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Light, traces and identity: The embodied experiences of urban explorers within abandoned spaces

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2022

Figure 1: The names of children on coat hooks within Pye Bank Primary School. Image taken by author, 2015.

Abstract

Urban exploration is an activity which requires practitioners to be within and move through derelict, abandoned, or otherwise off-limits spaces. These spaces possess a range of affective qualities, thus affording the urban explorers who embody them sensorial experiences that may not be accessible within increasingly sanitised urban public spaces. This research utilises a combination of qualitative video analysis, online ethnography, and narrative storytelling to understand the embodied experiences of the urban explorers who frequent abandoned spaces, and how they choose to represent these spaces through social media and other online sources. Five locations within the North of England and the East Midlands were selected to be the focus of this research. A total of 99 videos and 54 narrative forum posts, which detailed the personal experiences of urban explorers at these locations, were analysed. The findings highlight that, whilst space is experienced subjectively, there are a number of affective qualities that influence how urban explorers may perceive abandoned spaces. Furthermore, this research notes that many abandoned spaces retain material traces that reflect their former uses. The urban explorer is represented as an investigator who embodies these traces, reassembling the histories of the spaces that they visit. This research also evaluates academic criticism that the urban explorer identity is controversially linked to the idealisation of masculinity and white privilege. It does this through delving into the relationships that explorers have with positionality, identity, and online representation, finding that there is some evidence of assumed white privilege and hypocritical behaviours by a small minority of the urban exploration community.

Acknowledgements

Throughout the writing of this thesis, I have received support and assistance from a range of individuals, for which I am hugely appreciative.

I would firstly like to thank my supervisors Dr Marijn Nieuwenhuis and Dr Aya Nassar, who have provided me invaluable support and guidance. Their support has enabled me to continue writing during times when I thought I would not be able to finish the writing of this thesis, so I remain entirely thankful. I am also thankful for the support of the staff at Durham University Geography Department.

The care and patience provided by my partner James is also worthy of its own mention. Thank you for putting up with my late nights and for slacking on the washing up. I am sure I will pay you back as you continue to seek further academic success in the future. Additional thanks to our rescue dog Bellie, who has provided company on the aforementioned late nights. I now look forward to a summer full of adventures with both of you as I submit this thesis.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Figure 2: Image of author at Rugby Radio Station. Image taken by author, 2015.

Fenced Out: Exploring Rugby Radio Station

In the winter of 2014, I moved into a small single room in a house share in Rugby. I was 16 at the time, and this was my first real taste of freedom after securing an accountancy apprenticeship in the area. Around this time, I developed an interest in abandoned spaces after viewing a number of videos of 'urban explorers' on YouTube. I became invested in researching the activity, and soon discovered that there were a number of abandoned buildings approximately an hour's walk from my house.

The Rugby Radio Station was built in 1923, intended to facilitate the setting up of the Imperial Wireless Chain, where a number of stations would be used to exchange messages through Morse code across the United Kingdom. By 2000, buildings A and B had closed, with only building C still in use (Our Warwickshire, 2022). I discovered this site on 28DaysLater.co.uk, a forum which

facilitates the sharing of images and narratives of completed or attempted explorations with a network of urban explorers across the country.

After a day of filling numbers into spreadsheets, I finished work and met a friend who had nervously agreed to accompany me on the adventure to the radio station. Whilst it was believed that the journey would only take one hour on foot, we soon discovered that this was not the case. We hastily began the trudge across a series of waterlogged fields, every so often attempting to gain enough signal to check our location on Google Maps.

We began our journey as the sun was beginning to set, and we soon found ourselves within the pitch black in an unknown field. We had not thought ahead enough to bring torches with us. Though, our phones informed us that we were very close to our destination, all that remained was a sprint across the A5. But before we could complete this sprint, we first had to climb a security fence, which I estimated to be around 10 foot.

My friend was first over, clearing the fence with ease. Then, it was my turn. With an embarrassing level of difficulty, I began to make my way up the fence. Once at the top I swung my leg over, attempting to find a foothold on the other side. I could not find one. So, I did what any reasonable person would do, and sat down, right on top of a nest of barbed wire. Recognising my mistake, I attempted to remove myself from the wire, which had become entwined with my jeans. I shunted my body off of the fence, but still did not find myself free from the wire. Instead, I was now dangling from the top of the fence, attached by my jeans which were attached to my bottom.

With great difficulty, my friend managed to detach me from the fence, and I thudded back down to the ground. At this point, we had both decided that it did not feel worth it to continue our adventure. A quick call to my friend's colleague secured us a ride back to my house in a car, as attempting to retrace our steps across the fields was not entirely appealing.

The following weekend, learning our lesson, we drove out to the radio station. As I walked through the trashed building, I felt like I had discovered a new obsession, becoming in that moment, an urban explorer. I have long since moved away from Rugby, and thankfully also away from the career choice of accountancy, but I have continued to engage in my passion for abandoned spaces. This has taken me across a number of cities and countries and brings me to the present day where I have chosen to research the topic.

A brief introduction to urban exploration

Urban exploration is the practice of accessing spaces that are forgotten, neglected or otherwise off-limits (Kindynis, 2016). Those who participate in the activity are known as 'urban explorers' or 'urbexers'. Urban exploration takes place at a range of different types of sites, including those above the ground such as cranes and rooftops, to those below the ground such as cave systems and disused rail networks (28DaysLater, 2020). A range of motivations exist for urban explorers partaking in the activity, including a desire to interact with the urban environment playfully or to lay claim to the city (Kindynis, 2016).

Several urban geographers have linked urban exploration to the concept of flânerie, as both involve an individual who wanders, observing society and noticing small details and fleeting moments within city life. Both urban explorers and the flaneur may be seen to search for authenticity in the city, questioning how spaces are used and why (Arnold, 2018). Abandoned spaces in particular may offer sensorial experiences that are not found within more regulated urban spaces, as the exertion of external social control may be less influential (Edensor, 2008). As such, abandoned spaces may be seen to encourage the engagement of the senses. Abandonments continuously change as decay gradually sets in or objects are moved and removed. Therefore, the relationships that explorers have with spaces may also change, both physically and emotionally (Garrett, 2013). Moving through abandoned spaces may require individuals to embody space in ways that they had not done before, as

they crouch, crawl, and climb over debris (Edensor, 2008). Such spaces may also require them to interact with strange textures, such as rotting wood, rubble, broken grass, and harsh foliage, which are rarely seen within a sanitised outside world (ibid). Cultural shocks may also lurk around corners, as explorers are confronted with traces of lives which are no longer lived, stacks of papers from an industrial past or personal belongings of individuals who have long since vacated the space (Bingham, 2020a).

Much like the epitomisation of the flaneur as a white well-to-do male, the identity of urban explorers has also been called into question. Urban explorers have frequently been described as being predominately young white males (High and Lewis, 2007; Klausen, 2017; Stones, 2016). Furthermore, the urban exploration community has been accused of the idealisation of typically masculine traits and behaviours, rewarding individuals for engaging in brave, heroic, or dangerous acts (Mott and Roberts, 2014). Additionally, it is noted that individuals from different demographics, such as women and non-white individuals, may encounter difficulties when attempting to engage in the activity, or to interact with the urban exploration community (High and Lewis, 2007). Therefore, the experiences of most urban explorers may not reflect how minorities experience space, as this is shaped by the intersections of race, sex, class, and disability (Valentine, 2007).

There is a blossoming online community of urban explorers who use social media and forums to share their experiences of undertaking exploration at a range of different sites. Individuals may feel encouraged to build status online through the posting of themselves exploring particularly dangerous or difficult to access sites, which enables them to gain access to lucrative spaces or fend off competition from rival groups (Bingham, 2020a). However, perhaps through the motivation to build this status, many of the images that are displayed online are heavily stylised. Frequently, the use of filters and editing effects are employed, enhancing the appearance of decay, but also distorting the representation of space in order to promote specific aesthetic preferences (Kindynis, 2015). This results in the creation of ‘ruin porn’, which are images which centrally focus on ruination within space

(Arnold, 2015). Ruin porn serves to trivialise decay, ignoring the processes and reasons that may have led to the abandonment of space, and promoting the practice of 'slum tourism', where individuals may seek out areas of economic struggle and poverty in the city (Klausen, 2012).

Research aims and design

My initial plans as I set out to study the activity of urban exploration was to utilise an ethnographic approach towards research, through the use of in-person interviews, and participant observation, where I hoped to partake in the activity alongside urban explorers. The global Coronavirus pandemic changed these plans, as non-essential travel was discouraged, and in-person events were cancelled. It has been noted that the internet and social media are both heavily used within urban exploration communities, and the way that these sites are used by these individuals is a source of contention amongst some scholars (Kindynis, 2015). In a world of Microsoft Teams gatherings and stay at home mandates, the internet appeared to be an appropriate alternative to undertaking in-person research. I then began my search for internet sites, which I hoped would fulfil my desire to undertake a more digitally facilitated form of ethnographic research.

My search led me to identifying my two main sources of data, YouTube.com and 28DaysLater.co.uk. Initially, I had not intended to use a site other than YouTube. However, it soon became clear that some of the sites I had chosen had much fewer and lower quality videos than the other chosen locations. As such, I sought out other sites which would offer additional data. This led me to the urban exploration forum 28DaysLater, which was the most popular site of its kind in the United Kingdom. The narrative accounts posted on the forum offered a different type of data, which granted a voice to urban explorers as they communicated with others in the same community.
In designing my research, I settled on three research questions:

1. What affective atmospheres exist within abandoned spaces, and how are these represented by online urban exploration communities?
2. How are the material remains within abandoned spaces interacted with and embodied?
3. How does positionality and identity change the ways in which abandoned spaces are perceived, experienced, and represented?

Research methods

The data presented within this thesis was collected through utilising the following research methods:

Qualitative video analysis

The main method employed within this research was the qualitative analysis of video data. After selecting the sites that were used within this research, I began to compile a list of YouTube videos which featured the chosen locations. I approached the extraction of data from videos with an interpretivist approach, with my only guiding intention being to gain insight into how abandoned spaces were experienced and represented by urban explorers. Notes collected from the analysis of video data were handwritten, featuring verbatim quotes from explorers, observations on behaviours, interesting features within videos and brief demographic information. These notes were then typed up and given coded names, which I used to protect the identity of those who featured within the videos.

Online ethnography

I used online ethnography to search for posts on the 28DaysLater forum which related to the sites that I had selected. I sought to review every report which was available on the site, but soon found that many of the reports lacked much narrative input from the thread authors. As such, I discounted a number of accounts that contained little to no input. I specifically looked for posts where

the author spoke about their personal experiences of undertaking exploration within each site, as I was seeking thick descriptions which detailed their sensorial experiences of being within abandoned spaces. This approach to selecting only the more detailed accounts limited the number of narratives that were available for analysis, but I believe this number was still sufficient for use in this research.

Narrative storytelling

I chose to also include narrative accounts of my own experiences of undertaking urban exploration throughout this thesis. Each of the analysis chapters contain a short narrative account of my own experiences which relate to the chapter theme. I also weave short sections of my own experiences throughout the chapters where relevant. These vignettes and brief inputs represent an attempt to make clear my own positionality through this research, as somebody who is conducting research into my own social group. Through the act of writing these narratives I practiced reflexivity, allowing me to question my own experiences and critically evaluate my own actions.

Sites

With such a large number of videos and narrative reports available online, I focussed my research on five abandoned sites. Each site was located within the Midlands and North of England, and were familiar to me personally as a researcher, as I have previously visited them throughout my time as an urban explorer. I selected the locations according to their former purpose, ensuring that they represent a variety of the types of abandoned locations that can be found within the United Kingdom. This research focuses on the following sites:

1. Selly Oak Hospital, Birmingham.

This was a large former hospital site which closed to the public in 2011. The hospital grounds contained a number of buildings, including eight wards and a mortuary (BBC, 2010). The site has now been partially demolished, and the remaining buildings have been renovated to accommodate an estate of new houses and apartments (Business Live, 2021).

2. Leicester International Hotel, Leicester.

In the centre of Leicester, this 13-storey building has hosted a range of different businesses over the years, most recently functioning as a hotel. In 2011, an application was made for the demolition of the building. However, it still sits derelict to this day, despite a range of different planning permissions having been submitted over the past few years (Pub History Project, 2021).

3. Pye Bank Primary School, Sheffield.

The Pye Bank Primary School stood on the top of a hill overlooking the city of Sheffield. The building was comprised of two wings, the boys' and the girls' departments. Abandoned since 2004, the site stood derelict until recent years when it was restored and is now part of a newly opened modern academy school (Astrea Academy Sheffield, 2021).

4. Sheffield Ski Village, Sheffield.

Once the host of training for a number of Olympic athletes, this outdoor site suffered a fire in 2012 which caused its closure. In subsequent years, the site has been subjected to multiple severe fires, which are suspected to have been arson. A number of proposals have been submitted for the

future of the site, though work has yet to commence on the site as it sits slowly being absorbed by foliage (The Sheffield Guide, 2020).

5. Corah and Sons, Leicester.

This site once hosted a thriving textiles factory, yet as manufacturing began to grow overseas, financial difficulties caused its closure in 2004. Since then, the site has been in partial use by a number of small firms and a skatepark, though the vast majority of the site remained unused (Story of Leicester, 2022). Recent proposals suggest that the site may become home to a large number of new homes, but work has not yet started (Leicester Mercury, 2021).

Sample

A total of 99 videos were analysed as part of this research, with a combined total of 1084 minutes. This represents an average length of 11 minutes per video. Additionally, a total of 54 written reports were analysed. The site with the largest number of videos was Sheffield Ski Village (31), and the site with the least was Leicester International Hotel (5). The site with the largest number of reports was Selly Oak Hospital (20), and the site with the least was Leicester International Hotel (2).

Chapter overview

In the following chapter I introduce the core themes and debates that exist within the current academic literature which focusses on urban exploration and the affective experience of abandoned and ruined spaces. I introduce urban exploration as both an activity and a community before moving on to discuss the study of sensual geography. In the concluding section of this chapter, I draw out my guiding research questions, which ask how the affective nature of abandoned spaces are communicated by the online urban exploration community, how material remains within abandoned

spaces are embodied and how positionality and identity change the ways in which abandoned spaces are experienced, perceived and represented.

In chapter three, I introduce the methodological approaches that I used within this research. I discuss the benefits and limitations of my chosen research methods before introducing the sites that I chose to focus on. I then discuss the sample used within this research, describing any notable features within this sample. Within this chapter I also discuss the implications of my position as an insider-outsider researcher, considering what impacts this may have on the way that I conducted the research presented within this thesis.

Chapter four addresses the first research question, considering how darkness and illumination affects the embodied experience of undertaking urban exploration. Within this chapter, I consider how light has been historically used to implement social control through increasing visibility, and I discuss this in the context of undertaking urban exploration, as individuals face a trade-off between being made visible to others and being able to experience illuminated derelict space. I then discuss how different levels of light may change how explorers navigate through space, as obstacles take a different form where there is a lack of illumination. I also discuss how the senses are engaged differently within darkened space, as vision may be limited whilst other senses become heightened. Finally, this section challenges the emotional associations that we have with the dark, considering why darkened spaces have been associated with danger and haunting.

In chapter five, I focus on how urban explorers interact with the traces that remain within abandoned spaces. Through this chapter, I address the second research question. This chapter is split into five sections, focussing on each site individually, as what remained within each site varied according to their former purposes. I describe the traces that could be found within each location and discuss how these traces offer clues into the history of the sites, telling their stories when nobody else

is around to do so. I discuss how urban exploration could be seen as a practice of historical enquiry, as explorers feel compelled to reassemble the clues which are scattered throughout abandoned spaces.

I answer the third research question within chapter six, as I attempt to piece together the ways in which positionality and identity may influence the ways that urban explorers perceive and represent abandoned spaces. Within this chapter, I challenge the behaviours and attitudes of some urban explorers, discussing examples of transgressive behaviours and prejudiced views within the community. I also concentrate on the role of social media and the internet in shaping the behaviours of urban explorers. I note that for individuals to gain status and reputation within the community they must often engage in explorations that are considered to be risky or dangerous. This requirement may encourage a range of different editing and presentation techniques which seek to overstate the danger experienced within abandoned spaces, such as the use of clickbait, music, and visual effects.

I conclude in chapter seven, through restating my research questions and summarising my findings. Within this chapter I also discuss the strengths and limitations of my research, offering suggestions for the form that future research may take.

Research contributions

This thesis builds upon an already broad array of literature which exists on the topic of abandoned space and urban exploration in a few key areas. I make contributions towards this literature through describing the meaning-making processes that urban explorers go through as they move through abandoned space. In particular, I relate this to the themes of darkness and illumination and what they mean to urban explorers, as they negotiate the opportunity and adversity that both states afford them. Furthermore, I build upon the concept of urban exploration as a form of investigation, demonstrating how different spaces may inspire very different forms of interaction, and how this interaction is shaped through factors such as relationship with space and motivation for undertaking

exploration. Additionally, I investigate the role of identity within the urban exploration community, finding evidence to support claims of problematic types of behaviours. However, I conclude that such claims do not fully represent all urban explorers, and as such may offer a reductive summary of the community at large.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter aims to investigate the core themes and debates that exist in the current academic literature which focusses on urban exploration and the affective experience of abandoned and ruined spaces. I utilise this material to understand how urban exploration has been conceptualised and criticised, particularly by social and urban geographers.

The first section of this chapter focusses on introducing urban exploration as both an activity and a community. It does this by investigating the motivations behind undertaking the activity and the different forms that it may take. Following this, I touch upon the issues of identity within the community itself. I investigate the criticisms of scholars regarding the activity's ties to colonial behaviours, idealisation of masculinity and the commercialisation and stylisation of ruins and ruin photography. I highlight that representation within the community remains a major issue, as both practitioners and those who write about urban exploration are predominantly white men. Therefore, much of the material available online regarding the practice may not be representative of other types of bodies and identities.

In the second section of this chapter, I introduce the study of sensual geography, making note of how spaces can be experienced in a variety of ways, particularly those that do not always privilege sight as the most important sense. I introduce literature which speaks directly about the sensorial experiences offered within ruined and abandoned spaces, offering a comparison with the often stylised and highly curated representations of space which are frequently criticised as being produced by members of the urban exploration community.

In my concluding thoughts, I refer to the literature discussed within this chapter, noting that the way abandoned spaces are presented by urban geographers and urban explorers is often very different. From this I draw out my guiding research questions, which ask how the affective nature of abandoned spaces are communicated by the online urban exploration community, how material

remains within abandoned spaces are embodied and how positionality and identity changes the ways in which abandoned spaces are experienced, perceived and represented.

Introduction to urban exploration

Urban exploration is defined as the practice of accessing spaces that are forgotten, neglected or otherwise off-limits (Kindynis, 2016). Those who partake in the activity of urban exploration are known as urban explorers, or urbexers, who are described as a 'community of committed amateurs motivated by a love of photography (. . .), physical and embodied history and an inclination towards recreational trespass' (Bennett, 2011, p.432). Urban exploration comprises of visits to a number of different locations (Kindynis, 2015), some far above the ground, such as cranes, and others far below, such as transit systems. According to the UK urban exploration forum 28DaysLater (2020), the most popular types of locations discussed by explorers are industrial sites, 'other' sites (which include churches, railways, and schools), and asylums and hospitals. However, the website also caters to those who are interested in other locations, such as military, residential, and former mines. With such a diverse range of spaces to visit, it is perhaps unsurprising that the motivating factors behind undertaking urban exploration vary drastically depending on an individual's preferred type of location. As such, motivations may range from those who are seeking out opportunities to interact with the environment playfully, those who are interested in historical locations and those who wish to lay claim to the city (Kindynis, 2016).

Some forms of urban exploration may require evasive tactics that go beyond simple civil trespass. These types of exploration include infiltration, which entails an explorer gaining access to sites that are still in use, also known as 'live sites'. Live sites take a variety of forms, such as construction sites, roofs, and transit tunnels (Genosko, 2009). It is often more difficult to gain access to live sites, and the risk of being caught is higher due to the presence of workers. As a result, explorers who engage in infiltration may utilise tactics such as wearing uniforms to impersonate staff

or security workers. Through wearing uniforms, urban explorers are able to fake their way into many high-profile locations. Infiltration rewards explorers not just with a beautiful view or photos worthy of social media, it also demonstrates that the security process that are in place to protect spaces are not as impenetrable as landowners and lawmakers would like us to believe. As such, a successful infiltration attempt may provide explorers with a sense of euphoria and pride, as they have been able to effectively undermine the rules and methods of social control that attempt to limit personal freedoms within the city (Garrett, 2014a).

The motivation to experience pride and euphoria through urban exploration may be linked to the perceived freedom that is offered within derelict spaces. Within their walls, abandoned spaces may provide an opportunity for individuals to act out behaviours that are not typically permitted within other spaces. Edensor (2005a, p.21) describes how the 'looseness of ruined space permits a wide range of practices'. Loosened spaces, for example, may provide shelter for the homeless, a place to hang out for local youth and spaces of expression for artists and photographers alike. In some regard, abandoned spaces stand in contrast with spaces within the outside world which may seek to exclude particular groups of people, in particular youths and the homeless. The behaviours performed by these groups of people may be limited by forms of surveillance such as CCTV, which exerts control over personal liberties (Ninjalicious, 2019). Inside abandoned spaces, these regulations may cease to have the same impact on behaviour as the enforcement of rules and boundaries are not consistently enforced (Gates, 2013).

However, the enforcement of regulations and surveillance does appear to differ according to the where that the abandoned space is located. Through his experience of partaking in urban exploration across the globe, Gates (2013, p.145) observes that different cities often have starkly different responses to urban exploration, with some cities such as Paris operating a 'don't ask, don't tell' policy, whilst an explorer in New York is encouraged to take on a 'pray you don't get caught' attitude. Garrett (2013) similarly writes about his own experiences of the police responding to the

activity of urban exploration, describing an incident where he was arrested and had materials seized by the British Transport Police. Alongside this, he highlights a very different experience of interacting with the Parisian police force, who appear to have formed an alternative arrangement with the cataphiles who explore the catacombs. In exchange for a relaxed policing approach to their presence in the catacombs, the cataphiles report any structural issues or underground criminal activities to the police (Garrett, 2011a; Gates, 2013). It should be noted that both Garrett and Gates write from their own experience of undertaking urban exploration as white males, thus the experience of law enforcement and legal repercussions from undertaking recreational trespass may not be applicable to all who engage in the activity.

Interestingly it appears to be the case that policing of abandoned spaces can also be conducted remotely. Over the last the last two decades, the rise of internet sites relating to the activity of urban exploration have drawn significant public attention, growing rapidly in popularity. Arguably one of the largest sites, 28DaysLater, does not require an internet user to register on the forum before accessing reports written by other urban explorers. This also means that the reports on the site may be accessed by the police or security firms as they attempt to understand how explorers are gaining access to abandoned properties. This information can then be used to prevent the activity of urban exploration, as entry points are sealed, or popular locations are surveilled more closely. Information disclosed by explorers on reports could also be used if they refer to criminal behaviour, such as breaking a window to access a site (Garrett, 2013). However, beyond the risks of items being intentionally or unintentionally damaged, it may sometimes be difficult to ascertain exactly what types of damage an urban explorer could be causing, which leads Garrett (ibid, p.205) to speculate that it is social order that is damaged by the activity:

> 'The 'problem' with what explorers do is not that it is illegal but that, in capitalist terms, it's pointless and therefore is highly suspect, or that it embarrasses the forces of security, order and control'.

However, Garrett's placing of the practice outside of capitalism may not be entirely accurate. As will be detailed later on in this literature review, urban exploration often finds itself tightly intwined with the desires of capitalism.

Several urban geographers have made a link between the activity of urban exploration and the concept of flânerie. The act of flânerie involves wandering in order to observe society, allowing the flaneur to notice small details and fleeting moments that may go unnoticed within city life. In this regard, flânerie is said to grant narratives to the overlooked through searching for authenticity in the city (Trivundža, 2019). Urban exploration may be considered in a similar way, with the activity perhaps representing a desire to find authenticity through questioning the designated uses of space and the permitted behaviours within them. Arnold (2018, p.4) links urban exploration to flânerie through depicting exploration as a way of studying capitalism within the city:

> 'Today's equivalent to the flaneur might well be the urban explorer who confronts more contemporary expressions of capitalism in the city (. . .), the practice seeks out pleasure through trespass and exploration of novel, derelict, and abandoned spaces in the city'.

However, historically the flaneur has been represented as a white male, something which is similarly true of a large proportion of urban explorers. Teju Cole (2018), a black author and journalist, after the arrest of two black men for 'trespassing' at a Seattle Starbucks, writes:

> 'This is why I always say you can't be a black flaneur. Flanerie is for whites. For blacks in white terrain all spaces are charged (. . .) We wander alert, and pay a heavy psychic toll for that vigilance. Can't relax, black'.

The 21st century flaneur is in many ways different from their 19th century predecessors, however it cannot be ignored that the individual experience of moving through space is shaped by the intersections of race, sex, class, and disability (Valentine, 2007). Which leads to the question of how representative the most prominent creators of urban exploration content are of the experience of undertaking the activity.

Who is the urban explorer? The issue of identity

Whilst Gates (2013) and Garrett (2013) have argued that the urban exploration community is highly diverse and non-homogenous, many have contended that the vast majority of those who partake in urban exploration, and other forms of risk in leisure, are predominantly white males (High and Lewis, 2007; Klausen, 2017; Stones, 2016; See Lyng and Matthews, 2007 for risk in leisure). Furthermore, the urban exploration community appears to in many ways idealise and reward masculine traits. Whilst some scholars identify that positionality and personal characteristics may limit an individual's opportunities to undertake urban exploration (Edensor, 2005a), it has been noted that the idealisation of masculinity within the community itself may act as a barrier to participation. Mott and Roberts (2014, p.236) also describe how many of the taken-for-granted areas of exploration for men may not be as accessible for women:

> 'For many women, dark, derelict, urban environs signal the angers of sexual harassment or assault. Urban space, perhaps most especially the types of space favoured by urban explorers, simply is not accessible in the same ways for all'.

Furthermore, they note that several of the characteristics idealised by the community favour those with masculine physiques and personality traits. These traits, such as fearlessness and physical strength, perhaps seek to determine what types of bodies are able to become explorers. As such, the

masculinisation of urban exploration ignores the pluralities of embodiment, focussing instead on a single idealised explorer identity, rather than embracing diverse bodies and personality types.

Whilst the community is heavily dominated by men (Stones, 2016), accounts from explorers demonstrate that the masculinisation of the activity may also exclude some males. For example, Gates (2013) speaks of his own feeling of dejection when he was unable to push open a maintenance hole, explaining that the situation felt like a test of manhood, which he had failed. In this account, it seems as though those who do not fulfil the masculine ideal within urban exploration may feel like lesser explorers than those who do. In some cases, the masculinisation of the activity may also extend to the beliefs of those who partake in it. Bingham's (2020a, p.70) description of a young exploration group indicates that misogynistic language may form part of the shared identity of some explorers, even if they do not actually subscribe to these beliefs:

> 'As offensive as these comments might seem to an outsider, (. . .) 'the Boyz' choice of language is often not used to attack other people (. . .). The language is simply part and parcel of where they are from and a feature of their shared identity'.

Males are not the only demographic overrepresented within the urban exploration community, being white has also been associated with urban explorers (High and Lewis, 2007). Whilst direct evidence of racist beliefs within the community appears hard to come by, those from a non-white background may experience other barriers to participating in the activity. These most notably appear to come from biases and stereotyping of specific racial groups. Ninjalicious (2005, p.19), a prominent author within urban exploration literature, summarises the bias faced by non-white explorers as:

> 'Some people are going to have a lot of trouble becoming great explorers of uninhabited spaces through absolutely no fault of their own. Subtle or overt biases against dark-skinned people run pretty deep in many places. (. . .). While no one should abandon the idea of going

exploring based solely on their skin colour or ethnicity, people with darker complexions should be aware that they face longer odds of going through doors unnoticed. This is sad but undeniably true.'

One way in which urban exploration may be linked to racial injustice is through its use of colonial discourse. High and Lewis (2007) note that, historically, the use of the word 'explorer' has been steeped in negative connotations surrounding colonialism. They argue that the urban explorer is not far removed from colonial ideals, with a central tenet of urban exploration based upon the discovering, conquering, and claiming of space as one's own. In fact, it is often through being the first to conquer a space that status is awarded to an explorer, with them regularly being granted the opportunity to 'name' spaces that they have discovered (Richter, 2016a). Being granted status through the discovery of abandoned spaces allows some explorers to become somewhat of celebrity figures within the exploration community, as 'explorers rise to prominence by being the first to breach 'new' and elusive locations' (Garrett, 2013, pp.69). Though, urban explorers are not actually discovering anything, as the vast majority of abandoned locations were never lost to begin with. The desire to be the 'first' to discover a space may also lead explorers to make risky decisions regarding whether to enter a location, resulting in inhabited homes and other locations being wrongly claimed as abandoned (Daily Mail, 2020).

The heavy use of social media by some urban exploration groups may call into question whether the activity could be described as the mode of resistance that some have claimed it to be. Klausen (2017) notes that in displaying images of exploration on social media and receiving monetary gain through sales of merchandise or sponsorships, urban exploration is reduced to an activity which may be compared to tourism. Additionally, as the images posted by explorers become more popular on social media sites, the interest of large corporations may be sparked. This prompts companies to utilise the subcultural capital of urban exploration to promote sales of products, such as a clothing collection designed by Nike, which was openly inspired by urban exploration imagery (ibid). With

corporations actively commercialising urban exploration, it could be said that the activity has become a catalyst for the neoliberal economic regime, rather than resisting it. Furthermore, in displaying images on social media, explorers risk culturally inflating the practice. When this happens, urban exploration moves from the realm of subcultural resistance into an activity comparable to dark tourism (Jansson, 2018). Though, it is worth noting that not all explorers utilise social media sites to share their experiences of exploration. Arboleda (2016) makes a distinction between two types of urban explorer: the performative and the communicative. Performative explorers choose not to share information which risks others being able to access sites. Whereas communicative explorers prefer to share their experiences of exploration with others. Explorers face a difficult dilemma when deciding whether to be performative or communicative. The latter of these choices allows groups, or individuals, to build up an online reputation, which may enable them to gain access to lucrative sites or fend off the competition of rival groups. As Bingham (2020a, p.240) explains, posting on social media allows explorers to 'build a reputation for being 'epic' urbexers'. However, through sharing stories of their exploits online, explorers risk sites being damaged or sealed up, which limits the number of sites they have access to.

The types of images that explorers post on social media may also be problematic, as Trigg (2009) notes that urban explorers could be seen to celebrate decline as it presents opportunities for adventure. Furthermore, the level of decay present within abandoned locations may influence the likelihood that images of such spaces appear on social media. This is because the attachment that explorers have to specific sites may be reliant upon the perceived level of decay visible within them (ibid). With some explorers choosing to visit sites that display specific levels of decay, connections could be drawn between the activity of urban exploration and "slum tourism". Slum tourism is conceptualised as the act of visiting areas that are poverty stricken to marvel at slums and economic struggle within the city (Klausen, 2012). Urban exploration could be seen to parallel this form of tourism as it appears to romanticise or fetishise ruins through ignoring the human aspect of them and reducing them to a purely aesthetic spectacle (Dobraszczyk, 2010). Additionally, whilst photography

within these areas may allow the viewer to create their own understanding of the context behind ruin, the stylisation of images may stifle this process. Through the use of filters and editing effects, the representation of space may be distorted to promote specific aesthetic preferences (Kindynis, 2015). This may promote the creation of what Arnold (2015) describes as 'ruin porn', which are images where the central focus is on ruination within space. These images may serve to trivialise decay, through ignoring the processes and reasons that may have led to the abandonment of space. Garrett (2013, p.198) discusses the issue of explorers being removed from the reality of decay, positing that a lack of contextual understanding may negatively impact upon other people: 'at what point does our exploration cease to be simply an adventure in creative practice and begin to negatively impact those who are less fortunate than us?'. This quote suggests that there is a distinct separation between the two, however if we are to suggest that urban exploration is similar to slum tourism it would have a negative impact in all circumstances. That is not to say that it does not also hold merit as creative practice, as the production of urban exploration images are appreciated by many, even if they are used in capitalist promotional items or stylised as ruin porn.

Despite some arguments that may paint the activity as damaging, the urban exploration community does appear to try to encourage ethical behaviour to some degree, by encouraging participants to abide by a set of ethical codes. These ethical codes are readily available online and accessible to aspiring explorers. Some sources list a number of obligations that an explorer must follow, such as personal care, safety, and knowledge of the law. Another major obligation that is frequently seen within content pertaining to urban exploration is the motto 'take nothing but photos, leave nothing but footprints' (Broken Windows Theory, 2018). This motto essentially encourages those who explore spaces to be aware of their own impact, to avoid causing damage to a location through breaking items or leaving rubbish behind. It also encourages explorers not to engage in any forms of theft, which means that items are left to be appreciated by other visitors. It should be noted that other iterations of this motto also exist, such as 'take nothing that will be missed, leave nothing that will be noticed'. This motto represents a more liberal interpretation of moral responsibility within

the activity of urban exploration, and highlights that the community does not function as a single ethical body, rather a group of individuals who hold varying ethical beliefs. Furthermore, the application of ethical practice by urban explorers may be seen to be hypocritical in some circumstances, displaying what could be described as a pick and choose mentality. An example of this can be found within Gate's (2013, p.265) discussion surrounding explorer's views on graffiti, which often displayed an attitude of 'I don't like graffiti, except for the graffiti I like'. This attitude suggests that some ethical codes can be broken, so long as it fits the personal aesthetic of an explorer.

Introduction to sensual geography

The term atmosphere is difficult to define, it can refer to people, places and objects and appears to manifest as a sort of haze or feeling which surrounds them (Böhme, 2017). As atmosphere is not tangible it is also difficult to quantify it in a scientific or measurable way. Böhme's (ibid) discussion of Walter Benjamin's concept of aura expands upon how atmosphere extends beyond the objective experience of life and art. Both aura and atmosphere are absorbed through the body, which becomes a tool for experiencing the subjective reality of objects and spaces. In this regard, atmosphere may be described as the connection that is shared between the perceiver and the perceived, a unique sensorial relationship that is embodied through the engagement with a number of senses (ibid). As atmosphere is a relationship between bodies within space it is constantly forming, deforming, and changing as other bodies enter into relation with one another. These bodies create what Anderson (2009, p.80) refers to as affective qualities, which come together to produce and change atmosphere: 'Affective qualities emanate from the assembling of the human bodies, discursive bodies, non-human bodies, and all other bodies that make up everyday situations'.

Anderson (ibid) describes that these affective qualities, such as those emanating from light, sound, symbols, and texts come together to enhance, transform, and change our experience of atmosphere. Atmosphere is therefore presented as something which does not pre-exist but is rather

created by what exists within space at any one time. However, Tucker et al (2019) note that atmosphere may also be enhanced by those who were once within space but are no longer there. They argue that we rarely encounter spaces within our everyday lives which have not been visibly shaped by others. As such, historical cultural relations may also be woven into space, and these may inform and change the interpretation of atmosphere within space.

It was not until the 1990s that scholars began to focus on the study of embodiment and the interaction between infrastructure and the urban social world (Howes, 2005). This sensual turn has been seen within the humanities, arts and social sciences and it represents a focus towards the study of the connection of the body to space. Boutin (2012, p.125) describes that the move towards this mode of study is :

> 'A multi-sensorial approach [that] explores the connections and associations between the senses and their ties to cognition and memory, proximity and distance, self and other, intuition and reason, realism and fantasy, attraction and revulsion, male and female'.

The study of embodied experience recognises that the senses are a vehicle for understanding the affective power of space, allowing researchers to learn how environmental changes may affect the experiences and perceptions of city dwellers (Thibaud, 2012). Within the field of geography, the study of embodiment and the senses may be referred to as 'sensuous geography'. This form of geography emphasises the connection of our bodies to sense and space through studying our orientation in space and the relationships that we have with it (Urry, 2011). This form of study recognises that sight is often regarded as the most important sense, and it seeks to engage with a range of senses in order to gain a representative experience of city life (ibid). Furthermore, sensual geography may seek to understand how spaces are embodied subjectively. Characteristics such as class, social status, ability, and gender are linked to our bodies, and therefore become embodied within our experiences of our everyday lives (Low, 2011). As such, the ways that we experience and utilise space, atmosphere and

our senses within the city will differ greatly depending on our own life experiences and characteristics.

Modes of experiencing space

The senses are engaged in a number of ways within urban space, often according to the spaces within the city that we find ourselves, or the time of day that we visit them. For example, different kinds of spaces within the city may engage different types of senses, such as the bustling cacophony of sounds produced by main roads versus the relative hush of public green spaces. Sensorial experience may also be dictated by the cyclical nature of the city, with the city taking on a different atmosphere during the day compared to the night (Rodaway, 1994). As such, the dominant ways in which urban spaces are understood or communicated may not be fully able to represent the urban experience. The graphical expression of urban space through maps, for example, prioritises the visual as a mode for experiencing the city, therefore ignoring other ways of encountering urban space, such as through temporality, rhythm, or movement (Sand and Atienza, 2012). This has led to a growing interest in how spaces can be studied in ways that engage the whole range of senses.

The use of movement as a mode of investigation, particularly walking, is a method which allows researchers to study the everyday within the city. The researcher is able to reflect on the mundane aspects of the city, which are often taken for granted, yet offer insight into how urban life is constructed (Yi'En, 2014). Walking is a process of orientation and reorientation with the space around us, and we may be drawn to or repelled from certain spaces, objects, or people. Yi'En (ibid) describes how using walking as a mode of fieldwork allowed him to notice how small details within the city can have powerful affective qualities, describing how a discarded cup had led him to consider the absence of somebody who was once in the same space. As such, materials and objects within the city may be able to tell a story through encouraging onlookers to consider how others interact with and perceive space.

Taking time to move through the city in ways that are not productive may also allow us to learn about urban life. Through strolling, hovering, and getting lost we are able to learn the city through engaging senses beyond the visual. We may navigate by listening to the sounds of traffic, through copying the footfall of strangers or through following the scents of nearby restaurants (Rossiter and Gibson, 2011). This form of movement within the city challenges how space should be used, seeing them as places for curiosity, enjoyment, and performativity rather than simply a mode of getting from A to B, or spaces of work and consumerism. Frequently, walking is encouraged as a means to an end, as a mode of travel which has cost and health benefits rather than being promoted as an activity in its own right. However, walking is an important tool for investigating our own everyday geographies through questioning what we may consider to be a mundane daily activity (Middleton, 2011). Walking does not simply engage the feet, rather it involves the whole body. This means that, through walking, our bodies experience the environment in ways we may not immediately notice, such as humidity upon our skin (Wunderlich, 2008).

The sensorial nature of ruined and abandoned space

Public spaces are frequently regulated by forms of surveillance and observation. In these spaces, individuals are expected to move in a linear fashion, to avoid expressing oneself and to avoid loitering (Edensor, 2008). Within abandoned spaces, the exertion of social control may be much weaker. These types of spaces encourage decisions to be made on a whim and paths may change according to curiosity rather than regulation. Abandoned spaces encourage the engagement of senses, such as touch, which may be something that is discouraged within regulated public spaces (ibid). These spaces may also bring back memories and experiences of childhood play as those who frequent them are encouraged to look upon the limitless possibility of space with wonder and curiosity. This curiosity is perhaps, in part, inspired by the literature that we consume as children:

> ‘The promise of extraordinary sites and mysterious experiences is built into the popular culture of children with its myriad tales of adventure in secret gardens’ (Edensor, 2005a, p.3)

In this regard, urban exploration could be used as a method to inspire childhood nostalgia, as participants are able to engage in a range of playful activities which hark back to the game-playing, thrill-seeking and misbehaving of our youths (Anderson et al, 2015). When performing play within abandoned spaces the body becomes a tool for experiencing, which we use to feel, act and express agency within space. The body also allows us to experience the sensorial reality of these spaces, as touch, hearing, smell, and taste combine to create our own subjective spatial reality (Low, 2003).

Abandonments are continuously changing as decay gradually sets in. These spaces are in a process of ‘transition, mutating in form and meaning’ (Garrett, 2013, p.33). Throughout these changes, the relationships that explorers have with spaces may also change, both in a physical and emotional sense. Walking through derelict spaces may involve a staccato type of rhythm, as paths may become blocked off and new routes need to be sought. Additionally, breaks in movement may also be due to an explorer’s desire to interact with a specific object, capture certain images or to simply take in the ambience of space (Edensor, 2008). Abandoned spaces are also imbedded with temporal immediacy, as explorers are aware that each visit may be the last time that a structure is accessed before its inevitable demolition or collapse (Garrett, 2011b). This temporality of immediacy can amplify the perceived importance of a visit to an abandoned space, as explorers may desire to document each aspect of a space before they are no longer able to. Differing temporalities may also be felt within abandoned spaces through the sweeping of floors or the sealing of entry-points, as these signal that spaces are still being used, or perhaps even cared for, which disrupts or stunts the process of decay (Garrett, 2014b). To some explorers, an absence of these signs of care may be upsetting, as they may form a close emotional connection with the spaces that they frequent. For example, Bingham (2020a, p.88) describes that the knowledge that some abandoned spaces, and the personal items left within them, have been left to decay can be emotionally jarring:

> ‘We continued to explore the building for an hour or so, but eventually it started to bother us that no one gave a shit about the place anymore, especially when there were so many old personal belongings lying around’.

Urban exploration may be viewed as an extension of psychogeographical study, as they both share a central tenet in engaging with emotionality and affect within space (Benzaoui, 2014). Psychogeography may be best described as the study of how ambiences and other abstract spatial concepts can aid in the construction of alternate cartographies (Keep, 2009). Both psychogeography and urban exploration emphasise the importance of gaining a sense of authentic spaces, through the experience of real emotions and the formation of real memories. These are experiences which the world outside of abandonments may not offer so freely (ibid). The affective nature of abandonment has been explored through Light and Watson’s (2016) accounts of visiting ruined castles, where they note that a number of ambiences exist within these spaces. For some, these spaces may provide gloomy lessons about mortality and offer spaces for mourning over the irreversibility of time, and the inevitability of decline. For others, they offer encounters with the spectral, mythical, and mystical, they are spaces where ghost stories are told and often originate from. To some, they may also be places of open-ended possibility, ripe for the exploration of space and even ourselves. They provide opportunities to engage with our fears, which may allow us to overcome them and pursue spaces which were once off-limits. Within the related activity of parkour, fear is described as a limiting emotion. However, once it has been overcome, this fear is what propels individuals to even greater heights, and to complete more difficult manoeuvres (Saville, 2008). In this regard, fear may inspire individuals to create embodied knowledge, which opens up new possibilities within their bodily experience. Beyond the experiences of emotions such as fear, abandonments may attract explorers who wish to engage with emotions that are more intangible, or abstract, such as melancholy:

> ‘Might these non-conformist expeditions also exhibit a yearning to confront that which we almost never encounter within the build environment anymore - twilight emotions such as nostalgia and melancholy, even powerful experiences of the sublime?’ (Rapp, 2010, p.3).

Edensor (2008, p.126) similarly considered the affective nature of ruins and the types of mobilities that they enable. He describes ruins as occupying the status of ‘terrain vague’¸ as a counter image of the city, unproductive, dangerous and without the boundaries of the outside world. Within the city, surfaces are flattened and sterile, and senses are controlled. Negative smells and sights, such as sewage and rubbish, are removed and covered up by pleasantries such as the scent of fresh coffee, air fresheners and flowers. The sterility of the city may promote a feeling of placelessness, as diverse sensorial experiences and textures are muted. However, this is not the case within ruin, as Edensor (ibid) describes how the senses are engaged in a multitude of ways, such as through the scent of mould and rotting wood, the feeling of humid air and water dripping against the skin and through the textures of rubble, broken glass, and harsh foliage beneath the feet. In this regard, abandoned spaces allow for corporeal and sensual engagement within space which may not be available within a sanitised outside world. As such, Edensor (ibid, p.127) notes that, within ruin, ‘we might wander according to numerous geographies’ as linear passage is restricted according to the emotions, senses and materialities that we may encounter within space. Ruins also act as a space for bodily improvisation, as walking through ruin may require an individual to climb, crouch, run or jump to avoid obstacles. The sensorial and corporeal experience of ruin may be further enhanced by the affective nature of ruin, which may inspire a multitude of emotions. Edensor describes how senses may become heightened through hearing the echoes of footsteps or the dripping of water, and how gloomy unlit spaces may inspire the uncanny or a sudden awareness of isolation. The unique bodily experience offered within ruin therefore allows an explorer to actively engage with a range of emotional and physical states that they may not have previously experienced, allowing them an awareness of how body and space interact unconstrained by the outside world.

Urban exploration allows individuals to experience heterotopic space, which are spaces that seem far removed from our everyday lives. The way we act in or experience these spaces is not dictated by the outside world. Spaces are not sanitised, speech feels freer, and we can construct, and experiment with, our identities without the constraints of regulated space (Bingham, 2020a). Within these spaces we are free to engage with our emotions, which we are able to share with our peers. In sharing emotions with our peers, we may be able to achieve a level of bonding and closeness with others that may not be possible within the outside world (Lilja, 2017). The sharing of emotions and experience has been presented as a motivation for some to partake in the activity of urban exploration (Garrett, 2010). Through these shared encounters, urban explorers can construct mental cultural scrapbooks, which serve as collections of the experiences, thoughts and memories of friends and strangers who have been brought together within forgotten spaces (Richter, 2016b). It is the cherishing of these memories and experiences that perhaps binds all urban explorers, regardless of whether they are motivated by historical discovery, a desire to resist social control, the aesthetics of decay, or internet recognition. As Garrett (2013, p.132) explains:

> 'As much as urban exploration is a deeply physical practice, much of what urban explorers are searching for is that which verges on the indescribable, the sensory surreal. In short, 'embodiment' here is as much about emotions, feeling and affect as anything else'.

Concluding thoughts

Reviewing the available literature on the activity of urban exploration and the study of sensual geography has demonstrated that abandoned spaces are environments that offer a rich sensorial experiences. The urban exploration community has a diverse range of motivations for entering into abandoned spaces, inclusive of an appreciation for the relative freedom they offer compared to the outside world and for an opportunity to experience historical artifacts in a hands-on manner.

Urban exploration remains an activity that is heavily criticised by scholars for its embodiment of colonial ideals, inconsistent attitudes towards capitalism within the city and the idealisation of masculine traits. Despite arguments by some urban explorers (see Garrett, 2013; Gates, 2013) that the community itself is inclusive of members from all backgrounds, ethnicities, genders and abilities, the community itself appears to be heavily dominated by young white men. This domination is reflected within the literature, which is available about the activity, much of which is the work of male identifying academics. This presents an issue, as this chapter has discussed how space is experienced differently by different demographics, particularly women.

The work of Edensor (2005a, 2008, 2013, 2015b) has been instrumental in understanding how the senses may be engaged within ruined and abandoned spaces, particularly within industrial ruin. This work provides inspiring insight into how sensual geography can be used to study spaces which are rarely seen by the general public. Within this chapter it was noted that sight is often regarded as the most important sense, yet within abandoned spaces there is frequently an absence of light which brings the other senses to the fore. Edensor also discusses our relationships with the 'waste' materials which are frequently left behind within abandoned spaces, and how these may take on alternative uses or meanings as decay begins to set in (2005b, 2005c). However, Edensor does not appear to engage with the notion of urban exploration as an activity, instead his focus is upon the value of ruins themselves. Much of the material which is available to the general public about urban exploration is highly curated to present stylised and often fetishised representations of ruins and abandoned spaces. As such, the valuable insight offered by the work of scholars such as Edensor (ibid) or Light and Watson (2016) is not consumed by the public, nor many of the individuals who engage with urban exploration recreationally.

To address the disparity between the work of scholars and the information regarding urban exploration available to the general public, the following research questions will be pursued:

1. What affective atmospheres exist within abandoned spaces, and how are these represented by online urban exploration communities?

Through this question I aim to gain an understanding of the types of affective qualities that may influence how a space is experienced and represented by urban explorers. The literature above highlights that there exists a range of qualities, including levels of light, the types of movement through space and atmospheric conditions that all influence how a space is embodied.

2. How are the material remains within abandoned spaces interacted with and embodied?

With this question I aim to delve into the ways in which the objects that remain within abandoned spaces are interacted with by urban explorers. Abandoned spaces frequently bare traces of their former uses, and as such, explorers frequently happen upon objects that allow them to reconstruct and understand what these former uses may have been. The literature also highlights that these experiences may be of emotional significance to some urban explorers.

3. How does positionality and identity change the ways in which abandoned spaces are perceived, experienced, and represented?

Through answering this question, I aim to evaluate some of the assertations within the literature that the identity of urban explorers may in some ways be controversial. This question aims to evidence the ways in which identity and positionality may influence the behaviours of urban explorers, and how this is presented to the outside world through the use of the internet and social media.

The following chapter will discuss the methods used in the design, collection of data and analysis for this research.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter aims to introduce the methodological approaches taken for this research. I first discuss how my research design has evolved over the course of my year of study, accounting for the Coronavirus pandemic which had halted any aspirations for in-person ethnographical research. I then tackle the issue of positionality within my research, noting that having been a member of the urban exploration community for many years, I could be described as an insider researcher. I discuss the implications of this, and the conflicting priorities that conducting research on one's own community may have. I then introduce the locations that I have chosen to focus on within this thesis, providing brief detail about their histories and a justification as to why I had selected them. Before moving on to discussing the research methods I used, I discuss the sample that I had selected to analyse. I then reflect upon my chosen methods: qualitative video analysis, online ethnography, and narrative storytelling, before finally discussing the key ethical considerations that I encountered during the completion of my research.

Introducing an evolving research design

This project initially set out to utilise a more ethnographical approach, as I had planned to engage in in-person interviews and participate in urban exploration with members of its respective community. However, it would be perhaps unsurprising that the Coronavirus pandemic made this plan almost impossible. As such, the methods I sought to use have evolved as I closely watched the global situation and hoped that I may get the chance to engage in at least a small amount of auto-ethnography. When it became obvious that this was not going to be the case, I went back to the drawing board. I recalled that the internet had played a major role in my own access to the urban exploration community and the physical sites that I had visited in the past. As I continued to read literature relating to urban exploration, I also noted that the use of internet by some members of the community had been a source of contention, with some scholars noting that the media posted by urban exploration communities is often not representative of how abandoned spaces are actually

experienced (Kindynis, 2015). With this inspiration, I began my search to identify what forms of urban exploration media were available online to the general public.

A Google search reveals that there is a large quantity of video data relating to the activity of urban exploration available via the video sharing site YouTube.com. A search of key terms including 'urban exploration', 'urban explorer', 'urbex' and 'abandoned building' reveal that each had at least 15,000 video uploads with these key terms in their titles. This does not include videos which do not directly refer to the activity of urban exploration, which instead opt to use specific names of locations frequently followed by the terms 'exploration' or 'explore'. More popular locations often had several hundred video uploads on the site. It was therefore evident that YouTube had a large amount of data which could be utilised to address the research questions that I had posed.

As my research progressed it became increasingly clear that some of the locations that I had chosen had much fewer, and lower quality videos than the other chosen locations. I therefore sought to gain further location specific data via other online sources. This led me to search for online forums which allowed urban explorers to post written accounts of their experiences of exploring sites. The most visited urban exploration forum within the United Kingdom is 28DaysLater.co.uk. This site, as of March 2022, boasts upwards of 80,000 members and has a total of 45,000 threads (28DaysLater.co.uk, 2022a). Each thread refers to a single written account which has been published by a member of the site. Users are also able to comment on threads, of which there have been 270,000 comments to date, an average of six per written account.

Alongside these two rich sources of data, I wanted to ensure that I was able to have a narrative voice throughout each of the chapters within this thesis. I have been a member of the urban exploration community since I was 16, which is now a total of eight years. Throughout this time, I have travelled across the United Kingdom, and indeed to other countries, to experience a plethora of abandoned spaces. Whilst I did not undertake urban exploration during the researching and writing up

of this thesis, I wanted to ensure that my own stories could be told through my writing. As such, each of the three analysis chapters begin with a narrative vignette which tells of my own experiences and encounters with the themes discussed within the chapters. I also chose to include images I have captured during my years of participating in urban exploration. I believe that it is difficult to truly appreciate the atmosphere of the locations spoken about within the following chapters, and as such the images contained within this thesis may help the reader to imagine themselves moving through these spaces.

Positioning self within research

It is important for qualitative researchers to practice reflexivity, to deconstruct their own positionality in order to understand how the biases and preferences that they hold impact upon how they conduct and present research (Thurairajah, 2019). Reflexivity is a process of self-evaluation, which allows for a greater degree of transparency within research methodology. Discussions of reflexivity and positionality often bring up questions around the roles of subjectivity and objectivity within research. I do not believe that is desirable within this research to discuss urban exploration in an objective way, because space is experienced subjectively according to who we are. As such, I believe that my own experiences of undertaking urban exploration add value to this research. However, I must take care to ensure that my own biases and assumptions do not skew the experiences of others that are shared within this thesis.

Insider research is defined as the study of one's own social group or society (Greene, 2014). In many ways, I identify myself as an insider within this study. I have been involved with the urban exploration community for a number of years and have formed close ties with a small group of individuals across Europe. Garrett (2012) acknowledges that it is particularly difficult to gain insider status within the urban exploration community, noting that he was initially met with a high level of suspicion by members. My situation was different to Garrett's, as he began as a researcher desiring to

become an urban explorer, whereas I began as an urban explorer desiring to become a researcher. I had already put in the work required to establish trust and bonds within the community, which would have been far easier than establishing trust whilst identifying myself as a researcher. I must therefore acknowledge my comparative privilege in being able to access the community relatively easily. In fact, my first interaction with the community occurred purely by chance. I had stumbled upon a profile of an individual on a dating app, who had mentioned urban exploration within their biography, and I had matched with them. Once I had formed a friendship with this individual, I was introduced to others in the community through a process of mutual trust and vouching. A single individual had therefore acted as a gatekeeper to my involvement in the community. The people that I had met through being introduced by the gatekeeper have accompanied me on many adventures. This has granted me access to locations that I could never have dreamed of accessing myself, such as an inconspicuous hole in the ground of a disused railway tunnel, which was the gateway to a vast expanse of subterranean space known as the Paris catacombs. This is local specialist knowledge, which I was only able to access through my own connections to members of the urban exploration community, had enabled me to connect with an explorer located in Paris. I had never met this individual; however, they had somehow been convinced to take a complete stranger into a hole in the ground based upon the vouching of members of the community.

As an academic researcher, I also occupied the role of an outsider (Humphrey, 2007). As a researcher I did not look upon the data I collected in the same way that I would as an urban explorer. I would not study and speculate on the language used in the videos, for example. As an urban explorer I would have used these videos and written reports to decide whether a location was worth visiting, or to glean information about the entry points for a location or the presence of security. There is a duality to the role of an insider-outsider researcher, as you are encouraged to look upon a social group that you feel familiar with in a vastly different way. When engaging in reading for writing of this thesis, I began to look from the outside in. For example, references to sexist behaviour within the community led me to rethink some of my own experiences of undertaking urban exploration. Looking back at my

experiences from the position of an outsider, there were some instances where I felt as though I had been treated differently because of my gender. For example, during an interaction with police in Belgium, I was told by my male friends that I should stay hidden as they would deal with the police. As the only female in the group, I was left behind whilst the males conversed with the police. It did not feel at the time that I was treated this way because of my gender, but upon reflection in an outsider position I believe this to be the case. I therefore found benefit in assuming the position of an outsider, as this allowed me to critically reflect upon my own experiences, something which I do not feel I would have been able to do through occupying a purely insider perspective.

I was, however, presented with an ethical dilemma through assuming the position of an insider-outsider researcher. Toy-Cronin (2018) notes that the obligations as an insider may clash with those as an outsider, which leads to questions of which position should be prioritised. I experienced this dilemma when considering how much of my intimate knowledge of urban exploration to disclose through the writing of my auto-ethnographical narrative vignettes. I had gained much of this knowledge through establishing trust with other urban explorers as an insider. I have had conversations with some urban explorers, particularly during my research for my undergraduate dissertation, which uncovered a general distrust and suspicion of academic researchers and journalists. Many discussed this distrust as stemming from an incident with a well-known researcher which had landed many prominent explorers in legal hot water. This had damaged the reputation of researchers, perhaps irreparably for some. In this case, my position as an insider had been beneficial, as I was able to overcome some of this distrust. However, this puts me in a position where I must step carefully to avoid breaking this trust, and the bonds that I have formed with community members who I could now even describe as my friends.

To the few urban explorers that I call my friends, I occupy the position as an intimate insider. The intimate insider is a researcher who has close friendships with those within their field of study, which can be particularly problematic and confusing, with the potential for conflicting feelings and

priorities for researchers (Taylor, 2011). Many of the participants from my previous undergraduate research are now my friends, as we formed close bonds through the ethnographic research that I conducted. In the research for this thesis, I have referred to the videos of friends, some of them even featuring myself. The locations that I chose to focus on for data collection were not highly popular within the urban exploration community, and as such I was able to reach data saturation by analysing every video available on YouTube for each location, at the time of data collection. This meant that some of the videos created by my urban explorer friends had made their way into my sample pools. However, using these videos as data causes conflict, as I am aware that these videos were never created to provide an accurate representation of the abandoned space, they were instead created to simply remember shared experiences and to share these online with other members of the exploration community.

Case selection

With such a vast number of videos and narrative reports available online, I made the decision to select five specific locations to be the focus of this research. I intentionally chose places that I am familiar with as a researcher because this enabled me to utilise my own experiences to enrich the insight gathered through the analysis of the video and written data. The locations I chose to focus on were therefore all within the Midlands and North of England as this was where I grew up and spent the majority of my time undertaking urban exploration. It is perhaps fitting that my focus is primarily on the North of England, as Edensor (2005a) notes that northern cities are the most heavily populated with abandonments. I also made sure to select a range of different types of locations, as this allowed for a more diverse range of experiences to be analysed. The locations that were chosen were a hospital, a hotel, a school, an outdoor leisure facility and a factory. I believe that this provides a good representation of the types of abandoned spaces that exist within England. I will now provide a brief description of each of the chosen locations:

1. Selly Oak Hospital, Birmingham.

The first buildings on the site of the Selly Oak Hospital were those of a workhouse. In 1897 an infirmary was built on the site, accommodating up to 250 patients within eight wards. Selly Oak Hospital continued to grow over the years, with the workhouse eventually closing as attitudes towards the poor changed (University Hospitals Birmingham, 2022). In 2010, the transfer from Selly Oak Hospital to the site of a new hospital began, with its doors finally closing to the public in 2011 (BBC, 2010). The site of the former hospital is now occupied by a number of new houses and apartments (Business Live, 2021).

2. Leicester International Hotel, Leicester.

In 1962, on the site of a former shoe store in Leicester city centre, the Magnum Centre Hotel was built. The building has been occupied by a range of different businesses over the years, including bars, cinemas, health clubs, offices, and warehouses (Pub History Project, 2021). It has also been known by a variety of different names, including The Penguin Hotel, Centre Hotel, Park International Hotel, Leicester Exhibition Centre, and Leicester International Hotel (University of Leicester, 2022). In 1997, an application was made for the demolition of the building; however, this did not come to fruition. In 2011, a new application was made, which proposed that the building would be turned into student flats. This proposal has also not seemingly progressed, as the site still sits derelict within the city centre to this day (Pub History Project, 2021).

3. Pye Bank Primary School, Sheffield.

The Pye Bank Board School opened in 1875, providing places for children under the 1870 Education Act. The school was divided into three departments: infants, boys, and girls, with each having their own headteacher and section of the school. In 1883, two new wings were built onto the

building, providing much needed room for a growing population. In 1939, the boys' and girls' departments were amalgamated, with the school becoming known as the Pye Bank Junior Mixed School. By the 1970s, much of the school's playground space was occupied by mobile classrooms as the population continued to grow, and by 2004, the former Pye Bank Board School building stood empty and disused (Pye Bank CE Primary School, 2011). Today, the building has been restored, sitting next to a newly opened modern academy school, and is used to provide teaching for children through from reception to year four (Astrea Academy Sheffield, 2021).

4. Sheffield Ski Village, Sheffield.

Sheffield Ski Village opened in 1988, occupying a hillside location which overlooked the city of Sheffield. Over the years, the site became host to a number of other attractions, including quad biking, laser tag and ten-pin bowling. The site was popular with snowsport enthusiasts of all abilities and had facilitated the training of Olympic athletes and world champion skier, James Woods. The site closed in 2012, after suffering severe damage from a series of fires, which are suspected to have been arson attacks. A number of proposals have been put forward for the future of the 16.5-acre site, including plans to build new houses and to construct a new site for extreme sports. The latter proposal appears to have been the final decision, with work due to have begun in early 2021. However, this ambition has been impacted by the Coronavirus pandemic and little work has been completed on the site (The Sheffield Guide, 2020).

5. Corah and Sons, Leicester.

Corah and Sons was established in 1815 as a hosiery business, with the company purchasing a number of premises in both Leicester and Birmingham. In 1865, the foundation stone for the Corah factory at St Margaret's Works was laid. The building, which occupied a seven-acre site in the city centre was the largest factory of its kind in Leicester at the time and produced an extensive range of

clothing items. In 1926, Corah and Sons established a relationship with Marks and Spencer, supplying the retailer with knitted items for nearly 80 years. As a result of financial difficulties, and the growing textile manufacturing market overseas, Corah was acquired by Coats Viyella in 1994, and within a decade had closed down. Some of the site still remains in use, by a number of small textiles firms, a skatepark and a banqueting suite (Story of Leicester, 2022). More recently, proposals have been revealed for the construction of up to 1000 new houses on the site, in an attempt to revitalise Leicester's city centre. However, it is not clear whether this work has begun (Leicester Mercury, 2021).

Sample

Site	Number of videos	Length of videos combined (minutes rounded)	Average video length (minutes rounded)	Number of reports
Selly Oak Hospital	31	498	16	20
Leicester International Hotel	5	78	16	2
Pye Bank Primary School	16	116	7	5
Sheffield Ski Village	41	329	8	10
Corah and Sons	6	63	10	17
Total	99	1084	11	54

Table 1: Sample of videos and narrative reports used within this research

The information in the table above details the sample used within this research. A total of 99 videos were analysed, with a combined total length of 1084 minutes. This represents an average length of 11 minutes per video. Additionally, a total of 54 written reports were analysed. The data in the table displays that the number of videos for each site were not equal, and this was due to there being a lack of videos available for some sites, particularly Corah and Sons and Leicester International Hotel. To overcome this issue, I added the analysis of written reports to the research design, however there was still a noticeable disparity between the number of reports available for each site. Though, interestingly, Corah and Sons was amongst the sites with the largest number of written reports available, despite having the second lowest number of videos.

The table above also provides details on the average video length per site. Comparing these times to the average overall video length suggests that Selly Oak Hospital and Leicester International Hotel were higher than the overall average. This could be explained by the size of both sites, as both the hotel and the hospital were sprawling and required much more time to explore in their entirety than the other sites in this research. Corah and Sons was the site which had the closest average video length to the overall average which may be the case because, whilst it was a large site, many of the traces that remained within the space had long since been removed, which meant that explorers were less likely to linger within rooms. Pye Bank Primary School and Sheffield Ski Village had average video lengths below that of the overall average. The potential reason for this differs considerably. Pye Bank School was particularly small, which meant that people were able to cover each of the rooms relatively quickly, which shortened the unedited point-of-view style videos. Sheffield Ski Village was the largest of all of the sites, however due to it being entirely outdoors and having suffered a number of fires, very little of the original features remained.

It should however be noted that the was a large variation between the lengths of videos at all sites. This is detailed within the table below, which displays the longest video for each site and the shortest. Four out of the five chosen sites had at least one video which was around one minute in length or shorter. Additionally, four out of the five chosen sites had at least one video that was at least 30 minutes in length or longer, with Selly Oak Hospital having the largest number of these videos. It cannot therefore be claimed that the average video length for each site gives an accurate representation of how long videographers spent at each location. Further breakdown of video data is provided within the appendix (Item 2).

Site	Longest video	Shortest video
Selly Oak Hospital	104:34	1:10
Leicester International Hotel	35:02	0:30
Pye Bank Primary School	12:11	1:20
Sheffield Ski Village	51:38	0:20
Corah and Sons	39:22	2:36

Table 2: Longest and shortest video for each site within the sample

Research method: Qualitative video analysis

The main method employed in this research was the qualitative analysis of video data. Whilst still relatively new within the field of social sciences, the use of digital video by qualitative researchers has been growing steadily, particularly within the fields of anthropology, communications, and urban studies (Scarnato, 2019). By definition, qualitative video analysis refers to the use of video data to provide insight into social processes between humans and objects, animals, or other humans (Knoblauch, 2012). Unlike other qualitative methods, such as depth interviews, videos allow researchers to uncover a range of behaviours which may not be noticeable upon first observation. The ability to rewind and rewatch video therefore allows researchers to pick up on small behaviours such as gestures, body positions, movements, facial expressions and even ways of speaking (Ramey et al, 2016; Scarnato, 2019).

After choosing the sites that I wished to focus on, I moved over to YouTube to begin searching for videos which featured the chosen locations. I experienced difficulty in finding videos for some of the locations, especially those that I had chosen in Leicester: Corah and Leicester International Hotel. In order to ensure that I was able to find videos associated with these spaces, I expanded my key word searches to variations of those listed below:

- (Place name) urban exploration
- (Place name) urbex
- (Place name) abandoned
- (Place name) exploration
- Abandoned (place type) (city name)
- (City) urban exploration
- (City) urbex

I made this decision to reflect Arboleda's (2016) argument that there are two types of urban explorer: the performative and the communicative. Summarised, the performative explorer chooses not to disclose locational information which may risk others being able to access an abandoned site. As such, they may instead choose to minimise this risk through not directly naming the site that they have posted. Some performative explorers may go further than others in their anonymisation of place names, so whilst 'Leicester urbex' would have been able to reveal some of the hidden videos of Corah and Leicester International Hotel, not all hidden videos would be revealed. However, going further to search for the key words 'hotel urbex' or 'factory urbex' would have returned such a large number of videos that it would be impossible to filter for two specific locations. I therefore decided that using the search terms listed above would be a reasonable approach to uncover as many of the performative videos as was feasible to process.

I approached the extraction of data from the videos with an open mind, aligning myself with an interpretivist approach towards data collection (Hart, 2017). My only guiding motivation was to gain insight into how abandoned space was experienced and represented. I initially watched each of the videos at full speed (1.0), to get an initial sense of what type of content the videos contained. After completing this stage, I utilised the video speed setting on the YouTube site to rewatch any particularly interesting sections of video at half speed (0.5). I also utilised the option to add subtitles where it was available. These two settings aided in the analysis of the videos as I could ensure that I was able to record sections of speech verbatim and capture any small behaviours that I had missed during my initial viewing. Many of the videos appeared to have been recorded with handheld cameras or GoPro style cameras attached to the explorer's chest or head, which meant that there was frequently background sound as they moved around the sites. This made it especially difficult at times to understand what the individual was saying. As such, slowing down videos and making use of subtitles made it more likely that the speech could be deciphered, but this was not always successful. Notes collected from the analysis of the video data were handwritten, featuring quotes from explorers, observations on behaviours, interesting features within videos and very brief information on the

demographics of those featured within the videos. These notes were then typed up and stored in folders, with coded names, such as SVV2, referring to 'Ski Village video 2'. Data which contained links to these videos was stored separately, in a password protected Excel file. This was in an attempt to protect the identity of those who had featured in the videos, something which will be discussed in more detail within the ethics section of this chapter.

Reflecting upon the use of this method, I believe that it offered very valuable insight into the activity of urban exploration as it provided an opportunity to imagine the multi-sensory embodied experiences of urban explorers as they moved through abandoned space (Pink and Mackley, 2012). In this sense, knowledge of urban exploration was not built through listening to or reading descriptions, but instead through becoming acquainted to the activity as I imagined myself in the shoes of the explorer. However, this method was not without its drawbacks. The first of these drawbacks was the extreme difficulty in finding videos which were not produced by white male explorers. This is perhaps unsurprising, considering the evidence that exists of urban exploration being predominantly performed by white males (High and Lewis, 2007; Klausen, 2017; Stones, 2016). An alternative method, such as depth interviewing, would have allowed me to specify a desired sample which may have enabled greater representation of women and non-white individuals. A further issue was the small number of videos that existed for some sites, and the poor quality of a number of these videos. This issue was mitigated through the use of narrative reports, which allowed for a greater number of explorers to contribute their experiences of the spaces selected. Issues of video quality were navigated by utilising headphones, video speed settings and subtitles to clarify as many sections of video as possible. However, some sections were too distorted to comprehend fully.

My specific use of YouTube videos for collecting data also presented challenges. Patterson (2018) reflects on her use of YouTube videos, noting that she experienced a personal ethical dilemma associated with the treatment of these videos as data in their own right. Whilst an ethical panel did not view her research as including any human participants, it was difficult to separate the videos

themselves from their authors. As I watched the videos during my own research, I saw the faces of explorers and I heard their voices, reminding me that my research did use human subjects, even if I did not communicate directly with them. Whilst YouTube users upload videos to the site knowing that they will be available to anyone, they did not know that their videos would later be used in my research. Unlike more conventional research methods, such as interviewing or focus groups, the individuals who uploaded these videos are unable to clarify what they meant in sections of speech or correct themselves. I also know from my personal experience of uploading to YouTube that it is possible to lose access to accounts, which means that videos cannot be removed even if their uploader may wish them to be. With this in mind, I decided to treat the video data with sensitivity, especially when it came to protecting the identity of uploaders, some of whom had used their full names when naming their YouTube accounts.

Research method: Online ethnography

Online ethnography is the application of ethnographical study to virtual or digital settings. Whilst traditional ethnographic methods seek to understand social behaviour and cultures within real world settings, online ethnography is used to study virtual communities (Hart, 2017). The mode of study is known by a number of other terms, including virtual ethnography, netnography and cyber ethnography. However, this thesis will refer to this method as online ethnography. Ethnography takes an interpretivist approach, which seeks to discover the perspectives of those who are being studied. It therefore does not set out with goals to predict behaviours or form hypotheses, unlike positivist approaches (ibid). Therefore, I approached the collection of data in an open-minded manner, which set out to understand how users of the online urban exploration forum 28DaysLater.co.uk experienced and represented abandoned spaces.

Online forums provide a ‘narrative sandbox’ for individuals to express their experiences and interact with others who share interests or have similar life circumstances (Sik, 2021). Therefore, they

provide a rich environment for ethnographers to gather data and gain an understanding of the communities that they host. Forums are typically easy to access, which makes online ethnography an appealing method as many of the resources used within more traditional modes of qualitative study are not needed, such as the organisation of interviews or field visits (Hutchinson, 2014). Researchers themselves must decide the level of participation that they choose to have within their chosen online community. The activity of 'lurking' is sometimes frowned upon within forums, as it refers to community members who do not interact with others on the site (Hart, 2017). Researchers may also be criticised for partaking in lurking versus participating within forums, as this is seen to be a passive mode of enquiry which may not enable them to fully take part in participant observation and only grants a surface level understanding of how members of online communities interact with each other (Hutchinson, 2014).

The work of Bennett (2011) provided useful guidance for my own conducting of online ethnography. In his study, Bennett had also conducted an analysis of narrative reports posted on the 28DaysLater site, specifically those which focussed on the activity of bunkerology, the exploration of underground bunkers. Within his work, Bennett notes that the forum is accompanied by a set of guidelines, which dictate how places should be reported on by forum users. Gatekeeping is common in online communities, ranging from requiring users to simply register on the site to asking potential members to complete forms asking about their intentions of using the site (Heyes, 2017).

Furthermore, as Bennett describes, many forums also have moderators, who seek to control the types of content that are shared on forums. Hutchinson (2014) notes that there are different levels of forum gatekeeping, from sites which are entirely public to those that are entirely private. In my experience of using the 28DaysLater forum, the site strikes a balance between being public and private. As a non-member you are able to search for specific places on the forum, which enables you to read and view posts from other users. Non-members are not able to post on the site, react to posts or reply to posts. The sign-up process is relatively simple, requiring users to create a username and

password and link an email address or personal Facebook profile. Members are able to post, comment and react to the comments and post of others on the site. There is also an additional forum section which allows individuals to become members of sub-groups, which relate to the locations of explorers, for example there is a Leicester exploration group. Forum members are able to apply for membership of these groups, but there does not appear to be a guarantee of acceptance, which adds an additional level of gatekeeping to the site.

I have been a member of the 28DaysLater forum since 2016, when I first began to search for abandoned spaces which were local to me. I used the forum to gather information on sites, such as any hints toward their exact locations, entry points and a general indication of whether they were interesting enough to visit. The forum was also particularly useful for information relating to the up-to-date status of sites, as reports could be filtered by upload date. If a site was last posted about a year ago, it was likely that it was either no longer accessible or had been demolished. Whereas a site which had regular and recent posts would indicate that it was still accessible at the time. I have always been a 'lurker' on the 28DaysLater forum, not having made a single post or comment to date. However, I have visited the forum at least once a month since signing up as a member, so I believe that I have been able to gain an in-depth understanding of how members of the community interact with each other.

I collected data from the 28DaysLater forum after I had completed my initial stage of video analysis, as at this point, I had a good idea of how much data I had collected for each of the chosen locations. Similar to the video analysis phase of my research, I also sought to review each of the reports available for the sites, but I soon found that some of the reports lacked much narrative input from the thread authors. Many of the reports available for each location simply had a brief paragraph detailing the history of the location and then followed with images taken during the author's visit. I discounted these threads because I was looking for posts where the author spoke about their personal experiences of the space, as I was seeking thick descriptions which could be used to interpret their

sensorial experiences of being within abandoned space (Geertz, 1973). Whilst this approach limited the number of narratives that I could analyse, I believe that the number was sufficient for use in this research.

Research method: Narrative storytelling

Storytelling is a natural way of recounting experience, and a way in which we make sense of our experiences and share them with others (Moen, 2006). Autoethnography is an autobiographical style of writing which places the self within a social context, which makes it particularly useful for an ethnographer who is doing 'home' or 'native' research (Humphreys, 2005). Autoethnography attempts to dispel the notion that the researcher is an objective and disconnected observer of social phenomenon, as it enables the researcher to look inward and study themselves to create a reflexive dialogue (ibid). The sharing of our own stories brings spaces to life, granting readers an opportunity to imagine themselves within the author's shoes, or within the situation or space being described (Lewis, 2011). The writing of vignettes in particular offers a window through which a reader can view the experiences of a writer, eliciting an emotional understanding and bringing the research that proceeds it to life (Humphreys, 2005).

I chose to include narrative accounts of my own experiences of undertaking urban exploration throughout the writing of this thesis. Each of the analysis chapters are prefaced with a short narrative account which relates to the chapter theme, and I have chosen to weave short sections of my own experiences throughout the chapters where relevant. These vignettes represent an attempt to make clear my own positionality through my research, as somebody who is conducting research on my own social group. My own narrative accounts are a product of the events themselves and my own interpretations and recollection as I discuss them years later. Therefore, they cannot be presented as an objective representation of the truth, rather a subjective account of how I experienced space and how I recall them in the present day. Thus, the act of writing the narratives themselves allowed me to

practice reflexivity, letting me question my own actions and the actions of those around me, framed with the knowledge that I have gained through my years of undertaking exploration and subsequent years of studying the activity (Humphreys, 2005). It is important to note here that the explorations I describe within these narratives were not undertaken during the writing of this thesis, as I did not have the appropriate ethical approval to undertake exploration for the purpose of research during this period.

Ethical considerations

There were a number of ethical considerations that I navigated as I undertook the research and writing of this thesis. The first of these surrounded whether or not to disclose the online identities of those who produced the videos and narrative reports that were analysed within this research. Contreras (2019) describes how a lack of detail about participants and field sites can lead to speculation about the accuracy of the qualitative research presented. However, striking the correct balance between fully disclosing identities and stripping accounts of all identifying features can be difficult to manage. Furthermore, the call for transparency within the qualitative research world can present real safety risks to researchers and participants, particularly if it addresses sensitive topics. As some of the videos that were analysed contained depictions of vandalism, theft, and discriminatory views, I believe that there may be a risk to participants if full disclosure of their identities, through sharing their YouTube or 28DaysLater usernames, was to occur. Considering this, I decided to create distance between the user and the videos or narrative accounts they had created. I did this by referring to reports and videos in a coded manner rather than referring directly to the creator's username. A full list of the videos and reports used within this thesis is provided within the appendix (Item 1; Item 2). Although it is still possible for the reader to connect a coded reference to the video in question, this is discouraged through adding an additional step to the identification process.

In navigating the issue of criminal behaviour, namely acts of vandalism, I had to make another ethical decision. As I completed the initial phase of research, a significant number of the videos I watched contained acts of vandalism occurring. These ranged from very minor actions such as the writing of a name on a wall to actions involving the smashing of windows, walls, and items of furniture. By consuming these video outputs and not acting I wondered whether I was complicit in future acts of vandalism occurring, as I made no effort to report the videos themselves. YouTube does have a function where viewers can report videos that do not align with its community guidelines; however, I did not choose to pursue this. My justification for this was twofold. Firstly, I considered the severity level of the behaviours I watched. I was witnessing vandalism, which was being committed against an already decrepit space, I was watching the tagging of walls which were already littered with tags, and I was watching the smashing of a window on a building which had already been scheduled for demolition. I did not perceive this behaviour to be severe enough to warrant my own action. This leads into the second reason, which is that there exists a grey area within academic research about when behaviours should be reported, and it generally comes down to the individual beliefs of a researcher, especially where there are no human victims (Surmiak, 2020; Wiles et al, 2008). I have myself witnessed the urban exploration community policing itself. At some point in 2020, I saw a post that had circulated around social media denouncing an explorer who had filmed and uploaded themselves committing acts of vandalism. The post had a great number of comments which expressed their outrage at the explorer, and there was a general sentiment that this type of behaviour threatened the reputation of the exploring community as a whole. This suggests that the exploration community may themselves act upon the types of videos that I describe, which may mean that despite my own inaction the explorers in the videos could already be receiving backlash.

A further ethical consideration related to my decision to disclose the names of the locations that I chose to focus on within this research. To make a decision on this topic is effectively deciding whether I identify myself as a performative or communicative explorer (Arboleda, 2016). I recognise the risks associated with sharing locations that are still accessible, such as the potential to attract both

vandals and law enforcement. This risks both damage to the locations mentioned and the sealing up of existing entry points, both of which present issues for would-be explorers. However, choosing not to disclose locations at all risks a lack of transparency within the research, which is something that I would like to avoid (Contreras, 2019). I therefore decided to limit the amount of detail included within my location disclosures. Within the case selection section of this chapter, I briefly introduced the locations and provided a short summary of their history. I did not make note of any locational details beyond the city in which the sites are located. It was, however, important to include the names of the sites, as they featured heavily within both the video data and narratives that were analysed. It is also important to note that I did not disclose how exactly to access the sites, so anybody who is encouraged to seek the sites out from reading this thesis would be required to conduct their own research on specific site locations and how to gain entry to them. Furthermore, whilst some narrative accounts feature references to jumping fences, or climbing into buildings, entry points frequently change, so this information may not be at all accurate in the present day. It is also worth noting that each of the locations discussed had either been demolished, restored, or had planning permission granted for construction work. As such, at the time of writing this thesis it is possible that only a very small number of the locations, if any, are still considered to be accessible.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the key methodological approaches that have been taken within this research. I have introduced the research methods that were employed, considered my own positionality as an insider-outsider researcher, introduced the chosen sites, and summarised the sample used within this research. I have also considered the ethical issues that have arisen from my research and addressed the conflicting priorities that I experienced whilst conducting research within my own social group. The next chapter will begin to introduce some of the key themes that were identified within my research.

Chapter Four: Light and Dark Spaces

This chapter discusses how darkness and illumination affects the embodied experience of undertaking urban exploration. Within this research, I set out to ask how abandoned spaces are embodied and experienced, and a key theme emerging from my findings was the influence of illumination on the experience of urban abandoned space. As such, this chapter mostly addresses the research question 'what affective atmospheres exist within abandoned spaces, and how are these represented by online urban exploration communities?'. There are four sections within this chapter. The first section considers the role of light as a form of social control, both through discouraging deviant acts in the first instance, and catching acts that are currently taking place. This section explores the ways in which individuals may be made visible by different types of illumination, and how there is frequently a trade-off to be made between being visible to others and being able to experience illuminated derelict space.

The second section within this chapter discusses the activity of navigating through darkened space. It highlights that vision may be of very little use within these areas and that spaces become unfamiliar within the dark. This section of the chapter also discusses the potential physical dangers that urban explorers encounter whilst moving within the dark, and the ways in which individuals might seek to overcome these.

The third section investigates how individuals interact sensorially with dark spaces. As vision is limited, other senses are heightened, and spaces are embodied differently within the dark. Explorers rely upon senses, such as hearing, smell, and touch, to navigate derelict buildings, thus allowing them to gain a familiarity with space that is not wholly visual.

The final section within this chapter challenges the dominant western belief that darkness and dark spaces are associated with evil, fear, and threat. It considers how darkness provides hiding places for dangerous people who may be lurking in the shadows. This section also delves into how darkness

is associated with the paranormal, supernatural and death, and that derelict spaces possess many features that enable them to be perceived as eerie or haunted.

Within this chapter I build upon the already comprehensive writings of Edensor on the topics of darkness and illumination (2008, 2013, 2015a, 2015b). I demystify the meaning-making processes and tactile experiences that urban explorers go through within darkened abandoned space. Additionally, I expand upon the work of scholars such as Thomas et al (2018) to understand why urban explorers may choose to enter spaces which are associated with danger, thus granting insight into the motivations of those who enter spaces which many others may choose not to venture.

Ultimately, this chapter aims to illuminate how the senses are engaged within abandoned spaces, and how they are embodied by the individuals that frequent them. Many themes discussed within the chapter tie in with upcoming chapters, including how the material remains left behind within space serve to influence the experiences of visitors, which is further explored within chapter five. Additionally, accounts from explorers discussed within this chapter indicate that interactions with certain groups of people within abandoned spaces may be a source of fear, particularly within darkened spaces. However, these fears appear to sometimes be without reason. This will be discussed in further detail within chapter six.

On light: The Catacombs of Paris

When you have been socialising with other urban explorers for long enough you begin to hear about spaces that have gained legendary status within the community. These spaces become sacred to the people who explore them, often prompting explorers to travel large distances or spend vast amounts of money just to be able to visit. Some individuals, including myself, build a sort of bucket list of spaces that they wish to explore. These bucket lists often include sites such as Chornobyl, the chateaus of the French countryside, high profile asylums and former military bases. One of those

frequently listed space is the Carrières de Paris, which is known to most as the Catacombs of Paris. This series of mined tunnels beneath the city is so beloved that the urban explorers who frequent them have a distinctive name, the Cataphiles (Garrett, 2010). The Catacombs of Paris are commonly associated with death, which is not surprising considering the estimated six million skeletons that reside within them (Geiling, 2014). Although, these tunnels are far from dead, as they provide the perfect space for subcultural and countercultural activities to take place. From illegal raves, to hidden cinemas and secret art installations, the tunnels beneath the streets of France's capital city have always excited me (Bingham, 2020b).

In the summer of 2018, I jumped at the opportunity to visit the Catacombs, booking a cheap Airbnb, a regrettably long coach trip and dragging along my reluctant partner. I found somebody willing to take us down to the tunnels on Instagram, and we were soon waiting outside of our designated meeting point, a KFC on an unassuming city street. Then began our journey, which led us to a railway bridge which overlooked abandoned train tracks. To one side of the bridge, we found a black door, which surprisingly was unlocked. After descending a set of steps, we found ourselves on the tracks with gravel crunching beneath our feet. La Petite Ceinture, the little belt, was a circular railway which served the urban travellers of Paris between 1862 and 1934 (Atlas Obscura, 2021). After its abandonment, it was slowly reclaimed by nature and attracted a number of subcultural communities, including graffiti artists. Walking along the tracks allowed me to consider how the space around us is changed by light. The sunshine on the tracks was dappled by the overhanging vegetation and the vibrant tones of the graffiti art was amplified by the glow of afternoon sun. Entering a tunnel along the tracks suddenly brought other senses to the fore, as you could hear the rumbling of the nearby metro trains and the dripping of water. The sound of the crunching gravel was also amplified, heightening our nerves as we did not know who else might be within the tunnel. An expanding circle of light ahead of us signified that we were coming to the end of the tunnel, and back into the sunshine.

The entrance to the Catacombs was inside one of these tunnels, therefore our torches became our most useful possession. Our torchlight landed upon a pile of rubbish: bottles, cans, and food wrappers. This was our sign that we were nearing the entrance, as our guide told us that the Cataphiles respected the tunnels by removing any litter that they found within them. Sure enough, a few metres away from the pile of rubbish was a small hole in the tunnel wall. We had found the entry point. A tight squeeze and a practice of bodily contortion was required to gain entry, but we were soon inside.

Within the Catacombs we found ourselves in awe of the space that surrounded us, tunnels turned and twisted in different directions providing a dizzying sense of being lost. Most of the tunnels were marked with neon graffiti, tags and perhaps most curiously, lines. These brightly coloured lines of paint could be seen on either the walls or the ceilings of the tunnels, with some stretching for as far as the eye could see. Our guide told us that these were left by other explorers, so that they could follow their line back if they became lost. Suddenly I was reminded of my own mortality, starkly aware that my own safety was reliant upon a relative stranger from a social media site and the handful of batteries that I had bought with me for my torch. If these two safety mechanisms were to fail, we would be wholly reliant on another explorer finding us in time.

The Catacombs provided a unique opportunity to interact with, and experience, space in ways that the outside world does not allow for. Some of the tunnels were flooded, with the crystal-clear waist height water only becoming murky as we waded through. In some spaces the water was high enough that you could swim instead of walking if you wished to. Other tunnels were dry and dusty, with the debris lingering on your clothes even long after you exited the Catacombs. In some tunnels you were required to crouch, or even crawl on your hands and knees. In one tunnel we were required to cross a pile of bones on our hands and knees, thus becoming extremely familiar with the ancestors of today's Parisians.

Throughout the exploration of the Catacombs, I was surprised to see how various rooms had been reappropriated to fit the needs of the Cataphiles. One room, the Castle Room, featured a castle which had been sculpted from the rock. Over the years visitors have placed little trinkets, such as plastic figurines on top of the castle. Within this room we lit small tea lights, which provided ambient light as we ate and rested. These tea lights were a common feature amongst all of the rooms that we visited, indicating that other explorers also enjoyed their ambience, or perhaps wished to conserve the batteries of their torches. In another room, known as the mirror or reflection room, small pieces of glass and broken mirrors were affixed to the walls and a disco ball hung from the ceiling. As I moved within this room, the light from my torch was reflected within the broken glass and twinkling pockets of illumination danced across the sand-coloured walls.

Figure 3: A graffiti filled gate leading on to La Petite Ceinture, Paris. Image taken by author, 2018.

Figure 4: Lit candles illuminate a section of abandoned railway at La Petite Ceinture, Paris. Image taken by author, 2018.

Visibility and control

Walking through the Catacombs of Paris, one thing that struck me was the apparent lack of any formal control. This is something that both Gates (2013) and Garrett (2011a) also note experiencing within these darkened corridors. However, this lax approach is perhaps an outlier when speaking about abandoned spaces in general, or perhaps the movement of visitors without the fear of being caught was enabled by the unique styles of illumination experienced under the city of Paris. Light is a particularly powerful tool for enforcing social control within urban spaces. Since as far back as the 17th century, spaces have been regulated and policed through the use of light flooding, which makes visible spaces that may have previously attracted undesirable people or behaviours (Hall, 2012). Hall (ibid) links the use of light as a form of social control to Bentham's concept of the panopticon, whereby a central tower of visibility is constructed which allows those in power to observe and control individuals. According to Foucault's gaze, when individuals do not know when they are being watched, simply knowing that they are visible may dissuade problematic behaviours through self-regulation and self-surveillance (Fraser, 1981).

Encountering light, or an absence of light, whilst undertaking urban exploration has a number of observable impacts. The first of these impacts is observed through the role of light and darkness in hiding or illuminating what exists within abandoned space. Explorers are aware of the visual limitations that darkness offers to the activity of observing and navigating through buildings, which are often laden with physical hazards and potentially dangerous people. In one video, where a group of males are exploring a darkened room, one of them is heard exclaiming "what the fuck is under there?", to which a response of "shine a light on it" is returned (CV1). A number of videos also shared the same sentiment of this somewhat crude example, suggesting that explorers are regularly exposed to conditions where vision, without the aid of torches or other equipment, is essentially rendered ineffective. An explorer jokes about this in a video as he happens upon the box of a set of children's night vision goggles at Pye Bank. He remarks "they would come in handy; don't you think?" to his friend, further highlighting that the experience of limited vision is common within the activity (PV14). Often unable to rely on visual cues within darkened spaces, some videos demonstrated that darkness may cause a state of nervousness, as some explorers were observed calling out 'hello' or pausing for a moment to listen out for signs that other people may be nearby. One explorer of Sheffield Ski Village notes that darkness can inspire feelings of being watched: "it is creepy at night here though, (. . .) you get that weird vibe that somebody is following you" (SVV18). Thinking back to my time in the Paris Catacombs, I recall listening out for signs that others may be nearby. The sounds of water were my main source of information; however, it was sometimes difficult to ascertain whether these sounds were simply water dripping from the walls or a stranger lurking in the darkness.

Whilst darkness can promote feelings of being observed, the presence of light may also indicate that others are present within abandoned spaces. In a written report of an exploration of Corah, one explorer described how they had initially assumed they were imagining the sounds of machinery whilst exploring the derelict factory, but had been proven correct when observing lights within the building as they left:

> ‘As (username) and I moved up and down some of the floors we heard machines still whirring in certain places. I thought we were imagining it but as we left, we could see through one of the windows that the lights were still on and people were still working on one of the floors’ (CR11).

It is also the case that the light from torches or other devices can render an explorer visible to outsiders. Quite frequently in videos, explorers were observed covering their torches or even instructing other members of their group to do so. In a video featuring myself, our guides pre-emptively instruct “everyone, lights off please” as we approach the main foyer of Leicester International Hotel. The foyer is located on the ground level of the hotel, and just metres away from the entrance, is a busy pedestrian road. The only thing hiding our presence within the building is a thin dust sheet over the window which would easily be penetrated by the glare of a torch (LV2). There is therefore a calculated decision that an urban explorer must make when undertaking exploration in the dark. Relying too heavily on the use of a torch may result in them being caught but being too cautious about the use of illumination may mean that a space cannot be fully appreciated, as unnoticed traces may hide within the shadows.

The darkness of night may serve to lift some of the regulations that are in place during the day. This grants an opportunity for transgressive and subcultural behaviours to take place in spaces where they are not typically tolerated (Williams, 2008). The veil of anonymity granted by the darkness is often attractive to urban explorers, particularly when exploring spaces that may be difficult to gain access to during the day. However, the impact of darkness can have varying influences on the success of urban explorers.

Exploring derelict spaces during the night may further exacerbate the issue of visibility. Illumination from within, or outside of, a typically darkened space may draw unwanted attention from nearby residents, other occupants of the space, or even the police. In a video recorded at Pye Bank

Primary School at night-time, a pair of young males can be seen attempting to enter the construction site using a metal post. The area is well lit by a floodlight, and the camera operator appears to be nervous. He initially makes it halfway up the pole before noticing that a car has driven past and jumps down to avoid drawing any further attention. Upon successfully completing the climb on his second attempt, the camera operator notes that somebody shouts "what are you doing?", as the same car that had previously driven past pulls up alongside them. The two boys jump down from the pole and begin to run as the car pursues them, eventually losing the pursuer a few minutes later. The floodlight featured in this video appears to have been tactically placed, the surrounding area is cloaked in darkness with the nearest streetlights appearing to be approximately 50 metres away from the floodlit building (PV11). The floodlight seems to be demonstrating the efficiency of Hall's (2012) panopticon of light, as it is observed to be serving two functions. The first of these functions is demonstrated through the occupant of the passing car noticing the would-be intruders. The second function is demonstrated through the camera operator's apparent nervousness, which indicates that the knowledge of his own visibility is hindering his ability to undertake a potentially transgressive act.

Lights originating from unknown others may also spell disaster for would-be explorers, as they are likely to come from security or police officers. Thus, they possess the ability to put an end to an exploration or get explorers into trouble. One explorer's narrative re-telling of an exploration of Leicester International Hotel demonstrates how discovering the source of a beam of light could land curious individuals in hot water:

> 'When we were on the 6th floor, I heard a double beep which sounded familiar, followed by a voice. 'Fuck'. Assuming that the others hadn't recognised the sound, I suggested going onto the next explore. On our way down, we all heard a few voices below us. Quick vote, result: carry on down to the fire exit sharpish. Got there and it was screwed tight (. . .). And so followed my record time of going up 7 flights of stairs and heading back the way we came.

> Just as we could see the light at the end of the tunnel, we soon realised that the light was in fact, two coppers in their hi-viz jackets' (LR2).

This narrative highlights that light is an important indicator that the police or security may be present, however the author also describes the audible indicator of beeping. These audible hints may be more useful than visual ones in some spaces, particularly those with low light levels.

Perhaps ironically, explorers may even cause others to participate in the illumination of abandoned space, as being caught may often result in the activation of the blues and twos of the local police force. As one explorer who visited Selly Oak Hospital recounts, a run in with site security resulted in a unique audio-visual display:

> 'Then called the police who turned up with blue lights and WAA WAA bit over the top. Took names and dropped us off back at car' (SR9).

This narrative again highlights the importance of the audible indicators of others being present. It is likely that this group of explorers heard the police sirens before they saw the flashing lights.

Another obstacle presented by a lack of light within abandoned spaces, particularly for explorers who share their experiences online, is the ability for darkness to interfere with the activity of capturing images and film of some locations. On a practical level, the best time to capture images of abandoned space is often when there is daylight. However, during the day it is far more likely that an explorer will risk being caught on site due to the higher level of visibility. This may therefore result in explorers making a trade-off between image quality and a lower likelihood of being caught. It is often during the night or early hours of the morning that security are seen to be less active, thus explorers may visit sites at times which are less conducive to the production of high-quality images:

> ‘Firstly I apologize for the severe lack of photo quality, it doesn’t really do the place much justice but we didn’t have the natural daylight due to being there during the early hours of the morning. I did manage to get some night sunrise shots though!’ (SR13).

One individual explains how the production of lower quality images, due to poor visibility, may have discouraged them from uploading their narrative account of exploring Pye Bank:

> ‘Probably didn’t post this back at the time because I didn’t think it was that interesting. Or maybe I wasn’t happy with my pictures due to the poor light or it was down to the relatively poor standards of the graff’ (PR1).

This explanation, coupled with the apology detailed above, appears to suggest that low visibility within some abandoned spaces may also decrease their perceived upload worthiness, as some other explorers have added similar disclaimers to their own narrative accounts regarding image quality (CR5, CR7). The relationship between urban exploration and the creation of materials for the internet and social media will be discussed in greater detail within chapter six of this thesis.

Figure 5: A comparison of light sources. This image displays the illumination of a phone flash in a former hospital in Belgium. Image taken by author, 2020.

Figure 6: The same room, illuminated with a professional photography light. Image taken by author, 2020.

Navigating through dark spaces

> ‘Only recently travelled and manoeuvred space shifts and changes, and we are filled by a sense of unease as the layout and dimensions of rooms, doorways, objects, and artefacts lose their recently gained familiarity. Open doors leading to rooms just passed through become spaces of fascination, spaces without inhabitation, spaces filled with the potential for mysterious shapes, outlines, and noises. Space takes on a different luminosity. Rooms and staircases are strobed by handheld torches. The darkness alters sensory registers. Sight becomes strained as we look round rooms at objects and at other ghost hunters. Listening becomes more highly attuned to knocks, taps, breathing, and other noises’ (Holloway, 2010, p.630).

In the quote above, Holloway describes how spaces that we may have been familiar with, change in atmosphere and appearance when they are plunged into darkness. The body may be exposed to new sensations, relying upon senses other than vision to navigate, as the limited sight that we do possess may encounter the shifting of previously known objects into obscurity. An explorer may also interact with these changes within abandoned space.

Derelict spaces are frequently left to decay, and as this process progresses, the loss of identifying features also begins to take place. This process was particularly apparent within the videos which featured Selly Oak Hospital. The earliest videos of this location were uploaded to YouTube in November of 2014. The latest video of the site appears to have been uploaded in January of 2020. In the very early videos of the hospital, it was not uncommon for explorers to find that some rooms within the sprawling site still had functioning lights and electricity (SV1). However, as time moved on, the hospital was exposed to processes of natural and human decay, alongside demolition and building works to make way for the housing estate which was to occupy the grounds. By the time the final video was recorded, the site was almost unrecognisable. This video followed two explorers, male

and female, as they traversed through one of the remaining buildings within the site during the night. There is little left within the building to help viewers to discern what the space used to function as, aside from an occasional sign which detailed which department they were in. Many of the windows had been bricked up, which meant that, apart from a small beam of light from a torch, the couple were within almost complete darkness (SV31). Within these conditions, the endless corridors within the building become maze-like, and explorers were witnessed becoming lost and confused about where they had already been, or where the exit point may be (SV4). This experience of becoming lost within abandoned space represents an interaction between darkness and decay, as both serve to de-familiarise an explorer with space. When combined, this effect is strengthened as spatial hints may be both hidden by darkness and obscured by decay. This experience can be linked back to Holloway's (2010) account of darkness altering the embodied experience of space, as limited visibility appeared to cause explorers to lose familiarity with the space around them. This affect even appears to be heightened through the re-exploration of abandoned space, as some videos were re-visits of the hospital. Explorers had already experienced a loss of familiarity through witnessing the space gradually losing identifying features and objects. However, this loss may only be amplified through the darkness of spaces which they had previously known to be illuminated before the electricity was switched off, or before windows were boarded up.

Darkness may also hide a number of dangers for those who choose to navigate through it. Edensor (2015a) describes how hazards such as piles of rubbish and overhanging timbers presented risks for those navigating through medieval towns within the dark and little appears to have changed, particularly within derelict spaces. One explorer playfully describes the Corah factory as having a number of zoned areas of hazards:

> 'Parts of it still active so it's very much a "Crystal Maze" type of explore just without Richard o Brian. Theirs the zone that's full of old stock, Textilles, Paint and Completely Trashed Zone, The Stripped Bare and lots of Empty Rooms Zone, The Clambering about on Roofs and

> Ladders Zone and not to forget the Burnt Out and completely f***ed zone so watch your step Zone' (CR8).

This account appears to suggest that there may exist a cartography of darkness within abandoned spaces, with each 'zone' possessing its own form of hazard or embodied experience. Certain zones may therefore be more dangerous to navigate within decreased light or may be rendered inaccessible without the correct equipment.

Further hazards that were noted within narrative accounts included sealed off entry points, which sometimes compelled explorers to get creative with their tactics for entering space. One individual's narrative account of exploring Leicester International Hotel noted that their mode of entry involved jumping from one roof to another (LR2). I also undertook this jump; however, it was during the night. The process of accessing the hotel first involved infiltrating the nearby student accommodation and navigating our way to the top floor of the building. Once on the top floor, we were instructed to look out for 'the window', which was soon identified due to a number of scuff marks that were visible on the section of wall beneath it. After sliding the top section of the window open, we each took turns climbing through and on to the roof, contributing our own marks in the process. From where we stood, we could see the bright lights of Leicester by night, but soon found ourselves being pelted by the evening downpour. Our guides for the night warned us that, beneath the roof we were about to access lived a particularly grumpy man, so we set off trying to navigate through the darkness and rain on our tiptoes. We soon found ourselves on the edge of the roof, looking out at the famed jump that we were due to make. In reality the jump was probably less than a metre, which we could all comfortably step across, but in the wet, windy, and dark conditions it seemed much larger. After much encouragement we all made it safely across the gap, and onto the next hazard: navigating through the barely visible overgrown bushes and pieces of debris which laid strewn across the roof of the hotel. I returned to the hotel the next day, a sunny Saturday, and undertook the same

journey across the roof. It seemed much less perilous this time around, and I even found myself joking about how I was scared to jump from one building to the other the previous night.

Darkness may also leave explorers ill-equipped to deal with changes in the textures of landscapes, as Edensor (2013) notes that the loss of sight within darkness means that individuals are only able to survey just a few metres ahead. As such, an urban explorer may be unable to anticipate or prepare for changes in the landscape, such as steep descents or obstacles. Residual sight may therefore be focussed towards navigating the space safely instead of taking in information about what items or features remain within derelict properties. Some explorers take to forums and social media to report on the conditions of specific rooms or buildings. This may enable future explorers to anticipate potentially difficult textures in advance of visiting, thus allowing them to possibly circumvent some of the difficulties associated with navigating in the dark. An example of this type of report can be found within a narrative account of exploring the Corah factory, as the author warns other explorers about decayed flooring:

> ‘Anyone going to have a look at the place be careful of the flooring in the upper floors because it’s rotten, as I found out’ (CR12).

The beam of a torch or headlight changes the relationship that an individual has with the space around them, it can enhance specific shapes and textures whilst muting others. A beam of light focusses the attention on objects that are featured within a small area of illumination, which may leave explorers uncertain about what may lay beyond the beam, and just out of reach of our limited range of vision (Cook and Edensor, 2017). When exploring some locations, a torch is an extremely important item, often dictating whether an explorer is able to enter into spaces with limited illumination:

> ‘I didn’t get inside lots of areas as some of them were very dark (even on a bright sunny day) and I hadn’t got a torch with me (. . .). There is also access to a large cellar. However (. . .) it is pitch black down there, so I dare not venture into that part at this time’ (CR16).

Torchlight may also cause explorers to experience confusion about what they may be looking at. In a video capturing my exploration of Leicester International Hotel, we noticed that two members of our group had gone missing. As we attempted to re-group, the camera operator shone a torch into a pitch-black room, and assuming he had found the lost members, asked “does this door just open?” . Strangely, no response was heard. As the camera operator moved further into the room the figure became illuminated, and he quickly exclaimed “oh, that’s a dummy”, with perhaps a slight tone of embarrassment (LV2).

An absence of light may also draw an individual’s attention to spaces where there are sparse pockets of illumination. Like moths to a flame, lights become symbols that something interesting may be happening, and accordingly we are drawn to them (Radywyl, 2010). In one video of Selly Oak Hospital, a light can be seen flickering on and off, making a ticking sound as it does so (SV22). Whilst it seems a weird feature for the video to focus on, the light may symbolise a number of things to different explorers. For example, that the building may still be in use, that it was recently abandoned or perhaps even that something paranormal may be occurring. In my own experience of documenting Pye Bank School, I found myself drawn to the different ways in which the space was illuminated. The sunlight that streamed in through gaps in the metal and plywood window coverings bathed some rooms in a warm glow, whilst others were doused in cool tones. Light glistened off of pools of water, as the shadows danced around the room whilst we moved. Light also reflected off of the plastic coating of name tags, which drew my attention to the names of former students who had also passed through the space. In the darkest of rooms, the basement, an overhead grate cast a dappled pattern of light onto a red brick wall, revealing flashes of colour amongst the blackness of the space (PV6).

Figure 7: Light reflecting off of smashed glass on the floor of a building within the Chornobyl Exclusion Zone. Image taken by author, 2019.

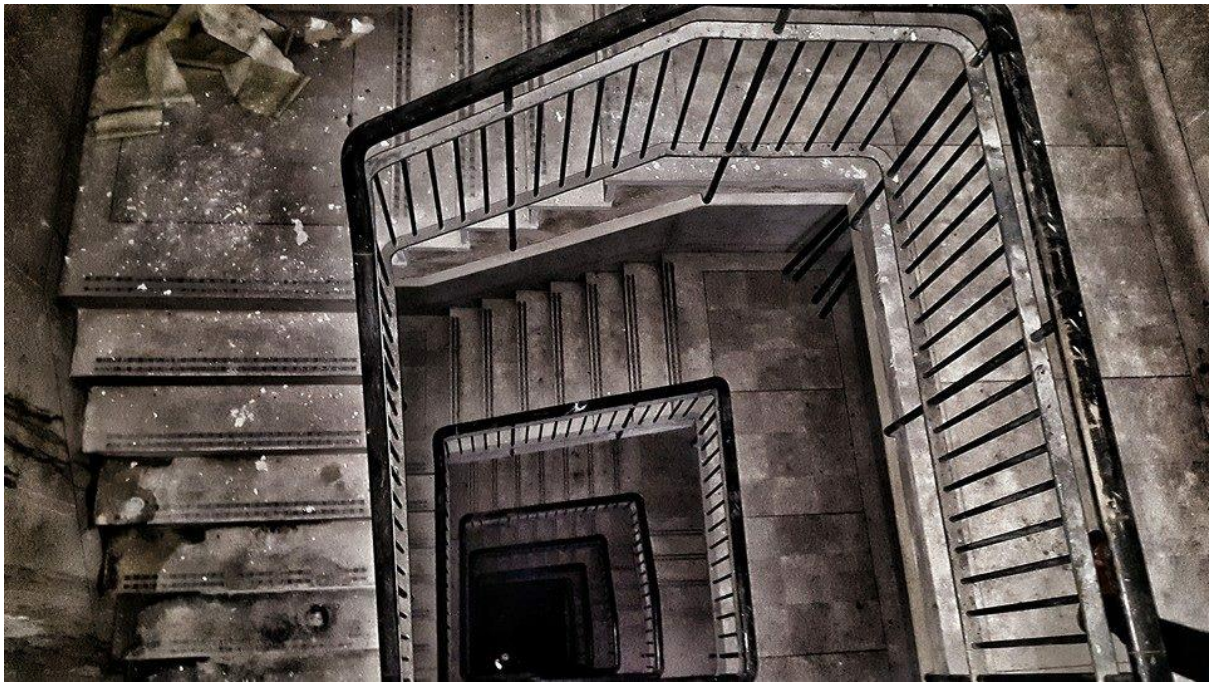

Figure 8: The view of litter and descent into darkness on the central staircase at Leicester International Hotel. Image taken by author, 2018.

Sensorial interaction with dark spaces

Within the dark we are often unable to rely on vision to find our way through spaces, and as a result, our other senses may become heightened. Within such spaces our hearing may become more sensitive, which increases the magnitude of our acoustic startle reflex. This means that sounds become more striking, often causing exaggerated startle reactions, particularly within people who may already be dispositionally wary of sudden noises (Schaller et al, 2003). This exaggerated acoustic startle reflex was observed in almost all of the abandoned locations that were researched, with each location having a specific sound that was likely to cause the videographer to startle. Two common sounds which were frequently observed to cause this response were animal sounds and the sounds of doors closing or creaking. Animal sounds, in particular that of pigeons, were more commonly heard within locations that were further along in the process of decay. Holes in the roof or broken windows offered an opportunity for the birds to seek refuge, and the locations where this type of structural damage was most evident was within Corah and Pye Bank. Pye Bank especially had developed a reputation for spooking explorers, with videos documenting them walking into rooms, only to be barraged by the birds and a flurry of their falling feathers (PV7). However, the most comedic story of an avian encounter can be found within a narrative account of exploring the Corah factory:

> 'There were loads of pigeons and I mean absolutely shit loads. At one point it seemed, every time I went round a corner, a group of pigeons suddenly flew away, making me decorate my underwear. In some of the rooms there was so much bird shit on the floor (. . .), the ammonia hits you right in the back of the throat' (CR17).

In the more recently abandoned, or better-preserved locations, doors were a likely culprit for triggering the startle reflex of explorers. Selly Oak Hospital was fitted with self-closing fire doors, which meant that, after an individual had passed through, there was a short delay before the door could be heard closing. Sometimes the closing sound was simply a light tap, or a small squeaking

sound. However, passing through other doors could result in a large crash or very loud creak. Explorers may sometimes place objects in front of doors to stop them closing, and potentially trapping them inside a building. Although, these objects can sometimes dislodge, and the crashing sound of a door may be heard in rooms that are far away from the explorer's current location. These sounds are perhaps the most unnerving, as they could falsely indicate that unknown others are also within the building. The absence of light, coupled with the sounds of doors closing, can leave explorers on edge:

> 'It was mostly just consultant rooms (and slow-closing doors that made a bang when we were least expecting it, very terrifying when it's pitch black' (SR13).

Edensor (2015a, p.431) describes how gloom produces 'a heightened, tactile sense of mobility' as it sharpens the senses and requires individuals to carefully pick their path through the darkness. Explorers may rely on bodily sensations to understand the space around them, finding clues within the darkness that may provide information about their surroundings. In a video recorded at the Corah factory, a group of teenagers found themselves in the underground section of the building. With only one member of the group possessing a torch there was very limited visibility, which prompted the group to rely on touch, sound, and smell to navigate their way through the space. One member of the group remarked that "something touched my head", to which another responded that "summit is dripping". The group soon began to hear the sound of running water, and also began to make expressions of disgust as they encountered an unpleasant smell. These sensorial clues led them to find the source of what had initially touched the head of the explorer, a dripping water pipe. The smell that emanated from the pipe also guided their choice of route within the dark space, as a decision was made within the group to move away from the space that featured the scent:

> "This piss stinks, no we'll go that way" (CV1).

Through utilising the tactile senses to move through the darkness, individuals are able to develop non-visual sensory familiarity with space (Edensor, 2015b). This grants them an opportunity to interact with space in new ways and allows explorers to learn about abandoned spaces in ways that are not typically permitted within other urban settings. One particular example of a novel type of interaction can be found within one individual's narrative account of exploring the basement beneath the Corah factory. The account details how the pair of explorers had initially been enticed to explore the basement level through reading another explorer's account of the space. The account then goes on to describe how the two had worn waders and wellington boots to prepare for the flooded space. It describes moving through the space in real-time, detailing how the water was initially only three inches deep, but by the time they had made it further into the basement it had risen to ten inches. The author details how their own interaction with the water had created waves, which threatened to breach the dry wellingtons of their friend. This displays how their understanding of the water levels had come from the physical sensation of water against the body rather than just sight alone:

> 'By this point the water is about ten inches deep. The waves I was making were nearly breaching (username)'s wellies' (CR13).

Figure 9: A descent into the dark, Dover.
Image taken by author, 2020.

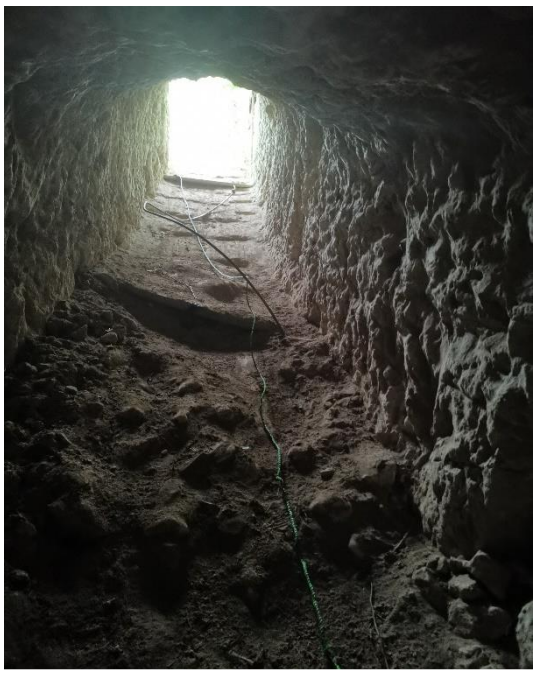

Figure 10: Completing the descent, Dover.
Image taken by author, 2020.

Emotion and dark places

Nyctophobia is the fear of darkness and what it may encourage. Edensor (2015a) notes that this fear is particularly common within the west. Recent research surrounding the role of darkness in the fear of specific spaces found that darkness is feared because it creates blind spots, within which we are unable to see who is present. This research also found that second-hand experiences and tales from the media or parental figures may prompt individuals to create mental maps of spaces that are considered to be inaccessible or dangerous (Thomas et al, 2018). Derelict spaces are frequently associated with dangerous people and activities, and explorers often encounter unnerving situations whilst exploring. Within many of the videos surveyed, certain groups of people were identified as potentially dangerous by the explorers. These included young people, the homeless, Gypsy, Roma and Travellers, and drug users. There were no negative encounters with these groups of people within the data collected, however some of the explorers displayed prejudice behaviours towards them. One example of this was observed within a video of Sheffield Ski Village. In this video a man is talking to the camera, in the background the sounds of teenagers shouting and laughing can be heard. The man then states:

> "We're not going to go right up to the top because the kids are up there, and we'll just get swearing and hand signs" (SVV41)

This quote suggests that the perceived level of danger provided by the teenagers had led the explorer to label the top of the ski slope as off-limits, despite there being no indication that the teenagers were dangerous. Whilst abandoned spaces may already be considered to be 'sketchy' (SR4), the addition of darkness may serve to amplify the level of perceived danger posed by other people. In a video recorded at Selly Oak Hospital, two men end their exploration as the sun begins to set, joking that:

"It's getting quite dark now. We're gonna get the fuck out of here before we're killed" (SV24).

Schaller et al (2003) describe darkness as being an almost culturally universal symbol of evil, threat, and danger, and as such, dark spaces may become associated with the supernatural and death. A common theme amongst the videos surveyed, particularly within Pye Bank School and Leicester International Hotel, was that derelict spaces are frequently rumoured to be haunted. Items found within these spaces may also inspire fear within explorers, and potentially threaten to cut explorations short. In a video recorded at Selly Oak Hospital, the torchlight of a group of explorers illuminates a pool of wet red liquid on the floor of a corridor. As they try to figure out where the blood-like liquid had come from, one of the men remarks "I'm glad we found that last, that'd put me right off" (SV17). It is perhaps unsurprising that the location most associated with fear was Selly Oak Hospital. Prescott (2011) notes that medical spaces are particularly enticing to urban explorers, especially morgues and maternity wards. The morgue at Selly Oak was no exception. There were a number of videos which solely focussed on exploring this section of the hospital and many videos detailing this building utilised editing techniques, such as horror music or grainy filters, to enhance the eerie atmosphere of the space. In one video, a young male plays on the notion of the morgue being haunted. The video begins focussed on the body chambers within the cold room, where a number of large white doors are closed. The door in the centre of the frame begins to slowly open as eerie music plays in the background. Before we have a chance to see who has opened the door, the video cuts to sweeping shots of the autopsy room and the chapel of rest. After these rooms have been documented, the video cuts back to the cold room. This time, as the white door swings open, a figure can be seen stepping out of the chamber and looking solemnly into the camera. The camera follows as the figure walks towards the chapel of rest, and the video ends as they close the doors behind them (SV20).

Throughout my own adventures as an urban explorer, I have found myself within a morgue on two separate occasions. The first of these was at Selly Oak Hospital, and the second at a semi-

abandoned hospital in London. It is difficult to describe the atmosphere that I experienced within these buildings, the air felt heavier, and I was suddenly much more aware of my own body within the space. I found myself bringing my hands in closer to my body to avoid touching items within the building and moving in a slow and calculated manner so as not to disturb the quiet. I vividly remember a sensual encounter that I had within the cold room at Selly Oak and thinking back to this experience still manages to make me shudder. The entrance to the cold room was covered by a set of heavy black studded curtains. The plastic curtains were marked with scuffs, indicating that, during their use, a large number of hospital trollies had passed through them. The only way to access the cold room was to push through the curtains, which parted as your body moved through them. Though, as I moved into the room the curtains dragged against the sides of my body, meaning that although I was in the room, I was still being touched by them. The way that the curtains lingered on my skin caused me to think about how they had also lingered on the numerous trollies which had passed through them containing deceased individuals. I felt that some intangible part of these individuals remained within the materialities of the morgue, and that by passing through these curtains these parts were now also passed onto myself. This feeling remained with me until I had showered, and the clothes that I was wearing were washed. However, I still find it difficult to understand why I had felt this way within the space. Whilst I knew the curtains had been sanitised and had not been used for years, I still felt that something unexplainable remained within the building.

Evolutionarily, humans have come to understand that spaces that trigger feelings of fear are typically associated with danger (McAndrew, 2020). Naturally, avoiding this danger has allowed humans to survive, which has left us able to identify features and stimuli within spaces that label them as unsafe. McAndrew (ibid) notes that there are a number of spatial features which may trigger fear responses within individuals. These include sparseness, the number of potential hiding spaces, level of isolation, age of the space, signs of life and spaces associated with death. Derelict buildings possess many of these features, which may explain why some individuals are fearful of them. Within the

videos surveyed, abandoned spaces were commonly compared to other known feared spaces such as catacombs and sites from popular horror films:

> Boy 1: "We have no service (. . .). This is so creepy (. . .). Don't fucking leave me on my own"
> Boy 2: "It's like the catacombs, it's literally like we're just going deeper and deeper" (CV2, in the underground tunnels at the Corah factory).

> "It really is like the Shining" (LV2, in a corridor at Leicester International Hotel).

However, an interesting question to consider is whether it is the building itself that triggers these feelings of fear, or whether it is the traces that remain inside them. Videos which featured Selly Oak Hospital chronicled its journey from being newly abandoned, to being gutted and empty, to then eventually being demolished. Out of all of the videos surveyed, the morgue at this hospital appeared to trigger the greatest range emotional responses from explorers. As McAndrew (2020) notes, this is likely to be the case because this building is associated with death, and therefore reminds us of our own mortality. Though, as I watched videos of this space, I slowly witnessed the morgue becoming more and more empty, as items were gradually removed. In the final videos of the morgue, the building was little more than a hollow shell with no traces of its former function. In fact, in some videos it did not appear that the explorers were aware of what this building used to be, and they did not react to the space in the same way that others previously had. At what point does this space lose its association with death, and its ability to trigger an emotional response? Perhaps it was the removal of the autopsy tables, or the body chambers. However, even before the removal of these items, it had been years since the last autopsy had been conducted at this morgue, and the physical traces of death had long since been removed.

Figure 11: A set of black curtains at Selly Oak Hospital morgue. Image taken by author, 2015.

Figure 12: The body storage fridges at Selly Oak Hospital morgue. Image taken by author, 2015.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the ways in which levels of light and illumination can change the embodied experience of derelict spaces. I begin by retelling my own experience of moving through the Catacombs of Paris. The low levels of light within this subterranean space meant that we had to become accustomed to navigating with senses other than our vision, listening to the rumbling of nearby metro trains and the dripping of water. At times we were reliant upon torchlight, remaining aware that our batteries would eventually run out and we could soon become trapped within the cloak of darkness.

Illuminating the darkness has historically served a purpose of discouraging deviant behaviours through making the invisible visible. For urban explorers, this means that unwanted attention may be drawn through their own use of torches and tactically placed street lighting. However, darkness may also enable explorers to evade the police or security, thus allowing them to avoid being caught. For this reason, explorers may seek to undertake high profile explorations during the night or early hours of the morning, particularly if the location is known to have prominent security.

Attempting to navigate through the dark also presents a number of challenges for urban explorers. Derelict spaces are constantly changing, as items are moved, and buildings are stripped in preparation for demolition. The loss of identifying features within a space can cause it to become maze-like to explorers, and this is often amplified by darkness as known spaces become unfamiliar. Hazards within abandoned spaces may become even more dangerous within the dark, as individuals are unable to see where they are going. As such, the dangerous climbing, jumping, and crawling which is frequently undertaken within these spaces becomes much more treacherous under the cloak of darkness. To combat some of these dangers, explorers frequently take to forums such as 28DaysLater to warn others of the difficult terrain that they encountered.

Darkness is also frequently associated with evil and the supernatural, which may lead people to fear abandoned spaces. These buildings often feature boarded up windows and they no longer possess electricity to power lights. As such, explorers do not know who is lurking within the buildings, and what their intentions may be. Though, in some of the videos surveyed, the fear of so-called dangerous people appeared to be based on prejudice and rumours rather than genuine negative experiences. Many videos played upon the concept of abandoned spaces being haunted, utilising video effects and music to emphasise the eerie atmosphere. This was particularly apparent within videos which featured the morgue at Selly Oak Hospital, potentially due to its clear association with death.

Returning to the research questions that I laid out earlier within this thesis, this chapter has argued that light is a powerful affective tool which impacts upon an urban explorer's embodied experience of abandoned space. Absence or presence of light may represent a range of different realities within space, including whether other people are present, the likelihood of being caught and whether a site may be considered accessible. Different types of illumination can also draw attention to different aspects of space, such as its acoustics and objects contained within it. Levels of light may also determine how an urban explorer represents their experience of space to online communities, as certain types of videography or photography techniques may be difficult to achieve in low light settings. Also briefly addressed within this chapter is how the positionality of explorers may change the way in which spaces are experienced. It is evident from some of the accounts detailed above that specific groups of people may be considered to be dangerous by some members of the urban exploration community, something which may point to discriminatory views existing within the community.

Chapter Five: Traces

This chapter focuses on how urban explorers interact with the traces that remain within abandoned spaces. In doing so, the main research question that this chapter addresses is 'how are the material remains within abandoned spaces interacted with and embodied?'. I decided to split this chapter into five sections, as the sites within this research varied with what materials remained within them. Each of the sites chosen had different former purposes: a hotel, a school, an outdoor recreation space, a factory, and a hospital. As such, they were all embodied differently by the explorers who visited them.

Within this chapter I build upon the works of scholars who describe urban exploration as a form of investigation, whether it be psychogeographical (Benzaoui, 2014), emotional (2016), or cultural (Kindynis, 2019). I demonstrate how different abandoned spaces may prompt different forms of investigative practices from urban explorers, and further describe how the relationships that explorers have with space may impact the ways in which they interact with the material remains that are within them. Additionally, I recognise that an explorer's individual motivation for undertaking the activity of urban exploration may play a major role in the ways that they interact with space.

To start this chapter, I have chosen to recall my own visit to a space littered with traces, the Chornobyl exclusion zone in Ukraine. Visiting this space was like walking into the past, with the possessions of former residents littered within the vast number of decrepit buildings in the zone. As I write this introduction, I am unable to ignore the context in which this narrative account was written, before Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Reading back through my words I am acutely aware that they do not reflect the current situation within the beautiful country that I had visited, and I am reminded of my own ignorance of treating the Chornobyl zone as a space of adventure. I had not granted much thought towards the nuclear tragedy that occurred there, which was why these traces even existed in the first place. I will, however, leave this narrative account unedited, as an opportunity to think reflectively about my own attitudes.

“There’s nothing in here”: Traces of life in the Chornobyl exclusion zone

It is November 2019, one month into my final year of my undergraduate degree. I am running to one of the train stations in Canterbury. It is raining and my suitcase skids along the pavement as I curse myself under my breath, I had missed my National Express to Heathrow, and I now had to catch the next train to avoid missing my flight. So much for saving money!

Luckily, my rail detour had not scuppered my plans and I was soon on my flight to Boryspil International Airport, where I touched down without issue. I searched through the crowd at arrivals, soon finding my partner who would be accompanying me for this trip, and after finding my name written on a sign held by our taxi driver we were soon on our way to Kyiv, Ukraine’s capital city.

Our itinerary for our trip: to visit the Chornobyl Exclusion Zone. We had booked the excursion months in advance, a two-day trip which promised an ‘unforgettable experience’. Before long, we were squished into the back seat of a van and asked to sign waivers where we accepted any risk associated with radiation or injury from unsafe structures. As the van headed towards the zone, we watched as the city turned into countryside and we were engulfed into the dense forest.

Our first stop on our journey is the Dytiatky Checkpoint, notifying us that we are 30 kilometres away from the Chornobyl powerplant. At this stop we are ordered out of our van and asked to present our passports for inspection. The checkpoint is much busier than we expected, and there are a number of kiosks selling Chornobyl memorabilia, such as fridge magnets, coasters, and t-shirts. At one of the kiosks there is a mannequin, which is dressed up in a hazmat suit with a gas mask over its face. We did not know if the kiosk sold these items, as we were too occupied by interacting with the number of stray dogs which congregate at the checkpoint, demanding affection and snacks from passing tourists.

Back on the road, we soon made it to Zalissia, the first abandoned village of our trip. The area mostly consisted of residential buildings, which were in varying states of disrepair. Some houses had trees growing through their walls, and others were simply covered in a thick layer of cobwebs and dust. Throughout these houses, small traces of their previous occupants could be found. Newspapers were strewn across floors, and food containers and textiles littered windowsills and surface tops. In one former shop, all that remained was an empty rusting refrigerator. On the top of this was a piece of paper, with a handwritten note listing stock and their prices. Some of the items had a line crossed through them, indicating that they had perhaps sold out. We questioned who had purchased the last of these items, potentially not knowing of the evacuation notice that would soon evict them from their homes and livelihoods. In another building, the community hall, a red sign caught our attention. Written in Ukrainian, it read 'long live Communism - the bright future of humanity'. It now exists as a relic, a reminder of Ukraine under Soviet rule, a trace of what life was for those who once inhabited the now empty buildings.

After the first day of our trip, we checked into our accommodation, the Pripyat Hotel. Our room was cold, the heating seemingly not working, and as we nestled into the itchy blankets, we could hear the howling of dogs in the distance. These dogs were the direct descendants of the pets of those who once occupied the bustling city of Pripyat, their howls served as reminder of resilience and activity within a space that many consider to be devoid of life.

The next day we found ourselves within a former children's nursery, which was littered with dolls who had missing limbs, discoloured animal figurines and the pages of books which had intermingled on the cracked concrete flooring. Later on that day, we entered a dental hospital and a maternity ward. In the ward we found a delivery table surrounded by a large swathe of medical documents, and in the dental hospital a windowsill held a group of bottles containing mysterious liquids, presumably medicines. It is not unreasonable to believe that an individual who had been born within Pripyat had visited all of these spaces during their time there. Perhaps their birth was recorded

within one of the pieces of paper which littered the floor of the maternity ward, or perhaps they played with the dolls at the nursery, maybe they received treatment from the dental hospital. Where were they now? Do they still remember these spaces? What do they think of the thousands of tourists who now follow the movements that they once made through the city that they grew up in?

The van headed towards the main square of Pripyat, following the tree lined roads which were covered in shades of green, orange and browns from the autumn leaves. Up ahead, there were two figures, who became clearer as we moved closer to them. They were two men dressed in military uniforms, holding guns. They motioned for the van driver to stop, and we screeched to a halt. In Ukrainian we were told to disembark from the vehicle, and we were guided through a forested area, which led to clearing surrounded by delipidated apartment buildings. One of the men pointed towards the clearing, and movement caught our attention. Amongst the ruined buildings, a lone moose could be seen eating the foliage from a tree. The gigantic creature did not seem to be bothered by our presence. They looked peaceful, as if they knew the space around them well. Perhaps the animals are most familiar with the Chornobyl exclusion zone, as the landscape of decay and dilapidation bore little resemblance to what the former residents of the zone experienced.

One final memory of our visit to Chornobyl will always stick with me. Our guide had allowed us to break off from the group to explore an old apartment complex. My partner and I slowly worked our way through a number of apartments, which had all experienced various levels of decay, before coming to an apartment which appeared to be particularly bare. There were no trinkets, papers or clothing left behind within this space. As we pushed open a door within the apartment, we were met with a room which contained a bed, a wardrobe, and a chair. “There’s nothing in here”, my partner declared, before venturing off to explore the other rooms. As I looked into this room, I questioned what he had meant by this. The furniture within the room only allowed me to guess who had lived within this space, however these items may have brought back a flood of memories for the former

resident. Within the nothingness of this room exists a plethora of stories, that the objects in it hide beneath layers of dust and crumbling cement.

Figure 13: Maps, playing cards and newspapers line the floor of a former nursery in the Chornobyl Exclusion Zone. Image taken by author, 2019.

Figure 14: Toys remain within a nursery in the Chornobyl Exclusion Zone. Image taken by author, 2019.

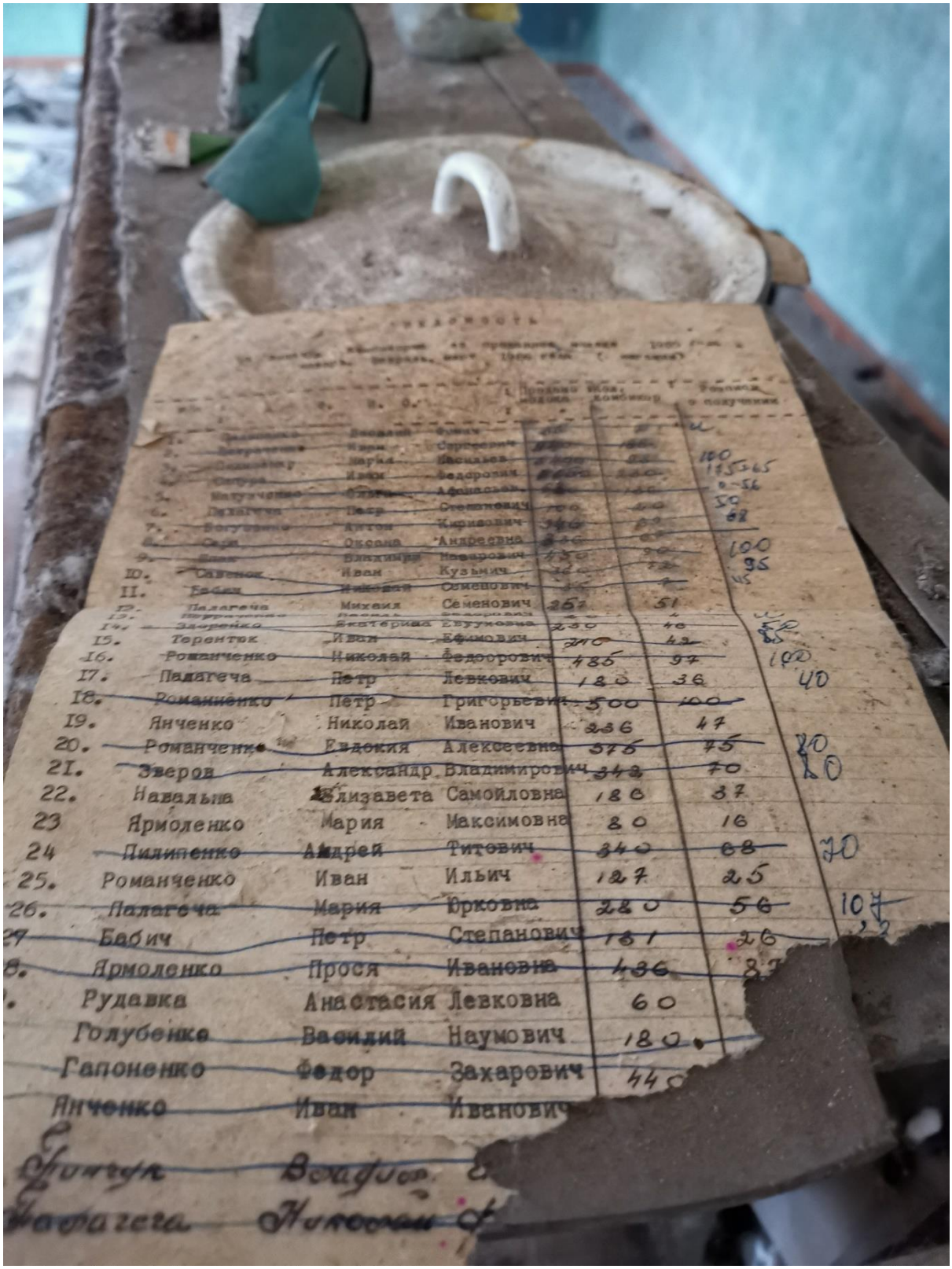

Figure 15: A shop note, detailing price and quantities of stock within the Chornobyl Exclusion Zone. Image taken by author, 2019.

Figure 16: A bed covered with cobwebs and pieces of newspaper in the Chornobyl Exclusion Zone. Image taken by author, 2019.

Selly Oak Hospital

Early in its abandonment, Selly Oak Hospital offered an opportunity for individuals to gain an insight into how hospitals are run. Signage appeared on almost every wall, notifying visitors of the department they were in, and offering instruction on how to locate other sections of the site. Other forms of signage also existed, designating uses to individual rooms, such as doctor's offices, lounges, and bedrooms. In one video, two men are walking through a ward, and they come across a sign on a bedroom door which instructs them to 'ask permission to enter'. The pair laugh, and one jokes "I knew we should have asked permission to come here" (SV9). The sign appears to no longer have the same power that it may have held when the hospital was in use, as it has now become the focus of a joke between friends. Edensor's (2005a) exploration of industrial ruins discusses this, noting that ruined factories possess residual power. This power may be demonstrated through the existence of notices, which forbid or enforce behaviours. However, the hierarchical nature of space disappears as ruination occurs, signs do not command obedience anymore and space is no longer segregated in the same way, as walls crumble and rooms are devoid of furniture. Whilst Selly Oak could not be classified as an industrial ruin, the joke between the two explorers demonstrates that the regulations of space often do not continue after their abandonment.

As time progresses, furniture is removed, and items are lost and broken. The nature of moving within abandoned spaces also changes. Early videos showed explorers walking down echoing corridors, whilst later videos featured the familiar sound of debris crunching underfoot. The colourful paint which once coated the long maze-like hallways now resembled confetti, flaking away, and mingling with dust and administrative papers which were also strewn across the floors. One thing that did appear to remain was a certain smell that many associate with hospitals. In a number of videos and reports individuals had commented on how the space "smells a bit like a hospital, don't it?" (SV28, SR17). Within the later videos, where the space was much less recognisable as a hospital, explorers did not comment on a smell being present. This appears to suggest that the sensorial trace of smell is

something that diminishes over time, or perhaps that the space resembling a hospital led earlier explorers to be more in tune with their senses. As this resemblance faded, explorers may have experienced Selly Oak as less of a former hospital and more of an abandoned building.

Before most of the items has been removed from Selly Oak, a lot could be learned about the space from what had been left behind. Armstrong describes how

> 'The fragments of human occupation and/or movement through space act like letters, words and sentences that can be pieced together to draw out an understanding of place and space' (2010, p.245).

In what appeared to be the first video uploaded of the hospital after its closure, the viewer is led into a waiting room. The space is immaculate, the floor appearing to shine under the glare of the overhead lights. There is a television which sits above a number of the chairs, and it is displaying static. At the service desk there is a pile of pamphlets, and a can of Pringles crisps is left on a small wall which divides the space (SV1). It feels like the people had disappeared only moments ago; the room appeared to be on pause. This scene does not feel dissimilar to what could be experienced at any other hospital across the country. The cleanliness of the space may indicate that it was well maintained. The large number of chairs may tell us that this particular part of the hospital was very busy. The can of Pringles may tell us that the atmosphere was relaxed, or maybe that the wait times required visitors to seek out sustenance. However, these are only the stories that the space is able to tell, and these stories are interpreted differently by each individual. Perhaps, the reality was much different.

Some of the traces of human occupation within Selly Oak were more recent than others. For example, one report writer tells of discovering a bed which appeared to bear the outline of a person:

> ‘My fave was the bed with the leather worn off in the shape of a person and then mould has started growing through the worn material, who doesn’t want to see some fungus feeding of the moisture of years of embedded human perspiration and growing in the shape of a person! fookin gross right’ (SR6).

This outline was likely a result of many different individuals using the bed, and over time this usage culminating in the creation of a worn-in silhouette. This trace of use therefore combines a range of stories and memories, of many different ailments, and the people that created the outline may not be aware that this trace remains.

Traces also existed within Selly Oak that indicated human occupation after its closure. For example, one video details evidence of rough sleeping within a former waiting room (SV10). A pile of mismatched fabric in one corner of the room appeared to demonstrate that the space now served a new purpose. This trace may serve to transform the way that we understand the former hospital site, which appears to attract a range of different forms of human occupation. Where Selly Oak may once have been a hospital, it had become home to some, a place of leisure for others, and in some cases a place to exercise destructive behaviours. These occupations are often at odds with each other and raise important questions about who has the right to derelict spaces and the types of behaviours that are acceptable within them.

Edensor (2005a, p.156) describes how traces of human occupation may also be demonstrated through the personalisation of space:

> ‘The ghostly traces of workers homemaking is found in the ways in which space becomes personalised’.

Out of perhaps all of the spaces surveyed within this research, Selly Oak had the most overt examples of homemaking practices. In one video, a group of teen boys are walking through an estates building. Within this building they come across group photos of individuals who used to work within the team, and they also discover a number of football banners which are hung above doorways. The football banners were in support of Birmingham City Football Club (SV13). These examples of homemaking within the estates building gives us an idea of what it may have been like to work at the hospital, with the group photos and football paraphernalia suggesting that there may have been a friendly and relaxed environment. Other examples of homemaking and personalisation can be seen within a number of videos which capture the messages that former staff had written on the walls of the hospital when its closure had been announced. These ranged from simple messages such as 'Sue woz ere' to some which demonstrated an attachment to the space, such as 'the old gal didn't give us up too easy' (SV1). In subsequent videos, the names, which often followed the messages had been scribbled over with black pen, therefore anonymising the sentiments that had been left behind (SV2). In the morgue, the names of those who last occupied the body storage bays had also been scribbled over, seemingly with the same black pen (SV5). It is unclear why this had occurred, or who had been tasked with removing these traces.

In an earlier video of Selly Oak, two men are walking down a corridor and happen upon an old WHSmith store. They enter the store to find the shelves empty, the only thing that remains are the "plenty of WHSmith carrier bags lying around" (SV17). This scene felt particularly eerie to me as a viewer. Most people are more familiar with retail space than hospitals, as we visit them far more frequently. With this familiarity I am able to identify what is absent or different within the store, and the scene of disarray challenged my perception of how a store is supposed to appear. Contrastingly, as I watched the many hours of video footage which featured wards or surgical theatres, I did not feel the same eeriness, as I did not feel that I could properly understand what was present or absent within the space. Edensor (2005b, p.321) touches upon this, noting that we are so used to the uniform and consistent ordering of objects that to see them out of order is to promote feelings of unfamiliarity:

> ‘Positioned in these new locations, objects become unfamiliar and enigmatic, they contravene our usual sense of perspective, rebuke the way things are supposed to assume a position in regimented linearity or are separated from each other at appropriate distances’.

As such, the movement and reconfiguration of traces within derelict spaces allows us to challenge the ways in which objects are presented to us in the outside world. In challenging our perceptions of how objects are supposed to be used, such spaces may allow for interactions with traces that are not typically permitted. This will be discussed further in the section on Sheffield Ski Village.

Figure 17: Laboratory signage within Selly Oak Hospital. Image taken by author, 2015.

Figure 18: A gurney sits within a stripped-out room at Selly Oak Hospital. Image taken by author, 2016.

Pye Bank Primary School

Pye Bank Primary School was in a state of severe disrepair when I first visited, much of the roofing had caved in and the rooms, which were now exposed to the elements, had fallen victim to damp. In some rooms there was a thick carpet of moss and mould, and in others the fallen roofs had enticed wildlife to take residence. There were small indicators that the rooms had once been used by those who were without homes, such as moulded sleeping bags and faded food wrappers. However, the winter weather combined with the lack of shelter had led these people to move on, and made way for a new group of residents, pigeons (PV1). Edensor (2005a) notes that this is often the case with abandoned properties, as unwanted vegetation and animals are no longer policed. Rodents and weeds would have once been prevented from entering, or even killed to avoid their breaching of the boundaries between controlled and less controlled spaces. Now they are no longer policed, new life finds home within these rooms.

What differed between Pye Bank and the other spaces that I have visited whilst engaging in urban exploration throughout the years, was the vast number of personal belongings and traces that could be found within the former primary school. The school had a number of antique features, including decorative fireplaces and walls which were coated in outmoded wallpapers (PV3). These features offered clues into the age of the building, and for how long it may have been left abandoned. The building was grade II listed (Burngreave Voices, 2011), though little effort appeared to be put towards maintaining its crumbling interior. However, Pétursdóttir (2013, p.43) argues that in the process of sites becoming heritage, they must also become managed and controlled. In doing so, such sites often lose their authenticity. Therefore, for Pye Bank to be maintained, the loss of identity may also be required:

> ‘In other words, things are made manageable – restrained, controlled and kept from revealing themselves to us in their true being’.

In this regard, there was value in Pye Bank being unmaintained, as it offered visitors a glimpse into its history, without compromising on its authentic identity.

Through words, the school offered visitors a glimpse into its former life. These words were presented in a number of different ways. Rows of name tags sat above the hooks for children's coats, each with their own name beneath a laminated film (PV6). Another child may have been designated the hook in the next academic year, but this never came. These name tags therefore represent a 'truncated future' where a blunt urban ending is symbolised, through the closure of a school which will no longer take on another class of students (Fraser, 2019). In other parts of the building, words tell a story of the learning that students took part in, a blackboard displays the words 'you smoke, you die' amongst a room which is now filled with the faeces of hundreds of birds and littered with signs which warn of disturbed asbestos. It is almost ironic that the air of the room in which this learning took place may now be as dangerous as inhaling cigarette smoke. Small handwritten signs are also scattered throughout the rooms, some aim to inform visitors of trivial matters, such as the purchase of hot drinks:

> 'Could all visitors please pay 20p into the tin provided below, per cup of tea or coffee. Thank you' (PV6).

Others take on a different tone. A blackboard hangs from a wall with a small sticker attached to its frame. The sticker says '£5' . It appears that there was a sale of items at the school before its eventual closure, with the items that did not sell simply being left behind. A 1987 copy of 'Healthy Food for Kids' is also left behind; it is not clear whether this item had also been up for sale.

After leaving Pye Bank, I decided to upload a video of my visit to YouTube. As I was writing this thesis, I took the time to look back upon this video. Attached to the video are the comments of a

small number of individuals who claim to have once attended the school. The comments appear to demonstrate both mourning and reminiscence, at the loss of their former school and the memories that the video had helped to illuminate (PV6):

> ‘Thanks for this I went there as a kid brings back loads of memory’s’

> ‘This was my old primary school (crying emoji)’

Reading these comments, I was reminded of a moment during my visit. My friend and I were inspecting a toy piano on the floor of a classroom, and in the background the sounds of children laughing and playing could be heard (PV13). This experience was not paranormal, as the schools sits just metres away from a children’s park. However, the sounds of children echoing through the building felt eerie, as though it was haunted by its former use. Perhaps, haunted by the same individuals who were seeking to relive their childhood memories through videos of the now derelict school. Speaking of his emotions upon returning to his abandoned childhood home, Armstong (2010) describes how the building maintained ‘memories even though we are gone’. Within the relics that could be found within Pye Bank Primary School, the workbooks, the notes, the artwork, and the gaudy wallpapers, are memories that can be read by former students and newer visitors alike.

However, newer traces with more exclusive audiences could also be found within the school. Many of the walls were decorated with various types of graffiti artwork. Walking through a room I recall being told by my friend that one large piece, featuring cartoon style worms, was the work of an artist known as Colorarti. This was knowledge that I did not have immediate access to. Whilst my friend knew that one particular individual had once been within the same room, the art to me was nothing more than a cool addition to an otherwise blank wall. Kindynis (2019) explores this, noting that some items and traces leave behind a story that only some are able to read. Familiarity with graffiti may reveal information such as the date that the graffiti was created, the materials and paints

used, the message behind the work, or even the identity of the artist themself. In this regard, Pye Bank tells different stories to those who possess different knowledge or hold different experiences of being within its walls.

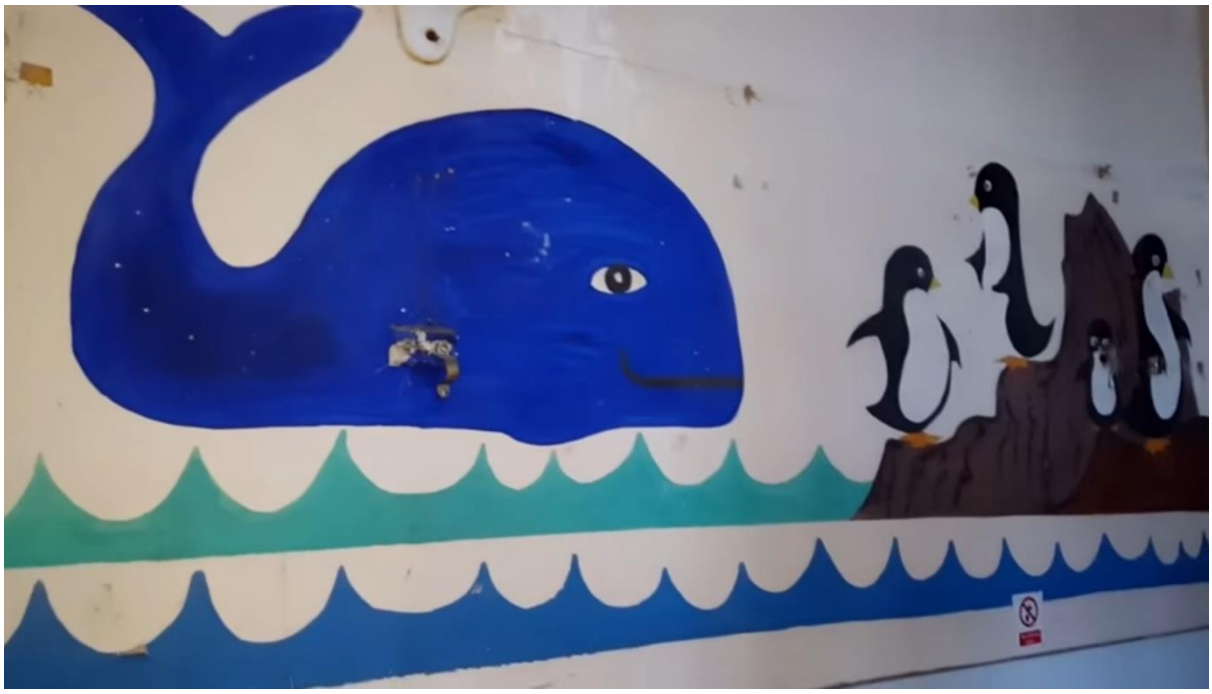

Figure 19: A mural of a whale in a bathroom at Pye Bank Primary School. Image taken by author, 2015.

Figure 20: Clown wallpaper within a classroom at Pye Bank Primary School. Image taken by author, 2015.

Corah

The Corah factory was a site that held particular value to me as an individual. Growing up, my family members would frequently discuss our origins, tracing back to my great-grandparent's roles as farmers and factory workers. As a child, I mostly remember my father working as a milkman and my mother as a cleaner. I take great pride in my working-class background, yet I did not know that my adventures into the abandoned structures of Leicester city would soon be connected with my family history. After my first visit to the Corah factory, I excitedly discussed my adventure with my mother, and found out that day that my mother and father had met there whilst they were working. My subsequent visits to Corah were filled with what could only be described as trace-hunting, seeking the small clues that offered me a glimpse into a place so instrumental to my existence.

Corah was full of these clues. On the upper floor there were cardboard boxes filled to the brim with labelled clothing, Marks and Spencer's amongst other high street names. Some of these clothes even had price labels attached to them, yet today they were worthless. In other areas of the building the remnants of manufacturing activities could be seen: handwritten paperwork, a rail of crinkled sewing patterns and rusting machinery. In the basement, an assortment of empty Schweppes bottles and a hollowed out vending machine. An outbuilding even housed a vintage car, a Daimler Conquest, dated between 1953 and 1958. It had recently been set on fire. In a video I recorded at Corah I note that I am enticed to touch the items that I happen upon, tapping defunct keyboards and running a reel of clothing labels between my fingers (CV6). In perhaps my favourite room of the building, hundreds of ribbons are strung from the ceiling, every colour tarnished slightly with a green hue. It was impossible not to interact with Corah through touch. However, there was a sadness associated with the space that I had not experienced to the same degree in other places I had ventured into. Mah (2017, p.205) describes how sites of ruination speak 'to the trauma, uncertainty, and tenacity of lived experiences with painful post-industrial transformations'. Perhaps my proximity to

individuals directly affected by the closure of Corah enhanced my awareness of the loss that the now empty building represented.

In one video of Corah, a group of teenage boys are moving through an almost unrecognisable office space, as one remarks that "it's weird to think that all of this was used, when you see it like this" (CV2). This comment speaks to Edensor's (2005a) observation that within ruined spaces, objects that were once valuable commodities soon become irrelevant. This is highlighted further in the boxes of clothing discussed earlier. These items once held a great value, with hundreds of garments stuffed into each box, waiting to be shipped out to retail stores across the country. Now, they sit unmoved, exposed to damp and the whims of human and non-human occupants. Similarly, the Daimler Conquest which was left behind in an outbuilding may have once been the valued possession of a vintage car enthusiast. However, it now sits motionless, after suffering a number of intentional fires and a smashed windscreen. It should be noted that this appears to be much to the dismay of a number of urban explorers on the 28DaysLater forum:

> 'Actually painful to see what's happening to that Daimler. Like seeing a wounded puppy for me, just want to go and rescue it!' (CR18).

> '(. . .) The daimler conquest is such a classic car!!! can't imagine whats running through someones head as they proceed to smash it up! all the instrument dials have been stolen but the engine and most of the body work is in good knick, the interior is in good condition too. can't believe anyone would want to smash up a classic motor like this, especially being looked after for so long!' (CR18).

Alongside the abandoned commodities of the factory, there was also a large amount of waste which appeared to have been dumped on the premises (CV1). At times, it felt hard to distinguish between what had been left behind by Corah employees and what had been left more recently by

members of the public. These items included bags of clothing, chemical drums, and glass bottles. In some ways, the inability to distinguish the origins of these items resembles Walter Benjamin's wind of historical change. Armstrong (2011) interprets this as the accumulation of history, as progress piles wreckage upon wreckage. Ruins tell stories through their accumulated histories, a build-up of time within space. However, at Corah this accumulation is muddied, as it is not clear when specific events occurred.

It is hard to ignore the allure of abandoned industrial spaces. The traces left behind offer the body a range of experiences that may not be afforded in other types of sites. Edensor (2007, p. 228) writes extensively about his experience of walking through industrial ruins in particular, often focussing on the sensorial experiences afforded by them. He notes that within industrial ruin:

> 'It is not a world of silken sheen or velvety textures, polished surfaces, ceaselessly swept flooring or plush carpeting. Instead, it contains the rough, splintery texture of a wooden workbench or floorboards, crunchy shards of glass on concrete flooring, the mulch of moldering paper, moss and saplings, decomposing clothes, corroding steel and slimy, rotting wood. In their unfamiliarity, such things invite touch'.

Within Corah it is the traces of chemicals that fill the air with a specific type of scent, the echoes of metallic machinery that clang in the breeze and the creaking of steel support beams. It feels as though the sensorial experience of Corah is defined by its industrial past.

Figure 21: Author and friend at Corah and Sons. Image taken by author, 2015.

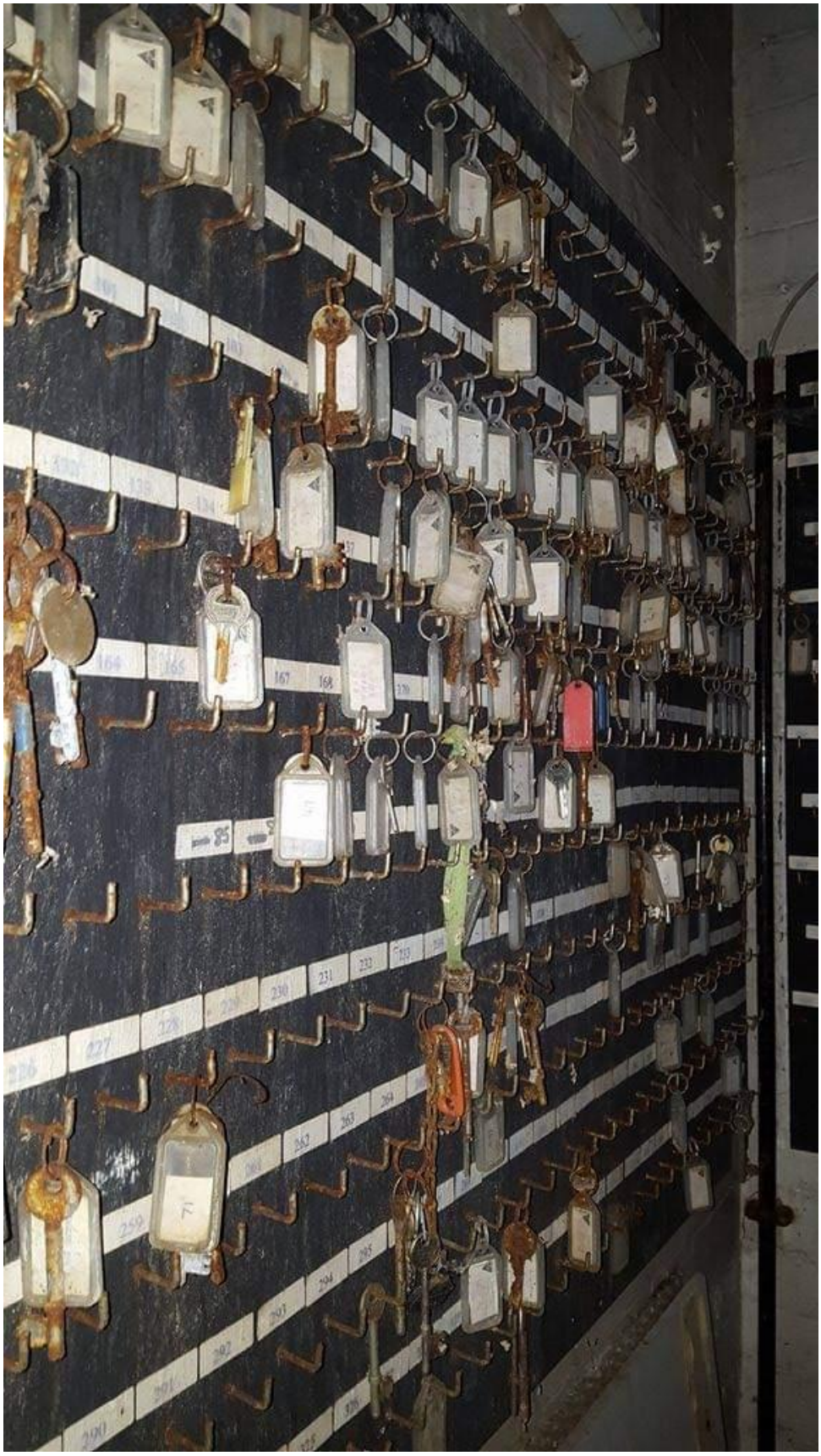

Figure 22: A collection of forgotten keys at Corah and Sons. Image taken by author, 2015.

Leicester International Hotel

Out of the five places I researched in the process of writing my thesis, Leicester International Hotel had the least material available about it online. The material that did exist was often short in duration, or unenthusiastic about what the building contained. There are a number of reasons why this may be the case. It may, for example, have been the obscure method of entry to the site, or the building's highly visible location. However, one user of the 28DaysLater forum (LR1) highlights another potential reason:

> 'Inside, the hotel is absolutely fucked, so that was a little disappointing'.

This quote points towards the emptied state of the building as one reason for a lack of material. Inside, it has been gutted. Most of its 13 storeys had been stripped back to their concrete foundations, devoid of many obvious traces of its former use. Some rooms contained stalactites and stalagmites, lush carpets of moss and water puddles, which suggested that the space had been exposed to the outside elements, likely because many of the windows had either been removed or smashed (LV1). Emptied buildings, such as Leicester International Hotel may be less attractive to urban explorers, as there is often little in the way of original features. Garrett (2013, p.268) notes that a common term to describe these types of spaces is a 'derp'. Whilst the word derp is short for the phrase derelict and ruined place, it is more frequently used by explorers to describe 'somewhere a bit dull [or] stripped out'. In my time undertaking urban exploration, I had seen the word being used to describe spaces which either lacked many identifying features, or which had been subjected to a large amount of vandalism, arson, and graffiti coverage.

Whilst the traces contained within the former hotel were less overt than in other abandoned spaces, a small amount of investigation revealed a number of items which hinted towards its former use (LV1). Some of these traces were found hidden within the drawers of otherwise empty desks.

Rifling through these drawers revealed a swathe of papers, each containing the personal details of former visitors. Alongside these, the drawers also contained office equipment, hole punches, staplers, and pens. This offered a glimpse into the use that the room had once had. The searching for clues within the desks of Leicester International Hotel is an example of the ghost ethnography that Kindynis (2019) describes. In order to make sense of the space, the items within it were the focus of a form of investigation. Whilst most of the floors of the building appeared to have been gutted, some floors still contained a large number of items. Whilst exploring one such floor, I entered a room which contained a large round table surrounded by a number of cloth covered chairs, and a heavy seemingly well-made wooden desk. This room had a different atmosphere to the other office rooms that we had explored earlier on in the building. It appeared to be a board room, with the expensive furniture and window view over the city demonstrating that this space was reserved for a select few individuals who likely managed the hotel. In the corner of this room was a table, which hosted a display of clean glasses, cups, saucers, tea bags and sugar sachets. There was also a number of unopened orange juice cartons, which had a use by date of May 2013 (LV1). The room appeared to have been set up for some kind of gathering, perhaps a business meeting, however this event had seemingly not gone ahead.

Moving further into the hotel we come across a door which appears to have sustained a large amount of damage and was now hanging by one hinge. As we move the door to one side, we are shocked to discover just how many items are stored within the room. Filled with metal shelving, it contains a variety of items. Electrical equipment, high visibility jackets, folders and hundreds of keys are jumbled together amongst an eclectic mix of other items. Some of the keys are labelled, one reads ‘gate’, whilst others simply have numbers. It was quickly agreed that these were likely to be hotel room keys. This specific floor appeared to be used by hotel guests, rather than staff members. Moving along one of the corridors revealed that some of the rooms still contained bathtubs and carpets, but that all furniture had been removed. This corridor bore a resemblance to a classic horror film, with similarly patterned carpets and wallpapers: “It really is like The Shining” (LV2). Later videos of this particular floor revealed that the hotel rooms had played host to drug users, as a collection of needles

and syringes was filmed littering the floor (LV3). These items were a trace of those who came after our visit and demonstrate how the uses of a building change after its dereliction.

Other floors of the former hotel building contained traces of what appeared to be more recent construction activities. One large open plan room contained a number of desks. On some of these desks there were hard hats, and on others were paper blueprints. In front of one of the windows, overlooking a busy road, was a mannequin wearing a high visibility jacket. This appeared to be used as a deterrent to would-be intruders, as it could easily have been confused for a person. Adjacent to this room was a small kitchen, which looked very well kept. On the kitchen worktop was a cardboard washing powder box, which had a handwritten label: 'lost property'. Behind the camera I narrate my experience of rifling through this box as I pull out items, a door handle, a drill bit, a fuse, and a collection of screws (LV1). These are not items that a standard office worker would have lost, which afforded me a hint to who had most recently been occupying the space. Further clues came in the form of a piece of paper which had been stuck onto a cupboard door. The paper had a tea list written on it, a collection of names followed by their preferred beverage and preparation instructions. My friend takes a pen and writes my name on the paper, it now reads 'Poppy, white, one sugar'. The paper is crisp, white and shows no signs of experiencing damp. The hotel had been abandoned for approximately seven years at the time of our visit, and it was highly unlikely that the paper had maintained its condition for such a long period of time. This small trace of occupation had informed us that the building had only very recently been fully abandoned, or that it had not been abandoned at all. If the latter were true, the hotel could be referred to as a 'live site', rather than abandoned, which could transform the identity of the urban explorer into an urban infiltrator (Genosko, 2009).

Discovering these small, seemingly insignificant traces had allowed us to learn about how the former hotel had been used since its closure. When nobody is around to tell the story of a space, the traces, artifacts, and other items that are left behind by people may speak for themselves (Armstrong, 2010). In the case of Leicester International Hotel, these traces appeared to tell of a dereliction which

occurred in stages. As some of the 13 storeys were left behind to be reclaimed by nature, some others were transformed by contractors, and used for a new objective. However, after 13 years of closure, this objective still remains uncertain.

Figure 23: A boardroom table at Leicester International Hotel. Image taken by author, 2015.

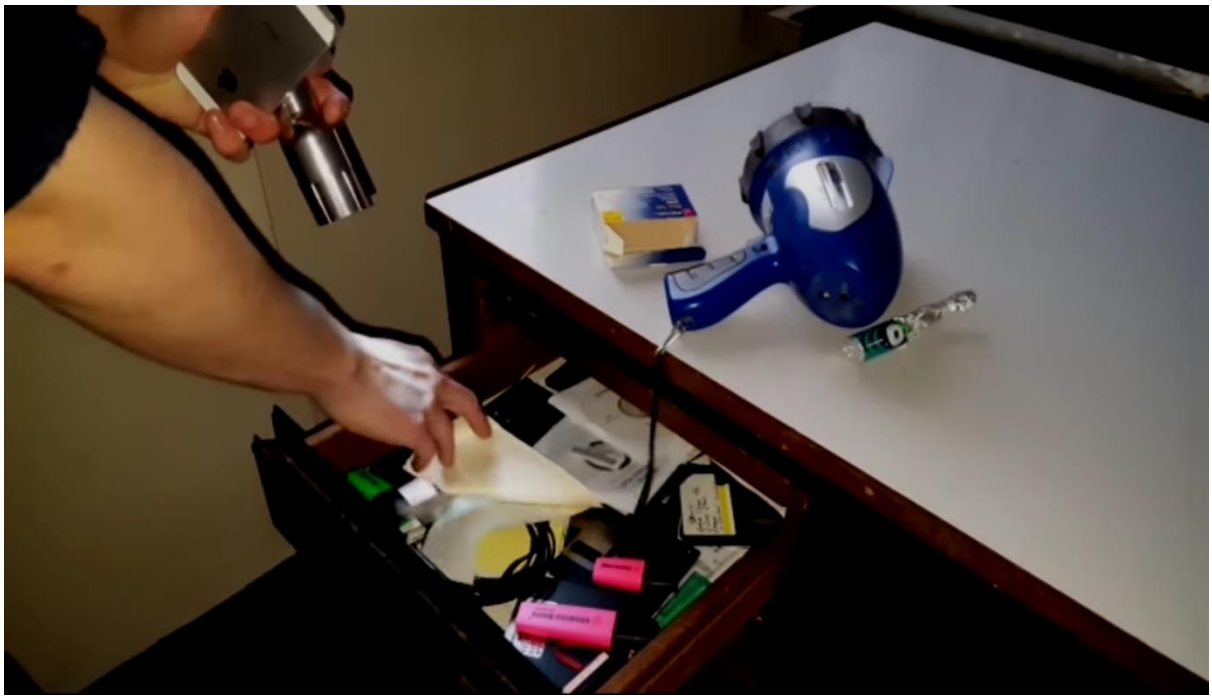

Figure 24: Rummaging through drawers at Leicester International Hotel. Image taken by author, 2015.

Sheffield Ski Village

Sheffield Ski Village was unlike the other spaces discussed within this chapter because it was an entirely outdoor site. Whilst there had once been a plethora of buildings on the site, including a bowling alley and laser tag, these buildings had been targeted by arsonists and subsequently were no longer standing. Writing of his adventures with the WildBoyz urban exploration group, Bingham (2020) recalls that the ski village was now 'part nature reserve, part wasteland'. This is a perception that was echoed by other explorers, with one describing it as "future war-zone looking" (SVV2). The thick overgrowth of trees and thorns had hidden some of the traces of the site, which prompted visitors to partake in a kind of treasure hunt. In one video a group of young males stumble upon a hollowed-out track hidden within a clearing of trees. With excitement in his voice one member of the group exclaims "it's a bobsled run, look!" (SVV26). Many others shared the same kind of excitement whilst exploring the site, which suggests that there was some perceived reward in uncovering traces which may not be immediately obvious to onlookers.

Desire lines were evident throughout the site, suggesting that many visitors had perhaps embarked on their own form of treasure hunting, deviating away from the main pathways. A desire line is created through the erosion that foot fall causes. They divert away from the paths that are built into space, representing an apparent desire to get to a space which is not on an official path (Tiessen, 2007). Perhaps the most frequently traversed desire line at the ski village was one which circumvented the locked gates at the main entrance to the site. The gates represented a barrier to accessing the site, and somebody had found a way past them. As this route was recreated by other visitors it became carved into the landscape, and others who visited were subsequently guided onto the site without much difficulty (SVV11). These lines were traces of explorers who had come before and would be maintained by visitors who were still to come.

Just as the landscape of Sheffield Ski Village changed, so did the way that it was used by visitors. Edensor (2008, p.128) describes how ruins become venues for 'adventures, den-making and imaginative play', and the ski village was no different. In fact, it was the traces that were left behind at the site that allowed for a range of different types of play to occur. In many of the videos surveyed, visitors can be seen re-appropriating pieces of equipment and broken materials that had been left behind after the official closure of the site. In one example, two teenagers can be seen using a large piece of blue plastic as a makeshift sled. One of them carries the item to the top of a steep section of slope and begins to slide down the snow-covered ground before grinding to a jarring halt, as the plastic catches on another piece of debris (SVV8). In another video, a large group of young adults scout the ski village in search of items that could be used for parkour. The group settles on old foam mats which had been left behind, allowing them to soften their landing as they completed jumps from the former finishing line at the bottom of the slopes (SVV9). In a number of videos and reports, explorers commented on their surprise at how the site was now being used. One explorer writes:

> 'What struck me most was how popular it seemed to be – kids riding bikes, families taking strolls. I wasn't the only shutterbug out on the slopes that day, either – in fact, getting good shots was an exercise in patience, there was so much human traffic to dodge.' (SVR6).

The level of activity at Sheffield Ski Village also struck me as odd when I visited. When exploring the other sites discussed in this thesis it was likely that you would come across a few individuals who were also visiting. However, this was certainly not to the same level as the ski village. As I visited the site back in 2016, I wondered why this was the case, and as I surveyed the countless videos of the site, I began to grasp why this may be.

A number of videos of the Sheffield Ski Village that were analysed were presented in a documentary style. These videos featured snippets of interviews from people who used to frequent the site when it was in use, and captures them moving through the space, on foot, skiing, or snowboarding

(SVV3, SVV22, SVV35). The videos of people skiing across the ruined slopes are accompanied by emotive instrumental music, which inspires feelings of sadness and nostalgia amongst the audience. These clips are interspersed with videos of people being interviewed about their memories of the site when it was in use. They describe how they had grown up attending the slopes, how they had met partners and friends at the ski village, and how it had once been the training grounds for a number of famous Olympians (SVV3, SVV22). The purpose of these videos appears to be to rally public support to rebuild and reopen the site, with a link to a petition calling for redevelopment and directions to join the Snowsport for Sheffield community group. Each of these videos demonstrate the value that the snowsport community placed upon the Sheffield Ski Village, and how they had become connected to the space. Whilst there are now very little traces of the spaces that many of the interviewees mentioned, such as the boot room where one had once been employed (SVV22), this did not appear to matter to the group.

For people such as Bingham's WildBoyz (2020a) the ski village appears to be nothing more than a wasteland, slowly eroding as it returns to nature. However, Armstrong (2010, p.245) describes how the traces that accompany emptied spaces are both visible, through artifacts, and invisible, through the memories that they hold. It is still not entirely certain what the future holds for the former ski site, however the commitment of local residents to restoring the site demonstrates just how powerful their connection is to the memories that the site holds.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discuss the range of traces that can be found within abandoned and derelict spaces. This addresses a key research question of how traces within abandoned spaces are embodied and interacted with. Traces highlight a former life, offering clues into how space was used and telling its story when nobody is around to do so. These clues may differ according to the former function of space, sometimes being as specific as a smell which, for example, could be identified as belonging to

a hospital. Urban exploration is a form of ghost ethnography, where items become the focus of a type of investigation (Kindynis, 2019). As the investigator, an urban explorer may feel compelled to rifle through drawers, read documents and follow desire lines as they attempt to gain an understanding of space. This understanding may differ according to each individual who moves through the space, as objects are interpreted differently, or specialist knowledge is possessed. As an explorer moves through an abandoned space, they make discoveries which grant them access to a historical cache which is inaccessible to the general public. They may become privy to unreleased information, such as discovering a blueprint left upon a table, or gain access to spaces rarely frequented by the average person.

Spaces which are left abandoned for a long period of time may begin to accumulate traces of human and animal activity that took place long after their official closures. A spray can, a sleeping bag, a needle, and a bag of discarded clothing may all demonstrate that a space cannot ever really be considered abandoned. Each of these items offers an insight into how such spaces can be reclaimed and embodied, by a variety of different individuals. The arrival of these types of traces frequently also signals the disappearance of the traces of former use. As others begin to occupy abandoned spaces, the objects that were left behind are stolen, sold, or burnt. Sites which have undergone this process are frequently referred to as ‘derps’ and are typically seen as less interesting to urban explorers (Garrett, 2013).

As I watched countless videos during the collection of data for this thesis, I noted that a large number of explorers paid little attention to the traces left by more recent occupants of abandoned spaces. Those that did address these traces frequently used them to create a spectacle or add novelty to videos, often through using them to imply that the explorer was in some form of danger. In many of these videos the explorer seems far removed from the reality of those who frequently occupy abandoned spaces, such as those seeking shelter. The next chapter focusses on unpacking the role of positionality and privilege within the urban exploration community.

Chapter Six: Gaps in the Fence

The title of this chapter is inspired by one particular video within this research that captured a group of young male explorers recording a traveller's site through the gaps in a metal fence, accompanied by tense music. The explorers appeared to attempt to display the site as dangerous or threatening through their choice of accompanying music. Watching this scene, I began to think about how the positionality of urban explorers may impact upon their attitudes and behaviours within abandoned spaces, and how they choose to display this through the internet and social media. Therefore, this chapter mostly focusses on answering the research question 'how does positionality and identity change the ways in which abandoned spaces are perceived, experienced, and represented?'.

Before I introduce the first section of this chapter, I talk about my experience of demonstrating my own privilege and utilising clickbait in an attempt to attract attention towards my YouTube channel when I had just started practicing urban exploration. I recount that I felt that using this method of gaining viewership would possibly allow me to grow my channel in the same way that many other popular urban explorers had. This led to my dramatisation of an interaction that I had with a homeless man at Corah and Sons. I speak about my regret reflecting upon this experience and conclude by acknowledging this is a trap that explorers often fall into when desiring to become known within their community.

The first section of this chapter discusses attitudes within the urban exploration community. The community is heavily dominated by white male individuals, who may not be aware of the danger faced by other demographics within abandoned spaces. This was frequently demonstrated through a lack of concern towards being caught or being treated unfairly by security and law enforcement. Furthermore, this section highlights some of the prejudice and derogatory views that appear to be common within the community. These prejudices included derogatory language directed towards the travelling community, to which damage within sites was often attributed. Classism was also noted

within online communication, which often referred to ‘chavs’ as a further source of damage towards sites, and homeless people, who were seen to restrict access to some sites, much to the dismay of some members of the community.

The second section within this chapter focusses on the problematic behaviours of urban explorers. Vandalism was frequently observed within the videos analysed, though this was at varying degrees of severity. Urban explorers were also observed engaging in graffiti tagging, which may have been used to communicate their presence with other explorers or to advertise their social media channels. More frequently than it was observed, graffiti tagging, and vandalism were called out by urban explorers, who described their confusion and anger at the defacement of the sites that they were visiting. This section concludes by noting that it is likely that these videos and narrative accounts do not highlight the true prevalence of these behaviours within the urban exploration community, as most people are unlikely to post evidence of their transgressive behaviours online.

The final section of this chapter concentrates on how urban exploration is represented through social media and the internet. It first discusses how credibility and status is earned by explorers online, which is often through being the first to discover a new site or to undertake the exploration of dangerous or difficult sites. This may lead to the use of clickbait within videos, which is often an attempt to gain viewership. A number of clickbait titles were used within the video sample, and these clickbait claims were rarely substantiated within the videos themselves. This section also discusses how audio effects, such as the use of specific genres of music, can be used to elicit specific emotional responses from viewers, and how visual effects may achieve similar goals.

Within this chapter I engage with a key debate that exists within urban exploration literature, which revolves around the topic of identity amongst the community. A number of scholars suggest that there are issues of misogynistic behaviour, white privilege and power imbalances between those deemed to have status in the community and those who are not (High and Lewis, 2007; Mott and

Roberts, 2014; Stones, 2016). There are a number of instances that I discuss below where these types of behaviours were observed, therefore supporting these claims. However, I also note how these behaviours are frequently met with disappointment and anger from other members of the community, which suggests that these claims of identity issues are not representative of, or generalisable to, all urban explorers.

Conjuring up danger: Reflecting on an encounter at Corah and Sons

In February 2016 I was on spring half term, and with a week off from college I decided to head over to Corah and Sons. I took a crowded bus into the city centre and walked the remaining ten minutes before I reached the crumbling site. After a quick climb onto the roof of an outbuilding, and a jump on to the bins below, I was within the fenced off complex. I do not recall having a specific agenda for this trip, I was simply hoping to pass some time.

I made my way into the nearest building, which I assume had once been used for storage. Before me was a sea of cardboard boxes, brightly coloured toys, and pieces of material. It was not immediately clear where these items had come from, but as I moved within the room it was impossible to avoid them as they cracked and crunched underfoot. I soon became aware that I was not the only source of noise within the building, as the familiar sounds of cracking appeared to also be coming from the next room along. So, in the interest of my own safety, I pulled out my phone and began to record a video.

It is pitch black inside the room, and my phone light is only able to illuminate a few metres in front of me. My breath combines with the cold air, creating a white fog as I breathe. I begin to whisper: “I’m in a room full of toys. Just loads and loads of children’s toys”. The sounds of banging in the background intersperse my words. “What was that noise? I can hear noises”. Then, the unmistakable sounds of footsteps, moving closer. I am glued to one spot, rotating my body as I record

all angles of the space. I locate the sound, fixing my camera on a darkened doorway, waiting. A light appears, another torch, I think.

The light goes out. I call out “Hi”. A response, “Hi”. “I’m just taking some photos and stuff”, I explain. The footsteps move closer, a man appearing in the doorway. He walks up to me, and I repeat my previous explanation, adding to the end “I’m not dangerous, don’t worry”. “Ah” the man replies, and he walks away, disappearing once more into the darkness. I begin to walk in the opposite direction, finally commencing my explore. It felt as though I had gained permission to be within the space.

I walk up a staircase, revealing a room to my left as I reach the top. Inside the room there is a mattress, a chair and food wrappers. This was somebody’s home. I make a thumbs up to the camera and say, “I’m going to call it quits, because this is quite spooky and I’m on my own”. I can hear the same crunching beneath me, as I record the staircase that I had just ascended. I whisper words of encouragement to myself, “okay”, “let’s go”, “come on”, as I begin to retrace my steps towards the exit. My pace of breathing increases, and my camera lingers on the darkened doorway one more time before I squeeze myself past a section of loosened plywood and back outside. My final words within the building were “shit, shit, shit”.

Once I was back home, I edited the video, cutting out all that I deemed irrelevant, and uploaded it to my YouTube channel. I titled the video ‘Urbex abandoned building homeless encounter’. I had created the YouTube channel a few months prior and had quickly learned that videos with clickbait style titles accumulated many more views than videos which simply used the place name in their video title. Therefore, I felt that the best method to grow my channel presence was through creating videos which sought to exaggerate the danger experienced whilst undertaking urban exploration.

This video was one example of my efforts, and it is something that I look back upon and regret nowadays. In reality, I did not experience any form of fear or apprehension when I met the homeless man. I had met many homeless people whilst exploring before this encounter, without issue. However, I knew that if I dramatised this experience through cursing under my breath, or increasing my breath rate, I would be able to attract more viewers as I would be seen to epitomise the dare devil urban explorer identity. In many ways, this method worked in gaining the type of attention that I desired. The video remains to this day the most popular one on my channel. And whilst some of the comments beneath the video fulfil my desire at the time to be seen as brave and courageous, some of them also uncovered just a taste of the discrimination that female explorers may experience from people inside and outside of the community:

> ‘OMG your so brave!! I would have totally packed my decks and bolted ASAP! Take care.’ (Commenter 1).

> ‘Crazy stuff! Glad he left you alone’ (Commenter 3).

> ‘At least he didn’t try and hurt you, he didn’t seem like someone who was living on the streets, because he’d rather drugs than a house, he seemed like the kind of person who’d been thrown out, because he’d lost his job. Poor guy…’ (Commenter 8).

> ‘Jesus babe, a girl like yourself going alone, so dangerous, do be careful won’t you x’ (Commenter 19).

> ‘It’s good that you’re not from tucson, I would have you bound in my shed and you wouldn’t be able to share all of this with everyone. jejeje (devil face emoji)’ (Commenter 9).

I no longer have access to this YouTube account. Although I would like to remove the videos that I uploaded, this is no longer possible. Reflecting back upon my motivations to record and deliberately misrepresent my experiences of meeting homeless people within abandoned spaces, I feel ashamed. Instead of looking upon the experiences of this man with empathy, I treated him as an opportunity to gain views on a channel that no longer has much relevance in my life today. Out of all of the fruitful and engaging conversations I have had with people who live within abandoned spaces, I instead chose to create a piece of clickbait. I had been sucked in by the allure of social media, which promises individuals the status of 'epic explorers' through conquering dangerous abandoned locations, even if the danger itself is fabricated (Bingham, 2020a, p.240).

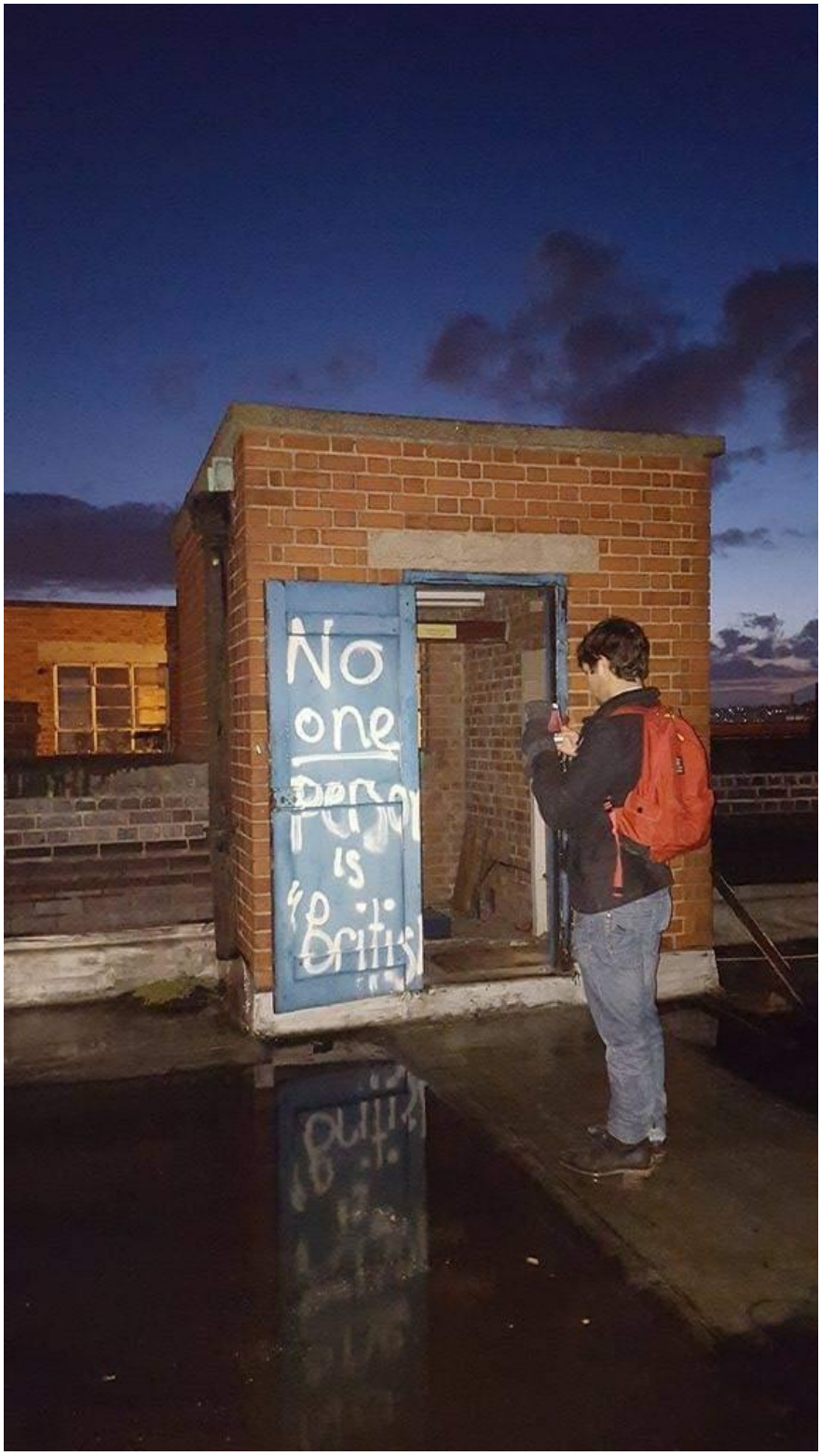

Figure 25: Accepting graffiti at Corah and Sons. Image taken by author, 2016.

Attitudes within the urban exploration community

A number of scholars argue that the urban exploration community is mainly composed of white middle class males (High and Lewis, 2007; Klausen, 2017; Stones, 2016). This is something that became immediately obvious during the analysis of the video data that I had selected. In a total of 99 videos, there was only one individual who could be identified as non-white. In fact, this individual joked about this during the video, laughing as he said, "I feel so white right now" (LV4). Whilst this was a joke, his statement leads the viewer to question why the activity is seen to be associated with white people. It is, of course, important to highlight how space is experienced subjectively, according to our own characteristics (Mott and Roberts, 2014). White people may not experience the same types of biases and treatment from law enforcement and are less likely to be seen as suspicious even when walking through an abandoned space. As such, those who are non-white may experience barriers to participating in urban exploration, not benefitting from the privilege that white explorers do (Mott and Roberts, 2014; Ninjalicious, 2005).

Many explorers appeared to express an awareness of their privileged position, demonstrating what could be described as a lax attitude towards the risk of being caught. In a video that I feature in, I address the audience, noting

> "We've just broken in and we've been spotted, which means that we may or may not be arrested and killed" (LV1).

Although, once again, this was presented as a joke, my apparent lack of concern about the fact that we had been spotted entering the building hints towards my own awareness that I was unlikely to find myself subjected to any form of legal punishment. Though, this was perhaps also in part due to the fact that at this point in time I had not encountered any form of law enforcement whilst exploring, so I had a general belief that an interaction with police or landowners would be unlikely. Other explorers

took comfort in their knowledge of the law surrounding urban exploration and the act of trespass, which one individual pointed out is "not technically a crime, as long as we're not being a dick to the place" (SV25). However, this ignores that a non-white person may be more likely to arrested on suspicion of committing a crime, such as burglary, even if they are only participating in trespass (UK Government, 2020). Therefore, awareness of trespass laws is only beneficial to urban explorers if they are not suspected of committing further offences. White urban explorers may also benefit from members of the public being less suspicious of their activities, and therefore less likely to contact the police or security. In one video at Corah and Sons, two teen males are scoping out the site and attempting to gain entry. The sound of an approaching car honking startles them, and a man shouts "private property, keep off". The pair apologises and feign ignorance, able to leave without any further interactions with law enforcement or landowners (CV3). Some explorers even appeared to welcome the opportunity to be caught. From brazen attempts to access security huts, descriptions of cat and mouse chases with security personnel, and descriptions of enjoying being escorted off of premises in a police car, it is evident that there are a few explorers so comfortable in their assumed privilege that being caught is more of a wish than a worry:

> "It's funny how obvious we're being. I almost kind of want to get caught" (SV24).

There were a number of different identities that the urban explorers within this research held prejudice towards, but perhaps the most frequent were the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities (hereafter GRT). McGarry (2017) describes how Romaphobia could be seen to be the last acceptable form of racism, as anti-GRT attitudes appear to be on the rise within Europe. A distinction was not made in videos or forum posts between different groups within the GRT communities, so I use Romaphobia here to refer to negative attitudes towards all groups. A variety of negative qualities have been associated with GRT people, including deviancy and criminality. The ascription of these qualities has resulted in the development of a negative group identity, which tars all members of the communities with the same brush. Through a process of othering and demonisation by the media, the

presence of GRT communities can be seen as threatening. In a scene which inspired the naming of this chapter, a group of teen boys are approaching the Ski Village gates. Tense music is played as the camera operator zooms in towards a metal fence, and through the gaps in this fence a site with a number of caravans can be seen. The camera operator moves closer towards the site's gates, as the tense music continues to play. Once at the front gates, the camera operator zooms in a final time, towards a single caravan. As the scene ends, the tense music is no longer playing (SVV13). The deliberate decision of the video uploader to add tense music only to a scene which involved the investigation of a GRT site suggests that the uploader either believed that they were in danger or wanted to portray the situation as dangerous. Both of these represent prejudice on the part of the uploader.

Romaphobia was also displayed when explorers attributed criminal damage within abandoned spaces to GRT individuals without evidence. Most frequently, the derogatory term 'pikey' was used when attributing evidence of theft or vandalism. In one video, two middle aged men are walking through a corridor at Selly Oak Hospital. There is evidence that there had been a theft of wiring, which the camera operator declared had been taken by "pikies". After the camera operator's friend warned that he should not have said that on YouTube, the camera operator responds, "I meant it in the nicest way possible" (SV17). It is not immediately clear what the latter quote meant, but the attribution of the theft of wiring to GRT communities indicates that the explorers believe that they are commonly the culprit of criminal behaviour. Further Romaphobia was evident within narrative reports published on 28DaysLater, as explorers claimed members of these communities were responsible for the damage that they witnessed within the places they had visited:

> 'These images are from my first visit, this place was pretty cool tbh but the pikeys have got there hands on it so ceilings have been pulled down and wiring stripped from the walls (. . .). The morgue has not been touched by pikeys yet so thats still worth a little look...' (SR16).

> ‘The place is pretty devastated what the pikies haven't taken the chaves (sic) have destroyed’ (SVR10).

Again, this represents a prejudiced belief towards the Travelling community, as neither of these reports provided any justification for why they had claimed that damage had been caused by GRT individuals. The latter quote reveals another assumption that had been made for the cause of damage at Sheffield Ski Village, claiming that this had been done by ‘chavs’, a term which is steeped in classism.

This type of classist belief was also visible within a number of videos. In one video recorded at the Sheffield Ski Village, a man and a woman in their 20s are walking towards the entrance to a field. The man walks on ahead as the woman records. Shortly after the man disappears into the field he reappears, explaining to the woman that there was a homeless man in the field who did not want to be filmed. The woman appears to become very offended by this, describing to the audience that there was a “pointless homeless guy who owns the place, or thinks he owns the place”. This annoyance continues throughout the video as she regularly refers to the man in a derogative manner (SVV14). There was no apparent reason why the pair could not have walked past the man and resumed filming once he was out of the shot. When the man returned from speaking with the homeless person, there was no suggestion that he had been threatening, he had just requested not to be filmed, something that the woman had chosen to oblige but with a great degree of annoyance. To the viewer, it seemed like the woman believed she had a greater right to the space than the man who had asked not to be filmed. However, this was not correct, both from a legal perspective, as both parties were trespassing upon private land, and from a moral perspective. Ninjalicious (2005, p.92) describes how:

> ‘Even though squatters don’t really have any legal right to ask you to leave, they do kind of have the moral right, since they actually live there, whereas you’re just visiting for kicks.’

Whilst a person who is squatting may not necessarily be homeless, Ninjalicious's argument is that those who live within abandoned spaces have a greater need for the space, and therefore a greater right to control over a space than somebody who is simply visiting. The two explorers here were annoyed that they could not record a small section of the ski village, however if they did so they would have likely been invading the privacy of the homeless man, by recording him and his personal belongings, which are essentially his home.

The term 'chav' was frequently used by explorers to refer to those who seek to cause damage to abandoned sites. However, it was also used to demarcate spatial boundaries within certain locations. It was not uncommon to see reports on 28DaysLater which referred to spaces being located in 'chavvy' areas, and in one video a group of teenagers use the term to explain their journey to the viewer, noting how they had "been through the chavvy and posh areas" of Sheffield (SVV13). Valentine and Harris (2014) describe how, over time, the term 'chav' has been used to spatially separate the middle class from working class 'slums', through the term's association with council estates and anti-social behaviour. In this case, it appears that the teenagers may have equated the existence of council housing with the 'chav' label, which is often treated as an acronym for 'Council Housed and Violent' (Tyler, 2008).

One explorer's report of visiting Pye Bank Primary School recounts a story of seeing a group of men outside of the building, appearing to take an interest in the author's car. The explorer and their friend describe the men as 'type of guys', indicating that they matched their idea of what a car thief may look like. The author explains that they soon found out that the group of men were in fact talking to a taxi driver, and that the car did not belong to the author:

> 'Nearing the end of our visit (name) hastily shouted that "three f***ing 'type of' guys are in your car and going to nick it" (shocked face)… "quick run and I'll call the copper's":mad. The exit wasn't too speedily and when I got there chaging like some sort of maniac ready for

> anything…….the three ‘type of’ guys were chatting to a taxi driver with a similar case as me…….mine was parked further up the road!!!! (laughing face). Try and explain that to the old bill once you have already called 999 and got the incident number…… (confused face) Easy mistake…….better to be safe than sorry tho’ (eye roll face)’ (PR5).

This account appears to demonstrate that some explorers may have a preconceived idea of what a criminal looks like, frequently without any evidence of these types of individuals actually committing any crimes. Some members of the community appear to stereotype certain groups of people as being responsible for the damage that occurs to abandoned spaces, which they are frequently very fond of, and therefore the stereotyping and vilification of specific groups of people becomes socially acceptable within the online urban exploration community.

Behaviours within the urban exploration community

The motto ‘take nothing but photos, leave nothing but footprints’ is well known within the urban exploration community as a guiding principle (Broken Windows Theory, 2018). This essentially means that urban explorers should ensure that they do not take anything from the sites that they visit, and do not leave anything behind, including things such as litter or damage. However, it is acknowledged that other forms of the motto exist, including ‘take nothing that will be missed, leave nothing that will be noticed’ (ibid), which represents a more liberal interpretation of moral responsibility. Though, some urban explorers may even breach the more liberal version of this guiding principle when partaking in the activity, which is something that was frequently observed within the videos analysed. Most commonly, individuals took part in two types of behaviour which may be seen to breach their moral obligations as explorers: vandalism, and graffiti.

Vandalism was almost exclusively performed by groups of teenage male explorers, who took part in vandalising sites with varying degrees of severity. In one video a group of teenage males can

be seen moving around the Corah and Sons site, smashing television screens, throwing chairs, and punching holes into walls (CV2). In another video, it appeared that vandalism was facilitated through peer encouragement, as members of the group were egged on by others to smash florescent tube lights on their heads and spray fire extinguishers at each other (SV13). It is interesting that most acts of vandalism were performed by teenagers, I believe that this may reflect Edensor's (2008) argument that abandoned spaces present an opportunity for individuals to re-engage with childhood activities, through enabling the performance of behaviours that may not be acceptable within public spaces. It is important to acknowledge that these individuals were all still young people, not fully matured adults, thus these behaviours may have been performed as part of play.

In another video, two teenage males are attempting to gain entry to Corah and Sons. One of the males picks up an empty spray paint can that was on the floor and proceeds to use it knock in glass shards from a window frame (CV3). The window had already been broken, and this action appears to have been motivated by a desire to gain entry without sustaining an injury, as removing the glass shards would enable them to avoid being cut. The damage to the window had already rendered the building accessible, therefore the additional damage from the spray paint can could be classed as negligible. Comparing this video to the video recorded at Corah, I feel inclined to describe them as different acts despite them both being classified as criminal damage. The differing factors are both the severity of the vandalism being committed and the intent behind causing the damage. Revisiting the liberalised motto, 'take nothing that will be missed, leave nothing that will be noticed' (Broken Windows Theory, 2018), the account of smashing glass with a paint can may fall in line with this obligation, whilst causing the level of damage described in the video at Corah and Sons may not. A future visitor, a member of security, or a landowner is more likely to notice damage sustained to internal walls than they would be to notice a few shards of missing glass.

Another form of potentially problematic behaviour performed by urban explorers within a number of the videos surveyed for this research was graffiti, most commonly tagging. One video in

particular was almost exclusively based around the spray paint tagging of the Selly Oak Hospital site. The video saw two young males making their way around the site, whist stopping frequently to tag walls, doors and pieces of hospital equipment that had been left behind. The pair also stopped to acknowledge the tags of other groups, appearing to recognise the artists who had created the tags (SV18). Reflecting on my own views as I watched this video, I found myself feeling sad and uncomfortable, particularly when it came to witnessing the tagging that had occurred within the mortuary and chapel. In the chapter on light and darkness, I discussed how I became much more aware of my body whilst inside this very morgue, wanting to avoid touching items and moving in a manner which aimed not to disturb the quietness of the space. I would not describe myself as being a remotely superstitious, religious, or spiritual person. Though, this space felt like it was still connected to the individuals who had passed through it, as though they remained within the materialities of the morgue. Therefore, the graffitiing of this space in particular felt disrespectful, almost akin to the graffitiing of a headstone. However, I recognise that this view is reflective of an attitude that Gates (2013, p.265) describes as being held by some urban explorers: 'I don't like graffiti, except for the graffiti I like'. Over my years of exploring, I have appreciated and even photographed the work of graffiti artists across Europe. The methods used by the graffiti artists within the morgue were identical to methods used to create works that I have appreciated, and their content and skill level were also broadly comparable. Therefore, through my own beliefs about morality within the practice of graffiti, I also appear to hold the potentially hypocritical attitude that Gates describes above.

There were a number of other videos which featured urban explorers partaking in forms of tagging, though with different materials to the account above. In these cases, the tool of choice was a pen or a piece of chalk as explorers sought to advertise their YouTube channels to other visitors. In one video, a ballpoint pen was used by a couple to demonstrate their love for each other, with '(name) loves (name)' etched into a wall at Selly Oak (SV31). In some spaces, it appeared that the signing of a wall or the writing of a name upon a chalkboard was almost a rite of passage for urban explorers, as videos frequently featured explorers adding their names to an already existing plethora of writing left

behind by others (SV5). Stickers were also commonly used to advertise YouTube channels, as one video recorded at Pye Bank School revealed (PV4). It appeared that these stickers had been deliberately created and printed for the purpose of advertising within abandoned spaces, which suggests that the sticker's creator saw the investment as worthwhile. It also hints at the audience that the creator hoped to attract to their videos, which was those who already were already involved with urban exploration to some degree, rather than the general public. Kindynis (2019, p.35) notes that 'an accumulation of tags on a wall can indicate who's been where with who, and when' and the urban explorers described above appear to use tagging as an opportunity to communicate with others who have a shared affinity for abandoned spaces. When urban explorers leave behind the names of their YouTube channels, they facilitate a cycle of knowledge sharing, as explorers can click onto their channels and see what other locations may be nearby or potentially even form connections with individuals located near to them.

Far more frequently than causing damage to the abandoned spaces within the videos, explorers expressed their annoyance and sadness at those who had partaken in behaviours which had caused the damage. From a practical perspective, spaces which fall victim to vandalism are at risk of becoming 'derps', a space which is stripped out and empty (Garrett, 2013). Derps may be less interesting to urban explorers because many of the original features that once existed within the building are either removed or damaged irreparably. Many explorers expressed sentiments which questioned what vandals would gain from causing damage to locations, something which Bennett (2011) also notes witnessing in online urban exploration forums:

> "Who the fuck would burn this? (. . .) can't people just fucking enjoy stuff?" (SVV2).

> "What a bastard setting that on fire. What the hell do you gain from it?" (SVV8).

> "[Points to a smashed skylight]. What dickhead did this?" (SV25).

Further concerns revolved around the risks that some acts of vandalism had on the health of both visitors to the spaces and the environment. In one video, two teens are exploring Pye Bank School and one stops to read a sign aloud, “asbestos, don’t damage. So, they smash it up? Idiots!”. The damage to the wall which held the sign was considerable, and now presented a risk to the health of anybody who entered the building. A further report at Corah and Sons expressed concerns at the deliberate knocking over of plastic oil drums, believing that the oil would soon make its way into the ecosystem:

> ‘Some knob jockey has somehow managed to get these plastic crates full of asphalt or thick oil into the old factory and dump them there, leaving them to empty into this drain. That drain will lead to a canal or river at some point… that’s going to do some bad damage…” (CR16).

Whilst this research did uncover acts of vandalism within the urban exploration community, I feel that it is important to note that the vast majority of videos and reports analysed either did not contain this type of behaviour, or deliberately spoke out against the damage caused by these behaviours. Though, as these behaviours are generally discouraged by the community, it may be the case that other explorers engage in them but choose not to record or make note of it, to avoid any risk of ostracisation from the community. During my early years of undertaking urban exploration, I often indulged in acts of petty theft, pocketing items including stickers, rope, and rubber bands. I was not alone in this behaviour, in fact I once met an urban explorer who had claimed to have kitted out his entire kitchen with items found within abandoned buildings, justifying that the items would have been disposed of anyway. I am sure that neither I nor the other explorer would have disclosed these acts online, which may suggest that others are also engaging in hidden criminal behaviours.

Figure 26: Water droplet style tagging at a theatre in Belgium. Image taken by author, 2020.

Figure 27: Fox graffiti at a factory in Birmingham. Image taken by author, 2015.

Figure 28: Pizza graffiti at a factory in Belgium. Image taken by author, 2020.

Representing urban exploration through social media and the internet

Explorers rise to prominence within the urban exploration community when they are seen to conquer 'new' or difficult to access abandoned spaces (Garrett, 2013). The desire to go viral within the community is not shared by all urban explorers, but it is seen particularly within younger male exploration groups. Bingham's (2020, p.239) ethnographic study of a young group of explorers, The Boyz', highlights that this desire may be fulfilled through interactions on social media platforms:

> 'The Boyz' follow an instrumental form of logic that makes them believe that being 'cool' will gain them more credibility, 'style', 'likes' and 'thumbs' on various social media platforms as word about them spreads far and wide'.

Gaining credibility through conquering 'new' locations is difficult within the urban exploration community, as the discovery of a site may simply fall down to luck. As such, in order to gain notoriety, explorers may be motivated to focus on the exploration of particularly difficult sites, or to exaggerate the difficulty and danger associated with sites. Many of the videos analysed within this research appeared to use this technique to increase viewership and engagement, through the use of clickbait style titles. The term 'clickbait' refers to the use of intriguing titles or thumbnails, which are designed to entice people to click on a video. Video creators are incentivised to post these types of videos because they may gain revenue, or notoriety (Gothankar et al, 2021; Beleslin et al, 2017). It did not appear that any of the videos within this research had been monetised by their creators, as most of the channels were small and there were no adverts within the videos themselves. However, the videos which used clickbait style titles had noticeably more views than those which did not utilise this style of title.

The following are just a sample of the clickbait style titles which had been used by video creators within this research:

‘SATANIC RITUAL found at abandoned factory – urbex’ (CV6).

‘CREEPY ABANDONED HOSPITAL (BLOOD ON FLOOR)’ (SV24).

‘ABANDONED HOSPITAL [SECURITY CHASE & BLOOD FOUND]’ (SV29).

‘Exploring abandoned haunted hotel in Leicester (POLICE CALLED!)’ (LV3).

‘HAUNTED HOTEL EXPLORATION W/PRANK!! FOUND CRACKROOM!!’ (LV4).

‘EXPLORING A HAUNTED ABANDONED PRIMARY SCHOOL’ (PV4).

‘EXPLORING HAUNTED ABANDONED SCHOOL (THE INFANTS SECTION)’ (PV5).

‘ATTACKED by Pigeons at ABANDONED Primary School’ (PV7).

It is evident that there were key themes used within the titling of clickbait videos, which included claims that the sites were haunted, that there had been some form of interaction with the police or security, and that explorers had stumbled upon some kind of threatening or dangerous situation, including the discovery of blood or drugs. However, within these videos there is little evidence to support any of the claims made within their titles. For example, in video LV4, the camera operator had discovered a lone needle in a hotel room bathroom. This discovery appears to have been exaggerated in order to claim that a ‘crackroom’ had been found. Perhaps the most comedic use of clickbait was within video CV6, where the creator had claimed to have stumbled upon a Satanic ritual

at Corah and Sons. The ‘Satanic ritual’ was in fact a broken plastic chair surrounded by half burned candles. Above this scene was a spray-painted Star of David with the word ‘DEATH’ above it. This was presumably a failed attempt at creating a pentagram, which is frequently associated with Satanism. The two explorers within this video joke between themselves that this scene was “like a bloody Exploring with Josh Video”. The reference to this channel hints towards an awareness of the use of clickbait by popular YouTube urban explorers. Exploring With Josh is a channel with a subscriber count of over four million (March 2022), it is well known within the exploration community for using clickbait titles amongst other methods of sensationalism, including the use of spooky music and video effects to engage viewers.

Much like the work of Exploring with Josh, the videos within this research also utilised editing techniques to engage viewers. One of these techniques was the use of music which sought to enhance sections of video or align with the mood that the creator was seeking. A number of different genres of music were utilised within the videos, and included sad instrumental songs, eerie horror music and dance music. A small number of video creators elected not to use any music at all, which left the viewer to listen to the sounds of the explorer moving through spaces or talking to their companions. It has been noted that the style of music can impact upon the perceived emotions within film (Parke et al, 2007). This is something that I noted when viewing the videos used within this research. Two of the videos of Selly Oak were uploaded by the same author and had utilised a number of the same video clips within their production. However, one had no music whilst the other had an eerie high pitch style of music (SV3, SV1). This allows me to compare the impact of the style of music upon my own emotions whilst viewing the videos. Of the video with the music, I wrote in my notes:

> ‘The music is high pitch, jarring and repetitive. At times it sounds like there is an alarm playing in the background, I feel unnerved by this – almost like tension building horror style music’ (SV1).

The music utilised in video SV1 made me feel as though the exploration was being conducted in haste, through fear of the camera operator being caught. As a viewer, I felt on edge, as though I was waiting for a jump scare to occur. This feeling was particularly heightened when the camera operator was walking down winding staircases and rounding corners into new rooms, providing a sense that somebody would be waiting for him. Video SV3 was not accompanied by music but shared many of the same clips as the other video. With an absence of music, the viewer was able to listen to the breathing of the camera operator and the sounds of his footsteps. Throughout the video he maintained breathing at a slow rhythmic pace, and his footsteps did not seem rushed. At one point in this video an alarm sounds, and the camera operator walks away from it. From the sounds of his footsteps and his breathing it is evident that he does not feel worried by the sound, as the pace of both of these remained unaltered.

The most common genre of music within the videos analysed was horror movie style. This appeared to have been used to amplify the fear or danger perceived by the viewer, and a number of videos appeared to have intentionally used jump scares where a loud jarring sound was played in order to cause surprise or fear (SV5, SV6). In other videos, music was used in both intentional and unintentionally comedic ways. In one video at Selly Oak Hospital, the creator appeared to have used horror music to inspire fear within the viewer. However, the music contained a number of crescendos at points in the video that did not feel appropriate. I found myself laughing along to this video as the spooky music reached a crescendo as the camera focussed upon a utility cupboard sign and on a patch of green grass (SV6). In a more intentionally comedic application, the song 'The Sound of Silence' by Simon and Garfunkel was played when a teen girl hit her arm on an object whilst sledding at Sheffield Ski Village. The video turned black and white and the lyrics "hello darkness, my old friend" played as the impact was replayed in slow motion (SVV32). The video concluded with the two explorers sharing a laugh and joking with each other about the unfortunate situation. In one other example of comedic application, Christmas music was used to inform viewers that they were watching a Christmas special. The group of young male explorers all wore Santa hats as they walked around

Selly Oak Hospital, appearing to have used the music to specifically notify the viewer that there were other episodes within their series of exploration at Selly Oak Hospital.

Similarly to audio effects, visual effects were also used to engage the viewer in a number of ways. In an example recorded at Pye Bank School, the video begins with a simulation of a video game start screen. The video then displays a menu, with the words 'PIGEON HUNTER 4' across the top of the screen, the 'start' option is highlighted in red and a clicking sound signals that the game has begun (PV7). This creative use of visual effects likely refers to the large number of pigeons that resided in the old school building, as the group in the video were startled on a number of occasions within the footage. The channel that this video was uploaded on has a relatively substantial number of subscribers, particularly when compared to many of the other channels within this research. It also appears that the video creators have successfully managed to monetise their involvement in urban exploration, as they note that merchandise is available for sale through their website. Comparing the polished nature of this video to many of the other videos analysed, it is evident that monetisation has likely led to the improved video quality.

Many of the smaller channels also used visual effects within their videos, including the use of slow motion and fast motion. Fast motion was most commonly used to speed up sections of video that the creator perhaps felt were less interesting, or to hide methods of entry. As such, this was mostly used in sections of video where individuals were seeking to gain access to sites. Slow motion was mostly used in the build up to a tense or dramatic event, such as a chase scene with security or the triggering of an alarm. One example of this featured three men at Selly Oak Hospital. The music that was previously playing in the background stops as the men approach a door, and the video is suddenly played in slow motion. A hand reaches towards the door handle and an alarm begins to screech. The men turn to run, and the video captures the group retreating in slow motion. As a viewer I held my breath, until the video returned to normal speed as the group exited the building, and the cinematic tension was released.

In other videos, annotations were added on top of footage to communicate information to the viewer that may not have been immediately clear. One video, for example, used annotations to apologise to viewers for poor video and audio quality. The annotations go on to explain that the video was not originally intended for YouTube when it had first been recorded (PV14). This suggests that explorers who enter sites with the intention of uploading footage may undertake the activity of urban exploration in a different way to those who do not wish to upload footage. In another video, annotations were used to explain to the viewer that there was something tapping against a window, which the explorers believed to be security. This annotation was used to explain why the exploration was cut short, as the camera operator left the building shortly after hearing the supposed tapping sound (PV5). Both videos demonstrate the creator's awareness of what viewers want from YouTube videos of urban exploration, with the annotations being used to explain why this expectation may not be met, in this case due to poor quality or due to fear of being caught.

One particularly interesting example of video editing that was noted within a small number of videos was the blurring of faces of individuals. This was not a widespread editing technique, but the use of blurring within a number of videos indicates that some urban explorers who upload their footage to YouTube may be concerned about their privacy. In one video recorded at Pye Bank School, the camera operator had blurred his own face but not his friend's face. Within the video, the camera operator clearly expresses his concern that he was potentially being watched, and that security may be on the premises. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that he chose to blur his face, as YouTube may present an additional opportunity to be caught. At the start of this particular video, the pair of young explorers introduce themselves, with the camera operator's friend promoting his own YouTube channel. This may provide a reason for the friend's face remaining unblurred, representing a differing opinion between the explorers on sharing their identity online (PV4). In another video, recorded at Sheffield Ski Village, the faces of two young male explorers had also been blurred. When I went back to rewatch this video at a later date I noted that it had been made private and could no longer be accessed (SVV12). It may be the case that the video had been made inaccessible through concerns for

the privacy of the uploader. A search for the channel name on YouTube does not reveal any results, suggesting that it could have been deleted entirely, which may add weight to the speculation that the uploader had concerns about their own privacy.

Figure 29: A pentagram drawn into dust on a table at a factory in Birmingham. Image taken by author, 2015.

Figure 30: A staged scene of fake blood at Selly Oak Hospital. Image taken by author, 2015.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the ways in which urban explorers may represent and embody abandoned urban spaces according to their own positionalities and identities. The research question that this chapter mostly aligns to is 'how does positionality and identity change the ways in which abandoned spaces are perceived and experienced?'. I unpack this question by focussing on three aspects within this chapter: attitudes, behaviours and the role of the internet and social media.

I began this chapter by reflecting upon my own experience of deciding how to represent abandoned space online through the video sharing site YouTube. I discuss how I felt compelled to employ the use of clickbait titling in an attempt to gain viewership, and that by doing so I had intentionally misrepresented the character of, and interaction that I had with, a homeless man at Corah and Sons. I reflect critically upon my decision to use the common technique of clickbait within my video, noting that I now feel regret for titling it in the way that I had. The writing of this chapter has allowed me to reflect upon my own experiences of interacting with the online community as an urban explorer and has most importantly highlighted that despite being what I consider to be a generally respectful and well experienced urban explorer, I am not without my own faults. I also note that despite my desire to remove this video, I am unable to do so, having lost access to the account it was uploaded on. Thus, highlighting the permanence of my prejudiced actions and of others within the community.

Within the first section of this chapter, I discuss how most urban explorers occupy a position of privilege, as the majority of members within the community are white males. Thus, these individuals may not have the same experiences within space that other demographics have, especially non-white explorers. Some explorers appeared to recognise this privilege, through demonstrating a lax approach to the topic of being caught by security or law enforcement, with some even joking that they wished they would be caught. This section then draws attention to a number of prejudiced views that

appeared to be common within both the narrative accounts and videos surveyed. Within these views, GRT communities, working class males and homeless people were addressed with derogative terms and blamed for the damage that had occurred within a number of the sites. There was, however, no evidence to suggest that these groups of people were responsible, yet these sentiments were still common.

The second section of this chapter focusses on the transgressive behaviours that explorers themselves may choose to engage in. Within this section, I describe how the most commonly witnessed transgressive behaviours within the videos surveyed were acts of vandalism and tagging. These behaviours varied in severity, from the punching of holes in walls to the writing of a name on a wall with a ballpoint pen. These behaviours may have been motivated by a number of factors, though I highlight that many of the explorers who engaged in vandalism were teenage males. These actions could therefore be regarded as a form of play or expression rather than motivated by malice. Tagging also appeared to have been a useful mode of communication between different groups of urban explorers, as videos frequently depicted explorers recognising the names of others. Tagging, and stickers, were also used to advertise the YouTube channels of explorers, which facilitates a cycle of knowledge sharing, as others can click on to their channels and discover new locations or form connections with individuals located near to them. At the end of this section, I note that it was far more common for explorers to denounce acts of vandalism or tagging than to participate in these acts themselves.

The last section of this chapter discusses how urban exploration is represented online and through social media. I discuss how urban explorers may be motivated to undertake dangerous explorations in the name of gaining status within the community, and how this may motivate the use of tactics such as utilising clickbait video titles. Clickbait titles made up approximately 15% of the videos surveyed, which represents a substantial number of videos particularly if generalisable to urban exploration videos as a whole. These videos very rarely substantiated the claims made within their

titles, and at most the titles represented highly exaggerated descriptions of actual events. The use of audio and visual techniques was also common within the videos surveyed. In particular, horror music was a very common choice amongst video creators, which caused the viewer to feel a level of unease when watching. The most common visual techniques were slow motion and fast motion, which served to draw the viewers' attention towards key moments within the videos, and away from sections which were deemed to be less interesting.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

The research questions that were asked within this thesis were:

1. What affective atmospheres exist within abandoned spaces, and how are these represented by online urban exploration communities?
2. How are the material remains within abandoned spaces interacted with and embodied?
3. How does positionality and identity change the ways in which abandoned spaces are perceived, experienced, and represented?

To answer these questions, I used three research methods. These were the qualitative analysis of YouTube videos created and uploaded by urban explorers, the use of online ethnography to study the urban exploration forum 28DaysLater, and narrative storytelling techniques which allowed me to utilise my own experiences to enrich the data collected from videos and forum posts.

I believe that these methods enabled my research questions to be successfully investigated, allowing for the collection of rich qualitative data which illuminated the experiences of a number of urban explorers across the Midlands and North of England. Through the analysis of video data, I was able to understand how explorers engaged with abandoned sites, embodying them through a range of sensorial encounters. I was also able to gain an understanding of how abandoned spaces are represented through the video content that explorers produced for YouTube audiences, and how these representations could be enhanced and modified to inspire a variety of different emotional responses from viewers. The written reports that I analysed from the 28DaysLater forum allowed for explorers to narrate their experiences of moving through abandoned spaces in their own words, which offered an opportunity for them to recount and reflect upon these experiences after they had occurred. These accounts were filled with profanity, comical tall tales of encounters with law enforcement, and littered with images that had been collected during explorations. These offered a refreshing contrast to the descriptions of abandoned spaces that may be found within the works of scholars such as Edensor

(2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2008, 2013, 2015a, 2015b), as they are outside of the confines of the academic professionalism which may discourage the use of some of the forms of expression seen within these accounts. Through my use of storytelling to narrate my own experiences of being within abandoned space, I felt that I was able to posit myself as occupying both an insider and outsider researcher position. I often reflected upon the experiences that I had whilst treating the activity as simply a hobby, now from the position of a researcher. This position allowed me to describe how I felt in the moment and how I now feel reflecting back upon these experiences. Reading the works of Mott and Roberts (2014), alongside others who write about representation within the urban exploration community, I am able to recognise points during my experiences that I had been treated differently as a female urban explorer, and also times when I may have treated others differently through my own desires to be viewed as an 'epic explorer' (Bingham, 2020a). I have at points been critical of some of the attitudes and behaviours displayed by members of the urban exploration community, and I have openly discussed criticisms of my own behaviours. This has been a particularly impactful practice of reflexivity, as I questioned my own biases, beliefs, and prejudices during the course of writing this thesis.

Summary of findings

1. What affective atmospheres exist within abandoned spaces and how are these represented by online urban exploration communities?

A key theme that emerged from the analysis of data within this research was the influence that illumination had on the experience of abandoned space. Within chapter four, I answer research question one by arguing that light is a powerful affective tool which changes how an explorer embodies abandoned space. This chapter discussed the ways in which illumination may impact upon the behaviours of urban explorers, as they are made visible and invisible according to the levels of

light within a particular site, how darkened spaces are navigated and interacted with sensorially, and the associations that individuals may make with darkened spaces.

I begin this chapter by retelling my own experience of illumination within the Paris Catacombs, describing how low levels of light heightened my other senses as I listened to the rumbling of nearby metro trains and felt drops of water against my skin. I described the influence of light on my own emotions, recounting my stark realisation that my safety relied upon the life of the batteries inside of my torch. Even in full light the catacombs would be difficult to navigate, yet at times I found myself swimming and even crawling in almost pitch-black conditions. Illumination was also used to add ambience to gathering spaces within the many rooms of the catacombs, with tea light candles a popular choice. I recount that for a few brief moments we rested, preserving the limited battery life we had remaining, enabled through the actions of those who had come before us, quite literally lighting our way.

The illumination of darkness has historically served the purpose of discouraging potentially transgressive behaviours through making the invisible visible. For urban explorers, the influence of light and visibility has a number of different effects. Whilst illumination may allow an explorer the opportunity to fully appreciate the contents of an abandoned site, the increased visibility may mean that they are more likely to encounter the police or security. Contrastingly, whilst a darkened site may mean that an urban explorer is less likely to attract the attention of these individuals, it presents barriers for explorers, such as increased difficulty navigating through spaces, less opportunity to interact with items that remain within the space, and issues with the production of images and videos.

Navigating through darkness also presents a number of challenges for urban explorers. Abandoned spaces are constantly changing, as items are moved, lost to decay, or buildings are stripped in preparation for demolition or refurbishment. Previously known routes may become sealed, as landowners seek to regain control of the site and the gradual removal of identifying features within

a space can cause it to become maze-like. I frequently observed videos where individuals expressed their confusion, and sometimes distress, at becoming lost within spaces that they may have even visited before. The process of decay and purposeful destruction may therefore render a known space unknown. This experience of becoming lost within the everchanging environment of abandoned spaces may only be further amplified through the addition of darkness, as windows become sealed up or obscured by dense foliage. Urban exploration frequently requires individuals to move fluidly and creatively through space, often crawling, climbing, and jumping in order to access areas. These movements become much more treacherous under the cloak of darkness, as the explorer must employ other senses to enable safe passage, such as the tapping of a foot against flooring of questionable strength or listening out for the sounds of glass crunching underfoot.

Darkness has also been frequently associated with the supernatural or evil, which may lead people to fear being within abandoned spaces, where low-light situations are frequently experienced. Such spaces very rarely have working electricity and are darkened further through the boarding up of windows and doors. Urban explorers do not know who may be lurking within an abandoned site, and what their intentions may be. Therefore, it was not uncommon within a number of videos for individuals to call out “hello” as they attempted to ascertain whether they were alone. A number of the videos analysed referred to the abandoned sites as haunted, with many resorting to using clickbait style titles on their videos to gain viewership through these claims. Other clickbait claims which played on this premise were those that referred to blood being found within Selly Oak Hospital, suggesting that something untoward may have occurred at the site. Scary video editing and the use of horror style music were also common in videos, suggesting that urban explorers were using fear to gain both viewership and exaggerate the danger that existed within the abandoned sites. This was particularly common within videos which featured the morgue at Selly Oak Hospital, potentially because of its perceived clear association with death.

2. How are material remains within abandoned spaces interacted with and embodied?

In chapter five, I investigated the ways in which the traces that remain within abandoned sites are embodied and interacted with by urban explorers. I decided to split this chapter into five sections, each section addressing one specific abandoned site. I did this because the traces that remain within abandoned spaces vary according to what their former uses may have been. When I initially chose the sites to focus on within this research, I deliberately selected a range of spaces with different former functions, as I wanted to investigate how this influenced how they were embodied and represented by urban explorers. As such, in order, this chapter focussed upon Selly Oak Hospital, Pye Bank Primary School, Corah and Sons, Leicester International Hotel and Sheffield Ski Village.

Traces symbolise former lives, offering clues into how spaces were used and telling their stories when nobody is around to do so. These clues differ according to the former function of a space, and can range from objects, such as the defunct machinery found within Corah, to sensorial experiences, such as the specific sanitary smell experienced within Selly Oak Hospital. Urban exploration may therefore become a form of investigation, as individuals move through space attempting to reassemble the clues that they come across. They may rifle through draws, read documents, or follow desire lines in an attempt to grasp how spaces were used. Through this investigation, an urban explorer may make discoveries which grant them access to a historical cache which is off limits to the general public, becoming privy to unreleased and confidential information and accessing rooms with now defunct ‘no entry’ signs.

Spaces that have been long abandoned may also begin to accumulate traces of human, plant and animal activity that had occurred long after the space’s official closure. These traces offer clues into how abandoned spaces become re-appropriated by different groups of people. They become shelters for those with no space to rest, places of artistic expression for graffiti artists and photographers, and a dumping ground for those with excess waste. The arrival of these types of traces

also frequently signals the disappearance of a number of traces of the site's former use. As spaces become re-appropriated, objects that were left behind are stolen, burnt, sold, or otherwise disappear due to decay and exposure to the elements. Considering the processual changes that occur within abandoned spaces, it is perhaps incorrect to refer to them as abandoned at all. It is often inevitable that even the most secure of structures will soon be breached by somebody who is determined enough, and once this has occurred, the site will be accessible to countless others, who all embody the space in different ways.

This chapter also highlights how spaces and the traces within them are embodied subjectively. I begin this chapter by recounting my own experience of moving through the Chornobyl Exclusion Zone, recalling a moment when my partner had claimed that there was nothing within a room in an apartment complex. As I looked at the objects within this room, I questioned how he could have said this. To me, the dust covered furniture represented a life which had been left behind. To him, it was just a room. I grapple with this concept throughout the chapters of this thesis, noting conflict between the ways in which different explorers may interact with abandoned spaces. Ultimately, those who partake in urban exploration have a great number of motivations for doing so. For example, whilst some explorers at Sheffield Ski Village had created videos and campaigns which aimed to restore a site that they felt personally connected to, to others the site was simply a space to joke around with friends and engage in playful behaviour.

3. How does positionality and identity change the ways in which abandoned spaces are perceived, experienced, and represented?

In chapter six I sought to understand the ways in which urban explorers may represent and embody abandoned spaces according to their own positionalities and identities. In doing so, this chapter aimed to answer research question three. I unpacked this question by focussing on three themes: attitudes, behaviours and the role of the internet and social media.

I began this chapter by reflecting upon an experience that I had whilst exploring the Corah and Sons factory. Within this reflection, I describe how I had met a homeless man within a darkened outbuilding and proceeded to dramatise this experience in the pursuit of social media recognition. Within this narrative, I grapple with the influence of social media and the desire for recognition as an explorer on my own behaviour. I note that dramatisation is a tactic which is commonly used by a number of the most globally well-known urban explorers, but also recognise my own regrets in creating a video which painted a false representation of the man that I had met that day. Within this narrative account I highlight that a conflict may exist for urban explorers, as they seek to abide by the ethical codes set by the community and also strive to replicate the successes of the most popular urban explorers.

I then consider some of the attitudes and biases that may exist within the urban exploration community. It has been widely noted that the community is comprised mostly of young white males (Mott and Roberts, 2014). These individuals may not have the same experiences of space that other demographics may have, notably females and non-white explorers. Some of the explorers within this research demonstrated a recognition of spatial privilege that they possessed, often joking about the prospect of running into law enforcement or being caught. They demonstrated a relatively lax approach to the legalities of undertaking acts of trespass, appearing to feel confident that they would not be treated unfairly if caught, an experience that may not be universalised to people of all ethnicities and backgrounds. Furthermore, a proportion of urban explorers appeared to display prejudiced and stereotyped views about a number of different groups of people, including the working class, homeless people, and GRT individuals. These groups were frequently addressed with derogative terms and blamed for the damage that had occurred within a number of the sites, without evidence that they had been responsible.

Whilst many urban explorers themselves claim to abide by the motto of ‘take nothing but photos, leave nothing but footprints’, this research discovered that this motto may be interpreted

liberally or completely ignored by a small group of individuals within the community. Within this chapter, I describe how the most commonly witnessed transgressive behaviours within the videos analysed were acts of vandalism and graffiti. These acts varied in their severity, ranging from explorers leaving their mark on a chalkboard to the smashing of holes into walls and doors. These behaviours may have been motivated by a number of different factors, though it is important to note that most of the explorers who engaged in them were young males. As such, I questioned whether these were simply acts of play, as these individuals found themselves in a space that allowed them to engage expressively with the environment around them. Tagging was also seen to be a useful mode of communication between different groups of urban explorers, with explorers leaving their mark to notify others that they had also accessed the site. Frequently, the names of YouTube channels were left by individuals, in an apparent attempt to advertise their content to an audience of fellow explorers, thus facilitating what I describe as a cycle of knowledge sharing within the community.

I stress that the acts of transgressive behaviours described within this chapter were unrepresentative of what I had discovered of the urban exploration community as a whole. Far more frequently than I witnessed acts of destruction in the videos I analysed, I saw explorers who expressed their annoyance and sadness at the damage that had been caused. Typically, explorers questioned what individuals had gained from causing damage to sites, asking why somebody would choose to cause the damage that occurred. Earlier in this thesis I refer to Arboleda's (2016) claim that there are two types of urban explorer, the communicative and the performative. It is the performative individuals who worry that, through the disclosure of details about an abandoned site, the space will become the target of those who engage in the types of behaviours described above. I believe that the videos capturing these behaviours validate these concerns, standing as a public warning to urban explorers who freely give out information without properly vetting requesters.

I conclude this chapter by reflecting upon the ways in which urban exploration is presented online and through social media. I discuss how urban explorers are motivated to undertake dangerous

explorations in the name of gaining status or notoriety within the community. This motivation may provide fuel for engaging in behaviours which seek to exaggerate or overstate the level of danger or fear than an explorer had experienced. This was frequently achieved by the use of clickbait titles attached to videos featuring individuals undertaking urban exploration. Such claims frequently revolved around sites being haunted, being caught by security, or encountering some form of dangerous object. These videos vary rarely substantiated the claims made within their titles, and at most, the titles represented a highly exaggerated description of actual events. Audio and visual effects were also frequently used within videos to amplify the level of fear and unease experienced by viewers. Comparing the contents and creative flair given to YouTube videos of urban explorers to the narrative descriptions written on 28DaysLater, it felt evident that both styles of accounts had been tailored to their intended audiences. YouTube videos appear to target those who do not engage in the exploration of abandoned spaces, thus allowing creators to exaggerate the danger encountered within such spaces without fear of being questioned. The 28DaysLater forum is occupied by individuals who frequently engage in the activity, or at least possess a higher level of understanding of what the activity entails. As such, the tall tales and clickbait titles of YouTube are rarely seen here or are treated with varying degrees of ridicule (28DaysLater, 2022b).

Contributions to the existing literature

Within chapter four of this thesis, I discuss how darkness and illumination affect the experiences of those undertaking urban exploration. Edensor (2013, 2015a, 2015b) writes extensively about the bodily experience of moving through darkened space, particularly regarding the heightened sense of tactility that dark spaces bring about and the individual's reliance upon non-visual senses to navigate these spaces. Edensor (2008a) additionally writes about the tactile reality of abandoned spaces and the obstacles and debris that frequently lie within them. However, I note that these works do not discuss the sensorial experiences of urban explorers who frequent such spaces. My research builds upon the work of Edensor to describe the specific meaning-making processes and tactile

encounters that urban explorers go through inside of abandoned space, in particular darkened abandoned space. I discuss the trade off that an explorer makes when it comes to the opportunity and adversity afforded by illumination and darkness, as they balance the need to be hidden from view with the need to see and document space. Furthermore, I discuss the meaning behind different types of illumination and how urban explorers may interpret them. For example, the comforting tealights left behind by cataphiles that I describe in my account of venturing into the Catacombs of Paris, versus the penetrating torch light that warns of potential members of site security.

Within this chapter, I also discuss how darkness is frequently associated with danger and risk. The research of scholars such as Thomas et al (2018) note that dark spaces are added to a mental map, which highlights zones that are considered to be too risky or dangerous to venture into. An ordinary person may choose to avoid these inaccessible spaces, focussing on remaining within zones of safety and comfort. Though this may lead to questions of what it is that may convince somebody to pursue these spaces despite their own mental warnings. Abandoned spaces are perhaps considered to be an archetype of dangerous spaces, yet my research highlights that there are a myriad of reasons why an urban explorer may be motivated to venture into these zones of danger. Such reasons may include the peer pressure provided by other members of an urban exploration group, thrill seeking, and status seeking through the perceived conquering of a space that others may be too scared to visit.

In chapter 5, I investigate how the material remains within abandoned spaces are interacted with and embodied. Benzaoui (2014) draws parallels between urban exploration and the study of psychogeography, noting that both practices engage with emotionality and affect in space. Similarly, both Light and Watson (2016) and Kindynis (2019) describe how urban exploration is a form of searching for artefacts and experiences within space. My research builds upon this through demonstrating how different abandoned spaces may inspire very different forms of engagement from urban explorers. For example, places such as Selly Oak Hospital and Pye Bank School appeared to motivate urban explorers to search for artefacts that related to the former use of the buildings.

However, more stripped out spaces such as Leicester International Hotel attracted less of this type of behaviour. This is perhaps owing to labelling of some abandoned spaces as 'derps', which indicates that they are seen to be less interesting due to their stripped-out status (Garrett, 2013). From my personal narrative accounts, I also suggest that the way urban explorers interact with space may be connected to the relationships that they have with them. Through my own connection to the Corah factory, I found myself experiencing waves of sadness that I had not experienced at any of the other sites. As I picked up random discarded items, such as empty bottles or clothing labels, I thought back to the relationship that my own parents had with the space as they worked there, and I was reminded of the loss that many individuals had experienced during the closure of the factory. Urban explorers without such a relationship to space may have simply regarded these items as waste, rather than remnants of a past life. Additionally, the motivation of urban explorers may play a significant role in the ways that they interact with abandoned space. As I highlight throughout this thesis, there is not one single motivation for participating in the activity. Those who are drawn towards the activity as a form of historical investigation behaved very differently towards material remains when compared to those who are drawn towards the status that urban exploration may offer through sharing accomplishments virtually.

In chapter 6, I delve deeper into the role of identity within the urban exploration community. A key commonality amongst many scholars who write about the identity of urban explorers is that they frequently offer reductive summaries of their behaviours, beliefs, and motivations. On one side of the debate, there are scholars such as Garrett (2013), Gates (2013) and Bennett (2011) who appear to offer a romanticised representation of urban explorers, as a group of diverse amateurs who enjoy the photography, adventure, and camaraderie that exploration offers. However, on the other side of the debate there are scholars such as High and Lewis (2007), Stones (2016) and Mott and Roberts (2014) who point towards issues of misogyny, white privilege and colonial-style status claiming within the community. My research substantiates the claims of these issues listed above, uncovering evidence of derogatory views towards women, homeless people, and the travelling community.

Furthermore, I highlight the prevalence of the use of clickbait and dramatisation within the community, as many explorers seek to build their status through conquering locations which appear to be particularly dangerous or scary. However, I note that my findings are not representative of the urban exploration community at large. As Arboleda (2016) describes, those who choose to share their experiences of urban exploration with people who do not belong to community are known as communicative explorers. Due to the nature of my data gathering, through YouTube and the public forum 28DaysLater.co.uk, it could be assumed that I only sampled the experiences of communicative explorers, and not performative explorers who prefer not to share details of the activity outside of the community. Therefore, the role of identity for performative explorers may be entirely different, as status amongst this group is not facilitated through public information sharing. It would be beneficial for any future research to attempt to gain access to performative explorers, however this has been known to be particularly difficult without access to a trusted gatekeeper (Garrett, 2013).

A discussion of research limitations

Throughout the research for this project, I encountered a number of issues that should be acknowledged as limitations. The first issue revolves around the generalisability of the data collected. When I designed this research, I set out to select five sites that I believed best represented the spread of the types of abandoned sites within the United Kingdom. I chose to select a hotel, a hospital, a factory, an outdoor site, and a school. However, I acknowledge that there are many other types of abandoned spaces that I did not choose to represent, including military spaces, underground spaces, and residential buildings. Whilst it may have been desirable to include such spaces, it is evident from the 28DaysLater (2022c) forum that the spaces with the largest number of threads were ‘Asylums and Hospitals’ and ‘Industrial Sites’. As such, I feel that I did address the spaces which appear to attract the most interest from the online urban exploration community. Furthermore, I deliberately selected sites which I was familiar with, which required me to have undertaken a number of explorations at each site. I chose to do this so that I could gain the greatest level of understanding of the explorer’s

experiences of each space, as I had also walked down the same corridors or even interacted with the same objects that they had. As I grew up partaking in urban exploration, I was frequently limited as to where I could access geographically. As such the five sites I selected were within the Midlands and North of England, locations which are heavily populated with industrial ruins in particular (Edensor, 2005a).

I note in my methodology chapter that I had initially set out intending to complete a project which utilised a more ethnographical in-person research approach. It is unfortunate that I was unable to integrate these aspects into my research. However, I felt that my ability to do so was heavily curtailed by the Coronavirus pandemic. I note throughout this thesis that there appears to be an issue of representation within the urban exploration community. This was replicated within the videos that I analysed, with very little representation of female or non-white urban explorers. The explorers who featured in these videos were also frequently of the same age group, teenagers or individuals in their 20s. I remain starkly aware that I was unable to gain insight from those belonging to minority groups within the community, and thus their insight into how they may embody and experience abandoned spaces differently. This is where I believe it would have been beneficial to utilise a more ethnographic approach towards my research, as I could have chosen to focus on the experiences of those who are not seen to epitomise the typical urban explorer identity.

Additionally, to engage directly with those who had uploaded videos of their explorations to YouTube, or posted their narrative accounts to the 28DaysLater forum, would have given an opportunity for urban explorers to describe their relationships with the internet and social media. It would have been particularly interesting to understand what aspects of an exploration they would deem worthy to upload to the internet, and which aspects they believe would not be interesting to online spectators. I note a small number of instances where an individual had posted to the 28DaysLater forum advertising a link to their YouTube video of the exploration. These posts frequently included a narrative of how they experienced the space, which had been tailored to fit the

audience of the forum. Speaking directly to the individuals who had created these posts may have allowed for insight into how online representations of urban exploration are curated and edited in line with the desires of explorers and different types of audiences.

Reflections on conducting research virtually

I note a number of times throughout this thesis that the Coronavirus pandemic had a significant impact on my research design and data collection methods. As a result, I became very familiar with the benefits and challenges of conducting qualitative research virtually. I discussed how my research did not use participants as one may traditionally define them, and how this raised a number of ethical challenges, particularly surrounding the use of identifying information. However, choosing these virtual participants also provided me with challenges during the analysis phase of my research.

Just above I note how the videos and narrative accounts that I analysed were frequently edited to fit the needs of the audiences that they were created for. The intended audience of these videos and accounts were not academics, and frequently they were edited to remove additional unwanted 'noise'. This 'noise' may have been uneventful minutes of film which were filled with re-orientation and becoming lost, finding the 'correct' type of lighting that was seen as conducive to filming scenes, and 'boring' or menial conversations between friends. These were the minutes that I believe may have offered the most insight into the spaces that were being explored. They may have offered a glimpse into the individual's unfiltered and unprepared experience of space before the camera is poised and ready to capture the narrative which made the final cut. In these removed minutes, individuals may have lingered in spaces not deemed aesthetic enough for the camera or made comments about the space that did not fit the overall theme of the video. In other videos, there were no comments left behind at all. In their place was music, frequently horror music, which meant that any additional insight into the author's sensorial experience was drowned out.

At times, I felt that I wanted to reach out to the creators of the videos and forum posts, to ask follow up questions and extract the thick descriptions that I believed editing had removed from my view. However, because I was conducting research virtually, my only option would have been to leave a comment beneath the video or forum post, many of which were years old and appeared that the creator was no longer active on the site. Ultimately, with no real-life participants I did not have the option to dive deeper into semantics or gather follow up data which would have allowed me to fully understand the sensorial experiences of these individuals.

A further issue that I encountered whilst utilising a virtual approach towards my research was more personal. The year in which I conducted the majority of my research was particularly trying for my own mental wellbeing as an academic. I had moved from Kent to Durham to pursue post-graduate study, had settled into a cheap house share just outside of the city and had attended my first few in-person university events before the first lockdown of the academic year began. Shortly after this, my housemate moved out, which left me alone in my house. In the months that followed, I attempted to continue an intensive routine of research and writing from home, as it felt like the days turned into one and I engaged in very little interaction with others beyond university Teams quizzes and Facetime calls with my partner. This unsurprisingly took its toll, and I began to experience burn outs and periods of creative blocks. Throughout this year I took a number of unplanned month-long breaks from study, which left me further behind in my research plan. I managed to overcome these challenges; however, I am now aware that a virtual research approach has the potential to be isolating for researchers if they do not have a supportive academic and social environment in place.

Reflections on future research

Through the researching for and the writing of this thesis I have gained invaluable insight into how individuals interact with the spaces around them. This thesis has attempted to understand how urban explorers embody the abandoned spaces that they visit, how they interact with the traces that

remain with them, and how these experiences are shaped by their positionalities. There are a number of directions that future research into this topic could take, but I suggest that one approach could include the use of ethnographic methods, including participant observation and the interviewing of those who partake in urban exploration. Throughout this thesis I have included a number of my own images that I have collected throughout the years I have spent exploring abandoned structures across Europe. Urban exploration is frequently motivated by the discovery and capturing of visually striking examples of ruined space, and I believe that I demonstrate examples of this within the images I share. It may therefore be interesting to pursue the study of urban exploration through the use of qualitative visual methods, such as film, photography, and other modes of creative visual expression. This may be enhanced by the use of participatory research methods, which allow urban explorers themselves to be involved in the design and implementation of research. This would enable them to decide how best to represent their involvement in the activity. An alternative method may be to involve the use of photo elicitation, which would allow participants to respond directly to the images or film they had taken whilst undertaking the act of urban exploration. Through this, explorers could provide the reasoning behind particular examples, narrate the situation, or reflect upon how they may have felt at the time the image or video was captured. This is something that I believe was a limitation within the research I had conducted, as I was not able to fully comprehend the perspectives of the urban explorers that I studied.

Overall, the writing of this thesis has been a very rewarding experience. I have been able to critically reflect on a pastime which I have been involved with for many years and study the topic from the perspective of both an insider and an outsider. I hope that my research has made a useful contribution towards the study of urban geography, and more broadly offered some insight into how urban spaces are embodied by the different groups that inhabit them.

Appendix

Item 1: List of forum posts collected from 28DaysLater.co.uk

Report Number	Site	Date of Report	URL
Report 1	Corah	30/03/2021	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/corah-textiles-factory-leicester-march-2021.127915/
Report 2	Corah	05/12/2020	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/corah-and-sons-factory-leicester-dec-2020.126386/
Report 3	Corah	24/06/2017	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/corah-industrial-leicester-june-2017.108986/
Report 4	Corah	01/10/2013	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/corah-leicester-in-use-october-2013.104791/
Report 5	Corah	09/03/2016	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/corah-sons-leicester-march-16.102238/
Report 6	Corah	19/08/2015	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/corah-sons-leicester-august-2015.98669/
Report 7	Corah	2007-2012	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/n-corah-sons-leicester-2007-2012.96648/
Report 8	Corah	20/07/2014	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/corah-leicester-july-2014.91123/
Report 9	Corah	17/04/2014	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/corah-leicester-apr14.89027/
Report 10	Corah	13/04/2014	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/nathaniel-corah-sons-leicester-13-04-14.89125/
Report 11	Corah	01/08/2013	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/n-corah-and-son-leicester-august-2013.83746/
Report 12	Corah	25/05/2013	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/corah-leicester-may-2013.80911/
Report 13	Corah	01/06/2013	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/corah-the-flooded-basement-leicester-june-2013.82033/
Report 14	Corah	19/08/2013	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/n-corah-sons-st-margarets-works-leicester-aug-2013.83219/
Report 15	Corah	25/06/2013	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/john-bull-rubber-corah-works-leicester-06-2013.81806/
Report 16	Corah	23/04/2013	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/corah-fabrics-factory-leicester-april-2013.80176/
Report 17	Corah	08/02/2013	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/corah-hosiery-plant-leicester-feb-2013.78259/
Report 1	Selly Oak	01/01/2020	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/selly-oak-hospital-library-birmingham-jan-2020.123196/
Report 2	Selly Oak	01/05/2015	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/selly-oak-hospital-birmingham-may-2015.111170/
Report 3	Selly Oak	01/09/2016	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/selly-oak-hospital-birmingham-september-2016.108975/
Report 4	Selly Oak	26/03/2017	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/selly-oak-hospital-birmingham-march-2017.107923/
Report 5	Selly Oak	06/2014 - 10/2016	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/selly-oak-hospital-birmingham-june-2014-oct-2016.105610/
Report 6	Selly Oak	12/01/2016	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/selly-oak-jan-2016.101298/

Report 7	Selly Oak	15/08/2015	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/selly-oaks-august-2015.98570/
Report 8	Selly Oak	14/02/2016	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/selly-oak-hospital-mortuary-buildings-and-rooftop-feb-16.101878/
Report 9	Selly Oak	17/08/2015	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/selly-oak-birmingham-august-2015.98601/
Report 10	Selly Oak	21/08/2015	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/selly-oak-hospital-birmingham-august-2015.98700/
Report 11	Selly Oak	18/09/2015	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/selly-oak-hospital-birmingham-aug-15.99347/
Report 12	Selly Oak	31/08/2015	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/selly-oak-hospital-birmingham-aug-1015.98905/
Report 13	Selly Oak	29/12/2015	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/selly-oak-hospital-and-morgue-demolition-site-birmingham-december-2015.101000/
Report 14	Selly Oak	27/07/2015	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/selly-oaks-morgue-pathology-labs-birmingham-july-2015.98191/
Report 15	Selly Oak	01/11/2014	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/selly-oak-hospital-morgue-november-2014.98440/
Report 16	Selly Oak	17/07/2015	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/selly-oak-hospital-morgue-july-2015-birmingham.97964/
Report 17	Selly Oak	27/05/2015	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/selly-oak-hospital-birmingham-may-2015.96739/
Report 18	Selly Oak	06/2014 & 11/2014	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/selly-oak-hospital-birmingham-june-november-2014.92845/
Report 19	Selly Oak	11/11/2014	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/selly-oak-hospital-birmingham-nov-2014.93005/
Report 20	Selly Oak	02/11/2014	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/selly-oak-hospital-mortuary-birmingham-november-2014.92851/
Report 1	Sheffield Ski Village	03/10/2020	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/sheffield-ski-village-october-2018.125400/
Report 2	Sheffield Ski Village	01/03/2010	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/sheffield-ski-village-south-yorks-march-2010.122548/
Report 3	Sheffield Ski Village	01/07/2019	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/sheffield-ski-village-july-2019.120114/
Report 4	Sheffield Ski Village	04/02/2017	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/sheffield-ski-village-feb-2017.107235/
Report 5	Sheffield Ski Village	01/12/2015	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/sheffield-ski-village-decemeber-2015.101501/
Report 6	Sheffield Ski Village	31/01/2016	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/sheffield-ski-village-january-2016.101612/
Report 7	Sheffield Ski Village	24/04/2014	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/the-ski-village-sheffield-april-2014.89731/
Report 8	Sheffield Ski Village	19/02/2013	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/ski-village-sheffield-february-2013.78568/
Report 9	Sheffield Ski Village	01/12/2012	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/ski-village-sheffield-december-2012.77632/
Report 10	Sheffield Ski Village	06/10/2012	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/sheffield-ski-village-october-2012.74845/
Report 1	Leicester International Hotel	01/08/2015	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/lec-park-international-hotel-leicester-august-2015.99728/

Report 2	Leicester International Hotel	18/08/2015	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/park-international-hotel-leicester-aug-15.98646/
Report 1	Pye Bank	01/11/2015	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/pyebank-school-board-sheffield-november-2015.127637/#post-1307077
Report 2	Pye Bank	27/09/2016	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/pye-bank-primary-school-sheffield-sep-2016.105522/
Report 3	Pye Bank	01/08/2015	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/pye-bank-primark-school-sheffield-august-2015.98984/
Report 4	Pye Bank	13/04/2015	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/pye-bank-primary-school-sheffield-april-2015.95729/
Report 5	Pye Bank	31/08/2014	https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/pye-bank-board-school-sheffield-august-2014.91860/

Item 2: List of videos collected from YouTube.com

Video Number	Site	Date of Upload	Time (Minutes)	URL
Video 1	Corah	01/03/2017	08:32	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tDEgtJBTYUI
Video 2	Corah	08/11/2016	39:22:00	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cp8xrZ4vTRg
Video 3	Corah	10/11/2016	04:37	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5JVdWP6B6OA
Video 4	Corah	21/05/2014	02:36	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1xUjt04apF4
Video 5	Corah	06/07/2014	03:57	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tl5zRl0irsQ
Video 6	Corah	05/01/2016	03:22	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=roLY1T5amcY
Video 1	Selly Oak	31/07/2015	04:30	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZiYkVUsDDao
Video 2	Selly Oak	01/08/2015	05:18	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Z9OUaOpuLE
Video 3	Selly Oak	23/07/2015	07:05	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1iVuDgV5VE
Video 4	Selly Oak	19/07/2015	43:48:00	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZIZ6vCD1xg
Video 5	Selly Oak	20/02/2016	54:52:00	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QwSRAsHvD_g
Video 6	Selly Oak	15/06/2015	28:10:00	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1ONNvNppEQ
Video 7	Selly Oak	06/11/2014	04:59	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cIabxR0Y8W8
Video 8	Selly Oak	06/11/2014	05:26	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39V1RziKrR0
Video 9	Selly Oak	03/02/2016	24:18:00	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nd3Re3MhjtY

Video 10	Selly Oak	02/03/2016	21:19	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vr2CWJwAzec
Video 11	Selly Oak	06/03/2016	21:33	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PsksvgHAz3Y
Video 12	Selly Oak	09/01/2016	01:57	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dI6kHnLRhUo
Video 13	Selly Oak	24/01/2017	04:20	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1e21SZY2McM&t=24s
Video 14	Selly Oak	24/01/2017	07:08	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=86BfkmJqxl4&t=56s
Video 15	Selly Oak	21/01/2017	06:29	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6z7sXkojzEI&t=248s
Video 16	Selly Oak	24/01/2017	05:35	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-7ac5n86RM
Video 17	Selly Oak	21/07/2015	104:34:00	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ylpc_O3UDJg
Video 18	Selly Oak	08/03/2016	12:52	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfN4tR8Nr-4&t=649s
Video 19	Selly Oak	02/02/2016	24:29:00	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Hiz7H2_JJs
Video 20	Selly Oak	02/08/2015	03:05	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WoqspPVViDo
Video 21	Selly Oak	04/10/2015	06:05	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0aBSrAXHXU
Video 22	Selly Oak	02/08/2015	01:10	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NTEsuCHM_Dk
Video 23	Selly Oak	20/03/2016	08:12	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9JbmQkcsf5w
Video 24	Selly Oak	08/12/2016	06:21	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VtUxunGOQfU
Video 25	Selly Oak	17/02/2016	16:50	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWRgZEVJIqk
Video 26	Selly Oak	17/02/2016	26:14:00	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPHb2yzRl0I
Video 27	Selly Oak	23/06/2015	09:16	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ueo9x8xMhkc
Video 28	Selly Oak	19/10/2015	05:37	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QlQCmoJFDZc&t=1s
Video 29	Selly Oak	26/03/2017	06:23	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-5ij35JWjg
Video 30	Selly Oak	04/05/2016	01:19	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8lr04xOA-mY&t=7s
Video 31	Selly Oak	14/07/2019	18:52	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdqwndHP-ac
Video 1	Sheffield Ski Village	12/11/2020	03:23	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MN9NEU2WUQQ

Video 2	Sheffield Ski Village	23/06/2015	05:06	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LS1JzSJ5mJM
Video 3	Sheffield Ski Village	26/05/2014	08:48	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KATwuJGe_xE
Video 4	Sheffield Ski Village	26/05/2015	02:08	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-1FFrZUqZg
Video 5	Sheffield Ski Village	12/10/2020	10:29	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6kU-GWjKu5M
Video 6	Sheffield Ski Village	07/12/2019	04:31	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NpMt_fmDc6M
Video 7	Sheffield Ski Village	28/12/2020	04:29	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=96kgpUxTZpM
Video 8	Sheffield Ski Village	28/11/2015	06:25	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I06KW0Ji8Is
Video 9	Sheffield Ski Village	04/12/2017	11:05	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uaqk2CWJ7co
Video 10	Sheffield Ski Village	08/12/2019	04:01	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftlfCbbN9Vo
Video 11	Sheffield Ski Village	20/06/2019	03:01	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bKnrghlzuhg
Video 12	Sheffield Ski Village	09/07/2016	06:01	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OEXuSffbEWQ
Video 13	Sheffield Ski Village	20/01/2018	33:36:00	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WfeQA4si4Fc
Video 14	Sheffield Ski Village	22/10/2019	15:00	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWFkVBty6VM
Video 15	Sheffield Ski Village	22/10/2019	41s	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7dkdozuPsA
Video 16	Sheffield Ski Village	22/10/2019	34s	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNDkrUWiGTY
Video 17	Sheffield Ski Village	20/10/2019	08:35	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vVwdI0WN6o
Video 18	Sheffield Ski Village	20/10/2019	13:21	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YOuLWXrqaU4
Video 19	Sheffield Ski Village	20/10/2019	07:17	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YOuLWXrqaU4

Video 20	Sheffield Ski Village	25/05/2013	03:10	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Odmf42UzaXA
Video 21	Sheffield Ski Village	04/11/2012	41s	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n81-VB1tbMU
Video 22	Sheffield Ski Village	22/06/2015	03:37	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NTsObj1WuIE
Video 23	Sheffield Ski Village	17/02/2021	33s	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MuVq3Vil028
Video 24	Sheffield Ski Village	18/04/2014	01:00	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dpUPeNUluoY
Video 25	Sheffield Ski Village	11/07/2017	02:03	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxOO6Fx61IM
Video 26	Sheffield Ski Village	28/06/2017	10:11	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_163C5f6q8
Video 27	Sheffield Ski Village	22/04/2018	05:30	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s4Ou_FRWY7w
Video 28	Sheffield Ski Village	27/10/2017	08:55	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vavtpg_hl2g
Video 29	Sheffield Ski Village	13/02/2016	06:54	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SUlQ3_yk_PE
Video 30	Sheffield Ski Village	02/11/2016	03:58	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HvyCREgLVGE
Video 31	Sheffield Ski Village	01/11/2012	20s	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kbHwVXAcnk8
Video 32	Sheffield Ski Village	08/04/2014	04:28	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lUso53MI9_Q
Video 33	Sheffield Ski Village	01/05/2013	01:15	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x11xaXwOW9Q
Video 34	Sheffield Ski Village	06/03/2015	01:03	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zlRRYyXFMBs
Video 35	Sheffield Ski Village	25/02/2017	04:15	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fp6K2hGi7RY
Video 36	Sheffield Ski Village	13/03/2019	05:17	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XF44LF32mPY
Video 37	Sheffield Ski Village	22/04/2014	09:04	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=teLS7tjW-wo

Video 38	Sheffield Ski Village	28/10/2020	13:55	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F1fJvtaOvKA
Video 39	Sheffield Ski Village	12/03/2017	21:16	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sfSBvewWVQ4
Video 40	Sheffield Ski Village	07/10/2012	21:47	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7iIjF2l7WHk
Video 41	Sheffield Ski Village	19/02/2017	51:38:00	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IyOt8pgP-Zg
Video 1	Leicester International Hotel	16/12/2015	12:48	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=STicFnqxTJc
Video 2	Leicester International Hotel	15/12/2015	10:16	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfmHlKOroxk
Video 3	Leicester International Hotel	08/05/2019	20:11	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ag6fyE4nmTM
Video 4	Leicester International Hotel	08/05/2019	35:02:00	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upPDaozOVyM
Video 5	Leicester International Hotel	23/05/2018	00:30	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=08b06c5F9P0
Video 1	Pye Bank	30/04/2016	06:23	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JYDxtLxTNRE
Video 2	Pye Bank	23/11/2014	08:37	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKrrhUQB0r4
Video 3	Pye Bank	27/01/2015	05:59	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VyFkQADWJxs
Video 4	Pye Bank	17/04/2017	11:58	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_zsGz298_E
Video 5	Pye Bank	23/04/2017	12:11	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKa4VWNGenA
Video 6	Pye Bank	26/11/2015	10:22	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mpQNmNTytsE
Video 7	Pye Bank	01/09/2015	08:22	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=THAkS1XBLGM
Video 8	Pye Bank	17/05/2016	04:52	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2AdYgNxpZK8
Video 9	Pye Bank	24/09/2016	04:06	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIOtyWYudUI
Video 10	Pye Bank	29/01/2017	01:20	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56L8jrVeS9A
Video 11	Pye Bank	02/11/2017	03:19	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZxNl71URrk

Video 12	Pye Bank	11/11/2017	11:31	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D3SL7yeYbyM
Video 13	Pye Bank	23/11/2015	11:59	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ngUwe6dAWlY
Video 14	Pye Bank	26/05/2021	08:33	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-vf6LeViDek
Video 15	Pye Bank	04/09/2016	01:20	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-2Rf0rqh4I
Video 16	Pye Bank	04/09/2016	05:17	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xIA9pWa5AFQ

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