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, squatting was a countercultural movement across Europe in the 1960s, often involving the greening of vacant land as a way to challenge land-ownership, local government's apathy or developers' indifference.<sup>27</sup> The more recent garden projects of the Hyde Park Diggers highlighted closely linked social, spatial, health and food-production issues for urban communities.<sup>28</sup> Drawing a large group of protesters together, the diggers were self-consciously politicized in their approach to land rights and occupation. Because of the collective's size, their anti-authoritarian tactics, adopted from the original diggers, were more highly publicized than those of their environmentalist peers, although the two were linked ideologically.

Representative of the synergy between this sort of communal living and environmentalism, in the 1960s and 1970s a number of east London-based artists were living and working in overlapping circles of interest and desirous of social change in their local environments. Their subversive public art drew attention to pockets of vacant city space while reacting against the gallery system, both as physical space for the display of art and as a system of power relations. One of these early collectives, known as Action Space (1968–78), was most active within neighbourhoods in Wapping, east London, and Camden, north-west London. Led by Ken and Mary Turner, this was a group unconcerned with environmental initiatives in and of themselves; rather, it focused on cultural change through methodologies of spatial transformation and interactive art installations. The work of Action Space across north and east London embodied the radical new artistic practices of the counterculture movement, closely intertwined with a growing appreciation of vacant urban space.

The first of many community workshops was situated in Wapping. The group used pop-up inflatable structures as a means of 'filling' space and inviting inhabitation of it. These plastic forms were large-scale and purpose-designed, easily erected and deflated. Initially sited on a well-established garden in the area, the artists quickly moved their project into the adjacent derelict church and churchyard of St. John's.<sup>29</sup> This site had suffered a direct

<sup>26</sup> McKay, *Radical Gardening*, p. 115.

<sup>27</sup> McKay, *Radical Gardening*, p. 121.

<sup>28</sup> McKay, *Radical Gardening*, p. 122. See also N. Awan, T. Schneider and J. Till, *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture* (Abingdon, 2011), p. 80; and M. A. LaFond, 'eXperimentcity: cultivating sustainable development in Berlin's *Freiräume*', in *Insurgent Public Space: Guerrilla Urbanism and the Remaking of Contemporary Cities*, ed. J. Hou (London and New York, 2010), pp. 61–70.

<sup>29</sup> For further information and images, see 'Unfinished Histories' <<http://www.unfinishedhistories.com/history/companies/action-space/productions-and-projects/>> [accessed 5 Jan. 2019]. See also M. Turner, *Action Space Extended* (2012).

hit as a result of Blitz bombing and was not redeveloped until the late 1990s (Figure 7.1). For an initial stint of three weeks in 1968, members lived co-operatively in the vacant, damaged parsonage, improving the physical fabric in a piece-meal fashion. The group also consulted with residents at all times of the day and night, engaging them through playful structures and guided processions snaking around other local sites of interest. In their filling of space, the artists were concerned with the sustained threat posed by potential redevelopments in east London.<sup>30</sup> In this light it is unsurprising that Action Space returned to the same site for a similar period of time the following year while diversifying and expanding its utilization of under-appreciated urban space to include warehouses in Camden, too. An oral history project 'Unfinished Histories' (2012–14) noted that the group particularly used derelict buildings and abandoned lots as well as parks, streets and schools for their installations and performances (Figure 7.2).<sup>31</sup>

Although beginning under the radar and in conflict with local councils, Action Space progressively garnered institutional support. Its semi-legal squats gained acceptance and the art-centre-come-squat it created in Camden called the Drill Hall was formally used by community groups and performers of all kinds for many years.<sup>32</sup> Beginning with a small grant for the Wapping project, later residencies received increasing funding from the Arts Council. Action Space itself became a charitable trust backed by the Greater London Council, Camden Council and private trusts. This transition, from informal appropriations of land largely disregarded by authorities to sanctioned occupations of approved spaces, is notable. It marked the beginning of an artist-led change in the perception of vacant spaces by governing bodies, with financial and material support following from this softening towards such 'radical' experiments. One can thus note a precedent here to recent institutionally backed initiatives in London.<sup>33</sup>

Action Space's experimental participatory methodology initially tended to be deployed in particular locations for only a few weeks at a time, but over many years became more concertedly cyclical and therefore locally embedded, returning to the same sites several times. The success of their

<sup>30</sup> See K. Turner, 'Imaginative Eye' <<http://www.imaginativeeye.co.uk/historical%20present.html>> [accessed 5 Jan. 2019].

<sup>31</sup> For further information and images, see 'Unfinished Histories' <<http://www.unfinishedhistories.com/history/companies/action-space/>> [accessed 5 Jan. 2019].

<sup>32</sup> See Turner, 'Imaginative Eye' <<http://www.imaginativeeye.co.uk/historicalpresence.html>> [accessed 5 Jan. 2019].

<sup>33</sup> See, e.g., the mayor of London's crowdfunding programme and the Skip Garden at King's Cross, run by the charity Global Generation and supported by developers and local councils.



Figure 7.1. St. John's churchyard, Wapping, from the air, 1922.  
Photo: Historic England/britainfromabove.org.uk.



Figure 7.2. 3 August 1970, St. John's churchyard. Photo:  
Dennis Oulds/Central Press/Getty Images.

annual inhabitations is evidenced by the eventual incorporation of their projects into existing systems of governance and the group's ability to draw local attention to the potential of empty sites. This short-term activism was intentional, conceived as a spark that might fruitfully connect communities with their 'empty' spaces, leading to greater social change. In its original form the group was active until 1978 before dissolving into several disparate strands of work.

### *Localizing emptiness in community gardens*

As indicated by Action Space's increasing engagement with institutional structures and local authorities, the relative 'lightness' of approach to empty space in the 1960s was soon to be replaced by the seriousness of the social and collective drive evident in the rise of the community-garden movement of the 1970s. Founded in 1980 as a result of this turn, the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens (FCFCG) represented an umbrella organization for community-managed farms, gardens, allotments and other green spaces. The FCFCG itself recognized that earlier artistic groups facilitated a reassessment of empty spaces as sites of local value, arguing that the British community-garden movement 'sprang out of the rise in community awareness and activism from the 1960s counterculture'.<sup>34</sup>

Derelict 'empty' land was still in abundance in the 1970s. The UK community-garden movement might not have taken advantage of it had there not been a parallel movement already growing in the US. Across the Atlantic, temporary gardens were built in reaction to urban abandonment and as a resource against inflation. At the same time they also embodied and endorsed new forms of environmentalism and provided an outlet for neighbourhoods experiencing social unrest.<sup>35</sup> In 1973, the same year that an oil crisis and the Vietnam War tipped the US into recession, the Green Guerrillas began advocating community gardening in New York City. The term 'guerrilla gardening' stems from those days. It was coined by Liz Christy, an artist living and working in New York in the 1970s and one of the founders of the movement.<sup>36</sup> Most of these 'guerrilla' projects eventually succumbed to New York's housing development pressures, but this did not stop activists from continuing to seek out opportunities for mixing housing with green spaces in inclusive design schemes for urban communities.<sup>37</sup> In this period temporary gardens were not just about 'education, nutrition,

<sup>34</sup> McKay, *Radical Gardening*, p. 176.

<sup>35</sup> Lawson, *City Bountiful*, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Awan, Schneider and Till, *Spatial Agency*, p. 152.

<sup>37</sup> Lawson, *City Bountiful*, p. 259.

beautification and recreation’ but also about ‘community empowerment and grassroots activism’,<sup>38</sup> acting as places of free experimentation and socialization for communities under significant pressure.

Back in the UK and working in west London, sculptor Jamie McCullough rambled through the canal-side housing ruins of his local Paddington in spring 1976 with an imaginative eye for this ‘vacant’ space. His discovery gave birth to Meanwhile Gardens (1976–). Seeing an opportunity amidst the clearance of local derelict buildings, but in contrast to Action Space’s initially unsanctioned activities, he applied for permission from the local council to create a community garden on this fly-tipped site.<sup>39</sup> Having obtained backing for a limited-term project, McCullough received substantial support for his idea from different directions. He wrote that ‘it felt a bit like being in the middle of an imploding miracle with ideas and support and materials pouring in from everywhere’ in order to bring about significant environmental change.<sup>40</sup> Like the work of the Guerrillas, the creation of Meanwhile Gardens was strongly symbolic of a wider ambition for social empowerment, a motivation McCullough identified as ‘taking control of your own world’.<sup>41</sup> The artist’s vision for the four-acre site was one that engaged residents in design through personal childhood memories of ‘secret’, ‘magical’ places, while an undulating form gave rise to womb-like, protected dips where both groups and individuals could feel equally accommodated and ‘at home’.<sup>42</sup> Its construction was backed by a government employment scheme, local businesses and residents (Figures 7.3–7.4).

Although intended to be a stop-gap before a wider redevelopment on the site, Meanwhile Gardens has been able to secure ongoing tenure from the council as a result of its sustained use by locals. It continues to be run by a community association with charitable status. McCullough’s discovery was perhaps fortuitous, but the implementation of his vision for the site involved strategic contributions from a range of organizations and individuals, each of which needed to invest in his creative idea in order to bring it to fruition. The project’s considerable endurance has been made possible only by a collective reimagining of this empty space as ‘public’ and ‘lived-in’. Previously the site had been rendered effectively invisible to nearby residents by its inaccessibility, legally and physically. However, the adoption of the ‘meanwhile’ vision by local people and groups translated

<sup>38</sup> Lawson, *City Bountiful*, p. 13.

<sup>39</sup> Nicholson-Lord, *Greening*, p. 117.

<sup>40</sup> J. McCullough, *Meanwhile Gardens* (London, 1988), p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> As quoted in Nicholson-Lord, *Greening*, p. 117.

<sup>42</sup> Nicholson-Lord, *Greening*, p. 117.



Figure 7.3. Front cover of J. McCullough, *Meanwhile Gardens* (London, 1988).

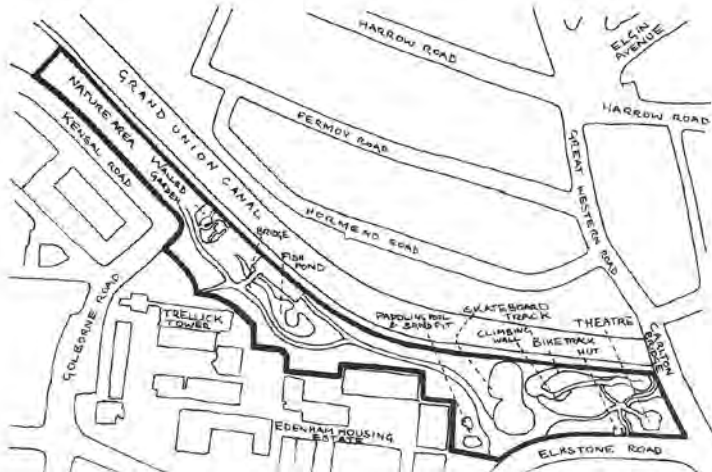


Figure 7.4. Map of 'Meanwhile Gardens' printed in McCullough, *Meanwhile Gardens*.

into a recognition of the site's 'fullness' by the local council. Its continued preservation by the governing authorities demonstrates the strength of this perceived activity and extent of inhabitation. If a site is to shake off its perceived 'emptiness' at an institutional level, the Meanwhile Gardens project suggests the importance of gathering a wide range of local supporters around the spark of an idea as early as possible. It is in the cumulative build-up of reimaginings that stability can be achieved for such empty spaces.

### ***Ecological parks and the cultivation of 'natural' emptiness***

Urban ecology developed into a recognizably distinct discipline in the 1970s and the movement of naturalists, environmentalists and wildlife conservationists supported the view that people in cities needed access, and had a right, to their own piece of the countryside. Persistent urban decline in the 1970s prompted new visions for cities and aided a change in perception that allowed 'empty' urban space to be associated with the unspoilt equilibrium of rural fields and moors far beyond city boundaries.<sup>43</sup> For new ecological organizations, the cultivation of overgrown and undeveloped empty sites made the vision of practically accessible, idealized spaces full of natural life a possible reality. They saw a different sort of potential in the pocket urban wastelands, ruins and dump-yards that peppered the urban environment. As Nicholson-Lord put it, 'ecology offered a way out of man-made aesthetics and proprietorial landscapes. It proposed filling empty urban wastes with the "real" landscapes of the countryside'.<sup>44</sup> Moving away from an emphasis on creative community participation, William Curtis Ecological Park and Camley Street Natural Park presented projects with a more definite focus on the cultivation and preservation of urban ecology stemming from these environmental roots, where 'real' landscapes were taken to mean 'natural' terrain.

Diverging from the strong social ambitions which primarily underpinned Action Space and Meanwhile Gardens, William Curtis Ecological Park (1977–85) represented one of the first attempts to create "pure" countryside' in the heart of the city for the principal benefit of nature itself alongside the education of inner-city residents in these ecological systems.<sup>45</sup> Although initiated by the Ecological Parks Trust (EPT, founded 1976) and closely associated with well-established wildlife-conservation organizations, the project has been read as 'self-consciously radical'.<sup>46</sup> William Curtis

<sup>43</sup> Nicholson-Lord, *Greening*, p. 82.

<sup>44</sup> Nicholson-Lord, *Greening*, p. 114.

<sup>45</sup> Nicholson-Lord, *Greening*, p. 120.

<sup>46</sup> Nicholson-Lord, *Greening*, p. 120.

was appropriated from a two-acre lorry park and derelict warehouse in Bermondsey near Tower Bridge for which the EPT was granted a short-term lease by the GLC. This consisted of five years on a peppercorn rent, but was later extended for a further three years.<sup>47</sup> It was the first space of many to be adopted by the EPT and was developed with a planting density that easily outstripped Meanwhile Gardens, for where Meanwhile Gardens claimed a concrete skate park and rolling green grass, William Curtis was carefully designed by expert ecologists to contain twenty densely programmed miniature ecosystems (Figures 7.5–7.6).<sup>48</sup> Moreover, the project was pitched more obviously to a wider city audience rather than just those living and working in the locality. After closure in 1985, the prominent inner-city site was redeveloped into the offices of the GLC, the same public body that had granted the park's first lease. The GLC's original endorsement of the scheme grew out of a developing planning strategy that sought to conserve London's ecology and habitat and to actively create new wildlife-friendly sites that were integrated into the design of the urban fabric, but this support was inevitably complicated by rising land values.

Yet this experimental project proved to be the first of many such miniature urban ecology sites set up by the EPT. The trust's aim for the project was to challenge city-dwellers to reassess the relationship between man and nature, while also acting as a testing ground for the wider possibilities of habitat creation on disused city sites. During its operation the park welcomed almost 100,000 visitors and schoolchildren. This figure supports the view that this was a very successful and mutually beneficial partnership, opportunistically spurred on by a reimagining of a previously disregarded space. And yet, in part due to its location, William Curtis appears to have been less wholeheartedly bound up with a particular local community. While the project was not primarily directed towards social transformation, it made an undeniable contribution to raising public awareness of the value of such underused slithers of land, especially in relation to urban wildlife. More importantly, it pioneered a way forward for environmentally focused groups like the EPT, adding credibility to their case for more miniature transformations on such vacant sites.

William Curtis was firmly positioned within a wider ecological movement which was well supported by the GLC. By 1982 twelve of the sixty-eight designated wildlife sites in the capital were ecological parks or nature gardens

<sup>47</sup> M. Hale, 'The use and provision of urban land for ecology field teaching: recent developments in north London', in *Land-Use Change: Proceedings of the Asahikawa-Sapporo International Symposium*, ed. R. D. Hill (Hong Kong, 1990), pp. 176–92.

<sup>48</sup> Nicholson-Lord, *Greening*, p. 120.



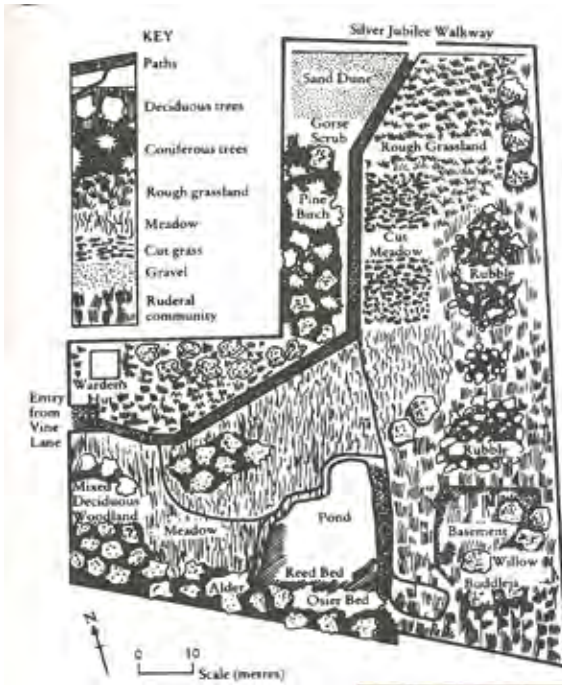


Figure 7.5. Planting plan of William Curtis Ecological Park. Image: Ecological Parks Trust, 1982 (from D. Nicholson-Lord, *The Greening of Cities*, copyright 1987, reproduced by permission of Taylor and Francis Books UK).

Figure 7.6. William Curtis Ecological Park from the air. Photo: David Goode in *New Scientist*, 25 March 1985.



based on this model.<sup>49</sup> Dedicated ecological professionals were included on council planning teams in order to facilitate the identification of suitable sites and encourage more of these innovative projects. However, with the GLC facing imminent dissolution and fragmentation, it was feared that these posts would be lost. The leader of the council's ecologists regretfully noted that there was 'little hope of this new ecological awareness being maintained'.<sup>50</sup> In spite of this, as William Curtis came to its planned date of closure, Camley Street Natural Park (1985 – present) began in Camden, founded on this micro-park model. In this case it was the enthusiastic campaigning of local groups such as the London Wildlife Trust (LWT) which inclined the Greater London Council to commit to the development of this particular 'in-between' space.<sup>51</sup> The two-acre site was bounded by Regent's Canal, St. Pancras Station and King's Cross Station (Figure 7.7). Hemmed in by industrial infrastructure on all sides, this location ensured the disinterest of private developers. Even so, Camley Street only narrowly escaped the fate of its predecessor William Curtis in the longer term, and remains an urban nature reserve to this day.



Figure 7.7. Camley Street Natural Park from above, showing King's Cross station and Regent's canal. Image: Google maps, 2014.

<sup>49</sup> Nicholson-Lord, *Greening*, p. 123.

<sup>50</sup> As quoted in P. Simons, 'A city fit for wildlife', *New Scientist*, cv (28 March 1985), 30–3, at p. 33.

<sup>51</sup> Kamvasinou, 'The public value of vacant urban land', p. 157.



Figure 7.8. Camley Street natural park looking towards north.  
Photo: David Goode in *New Scientist*, 25 March 1985.

So effective was the enterprise of the EPT at Tower Bridge that in the early 1980s a commercial proposal to transform the former coal yard in Camden into a lorry park was rejected by planners in favour of an ecological park. The exact impact on this decision of the active campaigning by local residents for the park is unclear, but the GLC was evidently supportive of the scheme from a very early stage. Consequently the GLC purchased the site in 1981 and was responsible for the clearing and development of it in partnership with Camden council, leading to its opening in 1985. The management of the space was undertaken by local volunteers alongside the LWT, which employed one full-time onsite warden to manage the site and organize the educational aspects of the project (Figure 7.8).

Hale states that Camley Street was a ‘direct consequence of the lessons learned’ at William Curtis.<sup>52</sup> However, despite sharing a similar ethos to William Curtis the project represented a slight shift in approach and legacy. As a result of the transformative work undertaken on the former coal yard, Camley Street achieved the official status of local nature reserve. This was a first for an ‘artificially-created nature park’.<sup>53</sup> Although William Curtis and Camley Street undoubtedly hosted plants and wildlife while they lay

<sup>52</sup> Hale, ‘The use and provision of urban land’, p. 188.

<sup>53</sup> Hale, ‘The use and provision of urban land’, p. 188.

'empty' as lorry parks and disused coal yards, it was only when there was a self-consciously designed plan for their planting and layout that they were deemed to have value as spaces 'filled up' with natural and human activity. It seems that if the original sites had been left fallow, accommodating more and more wildlife in an ad hoc fashion, they would more probably have been considered 'empty' by authorities and offered up to the highest bidder for development. A certain level of human intervention, no matter how light the touch or how wild the aesthetic, was critical in changing perceptions of these sites at an institutional level, aided by the existence of a successful precedent. Only with guidance from gardeners, landscapers and residents could nature overwhelm the 'emptiness' of an urban wasteland, leading to its establishment and preservation as a site of valued activity. Moving more concertedly out of an uncertain length of tenure to secure a longer-term future, the significance of Camley Street has also been in its longevity. It recently celebrated thirty years since opening and the collaborative venture is still maintained by a number of different organizations and voluntary groups. For institutions, empty spaces were implicitly those directionless in terms of the future, without an overarching man-made design or vision acting upon them. On the contrary, those spaces with a plan or expectation for change contributed to the idea of a landscape of potential rather than a landscape of decline.

### *The life cycle of emptiness in urban land use*

In the later twentieth century, London's status as a growing global city with ever-rising land values meant that vacant land suitable for temporary use was exceptionally scarce. Despite this trajectory and the rise of ecological initiatives there continued to be a good stock of unused 'gaps' in the urban environment of London in the 1980s, resulting in ongoing occupations by community activists. The 1980s were also characterized by an increasingly expressive global environmental awareness worked out, at least in part, through environmental art projects. One such project was Agnes Denes's 'Wheatfield – a confrontation' in 1982. Planting an entire field of wheat in downtown Manhattan, Denes transformed a landfill site which was destined for the construction of a luxury complex. In this Denes sought to raise awareness of misplaced values and the mismanagement of resources.<sup>54</sup>

By the mid 1980s ideas of environmentalism were well-recognized throughout the UK and had already made an impact on the ground, although to varying extents.<sup>55</sup> From 1974 more derelict land, once unnoticed

<sup>54</sup> See <<http://www.agnesdenesstudio.com/works7.html>> [accessed 18 Jan. 2019].

<sup>55</sup> Nicholson-Lord, *Greening*, p. 169.

and undervalued, was formally designated as open space through purchase by local authorities. This represented a large-scale change in land use and London boroughs were equally affected by this national shift. For example, in Newham, an inner east London borough, there was an increase of one hundred per cent in the quantity of open space from the mid 1970s to the mid 1980s. However, the majority of developments that occurred as a result of these official reclamations were concertedly post-industrial in intent, inclined towards recreational or amenity uses. On the whole, these increasingly substantial 'regenerations' were more commercially mainstream, in contrast to the more experimental, creative uses of alternative groups in the previous decades. These changes eventually led to tourist landscapes such as those of Covent Garden, Camden Lock and St. Katharine's Dock in London, and subsequently to gentrification more generally in the 1990s.<sup>56</sup>

In spite of this turning of the tide, local artistic and community groups continued to act in relation to small sites, clustering in boroughs which were still somewhat under the radar of developers. The radical new approach to environmental community art pioneered in the 1960s and 1970s was adopted by a range of artistic agencies, many of which were especially active in Hackney, east London, in the proceeding decades. Jerry Cooper, a designer of Hackney Grove Gardens (1982–c.1996), speaks of a feeling in the late 1970s and early 1980s that 'community projects [in the area] were sort of springing up all over the place and thriving'.<sup>57</sup> Again led by a group of artists, although also galvanized by a mandate from the local community, Hackney Grove Gardens was created on the site of a burnt-out factory by a community arts organization and co-ordinating body named Free Form, where Cooper worked. The garden was located in the shadow of the town hall and later developed into the Hackney Central Library and Museum (Figures 7.9–7.10).

For those passing by the sunken site it was evidently 'in waiting', but waiting for what? Whereas the local council saw an opportunity to develop it into a convenient car park, local residents petitioned for a landscaped garden to be carved out of the half-acre derelict basement. With echoes of Meanwhile Gardens and William Curtis, the council authorized a short-term project while it considered development proposals for its longer-term future. Constructed and designed by Free Form employees in collaboration with residents, the garden was open daily and used for community-managed events through the Hackney Grove garden group. Free Form's practice was a step away from the futuristic, fine-art aesthetic of Action Space towards a

<sup>56</sup> Nicholson-Lord, *Greening*, pp. 170–3.

<sup>57</sup> J. Cooper, interview with authors, 17 Feb. 2015.



Figure 7.9. Hackney Grove Gardens 'Work in Progress', Jan. 1983. Photo: Alan Denney via flickr.

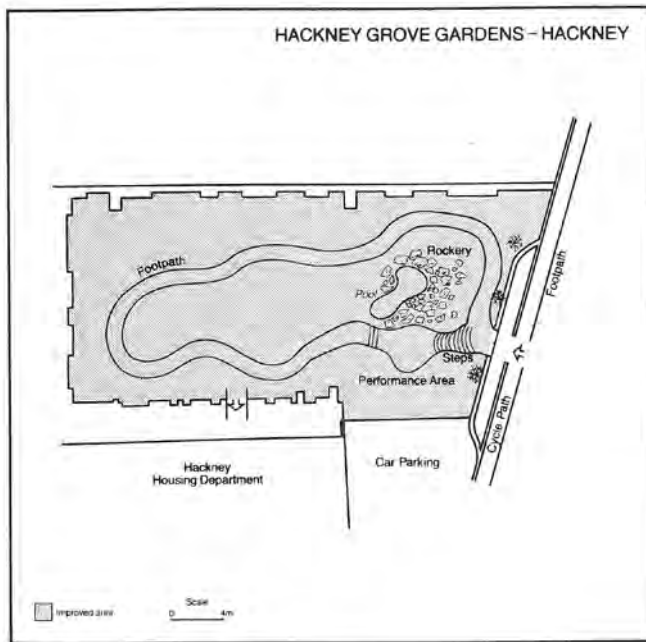


Figure 7.10. Plan drawn for case study of 'Greening City Sites: Good Practice in Urban Regeneration', Department of the Environment, 1987.

more handmade and idiosyncratic design style. Those involved often lived in co-operative local housing and their work clearly acknowledged the value of play in local communities.<sup>58</sup>

The creative practices developed by these artist-activists gained increasing recognition from governing bodies engaged with environmental reform, leading to Hackney Grove Gardens' selection as a case study for the Department of the Environment's 1987 publication *Greening City Sites: Good Practice in Urban Regeneration*. The report particularly commended the project on its value for money, noting that the constricted site 'has received a high intensity of resources, yet is cost effective because of the high intensity of use which it attracts'.<sup>59</sup> Hospital patients, school children, local workers, garden groups and youth counselling centres all overlapped in their usage of the garden. Despite this initial enthusiasm, however, by 1995 Hackney Grove Gardens was in danger of becoming 'completely overgrown' and the site was eventually redeveloped by the council as planned.<sup>60</sup> Local engagement was vital to the project's survival and when that failed the land lapsed back into disuse.

Its prominent location directly adjacent to the town hall clearly enabled the collective reimagining of the site by the community. The development of Hackney Grove Gardens also demonstrates a collaborative dynamic between artistic groups, institutions and the local community which was probably helped by a shared familiarity with similar projects in the recent past. The creation and continuation of the Gardens was only made possible through reactive dialogues between the diverse parties involved, all of which identified the derelict site as 'empty' because of its previous use and consequent disuse. Perhaps the stakes were higher because of the space's high-profile situation. Either way, the memory of the past was visibly imprinted on the site through the unoccupied post-industrial ruins of the factory. Its emptiness was potently represented and consequently actively overturned. Significantly, however, it seems that Hackney Grove fell back into 'emptiness' in the mid 1990s, its life span once more defined by its cultivation: in decline and overgrown, it was reclaimed by the council for their own redevelopment several years later.

In urban sites inhabitation as well as emptiness is cyclical in nature; the question is only the relative length of the cycle. These case studies, situated in conjunction with the broader narratives of urban change of which they

<sup>58</sup> Cooper, interview with authors, 17 Feb. 2015.

<sup>59</sup> Department for the Environment, *Greening City Sites: Good Practice in Urban Regeneration* (London, 1987), p. 20.

<sup>60</sup> M. Church, 'Magicians who can make urban gloom disappear', *The Independent*, 31 May 1995, p. 25.

are a necessary part, suggest that there has been a compression in this cyclical process as the decades have passed. In a city significantly more spatially squeezed than fifty years ago, empty spaces are less easily identified, but creative practitioners continue to seek them out and campaign with locals for periods of temporary occupation and transformation which re-substantiate the local value of pockets of 'empty space'.<sup>61</sup> Dialogue between diverse stakeholders has become ever more important in the active use and maintenance of these sites. Shared visions of potential have come to define the life cycle of spaces while the density and diversity of London's ever-changing population and built environment only serve to complicate community dynamics.

### ***Conclusion***

Against the perception of vacancy as emptiness, this chapter has attempted to offer a productive reading of 'unproductive' urban voids and to suggest that emptiness is a question of perception. Empty spaces can accommodate different types of use and are not 'blank spaces' as sometimes represented on land-use maps. This discussion has centred on a lineage of creative projects in vacant spaces in the post-war years in Britain, with a focus on London. From informal gardening and art projects in the 1960s to community gardens and the growth of environmentalism in the 1970s, and from land reclamation and environmental art in the 1980s to the mainstreaming of urban greening projects as part of the regeneration boom in the late 1980s and 1990s, there has been a historical evolution in how 'empty space' has been discovered, made visible and reimagined. As these creative projects show, a number of steps are necessary for empty urban spaces to be recognized as having potential in their emptiness. Usually this recognition comes first from enlightened champions and then from a range of citizens, eventually leading to organizations such as local authorities taking notice and enabling valuable local uses to occur. In the case of Action Space, for example, the initial counter-cultural, semi-illegal activities in empty spaces gained eventual acceptance and support by the Greater London Council, Camden Council and private trusts. In later years such endeavours became much more firmly rooted in specific local sites and communities, ensuring the support of local councils from an early stage and hence their longevity. Meanwhile Gardens is an example of this. An even larger vision, which saw empty spaces reconfigured as pieces of 'real' countryside in the city, led to the establishment of ecology parks such as William Curtis and Camley Street. These projects were purposed for the

<sup>61</sup> E.g., the Skip Garden project at King's Cross is a current example of such use incorporated within a larger-scale redevelopment project.



enjoyment and education, not only of locals, but of the wider city population too. While the location of many of these sites meant that some of the more prominent empty spaces were ultimately redeveloped (William Curtis and Hackney Grove Gardens), their legacy has lived on.

Although there is evidence that some of this history is known to the initiators of current temporary-use projects on vacant land in London, the awareness of officials and policy-makers who support such schemes is less clear. The story of emptiness in city space is often an oral, poorly documented history. While the historical legacy of the post-war projects presented here cannot be directly recognizable in the specific initiatives of the recent crisis (2008–12), it nevertheless contributes to a broader kind of collective memory. In effect, diverse groups now recognize the local value of small urban voids more often than they did fifty years ago. These often miniature, sometimes aesthetically unimpressive projects must also be valued for their role in challenging and changing attitudes towards vacant land and, more generally, in bringing environmentalism and community participation to the foreground in terms of cultural consciousness. What started as a marginal endeavour by a few pioneers has in various ways now become mainstream and accepted practice.

The relevance of this historical evolution for today's vacant spaces and contemporary city design can be seen in a number of persisting themes. One such theme seems to emerge from the fact that the discovery, reclamation and use of empty space for community activities has a significant influence on the community itself: 'Community gardens grow food [and flowers], but – just as importantly – they also grow community'.<sup>62</sup> The social links developed can then lead to tackling other issues in an area – housing, schools, unemployment, skills-training, crime and so forth. Where in Hackney Grove Gardens, for example, the local council saw space for a car park, Free Form saw an opportunity for a community garden that could connect and serve hospital patients, school children, local workers, garden groups and youth counselling. The creative use of vacant space through practices such as gardening or community art may not appear revolutionary but, more than turning everybody into a gardener or an artist, it has provoked a reimagining of the city. These projects address land ownership and community rights in a more equitable manner, beyond an emphasis on privatized public space.<sup>63</sup> Where house-builders may see only a wasted space

<sup>62</sup> C. Carlsson, *Nowtopia: How Pirate Programmers, Outlaw Bicyclists, and Vacant-Lot Gardeners are Inventing the Future Today!* (Edinburgh, 2008) p. 89, cited in McKay, *Radical Gardening*, p. 182.

<sup>63</sup> McKay, *Radical Gardening*, pp. 193–4. See also A. Minton, *Ground Control: Fear and Happiness in the Twenty-First-Century City* (London, 2012).

that could be exploited for profit, spaces perceived as empty have value which may be measured through community participation and satisfaction and which in turn can influence policy decisions about urban development and design. The ideological premises of value may differ between different actors and their diverse agendas, but the current emphasis on socio-economic and environmental sustainability requires a rethinking of value. Post-war planning in Britain suffered from 'the fallacy of trying to manage places and people as separate entities without recognizing the importance of their interaction'.<sup>64</sup> A more synergetic approach, giving people decision-making power and a certain autonomy in relation to the land they occupy, can lead to better environments, more socially integrated communities and less cost for the public sector.

A number of other recurring themes, from community and arts-led activism to environmental restoration and awareness and from the search for the rural in urban landscapes to urban ecology, are still relevant today. Current temporary projects on vacant land often focus on raising awareness of food production and food security and on educating about sustainability,<sup>65</sup> or on gardening and food-growing as a community activity more generally,<sup>66</sup> with some also advocating community-led regeneration and environmental restoration of abandoned landscapes.<sup>67</sup> However, today we are witnessing a further evolution towards economic opportunity and the rise of a new type of activism, that of the social entrepreneur and the culture of creative business start-ups which often intersect with the use of vacant space.<sup>68</sup> While the historical precedents examined in this chapter had a clear focus on social and environmental targets, today's equivalents integrate economic targets too, through their support for small local enterprises, manifesting the potential for spaces perceived as empty to provide financial benefits to communities.

Creative use of vacant land can help to develop an empty space into a highly valued community resource, acting as a catalyst for neglected sites to be reinscribed onto existing mental and physical maps. This visibility

<sup>64</sup> Coleman, 'The death of the inner city', p. 21.

<sup>65</sup> See, e.g., Global Generation <<https://www.globalgeneration.org.uk>> [accessed 5 Apr. 2019] and the Skip Garden at King's Cross <<https://www.kingscross.co.uk/skip-garden>> [accessed 5 Apr. 2019] and Cultivate London.

<sup>66</sup> See, e.g., Abbey Gardens in Newham, London <[http://www.abbeygardens.org/?page\\_id=1849](http://www.abbeygardens.org/?page_id=1849)> [accessed 5 Apr. 2019].

<sup>67</sup> See, e.g., Gasworks Dock Partnership and their project at the Cody Dock, London <<https://codydock.org.uk>> [accessed 5 Apr. 2019].

<sup>68</sup> See, e.g., the social enterprise side of initiatives such as the Cody Dock project and Cultivate London <<https://interimspacecreativeuse.wordpress.com/>> [accessed 6 Sept. 2015].

can lead to better-informed decisions: unless a local space is recognized by diverse groups it cannot be protected. Can 'empty spaces' then facilitate a variety of temporary uses for local or interest-based groups, changing over time as well as in nature? Historically, vacant spaces have acted as important pressure valves, able temporarily to accommodate and mitigate economic difficulties, environmental concerns and social unrest. Although they cannot be the solution to the long-term structural problems of the contemporary city, importantly they challenge accepted norms of value inviting assessments of land that go beyond the immediately quantifiable.



## 8. Urban prehistoric enclosures: empty spaces/busy places\*

*Kenneth Brophy*

### *The archaeology of emptiness*

What does emptiness mean to archaeologists? Actually, emptiness is something we are used to. We work within lengthy timescales of centuries or even thousands of years and the majority of this, like the inside of an atom, is empty space and time. Our datasets have many gaps and holes; and our interpretive theories may appear to have surface cohesion but beneath often lies empirical emptiness. The task of archaeologists is to resist emptiness, to fill in the gaps and the holes (often, ironically, by digging holes), to piece together rubbish, ruins and refuse into coherent narratives that are not entirely full, but satisfactory – a blend of ‘fact, fiction and comment’.<sup>1</sup> Our explanations about the past (and present), hovering on this boundary between fact and fiction, truth and belief, emerge from ruins, fill empirical vacuums and coalesce in the empty spaces of what we call the archaeological record. This is important, because with voids come room to think and space for the creativity we need to write our narratives about the broken past encountered around (and beneath) us today. And these voids are especially evident in prehistory, where we work without words, relying

\* I would like to thank the organizers of the Empty Spaces symposium and editors of this volume for allowing me to contribute and being supportive and patient throughout the process of completing the conference proceedings. Details in the discussions of Sighthill and Balfarg have previously appeared in my urban prehistorian blog. I am grateful to Roger Mercer for sharing with me his memories of excavating at Balfarg henge; and to Helen Green for collaborating with me on documenting Sighthill stone circle and for our many stimulating discussions about this monument over the past few years, which have influenced the content of this chapter. Work at Crieff Community Campus was undertaken in collaboration with Alistair Becket and Northlight Heritage. An earlier draft of this chapter was read and improved by Helen Green and Kimm Curran, for which I am grateful. Finally, I am very grateful to the editors of this book, who gave me detailed and insightful feedback on an earlier draft; this was greatly to the benefit of this chapter.

<sup>1</sup> M. Shanks, *Experiencing the Past: On the Character of Archaeology* (London, 1992), p. 183.

K. Brophy, ‘Urban prehistoric enclosures: empty spaces/busy places’, in *Empty Spaces: perspectives on emptiness in modern history*, ed. C. J. Campbell, A. Giovine and J. Keating (London, 2019), pp. 179–200. License: CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0.

instead on material culture, architecture, scientifically derived data and dead bodies. Archaeologists used to despair about how little we knew and how little we could infer about the empty spaces between facts and data, most famously Hawkes's despairing characterization of the limitations of what we could say about people and society in the past, symbolized by his 'ladder of inference'.<sup>2</sup> However, over the past few decades 'the unknown', the emptiness, has become less problematic as the status and nature of archaeological narratives have shifted from a positivist to a hermeneutic framework.

What happens when we try to make sense of emptiness in the archaeological record? This chapter will reflect on this question, first, by suggesting that traditional models of archaeological enquiry have struggled to deal with this scenario; second, by reflecting on recent fieldwork during which the author has been forced to confront what appear to be empty spaces; and, finally, by exploring how methodologically and conceptually emptiness might be reconsidered within archaeological and other narratives. It will do this by taking as an example large prehistoric enclosures in the past – and the present. Neolithic earthwork and megalithic enclosures in Britain, built between 4,000 and 2,500 BC, offer a conceptual challenge because they are frequently characterized by archaeologists as large empty spaces.<sup>3</sup> These are often very big enclosures, with banks and ditches, or standing stones, defining spaces of many hectares; and are difficult to make sense of because excavations can only ever sample a small proportion of interior areas or simply focus on entrance zones and the boundaries themselves. Just as problematic is that a good number of the activities that probably went on within these enclosures, such as processions, ceremonies, gatherings, dancing and fire-lighting, left few or no physical traces which could survive for the thousands of years that have passed since those activities took place. For instance, one of the earliest monumental enclosure forms in Britain is the cursus monument (very long rectangular earthwork enclosures), built in the fourth millennium BC. The biggest example is the Dorset cursus, on the Cranborne Chase, Dorset, which is some ten kilometres long and on average 120 metres wide, the same area as around 110 maximum-sized football pitches laid side by side.<sup>4</sup> Yet almost nothing that is contemporary

<sup>2</sup> C. Hawkes, 'Archaeological theory and method: some suggestions from the Old World', *American Anthropologist*, lvi (1954), 155–68.

<sup>3</sup> See reviews of Neolithic enclosures such as *Neolithic Enclosures in Atlantic Northwest Europe*, ed. T. Darvill and J. Thomas (Oxford, 2001); and R. Loveday, *Inscribed Across the Landscape: the Cursus Enigma* (Stroud, 2006) for typical discussions of large, apparently empty spaces.

<sup>4</sup> Loveday, *Inscribed Across the Landscape*, pp. 183–91.

with the earthwork boundary has been identified within the interior of this enclosure, other than a single long barrow (a burial monument) and some stray stone tools. It is a huge, empty space, in other words.<sup>5</sup> In the absence of tangible evidence, archaeologists fall back on vague explanations that amount to ‘rituals’ to describe what such enclosures were used for and what people did inside them. For some archaeologists, Neolithic cursus enclosures literally were empty spaces along which the ghosts of the ancestors processed, floating along good-quality farming land sacrificed to the gods and inaccessible to the living.<sup>6</sup> To make sense of what large enclosed spaces were used for some five thousand years ago therefore offers an interpretive challenge for archaeologists because they *appear* to us to be empty spaces through our methods and taphonomic (site formation) processes.

To explore this further, this chapter will recount the author’s own fieldwork at three enclosures in Scotland which have Neolithic associations. These enclosures all occur within urban landscapes, which is unusual because urban development tends to destroy or hide traces of prehistoric activity. The author also diverges from normal archaeological practice to concentrate on the modern biographies and uses of these monuments. In other words, the interest is not what these enclosures were used for in the Neolithic period, but rather *how they are used now*. This approach is called urban prehistory.<sup>7</sup> Two of the monuments discussed below – Balfarg henge and Broich cursus – can be traced back some five thousand years, deep into prehistory,<sup>8</sup> but both also have rich and traumatic modern biographies. The third site to be considered, Sighthill stone circle, is not prehistoric at all, but rather an impressive modern replica although it is used in peculiarly prehistoric ways. Crucially, as with Neolithic enclosures encountered in more traditional archaeological studies, these three sites all appear to be empty spaces. However, the key difference here is that they can be studied from the luxury of speaking to those who built and use them; and how people use these enclosures can also be observed. Therefore, although, as noted, these sites *appear* to be empty spaces, the author’s own fieldwork at these locations suggests that this is far from the case.

<sup>5</sup> C. Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 170–3.

<sup>6</sup> E.g., R. Johnson, ‘An empty path? Processions and memories in the Dorset cursus’, in *Pathways and Ceremonies: the Cursus Monuments of Britain and Ireland*, ed. A. Barclay and J. Harding (Oxford, 1999), pp. 39–48.

<sup>7</sup> <<https://theurbanprehistorian.wordpress.com/>> [accessed 26 Aug. 2016].

<sup>8</sup> Prehistory refers to the period of human existence when writing was not in use. In Britain, prehistory ended with the Roman invasion of England, although it could be argued that prehistory did not end in northern Britain for several centuries after this.

The objective in this chapter, then, is to discuss how we might understand and account for the varied and dynamic ways that prehistoric enclosures are used today. In turn, this sheds light on the challenges of understanding how big enclosures may have been used in prehistory and casts doubt on the notion of these simply being empty spaces: here, emptiness can be seen as a product of the archaeological gaze rather than any past reality. Archaeology presents paradoxical and complex interactions between the past and present; and it is by tacking back and forth between now and then (whenever then might have been) that we can perhaps begin to see empty spaces afresh.

### ***Urban prehistory and prehistoric enclosures***

What is urban prehistory and what purpose might it serve? As noted already, this is not about saying new things about the past. Rather the author's concern is exploring contemporary engagements with traces that survive from prehistory in places that have become developed, urbanized or industrialized, as well as edgelands, which Farley and Roberts have defined as post-industrial places.<sup>9</sup> This process of foregrounding prehistoric sites and monuments can, in turn, be used for the benefit of the local community. The definition of what can be included under the label 'urban prehistory' is broad. It could be surviving prehistoric monuments in urban places that are tangible and perhaps even well-known, such as standing stones, earthwork fragments or burial mounds. Or it could be intangible in nature and invisible, with enclosure ditches, pits and post-holes beneath houses, gardens, car parks and roads being common examples. Specific find spots can also be included here, especially sites that were discovered and excavated in advance of development and urbanization, most commonly Bronze Age cemeteries, but could also include stray material culture such as polished stone axes. Prehistoric sites can also have a traumatic modern history that is worth (re)telling, including damage, rearrangement, being moved, vandalism and the addition of concrete. In some cases, standing stones have been moved from one place to another, or temporarily put into storage; there are examples of earthworks slighted to make way for roads or given modern purposes (such as the green on a golf course). Finally, urban landscapes frequently have modern equivalents of prehistoric monuments erected within them, most commonly megalithic in form, such as standing stones and stone circles,<sup>10</sup> which usually fall within categories of art,

<sup>9</sup> P. Farley and M. Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands* (London, 2012), pp. 4–5.

<sup>10</sup> See C. Holtorf, *From Stonehenge to Las Vegas: Archaeology as Popular Culture* (Walnut Creek, Calif., 2005), pp. 119–27.



landscaping or memorials.<sup>11</sup> These may or may not relate to archaeological traces once found in these locations.

The inclusive nature of urban prehistory opens up many opportunities for conversations and activities with local communities, with demystification of little-understood prehistoric sites being one of the key aspirations of this author's research. Using any of these prehistoric traces or essences as a starting point, it is possible to explore intersections (those places where the ancient past intrudes into the contemporary, which on occasion literally are road intersections), documenting how these sites are being or have been used, or proposing ways in which forgotten and unknown prehistoric sites could be foregrounded once again. Urban prehistory has an interest in how people (and importantly, people who are not archaeologists) negotiate these points of fusion between past and present. It also allows us to ask how this information might help improve landscapes, attract visitors and offer educational opportunities. Through the adoption of amended versions of archaeological field methods, and drawing on experiential approaches such as phenomenology, walking and psychogeography, it is possible to explore the utility and meaning of prehistoric sites and traces within urban and industrial landscapes.

In particular, psychogeography<sup>12</sup> is helpful in framing engagements with prehistory in urbanized places precisely because traces of past activities and ancient ways of moving around the landscape have been almost completely concealed or destroyed by modern urban planning. Prehistoric pathways, sites and monuments lie hidden or obscured within housing estates, brown-belt land, transport links and industrial estates – a secret and invisible network that endures today only in a fragmentary form known only to a few disciplinary specialists. One way to understand this almost occult secret geography is through the psycho-geographical act of what Richardson called 'critical urban walking'.<sup>13</sup> This is explicitly an act of subversion (and

<sup>11</sup> H. Williams, 'Antiquity at the National Memorial Arboretum', *International Jour. Heritage Studies*, 20 (2013), 393–414.

<sup>12</sup> Psychogeography was famously defined by Guy Debord as 'the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals' (G. Debord, 'Introduction to a critique of geography', in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. K. Knabb (Berkeley, Calif., 1981), p. 5). This has played itself out as a series of creative practices that emerged in the 20th century and enabled practitioners to subvert monotonous and restrictive urban planning landscapes either through walking along highly stylized and planned routes, or wandering randomly (the so-called *flâneur*) (M. Coverley, *Psychogeography* (Harpenden, 2010), pp. 10–11).

<sup>13</sup> T. Richardson, 'Introduction: a wander through the scene of British urban walking', in *Walking Inside Out: Contemporary British Psychogeography*, ed. T. Richardson (London, 2013), pp. 1–27, at p. 4.

within archaeology, seeking out and celebrating ruinous, partial, invisible, reconstructed and completely modern prehistoric monuments is in itself a subversive act). Seeking out time-depth in mundane urban places could be viewed as akin to the urban explorer ethos: 'to find deeper meaning in the spaces we pass through every day'.<sup>14</sup> It is clear that modern urban planning has been at best unkind, at worst destructive, when it comes to prehistoric sites, such as the trapped and thoroughly changed garden-landscaped stone circle reconstructed in a cul-de-sac at Sandy Road, Perth and Kinross (Figure 8.1). The best way to encounter urban prehistoric sites is on foot, which also affords the collection of found items and chance conversations with locals. Walking is a powerful tool for mediating explorations of ruins and pasts-in-the-present<sup>15</sup> and has thus far mainly been used in archaeology as a means to carry out experiential phenomenologies of landscape of the type advocated by Chris Tilley.<sup>16</sup> However, walking urban prehistory is more concerned with revealing the invisible and lost today, rather than projecting back to how these landscapes may have looked and been used in the prehistoric past. The author's interest here is with the contemporary



Figure 8.1. The Sandy Road stone circle, reconstructed in its original form and location in a cul-de-sac in the town of Scone, Perth and Kinross, after housing built here in the 1960s caused complete excavation and temporary removal of the standing stones (photo: author).

<sup>14</sup> B. L. Garrett, *Explore Everything: Place-Hacking the City* (London, 2014), p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> G. Nicholson, *Walking in Ruins* (Chelmsford, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> C. Tilley, 'Phenomenological approaches to landscape archaeology', in *Handbook of Landscape Archaeology*, ed. B. Davis and J. Thomas (Walnut Creek, Calif., 2008), pp. 271–6.

landscape rather than trying to see through or beneath it and back into the past. (This does not preclude observations having some utility in the understanding of prehistoric incarnations of these sites and monuments.) Walks in built-up places are very much constrained bodily by the urban in terms of access: boundaries, pathways, railway lines and busy roads all stand in sharp contrast to the ‘disorderly space of the ruin’.<sup>17</sup> Psycho-geographic practice can also be difficult and uncomfortable: spending time standing in the middle of roundabouts, walking up and down suburban streets in the middle of the day with a notepad, sitting in a car reading an excavation report outside a specific house or photographing standing stones in gardens can all result in uncomfortable encounters with locals or create a sense of ‘loitering’.<sup>18</sup>

Most of the sites worked with to date are standing stones, rock-art panels or the locations of Bronze Age cemeteries, but there are also many examples of prehistoric earthwork enclosures in urban places. The scale of Neolithic enclosures and the preference of their builders for locations on flat, good-quality farming land, near rivers, on valley floors and along routeways, all combine to ensure that urban sprawl and road building have swallowed up many such enclosures. More often than not, the relationship between relic Neolithic monuments and urbanization has been one-sided and destructive, although many earthwork enclosures had already been ploughed flat by the time urban expansion began. Typically, Neolithic enclosures are not marked on town plans and maps and remain unknown to local people even if the enclosures were fully excavated and documented in advance of destruction (as has been the norm in the UK since the 1980s).

One such site is a cursus monument known as Broich, which is located at the southern edge of Crieff, a town in Perth and Kinross. This massive earthwork enclosure was identified during aerial survey as a cropmark site in the 1980s (the buried ditches impact on crop growth patterns during drought conditions and are visible from the air in the summer). This was a truly huge, early Neolithic enclosure, built soon after 3,600 BC, being at least eight hundred metres long and some hundred metres wide; intensive agriculture over the past few centuries means that this enclosure is no longer visible on the ground at all,<sup>19</sup> an invisible space as well as an empty one. This emptiness was disturbed between 2007 and 2010 when a local community campus was constructed over the middle portion of the cursus.

<sup>17</sup> T. J. Edensor, ‘Walking through ruins’, in *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot*, ed. T. Ingold and J. L. Vergunst (Farnham, 2008), pp. 123–41.

<sup>18</sup> Edensor, ‘Walking through ruins’, p. 124.

<sup>19</sup> K. Brophy, *Reading Between the Lines: the Neolithic Cursus Monuments of Scotland* (London, 2015), pp. 51–2.



Figure 8.2. Pupils from Strathearn High School marking the route of the western ditch of the Neolithic Broich cursus, which runs beneath the school campus and playground (photo: author).

This large building includes a secondary school, leisure centre and public library and yet is still dwarfed by the cursus enclosure which it straddles. Excavations in advance of construction located stretches of cursus ditch still surviving beneath the car park of the adjacent old secondary school; and investigations of the monument in the location of the new building concluded that the interior of the cursus survived but was almost wholly empty, although only a very small proportion of this area was investigated.<sup>20</sup> Positively, there have been attempts since the excavations to foreground this enormous, and yet invisible, enclosure for the local community. The author has worked with children to try to help them visualize the scale of the ancient cursus in relation to their school and classrooms (Figure 8.2), while a reconstructed Neolithic timber monument<sup>21</sup> and a planned archaeological

<sup>20</sup> R. Cachart and D. Perry, 'Archaeological works: Strathearn Community Campus (Crieff High School), Pittenzie Road, Crieff' (unpublished data structure report produced by Alder Archaeology, 2009).

<sup>21</sup> <<http://www.northlight-heritage.co.uk/conc5/index.php?cID=152>> [accessed 26 Aug. 2016].

trail are attempts by the school and campus community to make tangible the deep time beneath their feet and to populate this massive, apparently empty space with active learners.

Such examples need hard work, however, to foreground invisible or even destroyed enclosures in modern urban landscapes. The Broich cursus had not actively been used by anyone in this community since its modern discovery because no one could see it, few knew it was there and nothing above ground survived. Extant and visible prehistoric enclosures offer different challenges. These usually exist in partial or ruinous forms and are situated in a disciplinary and classificatory limbo, neither wholly understood nor appreciated by those who live nearby, belonging to neither the past nor the present. Often, such monuments are hemmed in by roads and houses, or located in the corners of small urban green spaces and are not taken seriously by archaeologists due to the perception that the enclosures have been ruined or devalued by the processes of urbanization and the emergence of an urban setting. As Tilley wrote so memorably, a 'megalith in an urban environment does not seem to work'<sup>22</sup> and the same could be said for enclosures, although the author does not agree with this position. These are hollowed-out places, monuments and enclosures that provide little direct evidence for their original purpose and now exist out of time and without context in unexpected (but geographically correct) locations. But that does not mean they do not have a role to play in society today or that they are truly empty spaces. To return to the theme of empty spaces, this chapter will consider the non-emptiness of two apparently empty enclosures in urban locations in Scotland: one a prehistoric replica, the Sighthill stone circle in Glasgow; and the other a reconstructed henge monument at Balfarg, Fife.

### ***Sighthill stone circle***

The Sighthill stone circle, a monument that was, until April 2016, located in an urban park ten minutes' walk from the centre of Glasgow, was an empty space (Figure 8.3). Or at least that *appeared* to be the case. Constructed in 1979, the brainchild of astronomer and author Duncan Lunan,<sup>23</sup> this circle of stumpy grey monoliths was supposed to be a device to help to teach the people of Glasgow about some of the key principles of astronomy, as well as to demonstrate that stone circles in prehistory could have acted as calendars

<sup>22</sup> C. Tilley, 'Art, architecture, landscape [Neolithic Sweden]', in *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives*, ed. B. Bender (Oxford, 1993), pp. 49–84.

<sup>23</sup> For the full story of this remarkable monument, see D. Lunan, *The Stones and the Stars: Building Scotland's Newest Megalith* (New York, 2012).



Figure 8.3. The Sighthill stone circle, Glasgow, in 2013 (photo: author).

and astronomically aligned monuments, an explicitly anti-establishment gesture.<sup>24</sup> The whole ethos of this megalithic enclosure, therefore, was not to enclose or contain, but rather to guide the eye outwards towards the sky and the horizon line. This was done through the creation of a circular space some seventeen metres in diameter defined by a cobbled path and sixteen whinstone megaliths, with a central tall standing stone.<sup>25</sup> The project was never fully completed, however, due to government cutbacks from 1979 onwards; and so the stone circle was left in limbo, lacking signage and guidance on how to use the monument, but also physically incomplete, with a number of standing stones left lying to the side un-erected.<sup>26</sup> The

<sup>24</sup> Astronomical explanations for prehistoric sites such as stone circles have very much been on the fringes of mainstream archaeology for decades, with Sighthill stone circle dedicated to, among others, Alexander Thom, a figure whose highly complex and specialized astronomical and mathematical understanding of prehistoric monuments has never been accepted by the archaeological establishment (A. Thom, *Walking in all of the squares – a biography of Alexander Thom* (Glendaurel, 1995)).

<sup>25</sup> Lunan, *The Stones and the Stars*, p. 187.

<sup>26</sup> K. Brophy, H. Green and A. Welfare, 'The last days of the Sighthill stones', *British Archaeology* (July–Aug. 2014), 44–9.

stones that did stand were set into large subterranean concrete blocks to avoid them toppling. There is a long tradition of using concrete to shore up actual prehistoric standing stones in Britain, notably Stonehenge, but even by 1979 this practice was frowned upon<sup>27</sup> and could only happen at Sighthill because this was not a truly ancient place. Nonetheless, concrete in such contexts offers a tantalizing fusion of horizons between ancient past and industrial present, something embodied by the Sighthill stone circle and within urban prehistory.

The stone circle was dismantled in advance of redevelopment of the area in 2016, the stones buried nearby until such a time as they can be re-erected in a new setting. The circle sat in scrubby Sighthill park, which is dominated by sickly yellowish-green to brown vegetation, with the incessant, low drone from the M8 motorway just one hundred metres or so away to the south offering a vehicular urban soundtrack. Several high-rise tower blocks built in the 1960s dominated the horizon to the north and east until recently: a scheduled demolition programme ensured that all high rises were demolished by the end of 2016. Therefore, the stone circle sat within an urban landscape in flux and in a sense was a microcosm of modern Glasgow, erected in the wake of the renewed hope of high-rise living and a better environment four decades ago and now fallen apart like that dream of urban renewal, swept away in a new phase of regeneration. New Sighthill – and the new Sighthill megalithic monument – are planned to emerge towards the end of the decade.<sup>28</sup>

This author has visited the circle many times since 2012, documenting (along with Helen Green) the various uses of the stone circle and its gradual abandonment and decline into untidiness, swamped by overgrown vegetation. One of the strongest sensory associations with these visits is how quiet this place was (aside from the hum of the motorway) and how few people were ever there, at least when we visited. In late 2015 the author spoke to a student who had been working on a short documentary film about the Sighthill stone circle. He said that he had gone on site one day to film some time-lapse footage and had been in the stone circle, with his camera, for six hours. He had seen no one that day at all. Not one person had visited the circle or even walked past it with a dog. It was an empty, lonely space. The only occasion this author has ever been there when anyone else was actually within the circle – as opposed to walking a dog nearby (other than those visiting with me) – was during the solar eclipse of spring

<sup>27</sup> H. Wickstead and M. Barber, 'Concrete prehistories: the making of modern megalithism', *Jour. Contemporary Archaeology*, ii (2015), 195–216.

<sup>28</sup> For information on the Sighthill development, including the fate of the stone circle, see <<http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/sighthill>> [accessed 26 Aug. 2016].



Figure 8.4. Solar eclipse at Sighthill stone circle, 2015: for once, not an empty space (photo: author).

2015: a modest crowd gathered, mostly consisting of students from nearby halls draining a box of red wine and large bags of crisps. A few bystanders with fancy cameras leaned on the standing stones, while a Glasgow band, Colonel Mustard and the Dijon 5, shot footage for a video promoting their new song (Figure 8.4).

So, the Sighthill stone circle seemed to be an empty space, hidden in plain sight, existing in classic urban edgeland along a motorway belt, near a canal and industrial units.<sup>29</sup> Bizarrely there were no signs or information to tell anyone where the circle was, even in the park itself, which perhaps explains the isolation to an extent. Despite this unpromising context, however, it is clear the circle was used and indeed was a place of some significance to various groups of users, almost all subversive and on the margins in their own way. (This is over and above the regular astronomical measurements taken at the site by Lunan and associates.<sup>30</sup>) To acquire a sense of how the circle was being used, Green and this author undertook improvised archaeological work – walking, surface survey, photographic

<sup>29</sup> Farley and Roberts, *Edgelands*, pp. 17–22.

<sup>30</sup> Lunan, *The Stones and the Stars*, pp. 252–63.



recording, careful documentation of evidence for human activity, the collection of found objects and the interpretation of material culture and symbols.<sup>31</sup> (We also documented the dismantlement of the stone circle with the co-operation of the local authority.) The material evidence suggested something very different from the empty, quiet, disconnected sense we and others have experienced.

The circle was a place for gathering, for drinking, for socializing. Drink cans, vodka and Buckfast bottles, crisp pokes (bags), cans of highly caffeinated drinks and so on were found in the stone circle and on its fringes. This author's sporadic daytime, weekday visits were unable to pick up on these illicit evening and night-time activities, something also true of the fieldwork at Balfarg (see below); and this suggests that in order to see beyond emptiness a more embedded approach is required. It is also clear that people were visiting the stone circle at other times; and so the impression of emptiness was directly derived from the author's own fieldwork methodology, something that could also be said of prehistorians attempting to make sense of Neolithic enclosures through the sporadic sampling of excavation and the detached gaze of the aerial photograph or plan. The stones were adorned with an ever-changing gallery of graffiti, dirt smudges and sinister markings, hard to interpret and often transitory. In late 2015 someone used white gloss paint to daub a crude hexagram on the cobbles beside the stone circle before discarding the paint tin to one side. The circle had other uses, too. It was the setting for pagan activities and ceremonies, largely based around solstices and equinoxes (including a large equinoxal gathering a few days before the circle was removed), which involved performance, fire, chanting, sticking large candlesticks and other props into the ground and possibly deposition.<sup>32</sup> Traces of these activities were occasionally found, notably the small fire spots and placed flowers, and excavation would surely reveal more. A rowan tree immediately beside the stone circle became a rag tree, with string, ribbons and scraps of material hanging from its branches. More transitory encounters were suggested by worn paths that wound around the stone circle, presumably created by dog walkers as well as visitors to the monument.

Perhaps the most remarkable role the stone circle played was as a memorial to two deceased local women. Their ashes were scattered at the stone circle and the central standing stone became a shrine to them, with an ever-changing series of offerings and deposits placed at the base of this megalith (Figure 8.5). These have included photos, postcards, crosses, candles, colourful stones,

<sup>31</sup> Brophy, Green and Welfare, 'The last days of the Sighthill stones', p. 47.

<sup>32</sup> J. Reppion, 'Stones in the city', *Fortean Times*, cccxix (Oct. 2014), 42–7.



Figure 8.5. The central stone of the Sighthill stone circle has increasingly come to be a focus for the memorialization of the deceased for one local family (photo: author).

cigarette lighters, coins, fruit and flowers (both artificial and real). Other objects of presumed sentimental value were placed at the base of the stone, such as a child's money box, photos carefully wrapped in plastic, a metal candelabra and a small painted card. At times, ribbons of varying colours were tied around the stone and sometimes objects hung from these, such as an empty mobile-phone casing and wreaths. This curious assemblage of objects suggested frequent visits by family and friends of the deceased women, but also revealed a strong emotional attachment to this place played out in material form. Jack Forbes told the BBC about one of the women, Lily, his wife, that '[s]he just loved the place. Two or three times a week I'm up here [at the stone circle]. I just get solitude and contentment, this is like a church to me'.<sup>33</sup> Intriguingly, the role of the stone circle in its final days appeared to be increasingly one of memorialization: on a visit in October 2015 the central stone had a piece of paper appended to it with the name, date of birth and death of Mr. Forbes's wife, suggesting the increasing appropriation of this as a place of sanctity, something confirmed in conversations with him. The

<sup>33</sup> <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-24186525>> [accessed 26 Aug. 2016].

transformation of this monument-to-science into a shrine is one of the more curious aspects of the story of the Sighthill stone circle.

The Sighthill stone circle was not prehistoric, but was used in the kinds of ways that we imagine prehistoric enclosures to have been utilized – for social gatherings involving food and alcohol; for the recording of the movement of the sun, moon and stars; for pagan ceremonies; and for the memorialization of the dead. (This is perhaps not surprising given that these are the kinds of behaviour that most people associate with stone circles and so could perhaps be explained as acts of conformity rather than subversion.) The archaeological recording of the Sighthill stone circle, the collection of material culture and the documentation of change have all demonstrated that this enclosure was far from an empty space – despite the numerous anecdotes heard by the author and his own personal experience of ‘no one ever being there’. The realization that this place matters to people has been one of the key reasons why Glasgow City Council has agreed to resite the stone circle in the future. Such empty enclosures, whether ancient or new, are never truly empty, but often full of life, death and meaning, not all of which leave much trace behind. As a pagan user of Sighthill stone circle told *The Scotsman* newspaper in 2013: ‘To the fool this looks like wasteland. But this is sacred ground to us’.<sup>34</sup>

### ***Balfarg henge***

Balfarg: a place ‘where a New Town is built on a 4,000 year old henge’,<sup>35</sup> a place where within a housing estate can be found the remnants of one of the most significant prehistoric ceremonial and burial enclosures in northern Britain. Situated in a northern suburb of the New Town of Glenrothes, Fife, are the remnants of three closely situated Neolithic enclosures, all excavated, reconstructed and rearranged in order to accommodate urbanization. The monuments – two henge enclosures and a stone circle – were all originally built in the third millennium BC, but the gradual creep of urban living in the form of house-building and road-upgrading meant that between 1970 and 1985 all three were fully excavated.<sup>36</sup> The excavation of these sites and

<sup>34</sup> <<http://www.scotsman.com/heritage/people-places/stones-of-destiny-the-sighthill-stone-circle-1-3008490#ixzz3yFuaLF9g>> [accessed 26 Aug. 2016].

<sup>35</sup> Fife Psychogeographical Collective, *From Hill to Sea* (2015), p. 7.

<sup>36</sup> Excavation reports, in chronological order: G. Ritchie, ‘Excavation of the stone circle and cairn at Balbirnie, Fife’, *Archaeological Jour.*, cxxxi (1974), 1–32; R. Mercer, ‘The excavation of a late Neolithic henge-type enclosure at Balfarg, Markinch, Fife, Scotland’, *Proc. Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, cxi (1981), 63–171; G. Barclay and C. Russell-White, ‘Excavations in the ceremonial complex of the fourth to the second millennium BC at Balfarg/Balbirnie, Fife’, *Proc. Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, cxxiii (1993), 43–210.

the creation of new suburban communities allowed the opportunity for the monuments to be reconstructed, eventually becoming stopping points on an archaeological walking trail, accompanied by a popular booklet<sup>37</sup> and five noticeboards. However, each monument had to undergo a radical transformation – a rebirth – in order for this to happen. Balbirnie stone circle was entirely removed from its original prehistoric location by crane then rebuilt in exactly the same arrangement amidst grass and flowers one hundred metres to the south in advance of road construction.<sup>38</sup> The ditches of Balfarg riding school henge (those that had not already been destroyed by a road) were cleaned out and an internal timber setting reconstructed from cut-length telegraph poles. The noticeboard for this site was set on fire, melted and thrown into the enclosure ditch in the late 1990s by vandals, an unintentional echo of burning and depositional events for which we commonly find evidence when excavating Neolithic enclosures.<sup>39</sup>

The focus here, however, is the third and largest of these monuments, Balfarg henge, an enclosure that was one of the largest of its kind constructed in Scotland in prehistory (Figure 8.6). Henge monuments are circular enclosures dating to the late Neolithic period onwards, typically defined by substantial earthwork boundaries with an internal ditch and external bank; one or two entrances are normal.<sup>40</sup> The Balfarg henge was a massive example of this type, measuring sixty-five metres across internally within a ditch eight metres wide and bank up to ten metres across, enclosing an internal area of 3,318 square metres.<sup>41</sup> The earthworks bounded a space which was filled with at least two standing stones (perhaps an entrance arrangement) and several circles of timber posts. When the henge was several centuries old, the burial of a teenager with a rare handled Beaker pot and flint knife was placed in a pit in the centre of this monument. In other words, Balfarg was not an empty space in the late Neolithic or early Bronze Age, although we cannot be sure what rites and ceremonies took place here, nor how many participants were permitted to enter. The afterlife of this monument was less assured, with millennia passing accompanied by the processes of erosion, slumping, silting and, finally,

<sup>37</sup> G. Barclay, *Balfarg: the Prehistoric Ceremonial Complex* (Glenrothes, 1993).

<sup>38</sup> G. Ritchie, 'Destructions, re-erectments and re-creations', in *From Sickles to Circles: Britain and Ireland at the Time of Stonehenge*, ed. A. Gibson and A. Sheridan (Stroud, 2004), pp. 40–63.

<sup>39</sup> K. Brophy, 'Ruins in the landscape: modern monuments', in *Scotland in Ancient Europe: the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age of Scotland in their European Context*, ed. G. Barclay and I. Shepherd (Edinburgh, 2004), pp. 143–54.

<sup>40</sup> See J. Harding, *The Henge Monuments of the British Isles* (Stroud, 2003).

<sup>41</sup> Mercer, 'The excavation of a late Neolithic henge-type enclosure', p. 64.



Figure 8.6. The reconstructed Balfarg henge, Fife – this view shows the entrance to the henge and one of the internal standing stones (photo: author).

mechanized agriculture, which meant that by the turn of the twentieth century all that was visible on the surface were ‘two monoliths in a flat meadow’.<sup>42</sup>

Impending urbanization and the earmarking of this location for housing development entailed the complete excavation of Balfarg henge, a substantial undertaking which took place in 1977 to 1978. Initially the plan was to completely remove the site to clear the way for housing, but as the project developed plans emerged to preserve the henge *in situ* and eventually it was literally written into the housing-estate architectural plans.<sup>43</sup> This was very much in character with the local government ethos in Glenrothes at the time, the employment of town artist David Harding between 1968 and 1978 ensuring an urban landscape of ‘dinosaurs, henges, flying saucers, pipe tunnels, giant hands and other curios which all “do something” to social space for those who

<sup>42</sup> Mercer, ‘The excavation of a late Neolithic henge-type enclosure’, p. 167.

<sup>43</sup> Roger Mercer has told me that changes in plans for the future of the henge at Balfarg were very much driven by enthusiastic staff of Glenrothes Development Corporation, not the heritage sector (interview, 18 Jan. 2016, Edinburgh).

stumble across them'.<sup>44</sup> Balfarg henge was therefore retained as a central green space with houses and streets arranged concentrically around it and the road around the henge called, appropriately, The Henge, with an offshoot of this being Henge Gardens (Figure 8.7). This urban henge is no longer the original prehistoric monument – rather, it is the ruin of a ruin, left in a deliberate state of semi-collapse and partiality. The ditches were cleaned out and given flat bases by machine, while the two standing stones were removed, then erected again (falling apart and being stuck back together in the meantime) and telegraph poles were used to reconstruct one of the timber circles. This radical (and no doubt expensive) change to the development proposals created a wide and open space at the heart of the new housing estate, a leisure resource giving this new town a quasi-prehistoric heritage. This was an explicit attempt by local government to offer an educational heritage resource, with the monument subsequently becoming part of the archaeological trail in the early 1990s, developed by the Fife Council archaeologist at that time, Peter Yeoman.

Despite being in a suburban space, Balfarg is – like Sighthill – remarkably quiet, something noted by the many students taken there on field trips since 2001. Two rather dirty noticeboards and a small parking area on one side of the henge are the only indication that this is anything other than a typical urban green space, while the re-erected standing stones and timber-post reconstructions have the look of being landscape furniture of no clear utility, or examples of the public art so commonly found across Glenrothes. On many visits over the past two decades documenting Balfarg henge (as well as the other monuments on the archaeology trail), this author has almost always found Balfarg henge to be an empty space. For instance, pedestrians and dog walkers tend to circumnavigate the henge using the surrounding pavement rather than walk directly across the enclosure. However, also like Sighthill, evidence for this being an enclosure that is well-used by local people abounds in the form of material culture, fabric alterations and use-wear patterns. Indeed, the perceived emptiness of this space almost certainly relates to the fact that the henge/green space has the same life-cycle and daily routine as the suburban housing estate within which it sits – flurries of activity at commuting time; dog walking at dusk and early morning; children playing in summer evenings; with perhaps a bit more activity at the weekend. The henge is, in fact, the ultimate commuter monument, almost certainly with a rush hour this author never sees because he visits on Thursday afternoons or early on sleepy Saturdays. This suggests that at the very least emptiness is time-dependent and contextual; and it

<sup>44</sup> Fife Psychogeographical Collective, *From Hill to Sea*, p. 131.



Figure 8.7. Henge Gardens, Glenrothes (photo: author)



Figure 8.8. Wear marks indicating the use of the timber posts at Balfarg henge for goal posts. My interpretation of these marks – caused by a diving goalkeeper – was subsequently confirmed by conversations with local people (photo: author).

is perhaps self-evident that places can sometimes be empty and at other times full; these states are not mutually exclusive. This author's gaze, as the *archaeologist-flaneur* making occasional visits, is contingent on the cycles of use of this and other spaces, as well as personal patterns of activity.

And this empty space does have a rhythm of use, usually for play. This author has observed the physical remnants of this during visits, confirmed by conversations with local people. Sporting activities take place within the henge, digging into the very fabric of the monument. The short posts that form the timber circle are used as goal posts, sometimes with pairs of timbers painted white, while wear patterns caused by a relentlessly diving goalkeeper are often evident between these uprights (Figure 8.8). The slope of the henge bank near the entrance on the north side of the enclosure became, at one point, badly worn and rutted, presumably by bikes rushing in and out of the ditch. This was remedied a few years ago by the erection of a low fence at the bottom of the slope to stop this damaging activity. Such little alterations, responding to circumstances, continue to change the character of this place, the biography of which is dynamic and usually reactive. The henge is often covered in litter associated with eating and drinking, too, although this is more juvenile in nature than the objects found at Sighthill – more likely to be soft-drinks packaging, sweet wrappers and pizza boxes than any sign of alcohol. This makes sense, as the henge is a panopticon, surrounded by an almost unbroken circle of houses, meaning that anti-social behaviour cannot be concealed. Stranger objects have turned up within the henge as well, such as condoms, rubber gloves, burst balloons and broken car number plates. Graffiti are also evident, with faded painted letters, bright-yellow paint blobs (see Figure 8.6) and occasional chalk doodles all evident on the standing stones at one time or another.

Therefore, this urban Neolithic monument, which is largely reconstructed and presented as a green space for urban leisure activities, is used commonly for a range of social and anti-social activities, usually when archaeologists are not around to witness them. What also seems likely is that the monuments around Balfarg are not being used as intended by archaeologists and planners in the 1980s, with the archaeology trail fragmented by continued housing development and the noticeboards declining in cleanliness and relevance as time passes. Interestingly, as with Sighthill the aspirations behind the modern construction of these monuments have been lost or subverted through time, victims of urban living.

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter has considered the role of emptiness at various levels within archaeology. It started by discussing archaeological thinking and suggested



that emptiness entails room to think; and that it is the spaces between what we know – the data – within the archaeological record that allow our imaginative and distinctive interpretations of past people and society to emerge. This is not to say that emptiness and empty spaces do not present interpretive challenges; and prehistoric enclosures from the ancient past and within contemporary landscapes are used as examples to illustrate this. Such enclosures appear to us to be empty: Neolithic sites such as the enormous Dorset cursus, populated by ghostly figures that acted but left no traces for us to find via excavation and survey; or the reconstructed Balfarg henge monument, seemingly devoid of human interaction and shunned even by dog walkers. To counteract the impression of emptiness in such enclosures in contemporary urban spaces, this chapter recounted psycho-geographical engagements with late twentieth-century variants on Neolithic enclosures in Glasgow and Fife, suggesting that surface emptiness need not lead to interpretive shallowness and that emptiness may simply be a product of the ways in which the fieldwork has been conducted. Although the challenges are all the more substantial in the analysis of 5,000-year-old enclosures, it is clear that reflection on our methods and assumptions about empty spaces is urgently needed. In other words – and perhaps this is a given among other archaeologists although is rarely expressed – archaeological emptiness and absence in the archaeological record do not mean actual emptiness, do not mean that no people were present, that no one did anything here.

The three sites discussed in this chapter are versions of the more typical prehistoric empty spaces which were reflected on at the start but which occur in modern urban contexts and have been shaped by contemporary processes such as urban development and renewal and mechanized agriculture. This makes them ideal for an approach using a psycho-geographical gaze as the very acts of visiting, studying and moving around and within these enclosures are acts that subvert urbanization and urban planning. The slow-motion destruction of elements of the Broich cursus by a railway embankment, road, ploughing and the construction of two large schools does not mean that we cannot still trace the lines of the ditches in the landscape and utilize them to inform school children about prehistory in the unlikeliest of places – beneath the grass and tarmac of the playground and rugby pitch. The urban spread of Glenrothes led to the complete transformation of a complex of Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments, but that does not mean that the underlying prehistoric logic cannot still be followed (and indeed this logic in part informed the shape of urbanization). Sighthill stone circle was a product of political expediency (built as part of a job creation scheme) and its dismantlement was down to forces of urban planning and regeneration, which has caused

much tension.<sup>45</sup> These enclosures are therefore entangled in contemporary landscapes, a state which makes them both challenging but also exciting to visit and bring back to life. Yet such urban prehistoric sites have for too long been hidden from the gaze of archaeologists who regard such sites as ruinous, degenerate, empirically empty places. This is despite the fact that we know from explorations of ruins in historical contexts, whether they be industrial<sup>46</sup> or urban,<sup>47</sup> castles<sup>48</sup> or the Berlin Wall,<sup>49</sup> that there is much to be gained by such engagements, notably through bodily and sensory interactions and novel forms of recording. This does not mean, however, that we should not reflect on these stylized and academic engagements: the collection of objects and the documentation of change and use all suggest that potentially difficult empty spaces are far from empty if we know when, where and how to look.

None of the activities recorded at these urban prehistoric enclosures have left any traces that would survive for a decade, never mind centuries or more, confounding the proverbial future generations of archaeologists who are supposed to find these kinds of remnant. Scuff marks in grass, fire spots and gloss paint may seem dramatic when initially recorded, but will almost certainly be invisible and undetectable within a few years. Therefore, the impression of emptiness can also be a product of the kinds of things people do within enclosures. Our gaze into the empty spaces of archaeology – in this case enclosures, but there are other examples – is probably more likely to identify emptiness than rule it out, whether we are considering prehistoric or contemporary landscapes. Archaeology is full of enclosed spaces and empty spaces, but too much focus has been placed on making sense of the ancient ones (a very difficult task) and not enough work done with those that still survive and are either relevant to communities today or could become so (a far simpler task as this chapter has shown). Empty spaces need not be a source of despair: emptiness is often simply an illusion caused by the processes we use to look at the past and the ways that we look at the world around us, even today.

<sup>45</sup> See, e.g., a petition against the removal of the Sighthill stone circle with many thousands of signatures by spring 2016 <<http://www.change.org/p/glasgow-city-council-should-scrap-their-plans-to-demolish-sighthill-park-and-its-stone-circle>> [accessed 26 Aug. 2016].

<sup>46</sup> Edensor, 'Walking through ruins'.

<sup>47</sup> Garrett, *Explore Everything*.

<sup>48</sup> Shanks, *Experiencing the Past*.

<sup>49</sup> A. Klausmeier and L. Schmidt, 'Commemorating the uncomfortable: the Berlin Wall', in *Re-mapping the Field: New Approaches in Conflict Archaeology*, ed. J. Schofield, A. Klausmeier and L. Purbrick (Berlin, 2014), pp. 22–7.

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Emptiness is a challenging concept: slippery in definition and elastic in meaning. It implies not simply a total lack of content, but an absence: of people, things, ideas and so forth. It thus follows that emptiness is a matter of perception, and as such, is a highly subjective phenomenon, dependent on who is doing the observing and what the subjects expect to find. Yet within the expanding literature on spatial history, comparatively little has been said of the role that emptiness serves or the social, cultural and political processes by which it is produced and maintained. *Empty Spaces* proposes that the seeming emptiness of rural landscapes, urban environments, air and ocean in history should not be taken at face value. Rather, the contributors argue that spaces which are considered empty are just as important to the social production of space and landscape across time as those which are remembered, celebrated or memorialized, and moreover, that empty spaces have had a crucial role to play in the creation and dissemination of a wider set of historical ideas about nation, empire, territory, community and self. The volume draws together contributions from authors working on a variety of purportedly empty land-, sea-, and air-scapes in either material or representational form, ranging from Ireland to Russia to Brazil and beyond. It considers the visual as an object of historical analysis, including the art of Edward Hopper and the work of the British Empire Marketing Board, and concludes with a section that examines constructions of emptiness in relation to capitalism, development and urban space. In doing so, it foregrounds the importance of emptiness as a productive prism through which to interrogate a variety of imperial, national, cultural and urban histories.

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