Creative Project Supporting Statement

Body word count: 1,498

My creative output for the New York fieldwork report is a website, accessible at http://matthewlaw.xyz/nyc2019. The site is designed to document and present the results of the fieldwork carried out on the field course to an educated, but subject non-specialist, audience.

Structurally, the website presents the research carried out through three key themes, each of which presents empirical information about the sites visited in the context of related underpinning academic literature. Following the 'Introduction' page, which makes use of an interactive map to introduce each of the sites and provide some geographical context, each of the key themes is presented through a separate web page. The 'Stories' page summarises the broad narratives of immigration I was able to read at each of the sites, interrogating some of the reasons for the presence of each narrative. The 'Places' page then examines some of the ways in which the sites themselves (and particularly their histories) have shaped the immigration narratives presented at and through each site. This section extends upon much of the material in the previous section, looking at the formation and determination of immigration narratives through an alternative angle: 'Stories' focuses more on the individual human decisions leading to the inclusion/exclusion of certain narratives, whereas 'Places' promotes the sites' prior uses in determining the present immigration narratives legible at each site. Finally, the 'Exhibits' page details some of the ways in which each of the places is used to communicate narratives of immigration, looking at the differing visitor experiences at each site and techniques employed to inform visitors (or arguably to convince them of a certain narrative).

The output is directly shaped by academic debates within geography. The website introduces the conceptualisation of the museums and memorials discussed as 'spaces of memory' (after Desforges and Maddern, 2004: 440). It examines the process of contestation through which different memories are re-produced in or excluded from such spaces, linking these memories to the different narratives of immigration that can be read at each site. The concept of 'collective memory' (Halbwachs, 1992) is introduced and the ways in which this takes physical form in certain places—and the ways in which these places then strengthen the collective memory—are exemplified through discussion of the sites visited. Nora's (1996) notion of 'lieux de mémoire' is also presented and linked to the

fieldwork sites.

The broad theoretical underpinning of the fieldwork conducted was an attempt to 'read the landscape' as one would a literary text (Duncan and Duncan, 1988), as a palimpsest, "a text that is continually shaped and re-shaped" (Bastian, 2014: 47). Also considered was Duncan and Duncan's (2010: 230) concept of intertextuality as a useful aid to reading the landscape: the examination of "the textual context within which landscapes are produced and read, which includes various other media, such as novels, films and popular histories".

The scope of our fieldwork was limited, however, by time constraints and a lack of planning of the investigation until a few days before its execution. Whilst it is widely acknowledged that field research is an inherently "messy" process (Harrowell et al., 2018), the relatively impromptu nature of our research—not having discussed in our group what the key areas of investigation would be until after having already visited several of the relevant sites—meant that our main research methodology consisted of visiting the sites and simply make observations of anything which seemed salient at the time. Another possible limitation of the fieldwork carried out was a failure to closely follow Crang and Cook's (2007) exhortation that "field-note writing should not be something you imagine you'll do in your 'spare time'". Time constraints also precluded us from recreating the methodologies of others conducting research on similar topics. For example, some research makes use of interviews with key actors in the production of the sites visited (Desforges and Maddern, 2004), while other research uses the perspectives of 'natives' to read a landscape in a way that reduces the influence of the researcher's preconceptions (Duncan and Duncan, 2010), for example by giving them disposable cameras to capture their views of the landscape.

The output took inspiration from some previous examples of interactive websites being used for the dissemination of geographic research. A primary inspiration was the greenestreet.nyc website (Easterly et al., 2014), which presents the key findings from a working paper written by researchers at NYU's Development Research Institute. Also produced by the DRI, migration.nyudri.org (Leeson and Blount, n.d.) presents the findings of another project, this one inspired by two previous research papers but not directly linked to any specific academic publication by those who produced the website.

The interactive map presented on the 'Introduction' page, which flies from site to site as the user scrolls down the page, was based on many other examples of 'scrollytelling' (Seyser and Zeiller, 2018). This, and other methods of visualising geographic and geospatial content online, makes such content easily accessible and

engaging to a wide audience. Smith (2016) reports that “there appears to be an expanding online audience engaged with data visualisations such as interactive maps” (ibid: 109), and that this offers many potential opportunities for wider research dissemination. Although the data used in my website were relatively simple, in future “this approach could be used in research applications to guide users through more complicated datasets and models” (ibid: 116).

The choice of medium presented numerous novel opportunities and possibilities for presenting the research undertaken beyond those offered by a typical essay. Arguably the primary justification for the choice of medium is the much larger reach attainable, compared to that of research published in a peer-reviewed academic journal. The latter format is inaccessible to most people outside of the academy: the majority of papers will only be accessible to those with institutional access to the journal (or those willing to pay large sums for individual access). Even in the case of open access papers, academic writing can be dense and jargon-laden, ultimately discouraging those without a high level of requisite subject knowledge and understanding from reading and engaging with such forms of output. This is a justification acknowledged by researchers who have employed websites as means of disseminating their research: William Easterly described how the greenestreet.nyc website was based on a paper that was “very wonky paper full of academic jargon”; the website “is meant to make it more accessible” (Miller, 2015). Another geographer, Alisdair Rae, notes how “in a world where an academic paper with 50 citations is quite a big deal, getting a few hundred thousand page views is a nice way to make you feel like you can reach a wider audience” (Rae, 2015).

Whilst my website does include academic references and makes geographic arguments about the sites visited during the course of fieldwork and what they show about narratives of immigration and sites of memory, I intentionally limited the complexity of the writing on the website and eschewed some academic conventions (for example, much of the website’s text is written in first person in order to describe my own fieldwork experiences). Additionally, the interactive format of the website presented novel ways of formatting the prose. The key example of this is my frequent use of clickable popups within the text, primarily as a way of hiding citations that the casual viewer may not need or wish to follow but which provide the academic underpinning of the veracity of what is being said, and of the prior research upon which the arguments being made are building. These popups also provide the opportunity to add footnote comments to points in the text, expanding on a point with additional (but non-essential) information, and in the case of citations linking directly to the full bibliographic entry. The website also differs from a traditional written output in that it provides opportunities to (literally) make links between

different topics and parts of the output. Although my website retains a broadly linear structure, this is not as constricted as that of a typical essay written to be read from start to finish.

Fieldwork is “an experiential and tactical enterprise” (Shank, 2006: 23), and this can be represented better through an interactive website than it would be allowed by a purely written account. The possibility of illustrating the project not only with still photos, but also with videos and audio taken in the field, adds to the medium’s cachet when compared to other potential outputs.

Whilst—as detailed above—good, well-executed websites presenting research offer many possibilities over those afforded by a typical journal publication, the process also carries with it many challenges beyond (and usually of a different nature to) those encountered when writing an essay. The creation of the website, which I (perhaps too ambitiously) coded from scratch myself, was a time-consuming and error-prone process and not one which all researchers would want (or indeed be able) to devote a large amount of time to. However, through using simpler development workflows or collaborating with others, websites could offer many opportunities for research dissemination.

Bibliography

Bastian, J. (2014) ‘Locating Archives within the Landscape: Records, Memory and Place’, *Public History Review*, vol. 21, pp. 45–59. DOI: 10.5130/phrj.v21i0.3822.

Crang, M. and Cook, I. (2007) ‘Participant Observation’, in *Doing Ethnographies*, London, United Kingdom, SAGE Publications Ltd. DOI: 10.4135/9781849208949 (Accessed 27 January 2020).

Desforges, L. and Maddern, J. (2004) ‘Front doors to freedom, portal to the past: history at the Ellis Island immigration museum, New York’, *Social & Cultural Geography*, vol. 5, no. 3, pp. 437–457. DOI: 10.1080/1464936042000252813.

Duncan, J. and Duncan, N. (1988) ‘(Re)reading the Landscape’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 117–126. DOI: 10.1068/d060117.

Duncan, J. and Duncan, N. (2010) ‘Doing Landscape Interpretation’, in DeLyser, D., Herbert, S., McDowell, L., Crang, M., and Aitken, S. (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Geography*, Los Angeles ; London, SAGE, pp. 225–247.

Easterly, W., Freschi, L. and Pennings, S., ‘A Long History of a Short Block: Four Centuries of Development Surprises on a Single Stretch of New York City Street,’ DRI Working Paper No. 96, Development Research Institute, New York University, New York, NY, 2014, Online Appendix. Available at http://www.greenestreet.nyc (Accessed 26 January 2020).

Halbwachs, M. (1992) *On Collective Memory* (trans. L. A. Coser), Heritage of sociology, Chicago ; London, University of Chicago Press.

Harrowell, E., Davies, T. and Disney, T. (2018) 'Making Space for Failure in Geographic Research', *The Professional Geographer*, vol. 70, no. 2, pp. 230–238. DOI: 10.1080/00330124.2017.1347799.

Leeson, K. and Blount, M. (n.d.) *Networks Beyond Borders* [Online]. Available at http://migration.nyudri.org/ (Accessed 26 January 2020).

Miller, G. (2015) 'From Brothels to Luxury, Mapping 400 Years on One NYC Block', *Wired* [Online]. Available at https://www.wired.com/2015/08/maps-economics-greene-street-new-york-city/ (Accessed 3 January 2020).

Nora, P. (1996) *Realms of Memory* (trans. A. Goldhammer), European perspectives, New York, Columbia University Press.

Rae, A. (2015) 'Blog retrospective', [Online]. Available at http://www.undertheraedar.com/2015/12/blog-retrospective.html (Accessed 18 January 2020).

Seyser, D. and Zeiller, M. (2018) 'Scrollytelling – An Analysis of Visual Storytelling in Online Journalism', *2018 22nd International Conference Information Visualisation (IV)*, pp. 401–406. DOI: 10.1109/iV.2018.00075.

Shank, G. (2006) 'Praxical Reasoning and the Logic of Field Research', in *The SAGE Handbook of Fieldwork*, 1 Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road, London EC1Y 1SP United Kingdom, SAGE Publications Ltd, pp. 22–35. DOI: 10.4135/9781848608085.n2 (Accessed 27 January 2020).

Smith, D. A. (2016) 'Online interactive thematic mapping: Applications and techniques for socio-economic research', *Computers, Environment and Urban Systems*, vol. 57, pp. 106–117. DOI: 10.1016/j.compenvurbsys.2016.01.002.