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# Voices from the South

## Digital Arts and Humanities

Edited by Amanda du Preez

# **Voices from the South**

**Digital Arts and Humanities**



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# **Voices from the South**

**Digital Arts and Humanities**

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## **Research Justification**

This volume captures the status of digital humanities within the Arts in South Africa. The primary research methodology falls within the broader tradition of phenomenological hermeneutics, with a specific emphasis on visual hermeneutics. Some of the tools utilised as part of the visual hermeneutic methods are geographic information system (GIS) mapping, sensory ethnography and narrative pathways. Digital humanities is positioned here as the necessary engagement of the humanities with the pervasive digital culture of the 21st century. It is posited that the humanities and arts, in particular, have an essential role to play in unlocking meaning from scientific, technological and data-driven research. The critical engagement with digital humanities is foregrounded throughout the volume, as this crucial engagement works through images. Images (as understood within image studies) are not merely another text but always more than a text. As such, this book is the first of its kind in the South African scholarly landscape, and notably also a first on the African continent. Its targeted audience include both scholars within the humanities, particularly in the arts and social sciences. Researchers pursuing the new field of digital humanities may also find the ideas presented in this book significant. Several of the chapters analyse the question of dealing with digital humanities through representations of the self as viewed from the Global South. However, it should be noted that self-representation is not the only area covered in this volume. The latter chapters of the book discuss innovative ways of implementing digital humanities strategies and methodologies for teaching and researching in South Africa.

**Prof. Amanda du Preez**, Visual Culture Studies, Department of Visual Arts, University of Pretoria



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# Abbreviations and Figures Appearing in the Text and Notes

## List of Abbreviations

ADHO	Alliance of Digital Humanities Organisations
ANC	African National Congress
AV	Audio and Visual
CSH	Chronic Sick Hospital
DA	Democratic Alliance
DH	Digital Humanities
DHASA	Digital Humanities Association of South Africa
DHRU	Digital Humanities Research Unit
DMS	Degrees/Minutes/Seconds
DST	Department of Science and Technology
EFF	Economic Freedom Fighters
EVM	Edoardo Villa Museum
FBA	Fort Beaufort Asylum
GIS	Geographical Information System
GLA	Grahamstown Lunatic Asylum
GPS	Global Positioning System
ICOM	International Council of Museums
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IoT	Internet of Things
JAG	Johannesburg Art Gallery
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Other
MoMA	Museum of Modern Art
NMC	New Media Consortium
NWU	North-West University
PAA	Port Alfred Asylum

PAM	Pretoria Art Museum
QR	Quick Response
QS	Quantified Self
RL	Real-life
SAHRA	South African Heritage Resource Agency
SAHRIS	South African Heritage Resource Information Systems
SARHA	South African Resource Heritage Agency
SARIR	South African Research Infrastructure Roadmap
SLLM	School of Language, Literature and Media
SNS	Social Networking Services
UCS	Under Colonial Secretary
UCT	University of Cape Town
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UP	University of Pretoria
US	United States
WAM	Wits Art Museum
WWW	World Wide Web
YASS	Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences

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This book forms part of a broader research project entitled *From Self-Portrait to Selfie: Social Media and the Democratization of Identities* that is generously sponsored by the National Research Foundation's Competitive Programme for Rated Researchers from 2016 to 2018.



# **PART 1**

---

## **Representations of the Self**



# Digital Scholarship and Representations of the Self: Exploratory Notes

**Amanda du Preez**

Visual Culture Studies  
Department of Visual Arts  
University of Pretoria  
South Africa

## ■ Introduction

A remark made in passing by Tara McPherson, one of the keynote speakers during the *All about Me: Digital Humanities and Representations of Self* symposium on 17–18 June 2016, confirmed my suspicions. McPherson commented that it is perhaps better to start late in the game of Digital Humanities (DH) so that one can learn from what has happened before. She made this comment after my apologetic introduction, as convenor of the symposium, about the lacking status of DH locally. I have since internalised McPherson’s statement, and it has been most helpful in positioning this collection of chapters presented here.

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The volume compiled here had a precursor in the *All about Me: Digital Humanities and Representations of Self* conference (Figure 1.1), which falls within the ambit of the



**ALL ABOUT ME:**  
digital humanities and representations of self  
17 - 18 June 2016

Time	Venue	DAY ONE: DIGITAL HUMANITIES Friday 17 June 2016	
8:00 - 9:00	Conference Centre		
9:00 - 9:15		Opening: Prof. Vasu Reddy Dean: Faculty of Humanities	
9:15 - 9:30		Welcome: Prof. Norman Duncan Vice-Principal	
9:30 - 11:00	Conference Centre	<b>PLENARY: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE SOUTH</b>	Chair: Raimi Gbadamosi
		Padmini Ray Murray (Srishti Institute of Art, Design and Technology, IN)	
		<b>Visual (Auto) Ethnographies: How the Digital disrupts Witnessing and Agency</b>	
		Eduard Arriaga (Modern Languages and Literatures, University of Western Ontario, CA)	
		<b>Afrxlatinx Digital interventions in Gender and Ethnicity</b>	
		Justus Roux (Former Director of the Research Unit for Languages and Literature, North-West University, ZA)	
		<b>Developments in promoting Digital Humanities in Southern Africa</b>	
11:00 - 11:30		Tea & Coffee	
	Conference Centre	<b>KEYNOTE: DIGITAL HUMANITIES</b>	Chair: Amanda du Preez
11:30 - 12:30		Tara McPherson (Critical Studies, University of Southern California, USA)	
		<b>Designing Digital Scholarship: Art, Feminism and the Digital Humanities</b>	
12:30 - 13:30		Light Lunch	

**FIGURE 1.1:** Programme for the All about Me: Digital Humanities and Representations of Self Symposium, 17-18 June 2016, University of Pretoria.

13:30 - 15:00		<b>AFRICAN DIGITAL ARCHIVES</b>	Chair: Nisa Paleker
		Glen Ncube (History & Heritage Studies, University of Pretoria, ZA) <b>Online Ancestral Practices, Blasts from the Past &amp; Throwback Thursdays: African Modernities and the Dynamics of Auto-Archiving and Self-portrayal in the Digital Era</b>	
		Rory du Plessis (Visual Arts, University of Pretoria, ZA) <b>Excursions, Explorations and Engagements in Digital Environmental Humanities</b>	
		Daniel Mosako (Museum Curator & Researcher, UP Arts, University of Pretoria, ZA) <b>Museums and Digitisation: Technology Applications at the Villa Sculpture Collection Museum</b>	
15:00 - 16:00	Conference Centre	<b>Cockails and Selfies</b>	
16:00 - 17:00		<b>Media Event</b> Topic: "It is official Selfies are more dangerous than sharks" Hosts: Chris Broodryk & Deneesher Pather	
<b>DAY TWO: ALL ABOUT ME</b> Saturday 18 June 2016			
9:00 - 9:30		<b>Coffee and Registration</b>	
9:30 - 11:00	Conference Centre	<b>PLENARY: ALL ABOUT ME</b>	Chair: Jenni Lauwrens
		Adebayo Adegbenbo (Founder and Lead programmer at Genii Games Limited, NG) <b>African Deities in an Age of the Self</b>	
		Amanda du Preez (Visual Arts, University of Pretoria, ZA) <b>Sublime Selfies</b>	
		Marieke Burger (Communication Studies, University of Johannesburg, ZA) <b>Decolonising Media Representations through Participatory Culture: Nompandulo Mkhatswa, Self-creation, Self-expression and Self-(re)presentation</b>	
11:00 - 11:30		<b>Tea &amp; Coffee</b>	
		<b>KEYNOTE: ALL ABOUT ME</b>	Chair: Rory du Plessis
11:30 - 12:30		Terri Senft (Global Liberal Studies, New York University, USA) <b>Micro-celebrity 2.0: Self as Brand, Self as Tension</b>	
12:30 - 13:00		<b>CLOSURE: CHRIS BROODRYK</b>	
 <b>Faculty of Humanities</b> Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe Lefapha la Bomotho		Visual Culture Studies Southern Modernities  <b>NRF</b> National Research Foundation  <b>MELLON</b> FOUNDATION 	

**FIGURE 1.1 (Continues...):** Programme for the All about Me: Digital Humanities and Representations of Self Symposium, 17-18 June 2016, University of Pretoria.

critical DH.<sup>1</sup> Not all the chapters presented in this volume formed part of the conference however, hence the requirement for a new scope and title – *Voices from the South: Digital Arts and Humanities*. This book should be taken as a serious jab at the neoliberal culture’s obsession with big data and the platform society. The volume and broader project represented here are more concerned about moving beyond recent data-fetishism and in fact about bringing human meaning-making back into focus.

At the onset, one must take cognisance of the recent heated debate in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (October 2017) sparked by Timothy Brennan’s ‘blistering attack on the digital humanities’ [lack of producing tangible results] (Brennan 2017:n.p.). Brennan asks, rightfully, what has DH accomplished so far? Taking stock of the legacy and contribution of DH to better the position of the humanities is not an unreasonable request. His conclusion: ‘What people mean by “DH” is a program and, ultimately, an epistemology’ (Brennan 2017:n.p.). He argues that even the most digitally unenthusiastic humanities scholar (‘Even Luddites’) works with the digital, and therefore ‘the digital in the humanities is not the digital humanities’.

The issues raised by Brennan require critical consideration if as to whether DH wants to veer clear of becoming yet another ‘programme’ and ‘epistemology’. In fact, if this is correct and DH is at risk of becoming simply another epistemology, these epistemological tenants need to be countered by a hermeneutical ontology. For Brennan, DH is obviously lacking in its ontology or what it allows us to know: ‘To ask about the field is really to ask how or what digital humanities knows, and what it allows us to know. The answer, it turns out, is not much’. But is this assumption accurate? Does DH indeed not allow us to know much or not contribute

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1. The concept of ‘critical digital humanities’ has been introduced by Berry (2013, 2014; Berry & Fagerjord 2017) and can be summarised as approaching digital humanities through the lens of critical theory.

to our understanding of society and culture? According to Andrew Prescott's (2012:n.p.) estimation of DH, and human-technology interaction in general, it has always been one of 'constant renegotiation of our understanding of the nature of being human and of the place of the human in the wider universe'. In other words, contra Brennan's scepticism, human-technology interaction always contributes to our understanding of ourselves and the broader society and culture. In what follows, human-technological inquiries and other DH-related questions are addressed to provide a context for this volume and the research project's trajectory.

## ■ Mapping Digital Humanities Locally

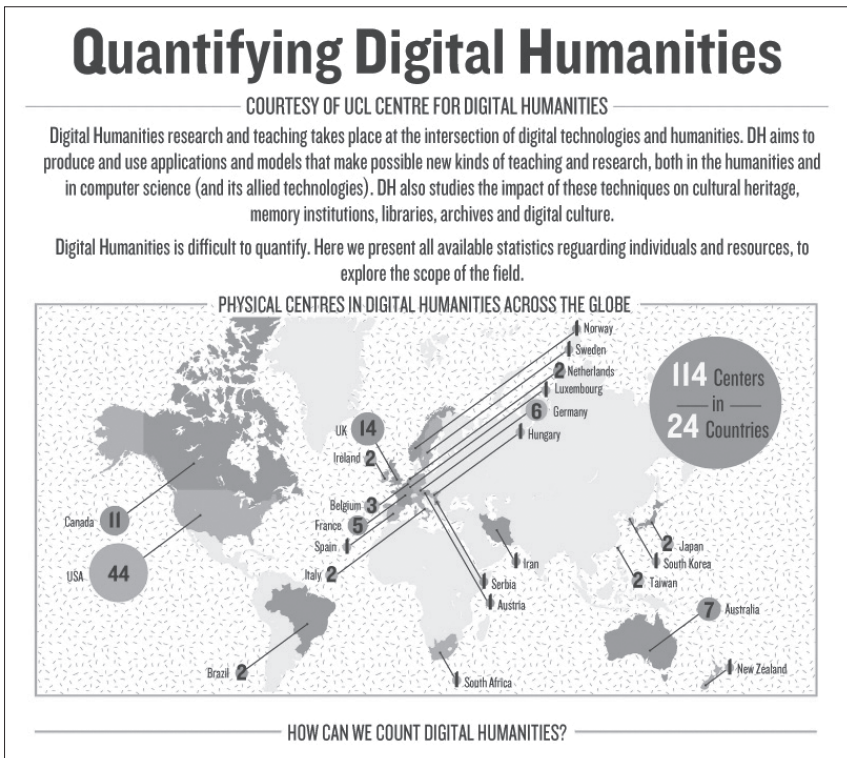
Although Africa has been relatively slow in the uptake of researching and teaching of DH, there are examples of DH engagement within the continent's diverse histories. For instance, the *Apartheid Heritages: A Spatial History of South Africa's Township* project, spearheaded by Angel Nieves from the Digital Humanities Initiative (DHi) at the Hamilton College (New York University), or the interactive mapping project incorporating oral history and DH methods, entitled *Digital Humanities and the History of Apartheid* (2013), by Nicholas Grant (University of East Anglia, UK) and Vincent Hiribarren (King's College London). Another example of collaboration can be sampled on the *MaCleKi* platform curating the Kisumu from Kenya, which is a partnership between the Maseno University (Kenya) and Cleveland State University (USA).<sup>2</sup> And in 2009, the University of Cape Town's *Archive and Public Culture Research Initiative* probably launched the first comprehensive research into the digital archive and memory on the African continent.

It would take another few years, however, before the North-West University's Research Unit: Languages and Literature in the

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2. *MaCleKi* allows visitors to explore the history of the Kisumu, in Kenya, through location-based essays and media. See <http://macleki.org/>

South African Context hosted the ‘First South African Workshop on Digital Humanities’ in February 2015. The Digital Humanities Association of Southern Africa (DHASA) was established at this event. In January 2017, DHASA hosted its inaugural conference. However, as indicated above, before this initiative no consolidated DH project had been established in the region yet. In this regard, compare the map in Figure 1.2 compiled in 2012 by the University College London’s Centre for Digital Humanities that identifies one DH centre on the continent, compared to 44 in the United States (US), 11 in Canada and 14 in the United Kingdom. The only



Source: University College London, Centre for Digital Humanities (UCLDH), 2012, *Quantifying Digital Humanities*, viewed n.d., from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/ucldh/6730021199/sizes/o/in/photostream/>.

**FIGURE 1.2:** Quantifying digital humanities.

DH centre designated in Africa is located at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. In a more recent mapping of DH centres around the globe by centerNet, one more location appears on the African continent, namely, the Digital Humanities Research Unit (DHRU) in Lagos, Nigeria. This unit was established in 2016. In turn, if one scrutinises the *Around DH in 80 Days* project presented by the Global Outlook::Digital Humanities (GO::DH) in cooperation with the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organisations (ADHO), several projects (about 15) are identified on the African continent. However, upon inspection, it becomes clear that these projects are digitisation initiatives and not necessarily centres or consolidated endeavours engaged critically and hermeneutically with DH.<sup>3</sup>

The DH scene in South Africa has subsequently changed, and current local projects that are underway (commencing in 2018) include the Supra-Institutional Program in African Digital Humanities with representatives from the universities of Cape Town, Pretoria, Stellenbosch, Western Cape and Witwatersrand. The programme takes reading and the problems associated with access to African resources, as well as digital literacy and digital publishing, as its fundamental aims. In a related field, the South African Centre for Digital Language Resources (SADiLaR) has established a multi-partner entity in 2017 hosted by the NWU. The centre focuses on ‘the digitisation of language resources and the high-level training of scholars in methodological aspects related to the use of digital language resources in research and development endeavours’ (SADiLaR 2017:n.p.). These two innovative projects take language (text) as its prime source for implementing DH methodologies.

One of the enabling factors contributing to the ignition of DH collaborations is the ‘South African Research Infrastructure Roadmap’ (SARIR) released in October 2016 by the Department

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3. For instance, in South Africa, where the African Online Digital Library, Tombouctou Manuscripts Project and the Transcribe Bleek & Lloyd open access project are located, to name a few.

of Science and Technology (DST). The document outlines research infrastructure areas that need to be developed, namely, 'human and society', 'health, biological and food security', 'earth and environment', 'materials and manufacturing', 'energy' and physical sciences and engineering (DST 2016:iv). The contributions in this edited volume align with developing research infrastructure within the broader category of 'human and society'. The SARIR report also emphasises the appropriate role of human and social sciences in the 'economic and cultural development and transformation of South Africa' (DST 2016:19). Most of the research infrastructures identified in the document refer mainly to digitisation, for example, digital libraries, museums and language and data repositories. Although digitisation is an important part of building research infrastructure, this volume aims to show that meaning-making of the digital is just as important. As noted in *A Companion to Digital Humanities*, edited by Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens and John Unsworth (2004:n.p.), 'Moreover, digital humanities now also concerns itself with the creation of new artefacts which are born digital and require rigorous study and understanding in their own right'.

The 'Consensus Study on the State of Humanities in South Africa: Status Prospects and Strategies' and the 'Charter for Humanities and Social Sciences' further bolster DH initiatives. Both documents highlight the diminishing role of the humanities in academia and society. The same conclusion was made by the DST's 'Ten-Year Innovation Plan for South Africa', which also highlighted the human and social dynamics as one of the grand challenges in the future development of research infrastructures. In other words, the crisis in the humanities is foregrounded by these reports. Linking to this dilemma, the research presented here similarly wants to emphasise what it means to be human in a digital age by placing interpretive and critical questions led by the humanities at the centre. Thereby, we can hopefully add a much-needed perspective to counter the diminishing role of the humanities nationally.

DH in South Africa thus finds itself in turbulent times as the humanities staggers under severe funding cuts, enjoys shrinking estimation within universities ruled by neoliberal corporatisation and is besieged by an ever-increasing demand for tertiary education. Given this context, how does one align a DH project that moves through digitisation, datafication and textual dominance? In other words, moves beyond corporatisation and reverts from becoming a programme or epistemology in Brennan's terms. The logical way seems through aligning with scholars and endeavours that provide guidance on how to think and do DH that builds on what makes the humanities essential to human existence. Coming late to the table of DH means one at least has the advantage of making that informed choice.

## ■ Is the Human Condition at Stake?

When thinking about the human condition at this juncture, the intersection between digital technology and humanity has become a burning issue. In fact, according to Janicaud (2005:1) in *On the Human Condition*, '[t]here is now an unprecedented uncertainty about human identity'. The intersection between human and (digital) technology is already interrogated in 'The Question Concerning Technology' (Heidegger [1954] 1977), in which the essence of technology is described as 'by no means anything technological'. Instead, the essence of modern technology is referred to as an Enframing (*Gestell*) that shows nature (the world) to be a mere standing reserve (*Bestand*) waiting to be tapped into and unlocked for energy. Although Heidegger provides a somewhat pessimistic and deterministic viewpoint, with pertinent shortcomings, it has remained a vital influence in the philosophical hermeneutic approach towards technology (cf. Ellul 1980; Ihde 1990; Jonas 1973; Sloterdijk 2000). For our purposes here, human-technology interactions are treated as a complicated entanglement of making and being made in turn (cf. Du Preez 2005).

However, it is tricky even to ask if the human condition is at stake in human-technology interaction because it does



presuppose human uniqueness or exceptionalism. Phrased succinctly by Joanna Zylińska (2012): ‘How can the human speak in the shadow of the post-humanist critique?’, human exceptionalism is giving way to not only rethinking the differences between human and machine but also between species (human and non-human), matter (animate and inanimate) and planets (human and alien). Concepts such as ‘interspecies relationality’ (Zylińska 2012), ‘co-evolution’ and ‘co-emergence’ (Haraway 2008) and ‘zoe-centred’ (non-human life) as opposed to ‘*bios-centred*’ (human life) (Braidotti 2016:382) approaches tend to dominate current discourses. The Anthropocene or the human age shows that the human has left an indelible mark (scar) on the earth. We stand to become self-extinct by our own doing. The paradox of the human at this juncture is outlined by Claire Colebrook (2014):

Precisely at the moment of its own loss the human animal becomes aware of what makes it human meaning, empathy, art, morality – but can only recognize those capacities that distinguish humanity at the moment that they are threatened with extinction. (p.12)

Human exceptionalism is undone by human prowess.

This introductory chapter regrettably does not allow for further exploration into this crucial debate. Therefore, it will suffice to acknowledge that speaking *as* and *for* the human has become challenging. I want to propose, as Zylińska does, that we hang on to the human with a particular intransigence because ‘there is nothing more humanist than any unexamined singular gesture of trying to “move on beyond the human”’ (Zylińska 2015:135). In other words, even demands to move beyond the human are made from a human perspective. Being human is to occupy a precarious state and the human condition, as Hannah Arendt (1958) heeded, is indeed at stake.<sup>4</sup> What Arendt reflects

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4. Especially because an instrumentalist world view has become dominant that ‘acts into nature from the standpoint of the universe and not into the web of human relationships’ (Arendt 1958:324).

on is the eagerness of scientists to forget that ‘earth is the quintessence of the human condition’ (1958:2), followed by a general devolution of the material, and thus human existence. The freedom of the human subject (freed from material and human necessities) is the main project of the modern world, states Arendt, which has dire consequences for humanity.

If the question of the human condition *qua* human–technology intersections is transposed to the humanities and DH, a recent publication by Fiormonte, Numerico and Tomasi (2015) entitled *The Digital Humanist: A Critical Inquiry* asks, ‘Do we still need humanists and why?’ The question is linked to the global crisis in the humanities. Technology ‘is the result of [human] choices’ and has politics; therefore, it is important to realise ‘that humanists have indeed played a role in the history of informatics’ (Fiormonte, Numerico & Tomasi 2015:18). The humanities, therefore, does not have to shy away from its shared history with informatics for instance but is urged to claim this co-constitutive legacy. Humanists are called to acquire the skills to become digital humanists (Fiormonte et al. 2015):

We need digital humanists who don’t just use what is at hand but inquire critically into what is in their hands. We need humanists that ask about how it might bias the representation, conservation and interpretation of the cultural record. (p. xii)

What becomes evident is how involved the humanities and humanists were and are in directing digital encounters.

## ■ Moving Towards Critical Digital Humanities

If Africa has been unhurried in the uptake of DH, as already indicated, it can be argued that there are benefits to being slow beginners. It means that the mistakes and lessons, in the fast-moving field of DH as Matthew Gold (2012:xii) remarks, can be internalised and integrated when plotting DH strategies for Africa and South Africa. It also suggests that certain pitfalls, such as the drive to merely digitise without critical or hermeneutic

engagement, can be avoided. As Schreibman, Siemens and Unsworth (2004) argue in *A Companion to Digital Humanities*:

Widely spread through the digital humanities community is the notion that there is a clear and direct relationship between the interpretative strategies that humanists employ and the tools that facilitate exploration of original artefacts based on those interpretative strategies. (p. xxv)

In fact, it may even be a flagrant simplification to state that digitisation happens without hermeneutics. For as Fiormonte et al. (2015:17) suggest, ‘every encoding is a hermeneutic act’, which indicates that the undertaking of digitisation always implies a form of human intervention by ‘select[ing] what and how to preserve and transmit’. But this is not to argue that by digitising DH enough has been done, it is merely the activation of the venture.

The call then to intensify the level of humanistic scholarly engagement in DH practices is echoed by Roberto Simanowski in *Digital Humanities and Digital Media* (2016). Simanowski (2016:16) asserts that the best way forward in researching DH and digital media is ‘to combine philosophical concerns with empirical data’, as well as ‘to trigger hermeneutic debates that live off of the combination of algorithmic analysis and criticism’. Algorithms and hermeneutics do not necessarily exclude one another but can be critically engaged and here the Scalar project in collaboration with the Alliance for Visual Networking is exemplary.<sup>5</sup> According to McPherson, the co-primary investigator of *Vectors: Journal of Culture and Technology in a Dynamic Vernacular*, and later Scalar, succeeded in challenging the long-held opposition between code and cultural context. ‘Scalar respects machinic agency but does not cede everything to it’, McPherson (2014:185) notes. Similarly, Berry and Fagerjord in *Digital Humanities: Knowledge and Critique in a Digital Age* (2017:9) pick up on these ‘early threads of critical

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5. The *Scalar* platform is available at: <http://scalar.usc.edu>

digital humanities’ that moved beyond the novelty value of digital technologies. By not treating the computer as a ‘truth machine’ and instead start turning ‘our hermeneutic skills on the very software and algorithms that make up [DH] systems’ (Berry & Fagerjord 2017:136–137), the foundation for a ‘critical digital humanities’ is laid. This means DH does not compliantly accept the parameters laid down by the software and relational databases but instead challenge those. ‘A critical digital humanities continues to map and critique the use of the digital but is attentive to questions of power, domination, myth and exploitation’, assert Berry and Fagerjord (2017:138).

If issues of power and domination become guiding principles in developing critical DH, the challenges from the (postcolony) periphery addressed to centralised DH metropolises and mega-projects are significant. When McPherson (2012) asks ‘Why are the Digital Humanities so white?’, she uncovers the hidden relation between technology and race. She shows how ‘our technological productions within the digital humanities (or in our studies of code) are actually an *effect* of the very designs of our technological systems’ (McPherson 2012:140) that has made it almost impossible to see how race is implicated in these neutralised designs. McPherson (2012:140) warns against ‘partition[ing] off considerations of race’ in DH and here new platforms such as *#TransformDH* and *#decolonizedh* place race, among others, in the centre stage. The *#TransformDH* project works towards DH of transformative research, pedagogy and activism for social justice, accessibility and inclusion.<sup>6</sup> The *#decolonizedh* platform draws from DH’s sub-fields, including postcolonial, queer, critical race, disability, radical librarianship and digital pedagogy.<sup>7</sup> The edited volume *Disrupting the Digital Humanities* (2015), by Dorothy Kim and Jesse Stommel, ‘works to push and prod at the edges of the Digital Humanities – to open

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6. *#TransformDH* can be accessed at: <http://transformdh.org/>

7. *#decolonizedh* can be accessed at <https://twitter.com/hashtag/decolonizedh>

the Digital Humanities rather than close it down' which epitomises the endeavours of critical DH.<sup>8</sup>

Embarking in the DH given the contested areas and debates touched on above means such a venture cannot blindly associate with techno-optimism or globalised mega-projects but must take a carefully negotiated place that continues the proud tradition within the humanities to critically engage with technologies and subsequently the digital (cf. Jones 2014). The edited volume contained here is pitched with this in mind and has opted to work through the intersections between selfies and critical DH.

The volume asks what it means to be human in an age of digital technologies. This is by no means a new question, but the problem is parsed here through the prism of alternative voices inclined towards the South. The particular angle I want to take in terms of DH is through focussing on popular digital self-depictions on social networking services (SNSs). By flagging two trends within digital self-expression, namely, democratisation and datafication, human experiences in the current network society can be probed. The possibilities for spreading democracy are abundant at this juncture, just as the looming presence of control through datafication (big data) threatens human freedom. It is proposed that human interactions with digital technologies are manifesting in unpredictable and yet distinct ways that challenge our notions of being human dramatically.

## ■ What Do Selfies Want?

For scholars familiar with W.J.T. Mitchell's *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* (1995), the question posed by 'what do selfies want' should resound clearly. Mitchell announces

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8. A digital edition of the volume can be accessed at: <http://www.disruptingdh.com/category/digital-edition/>. In addition, Roopika Risam's scholarly investigation into issues of postcolonialism, feminism, African-American and US ethnic studies is another exemplary example of critical digital humanities. Her webpage can be accessed at <http://roopikarisam.com/>.

the ‘pictorial turn’ (1995) in the US, while Gottfried Boehm simultaneously (more or less) identifies the ‘iconic turn’ (1994) on the continent. What these paradigm shifts substantiate is how ‘the image question touches on the foundations of culture’ (Boehm & Mitchell 2009). The image in all its different guises dominates the media and social spheres – and our imaginations. In the contemporary ‘image-dominated network society’ (Mirzoeff 2015:16), the image is not just a new topic but relates more to a different mode of thinking. Therefore, studying images correlates seamlessly with DH scholarship (cf. Hayles 2011). The proposed research project of which this volume forms part proposes to combine DH scholarship with image studies by focussing on the selfie as the latest bearer of the imposing imminence of images.

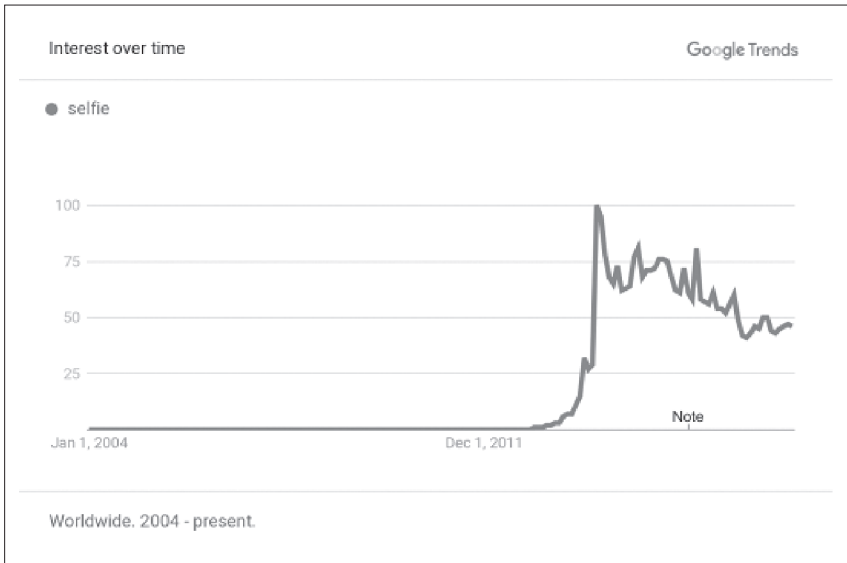
Selfies are omnipresent. About 24 billion selfies were uploaded to Google in 2015 and millennials are estimated to upload 25 000 selfies in their lifetime. Research on selfies proliferate: why are selfies so popular?; what are the narcissistic index propelling the sharing of selfies?; what is the gender preference of selfies?; can selfies act as agents for democracy?; how do the technological affordances steer selfies?; what do selfies indicate of human-technological interactions?; how should we understand selfies phenomenologically?; how do selfies participate and forward the traditional art form of self-portraiture?; and how do selfies implicate the quantified self-movement? to mention only a few relevant themes.

If images are not only signs of human communication but rather events, encounters and openings for meaning-making: what do selfies reveal? We have enough data about selfies to provide preliminary answers to questions such as ‘do more women than men upload selfies?’ (e.g. *Selfiecicity*), and ‘can selfies be relegated to narcissism?’, but what selfies want as images has remained under-researched.

The research question posed here (what do images [or selfies more particularly] want?) indicates that images are imbued with a particular agency. Images address us, not only in the sense of

interpellation (cf. Althusser) but also in a radical ontological sense. Something comes forward to meet us when we engage with images. This meeting can be understood affectively (the ‘affects turn’) because the outcome remains unpredictable. We cannot decide beforehand what will be met; all we know is that we are met (at least halfway) when engaging with images. From this radical gesture, this research project wants to ask (working through DH and image studies methodologies): what do selfies want and what do they do?

By way of providing a preliminary, albeit, crude answer, responses to the search term ‘selfie’ using Google Trends show how the term has ignited interest over time spanning the period from 2004 to 2018 (Figure 1.3). The graph in Figure 1.3 clearly shows that the selfie as search term did not appear until December 2012. No one searched for the term ‘selfie’ before 2012 because

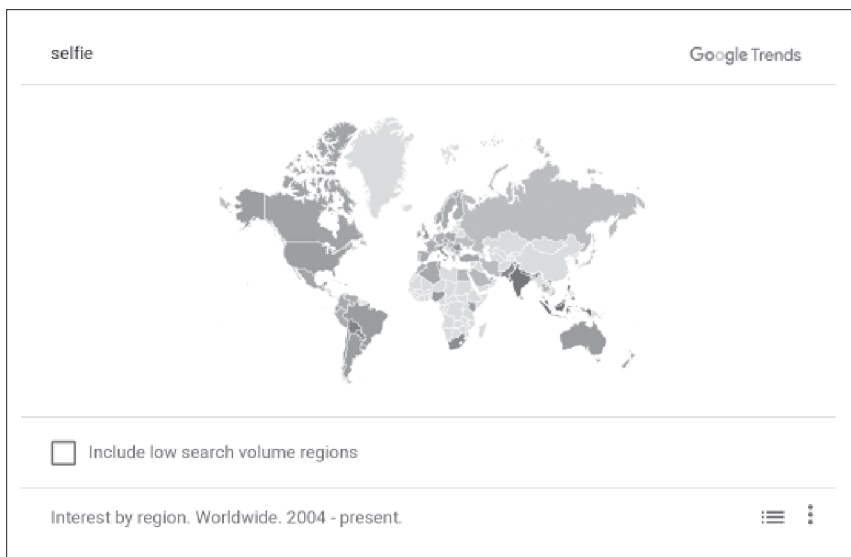


Source: Google Trends, 2017, *Selfie*, viewed n.d., from <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?q=selfie>

**FIGURE 1.3:** Google Trends result: ‘Interest over time’ for search term ‘selfie’ 2004–present (February 2018).

the concept of a selfie did not exist yet. We were familiar with self-portraits, self-expression and even self-photography but not selfies. The selfie only became a possibility with the development of handheld cameras via smartphones. From the graph, it becomes apparent that the interest in selfies peaked in April 2014 and we are now seeing a slow decline with intermittent spikes of interest, for example, March 2016.

The list of countries (Figure 1.4) from where the interest in the search term 'selfie' was launched is topped by the Philippines, followed by Nepal, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Bolivia, Paraguay and Pakistan.<sup>9</sup> South Africa is 11th on the list and the only other African country to make the top 20 list



Source: Google Trends, 2017, *Selfie*, viewed n.d., from <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?q=selfie>

**FIGURE 1.4:** Google Trends result: 'Interest by region' for search term 'selfie' 2004–present (February 2018).

9. Interesting to note that Nepal (at no. 2) and Bangladesh (at no.6) are considered as 'least developed countries' in the world, according to the United Nations.



is Nigeria at number 17.<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, the United Kingdom is listed as 22nd, and the US is only in the 25th position. It seems from this result that the search for the term selfie is dominated by the Global South and not as one may mistakenly have expected from the Global North. Can we speculate from this initial analysis of the interest by regions that what selfies want and do are already more unpredictable than anticipated? If 'selfie' as a search term is any indication, perhaps the agency embodied by selfies comes from the Global South?<sup>11</sup> Granted, this is mere speculation and what happens if other search terms such as 'selfies', '#selfie' and 'teen selfies' are used. Yes, the results differ and sometimes considerably; however, the Philippines remains listed as number 18 for the search term 'selfies' and number 5 for the search term '#selfie'. What the graphs do suggest is that the selfie is a more varied and diversified phenomenon than anticipated.

## ■ Contextualising Selfies

Let me start by stating the obvious: SNS have changed 'the nature and status of interpersonal communication irrevocably. It has also expanded the ways and means of self-expression' (Du Preez 2017:3). The selfie, defined as 'an image of oneself taken by oneself using a digital camera especially for posting on social networks' (Merriam-Webster 2014), has become the preferred means for self-expression in the digital age. *Time magazine*

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10. Google (Google Trends 2017) provides the following note to explain the search results: 'Values are calculated on a scale from 0 to 100, where 100 is the location with the most popularity as a fraction of total searches in that location, a value of 50 indicates a location which is half as popular. A value of 0 indicates a location where there was not enough data for this term. [...] A higher value means a higher proportion of all queries, not a higher absolute query count. So, a tiny country where 80% of the queries are for "bananas" will get twice the score of a giant country where only 40% of the queries are for "bananas".'

11. The results from Google Trends may however be skewed as recent research indicates the biases of search engines. In this regard, Safiya U. Noble's recent publication, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (2018), should be considered with my preliminary interpretations of the search term results.

nominated the selfie in 2012 as one of the 10 buzzwords of the year, while the Oxford Dictionaries declared it as the international Word of the Year in 2013. It seems that selfies are irresistible (Du Preez 2017), because:

[E]ven those in high dignitary positions cannot resist its mesmerising pull, as the selfie taken by President Barack Obama and UK Prime Minister David Cameron with Danish Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt, attending Nelson Mandela's memorial service in December 2013, demonstrates. (p. 3)

Then, in 2015, selfies became deadly as more people died that year taking selfies than mortalities caused by sharks (cf. Du Preez 2018).

As images, 'selfies stand in the tradition of doubling, imitation, twinning, cloning, alter egos, mirroring, masks, and shadows. To the degree that selfies are impersonations, they are also mimetic creatures' (Du Preez 2017:5). Selfies stand in as virtual substitutes or avatars that network on behalf of the (real) self, or as one of Turkle's (2011:165) respondents describes her Facebook profile as 'an avatar of me' or even more tellingly, 'my Internet twin'. Senft and Baym (2015:1589) interpret the selfie as both a 'photographic object that initiates the transmission of human feeling' and as 'a practice - a gesture that can send different message to different individuals'. The selfie establishes a sophisticated linking between subject and object as the self is both the photographer and the subject photographed, and the creator and the created.

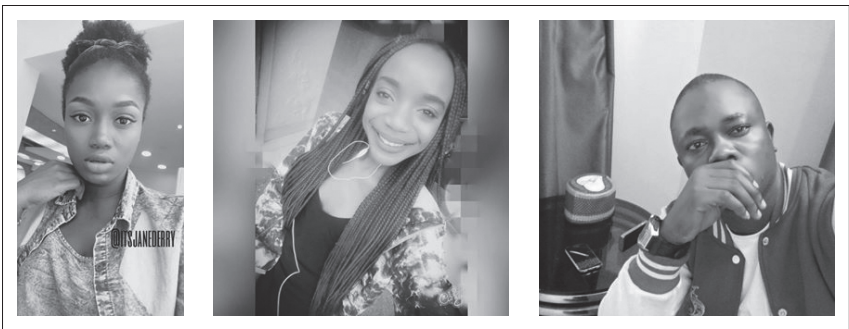
But the demise of the selfie was perhaps already announced when the reality TV star Kim Kardashian recently released a publication containing 1200 selfies, entitled *Selfish*. How does the selfie recover from this overexposure, one may ask? Disregarding the Kardashian image glut, selfies can rightly be described as the folk art of the digital age (Williams 2006), precisely because they have become ubiquitous through web cameras and smartphones with front-facing cameras. In contrast with 'the traditional genre of self-portraiture reserved primarily for artists and aristocracy, now most global citizens can

participate in expressing themselves via selfies’ (Du Preez 2017:3). For instance, the *#selfieafrica* (Figure 1.5), *#AfricanBeauty* and *#blackisbeautiful* Instagram pages – aimed at celebrating real African beauty – are an indication of the prevalence of selfies on the continent of Africa, for instance.<sup>12</sup> Selfies have been celebrated as well in the multimedia research project *Selficity*, led by Lev Manovich, wherein the selfies from five cities were compared, namely, New York, Moscow, Berlin, Bangkok and São Paulo.<sup>13</sup>

What many people don’t realise, however, is that (Du Preez 2017):

[7]he demotic turn of self-expression was anticipated by Andy Warhol (who can in all likelihood be identified as the father of the selfie with his self-portraits taken in photo booths) when he predicted that ‘everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes’ in the future. (p. 3)

It is actually startling how accurate Warhol’s prediction has been when he stated that: ‘In the future, everyone will be famous to 15 people’. However, Warhol could not have anticipated that



Source: Screenshot of *#selfieafrica* Deskgram page; <https://deskgram.net/explore/tags/selfieafrica> (used under fair use conditions)

**FIGURE 1.5:** Randomly selected selfies from the *#selfieafrica* Instagram page (15 February 2018).

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12. It is interesting to note that many of the selfies uploaded on the Instagram pages do not originate from the continent (strictly speaking) but are uploaded by people of African-American descent.

13. The *Selficity* project can be accessed online at: <http://selficity.net/>

digital media would shrink the duration of fame to 15 s to what is now known as micro-celebrity.

But before SNSs captured our imaginations, the Internet ushered in explorations into virtual selfhood. Since its inception, the Internet has been lauded as a harbinger of freedom and democracy (Poster 1995; Rheingold 1993). The early optimism about online democracy has gradually waned and been replaced by more sinister and sceptical assessments about our image-based networked society (Agger 2012; Carr 2010; Turkle 2011). In the current flux, at least two strands of engagement can be identified. One carries the early optimism about ‘cyberdemocracy’ into digital activism movements, for example, Arab Spring, *#BlackLivesMatter*, *#FeesMustFall* (Figure 1.6), and the other explores big data as a means of turning everyday life (among other things) into quantifiable code. These two trends intersect in online self-expression. The democratising developments epitomise the liberating, socialising and mobilising agency of digital selves, whereas the datafication movement turns the online self into a *data doppelgänger* trailed by digital data left consciously or unconsciously online. By exploring the intersections



Source: (Image Left) Meyer, Y., 2015, 'What Joining #FeesMustFall Protest Meant to Me', Bushradio, 23 October, 2015, viewed n.d., from <https://bushradio.wordpress.com/tag/yuzriq-meyer/>; © Yuzriq Meyer (used under fair use conditions)

(Image Right) Monyela, C., 2015, 'Trafalgar Square protest: 150 join students fees demonstration at South African High Commission in London', *Evening Standard*, 23 October, 2015, viewed n.d., from <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/trafalgar-square-protest-150-join-students-fees-demonstration-at-south-african-high-commission-in-a3098001.html>; ©Clayson Monyela (used under fair use conditions)

**FIGURE 1.6:** Selfies from the *#FeesMustFall* campaigns (2015).

between the democratisation and datafication catalysts that work online through self-expression, and mainly through selfies, the complexities of digital selves are foregrounded.

## ■ Selfies and Democratisation

The democratisation trend in selfie-taking is aided by digital cameras that allow global citizens with smartphones to instantly take and upload images. The spirit of democratisation manifests for instance in the Saatchi Gallery's 'From Selfie to Self-Expression' (31 March 2017–28 May 2017) which includes selfies taken as part of the *#SaatchiSelfie* competition. The competition invited artists, photographers and citizens from all over the globe to participate by submitting selfies that explored the topic innovatively. The traditional distinction made between professional artists and photographers and amateur or ordinary 'selfie citizen' (cf. Kunstman 2017) has been erased.<sup>14</sup> It seems in the taking of selfies we are all equal.<sup>15</sup>

Another democratising aspect afforded by omnipresent digital cameras is that every day happenings and even the banal can be captured and shared instantaneously. Nothing is apparently too trivial or too humiliating to be shared.<sup>16</sup> Turning the camera on ourselves may be interpreted as a new form of self-surveillance that enables the society of control. The self-surveillance can also be interpreted as 'empowering exhibitionism' (Koskela 2004). Instead of being mere passive objects increasingly under observance,

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14. All the submissions can be viewed on Saatchi's webpage: <http://www.saatchigallery.com/selfie/>.

15. Lilie Chouliaraki's contribution to the special issue in *Popular Communication* on self-representation, 'Symbolic bordering: The self-representation of migrants and refugees in digital news' (2017), indicates that the selfies taken by refugees are not treated as equal to Western selfies. Therefore, we may see a lot of refugees taking selfies in Western media, but we do not see the actual selfie of the migrant. One should not be too hasty in assuming all selfies are equal.

16. The problem of oversharing online is dealt with by Ben Agger in *Oversharing. Presentations of Self in the Internet Age* (2012).

ordinary citizens now also participate in their surveillance by actively producing and circulating images of themselves. Hence, the budding trends of ‘prosuming’ (simultaneously producing and consuming), ‘produsage’ (simultaneously producing and using), remixing and mashups as part of a user-driven culture. By taking ownership of images, a counter-surveillance is created which defiantly trumps the panopticon. That is the optimistic reading of self-surveillance, while it could be argued just as convincingly that by participating in the panopticon, citizens extend machinic vision through their senses.

What happens in the case of selfies taken during protests? As already indicated, selfies interpolated into protests have become part of hashtag activism, for example, *#NotAMartyr*, *#BringBackOurGirls*, *#SuffocatingPrisoners* and recently in South Africa the *#FeesMustFall* campaign. Do these selfies bolster democratisation trends? Certainly, protest selfies express a ‘sensitivity of mass culture’ (Hall 1984) and thus may act as instruments of democratisation. Protest selfies contradict the notion that all selfies are narcissistic by nature by opening the ‘premise for self-production’ as Amy Dobson (2016:13) suggests.<sup>17</sup> In other words, can resistance and agency be constituted by self-production? Feminist artists, Vivian Fu and Nooran Matties, for instance, explore the possibilities of self-production by claiming ‘representational agency’ (Murray 2015:511) by refusing to remain invisible as ‘Asian others’. In Murray’s analysis of the work of young female artists, he proposes that they utilise their selfies as ‘self-preservation’ that allows them, despite the engulfing wave of late capitalist self-indulgence, to ‘envision themselves anew’ (2015:512). Protest selfies do engage the image-based network society with a ‘counter-visuality’ (Mirzoeff 2011) that claims the right to look and be looked at and in this sense agency forms.

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17. Dobson suggests the ‘premise of self-production’ within the context of young women’s production and participation in making their selves in SNSs and does not refer to ‘protest selfies’ in particular. Dobson (2016:13) also notes that the premise does not constitute the truth about identity but should rather be understood as ‘a *premise* of, or assumed claim to, “authenticity”, rather than a “truth” of how things are’.

## ■ Selfies and Datafication

When viewing the selfie through the democratisation lens, ‘the selfie signifies a sense of human agency’ (Senft & Baym 2015:1589) without acknowledging that selfies are transmitted, displayed and tracked through non-human agents. The transmitted digital presence conveyed through non-human agents, however, tends to ‘out[live] the time and space in which it [selfie] was original[ly] produced’ (Senft & Baym 2015:1589). In other words, the selfie image on the screen is literally just the tip of the information iceberg. As Du Preez (2017:6) states: ‘Selfies are not just images posted; they are combined with metadata from the mobile device sensors, user hashtags and social network info’. The selfie taker is not necessarily (probably not at all) in control of the data flowing from the image. The selfie thus obtains a life of its own. The code is intercepted by third parties and changed, meaning the self-image (or selfie) is also transformed accordingly.<sup>18</sup>

What seems to be an innocent transaction such as merely checking into places and taking a selfie actually leaves data crumbs that are picked up and shared by platform owners ‘with third parties for customised marketing in exchange for free services’ (Van Dijk 2014:197). According to Van Dijk, the compliance with personal information can be interpreted as ‘a trade-off’ because ‘masses of people – naively or unwittingly – trust their personal information to corporate platforms’ (2014:197). Van Dijk identifies our seemingly neutral data exchange with networks, which is in turn utilised by big data research, as ‘the ideology of dataism’ (2014:198). As Du Preez (2017:6) explains: ‘Dataism assists in creating or mirroring another self, unknown or undefined up to this point – a data double’. The most pronounced form of the data double is manifested in the quantified self (QS) movement. Rettberg (2014) describes the QS as follows:

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18. See in this regard the selfie project by Maia Grotepass, artist-coder, illustrating how software (algorithmic interventions) on mobile devices, for instance, affects the human interpretation of selfies. As Grotepass observes: ‘Our [images] are mediated; touched at bit-level by the software systems they traverse’ (2014:283).

We don't typically think of these self-tracking tools as self-representations in the same way as we do self-portraits or diaries, but they do preserve and present images of us: images that are both very accurate and very narrow, whether they track steps, heart rate, productivity or location. (p. 62)

The QS is mapped onto the data double by means of tracking heartbeat and activities such as the number of stairs climbed to the steps taken daily. The QS discourse is dominated by four interrelated themes, namely, transparency, optimisation, feedback loop and biohacking (cf. Ruckenstein & Pantzar 2017). In fact, the self is turned into a project where 'optimization becomes not only possible, but also desirable' (Ruckenstein 2014:69). By utilising *Dopplr.com* – a free social media network service – a 'portrait' of travellers is generated by comparing travel itineraries and turning these shared itineraries into visualisations. Another version of the data double is created by the application entitled, the narrative clip, which consists of a wearable camera that documents every moment and interaction of one's daily existence and so delivers a 'true' portrait of the wearer. Can the QS movement provide a complete picture of ourselves? Or is the digital double more akin to a '(mis)interpretation by others and a (mis)representation by an individual' (Reppel & Szmigin 2011:121). Whatever the response, it is clear that a countenance is taking shape in the form of the data trail we leave – consciously or unconsciously – behind daily.

The optimistic reception of the selfie as a democratising agent is therefore countered by the 'darker' data-self that emerges from the flow of algorithms beyond human control. Plotting what selfies want and do has to take these opposing trends of democratisation and datafication into consideration, if a meaningful assessment is to be made.

## ■ Introduction to Chapters in This Volume

The volume brings together research that reflects on DH from various perspectives. In Part 1, representations of the digital self or



the selfie take precedence. Sometimes, DH and selfies are thought together as in Charles Travis's contribution 'Humanities GIS Selfie and *Anti-Selfie Bricolage*, Urban Affect and Public Mental Hygiene: The "SmartCities" of James Joyce and Charles Bukowski'. By plotting a Geographical Information Systems (GIS) selfie onto Joyce's meandering through Dublin and Bukowski's live-in literature in Los Angeles, he succeeds in not only plotting the selfie culture onto the SmartCity discourse but also providing a potent critique thereof. Travis's (2018) chapter in this edited volume notes:

Through the lenses of critical GIS theory, the *Selfie* can be viewed as a spatial-temporal phenomenon, mutating individuals into flesh and blood data points, living, breathing remote sensors, and unwitting environmental actors. (p. 33)

The affective human factor does however seem to remain ever illusive and although mapped also uncontainable.

Juan-Pierre van der Walt's 'The leadership persona: A platform for self-representation' proposes the 'selfie' in another guise, namely, that of South African leadership personas on social media sites during the *#FeesMustFall* campaign on South African campuses. How are leadership personas performed differently among student leaders and vice-chancellors? Van der Walt addresses topical issues of leadership performances as powerful manifestations of the self.

While Chris Broodryk's chapter, 'The Selfie as Articulation of, and Response to, Indifference(s)', reflects on the phenomenon of selfies solely, Broodryk utilises Alan Badiou's categories of truth-events to read selfies as emancipatory responses to political events. In other words, how can selfies be understood as participatory responses to events, instead of being hailed as doped narcissism clad in indifference. In Broodryk's analysis, the selfie is an answer to the call of the rupture of the event.

In Part 2, contributions think through DH and digital tools. Karli Brittz works through the difficult marriage between dataism and art in 'The Big Picture: What the Digital Humanities Can Learn from Data Artworks'. Brittz explores ways in which DH

products or results can be expanded to reach a wider audience. She focuses on three selected data artworks, namely, *A More Perfect Union*, *The Wind Map* and *Dear Data* and traces their compelling impact to show their potential in enhancing digital scholarship both as a medium and methodology.

The contribution of Jenni Lauwrens, entitled ‘Digital Humanities Meets Sensory Ethnography: Using Digital Resources to Understand Multisensory Experiences in a Public Place’, explores DH methodology in conjunction with sensory ethnography. By exposing graduate students enrolled in the Honours programme in Visual Studies at the University of Pretoria (UP) to digital research methods, Lauwrens maps their multisensorial experience of a public space. The sensory experiences are captured, represented and analysed using digital tools with fascinating results.

A rather sophisticated implementation of GIS is utilised in Rory du Plessis’s chapter, ‘Visualising the return pathways of patients to the Grahamstown Lunatic Asylum’, wherein Du Plessis tracks the ‘after-life’ of discharged patients and illuminates fascinating (previously invisible) pathways of these patients. Mostly, these pathways led to readmissions and patients encountered numerous transfers between institutional sites. Du Plessis’s visual analysis shows the heart-rending returns and journeys of chronic patients.

The volume concludes with Daniel Mosako’s reflection on the use of digital technologies in art museums in the Gauteng province. Mosako provides an overview of the potential of digital scholarship within museums not only to address past inequalities but also to increase access to a broader audience. As a museum curator and artist, Mosako is keenly aware of the positive role that the appropriate selection of digital technologies can make to broaden the reach of the arts and museums to the general South African public.

DH may be in its infancy stages locally, but the ideas, research and endeavours put forward in this volume indicate that critical DH may become a genuine possibility in the near future.



# Humanities GIS *Selfie and Anti-Selfie Bricolage*, Urban Affect and Public Mental Hygiene: The 'SmartCities' of James Joyce and Charles Bukowski

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## ■ Introduction

### ■ GIS and the Selfie

From Homer's *Odyssey* and Dante's *Inferno* to Joyce's *Ulysses* and Picasso's *Guernica*, artistic, humanistic and technological renderings and remediations of place have played central roles in the course of Western history in telling us stories to explain the vagaries and contingencies of our shared human condition. In addition, Eratosthenes' *Sphere*, Plato's *Republic*, Immanuel Kant's distinction between *chorology* and *chronology*, Martin Heidegger's *Lebenswelt* and Hannah Arendt's repurposing of the Greek *Polis* still pose crucial questions on human and social agency, space, time, identity and place. The word *Selfie*'s 2013 validation by the Oxford English Dictionary has linked millennial culture with digital and social media. In this regard, selfie culture, as Theresa M. Senft and Nancy K. Baym (2015) note, can be seen as the coalescence of visual and textual acts, objects, gestures and practices, remediated and amplified through various scales of media platforms into assemblages that string together individual and collective trends, fashions and pathologies:

[P]eople pose for political selfies, joke selfies, sports-related selfies, fan-related selfies, illness-related selfies, soldier selfies, crime-related selfies, selfies at funerals, or selfies at places like museums. (p. 19)

However, place-based explorations of selfie culture, like the latter two examples, are under-explored: 'as much as selfies illustrate an expression of self, they are also characterized by a relationship to space and place' (Hess 2015:1636). Place also plays a role in selfie-related deaths which have become a global phenomenon and resulted from (Subrahmanyam et al. 2016):

[C]razy acts like taking selfies in front of an oncoming train, on edges of mountain cliffs, in front of pouncing bulls, on speeding motor bikes, near the oceans, on the banks of river canals on the top of trains and getting electrocuted by contact with live very high voltage wires. (p. 52)

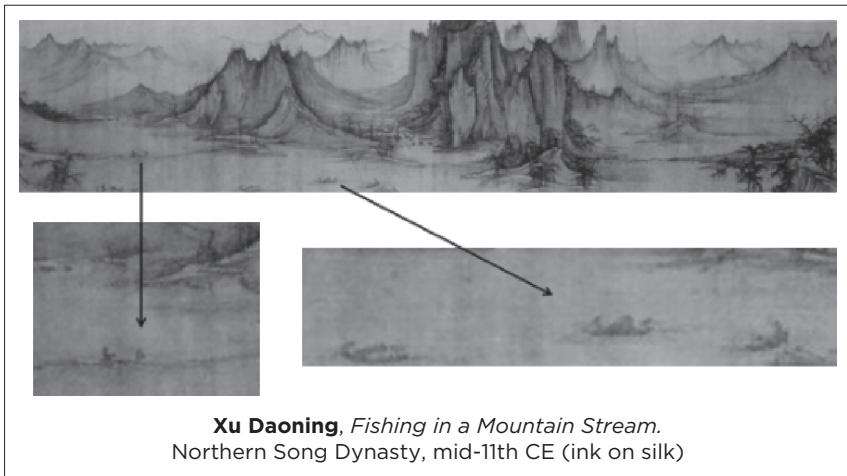
In addition, selfie culture has also spawned its own pathologies. The live 'on-air' killings of a news reporter and photojournalist

posted on Facebook and Twitter in 2015 by a jealous and murderous colleague in West Virginia before a live shot of his suicide. Most recently? The tragic 2018 mass murder of 17 public high school students by an ex-classmate in Florida, live streamed from smartphone selfies and videos by terrified peers hiding in school rooms from the deadly onslaught of an AK-47 assault rifle; the selfie streaming of the Las Vegas country music festival massacre in 2017; the 2016 killing of people of mixed race in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, St. Paul, Minnesota, and the slaughter of five policemen in Dallas, Texas, illustrate the mutations of selfie culture. This mutation gathers its DNA strands from the place, reflecting the state of public mental hygiene, dysfunction and dystopia. It is colouring the urban spaces of our world, despite the utopian and fantastical aspirations towards social and technologically engineered 'SmartCities'. The millennial spawn of selfie culture is cross-pollinating with the techno-agencies of social media networks, smartphones and wristwatches, Xbox, tablets and laptops. Through the lenses of critical GIS theory, the selfie can be viewed as a spatial-temporal phenomenon, mutating individuals into flesh and blood data points, living, breathing remote sensors, and unwitting environmental actors. Daniel Sui and Michael Goodchild (2001) observe that the instrumental view of GIS as a spatial database, mapping tool and spatial analytical tool is now inadequate in capturing the fundamental essence of this technology and its social implications. They contend that the 'complex relationship between GIS and society can be better understood if one conceives of GIS as new media' (Sui & Goodchild 2001:387).

In our new social media landscapes, selfie 'digital wildfires' rage across the networks of SmartCities to enhance our empty, information-saturated, quotidian and *ennui*-ridden existences. James Joyce, anticipating such a cultural mutation even before the onset of Twitter and the age of the selfie, observed that 'it is almost as though modern man has an epidermis rather than a soul' (Alberti 2016:137-138). However, in the words of Joyce's wise apprentice, Samuel Beckett, we all now have the potential

in selfie culture to reveal to the world ‘all that inner space one never sees, the brain and heart and other caverns where thought and feeling dance their Sabbath’ (1955:10). Selfie culture provides us with a heuristic that allows us to consider how GIS as a type of media can geo-locate and visually parse visual representations and frame questions within SmartCity discourses about the interplay between textual, visual, discursive digital, social, embodied, affective, psychological, technological, built and natural landscapes. Because of increasing digital video capabilities of smartphones, selfie culture is being transformed from a one-eyed Cyclops snapshot act to the panoramic practices of the ‘cinematic eye’, which also offers a ‘way of seeing’, similar to the ocular technologies, techniques and tropes which have preoccupied the practices in geography, cartography and GIS.

Geographers Marcus Doel and David Clarke (2007) state that the cinematic perspective abstracts, manipulates and reengineers our spatial and temporal perceptions (Figure 2.1). The selfie possesses a similar cinematic and phenomenological



**FIGURE 2.1:** Mid-11th century Chinese landscape painting and the ‘drifting cinematographic eye’.

ability which in the words of Siegfried Kracauer (1960) allows our eye to ‘drift’:

[7]owards and into the objects – so much like the legendary Chinese Painter who, longing for the peace of landscape he had created, moved into it, walked towards the faraway mountains suggested by his brush strokes, and disappeared into them never to be seen again. (p. 165)

Conceiving and incorporating phenomenological and cinematographic aesthetics into GIS to represent past and present ‘senses of place’ of a city, drawing upon social media networks and posted selfie snapshots or videos raises significant representational challenges. Kracauer’s phenomenological perspective is echoed in Finn Arne Jørgensen’s observation: ‘the idea of nature is becoming very hard to separate from the digital tools and media we use to observe, interpret, and manage it’ (2014:109). Selfie culture cross-pollinates the realm of computer-generated virtual worlds, such as video games and virtual reality platforms like *Second Life*, with the digital representation of place and space in GIS: ‘taking a selfie is a form of place expression, meaning that selfies are about the placement of one’s self in a place at a time’ (Hess 2015:1636). The digital text of a selfie is a product of human perception and experience and imparts a ‘sense of place’ snapshot. Cultural geographers use literary analysis tools to explore the imagery, narratives and settings of such texts to access the social and subjective dimensions of place which the Irish laureate Seamus Heaney (1980) defines as:

[7]his feeling, assenting, equable marriage between the geographical country and the country of the mind, whether that country of the mind takes its tone unconsciously from a shared [*orally*] inherited culture, or from a consciously savoured literary culture, or from both [...]. (p. 132)

Such nuanced and affective perspectives on the human experience of place have been largely absent in GIS representations. Sui and Goodchild (2011:1737–1748) observe that ‘until recently, place has been off the intellectual radar screen of GIScientists, many of whom appear to use the two terms place and space somewhat [interchangeably]’.



One of the key questions for GIS is how its various suites of geospatial technologies can be used to mine, manage, manipulate, chart, visualise and analyse the subjective geographies of landscape and place embedded within literary, historical, cultural, cinematic and digital texts. Recently, human-centric GIS techniques have attempted to tease the distinctions between the subjectivity of place and Euclidian space by engaging in perceptions and perspectives anchored and framed in such texts. Repurposing GIS as a form of media within the ubiquity the digital metadata produced by selfie culture allows us to consider questions concerning space, and place upon issues related to urban public mental health and hygiene. Human-centric and 'place' based as opposed to spatially plotted GIS applications have emerged in the wake of the DH revolution of the past quarter-century.

As Travis (2015a) explains:

The first wave of this revolution (1980s–2010) witnessed the digitisation of historical, cultural, literary and artistic collections facilitating online research methods and pedagogy, which dovetailed with a second wave (2002–2012) of humanities computing quantification exercises, digital parsing, analysis and visualisation projects. Currently, a third wave of the revolution (2012–2020) is cresting with the ontological tide turning, as humanities discourses and tropes are now beginning to shape emerging coding and software applications, and methodological frameworks for computing platforms. (p. 927)

GIS applications are coming into league with smartphone applications, gaming platforms, tablets and the visual and performing arts to force transdisciplinary encounters between fields as diverse as human cognition, neurology, environmental studies, genetics, bioinformatics, linguistics, gaming, architecture, philosophy, media, literature, painting and history (Liu & Thomas 2012; MacTavish & Rockwell 2006; Travis 2015b). Milad Doueihi (2013) contends that 'digital humanism' is a manifestation of this new reality, and asks:

[W]hat is the situation with the anthropology of this new inhabited earth, these new digital territories that are flexible, fluid and constantly moving? How should we think about them, analyse them,

especially since geolocation and smart cities cannot be dissociated from our daily lives? (n.p.)

One way to address Doueihy's question can be found in the work of native American writer William Least Heat-Moon who employed a textual, historical, stratigraphic and cultural representation and analysis method to survey the domains of Chase County, Kansas, in *PrairyErth: A Deep Map*. This method, notes Verlyn Klinkenborg (1991):

[/]s the work of an encyclopedist without an alphabet. It is arranged geographically, quadrant by quadrant, around the county, 'my arbitrary pattern [...] that of a Japanese reading a book, up to down, right to left'. The grid that Heat-Moon imagines for his book is part actual, part imaginary - it corresponds to the 12 U.S. Geological Survey maps that cover the center of the county, and it resembles the grid that an archeologist lays over ground he will excavate [...]. (n.p.)

David Bodenhamer, Trevor Harris and John Corrigan (2015) argue that *deep mapping* techniques in GIS can create finely detailed, multimedia, visual gazetteers that plot the connections and disjunctions between place, people, objects, buildings, flora and fauna that are inseparable from the activities of our everyday lives. Jo Guldi (2013:n.p.) suggests that GIS: 'mapping, code, and data collection [...] must be allied to a sense of memory' to counter 'information overload, the corruption of privilege, and the inefficacy of expertise'. The textual bracketing of Dublin and Los Angeles in the respective literary works of James Joyce (1882-1941) and Charles Bukowski (1920-1994) provides phenomenological perceptions of urban space that can be translated into GIS templates. Using such templates, it is possible to map locations depicted in Joyce and Bukowski's texts in conjunction with the digital texts produced by selfie culture. In Joyce's case, selfies taken by Bloomsday revellers on 16 June 2014 re-enact (as well as rewrite) episodes of the novel *Ulysses* ([1922] 1992). Mapping Bukowski and his works provides a method to plot-out the spaces of the anti-selfie inhabiting Skid Row, Los Angeles. This hermeneutic application of GIS provides the means to plot, parse and analyse the affective dimensions of

cities in general, and the mental hygiene of the people inhabiting its streets, spaces and places mentioned in Joyce and Bukowski's texts. The term mental hygiene derives from the practices of the psychiatrist Adolf Meyer (1866–1950) and mental health reformer Clifford Whittingham Beers (1876–1943) who held that mental illness in part was the outcome of the dynamic interactions of individuals with their environments (Parry 2010). Before discussing the selfie-influenced mappings of Joyce, Bukowski and the mental and affective dimensions of their cities, the chapter will outline the SmartCity and the development of Humanities GIS (HumGIS) applications.

## ■ **SmartCities, Affect and Mental Hygiene: Towards a HumGIS *Selfie Bricolage* Method**

In his *The Production of Space* (1991), Henri Lefebvre considers the postmodern transformation of urbanity through which 'fixed points, movements and flows and waves – some interpenetrating, others in conflict' manifests in a 'hyper-complexity of space'. Echoing Lefebvre, Kittler and Griffin (1996) observe that 'cities no longer lie within the panopticon of the cathedral or castle and can no longer be enclosed by walls or fortifications'. Rather, they noted that urbanity was being transformed into 'a network made up of intersecting networks' that 'dissects and connects the city – in particular, its fringes, peripheries, and tangents' (Kittler & Griffin 1996:718).

In the 21st century, the SmartCity is the latest iteration of this discourse and repurposes the city as a cybernetic web-work of Information Communication Technology (ICT) and global positioning satellite (GPS) monitoring and conventional GIS regulation. Through the harvesting of digitised social and environmental data and the coding and algorithmic programming of various activities, our urban human condition is enmeshed in

a ‘complex network of interconnected systems’ purportedly designed and implemented for our common social and environmental good (IBM 2012).

Stephen Roche (2015) defines the SmartCity in four ways:

1. as an intelligent city (social infrastructure)
2. as a digital city (informational infrastructure)
3. as an open city (open governance)
4. as a live city (a continuously adaptive urban living fabric).

However, SmartCity perspectives seem blind to the vagaries of urban human subjectivity, including issues concerning public affect, mental health and hygiene. One objective of HumGIS *deep mapping*, to quote Trevor M. Harris (2015):

[/]s to shift from a view of humans as entities or data points to an examination of behaviour, the material and imaginary worlds, and the relationships that compose notions of a nuanced, non-reductionist, deeply contingent, and scaled conception(s) of place. (p. 42)

Projects such as *Selficity* employs DH methods to visualise thousands of selfies posted on Instagram from the cities of Bangkok, Berlin, Moscow, New York and São Paulo. For HumGIS, *Selficity* can suggest how to ‘organize and analyze content from visual culture that may be described variously as “user-generated”, “vernacular”, or “in the wild”’ (Losh 2015:1647).

Recently, HumGIS applications have attempted to engage the subjectivities of place and urbanity as bracketed by literary, historical, cinematic and digital texts, in addition to the remediations of place diffracted by social media platforms and mobile computing devices (Cooper, Donaldson & Murrieta-Flores 2016; Stadler, Mitchell & Carleton 2015; Travis 2015a). SmartCities can be reframed in HumGIS as a human web of *places* rather than an abstract network of *spaces* spawned by ‘digital (spatial) activity generated by social media users’, such as the cyber spoor left behind by selfie culture (Roche 2015). *A Berlin Chronicle* (Benjamin 1999), a companion volume to Walter Benjamin’s

*Berlin Childhood* (1892–1940), perhaps anticipated such a type of HumGIS mapping:

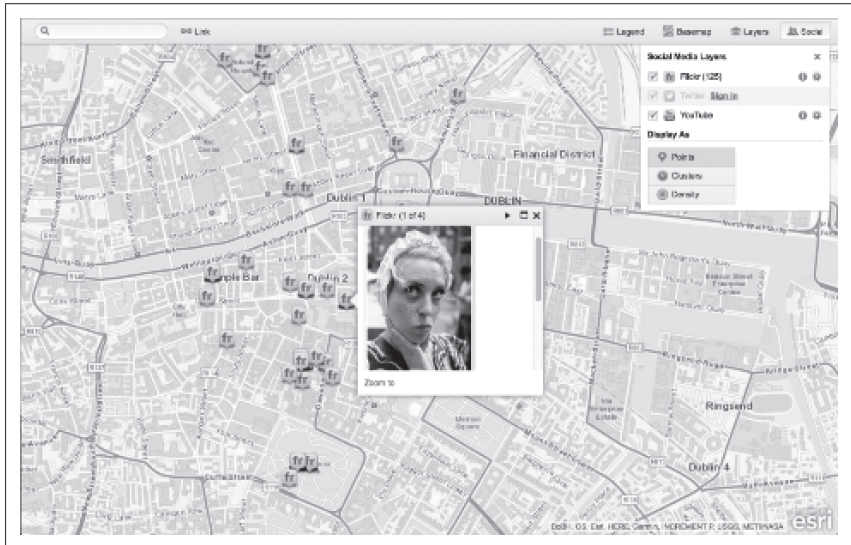
[P]laced with the idea of setting out the sphere of life-bios-graphically on a map. First, I envisaged an ordinary map, but now I would incline to a general staff's map of a city center, if such a thing existed [...] I have evolved a system of signs and on the grey background of such maps they would make a colorful show if I clearly marked in the houses of my friends and girl friend. (pp. 595–637)

A HumGIS *Selfie Bricolage* mapping of social media posts, layered with *deep mappings* of texts, oral testimonies, anthologies, memoirs and biographies draw upon Paul Ricoeur's (1992:159) observation that literature, born from the life of writers provides 'an unstable mixture of fabulation and actual experience' and thus 'an immense laboratory for thought experiments'. The next two sections will discuss HumGIS *Selfie Bricolage* mappings of Dublin and Los Angeles framed by the literary perspectives of James Joyce and Charles Bukowski, respectively.

## ■ Mapping Urban Affect: The Dublin Bloomsday Selfies

Frank Budgen (1972:123) recalled that '[Joyce wrote [*Ulysses*]] with a map of Dublin before him [and] calculated to a minute the time necessary for his characters to cover a given distance of the city'. In a comparable manner, HumGIS Bloomsday social media and deep mappings of *Ulysses* provide methods with which to add the flesh, affect and 'soul' of the human experience of place to the often-skeletal landscapes of urban analysis. We begin by discussing a HumGIS Bloomsday *Selfie Bricolage* mapping conducted on 16 June 2014. The geodatabase structure of the HumGIS was tabulated from the 1920 schema Joyce created to explain the 18 episodes of his kaleidoscopic novel to the Italian literary critic and translator Carlo Linati (Norris & Flint 2000):

[Joyce employed] free indirect discourse and stream-of-consciousness [*narrative techniques*] (the latter influenced by Edouard Desjardin's 1887 novel *Les Laurier's sent coupés*) [*in the Ulysses*] to imitate the



Source: Reprinted from Travis (2015b), with permission from the author Charles Travis.

**FIGURE 2.2:** Molly Bloomsday selfie.

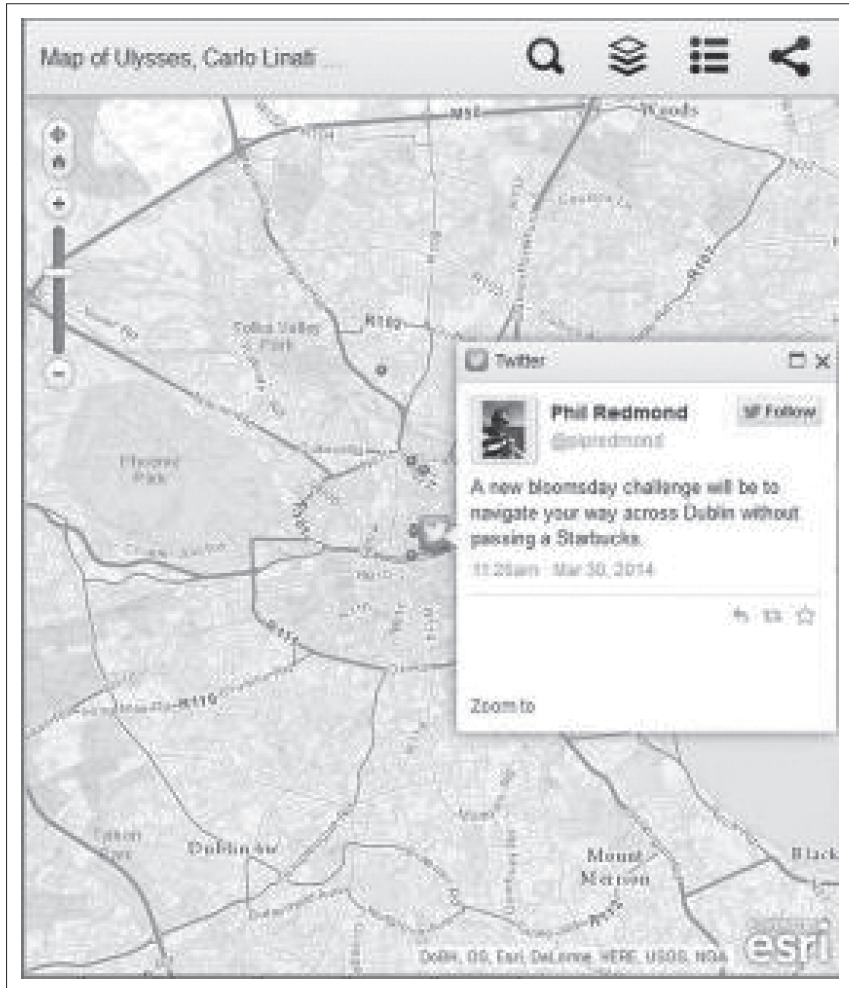
numerous ways in which the human mind ‘speaks’ to itself through complex fluid patterns, random interruptions, incomplete thoughts, half words and tangents. (n.p.)

Drawing on Jacques Derrida (1984), it can be argued that Joyce’s writing style anticipated the instantaneous and almost omnipresent type of digital communication that social media platforms afforded us in the early 20th century:

[Y]ou can say nothing that is not programmed on this 1000th generation computer – *Ulysses*, *Finnegans Wake* – beside which the current technology of our computers [...] remains a bricolage of a prehistoric child’s toys [...] its mechanisms are of a slowness incommensurable with the quasi infinite speed of the movements on Joyce’s cables. How could you calculate the speed with which a mark, a marked piece of information, is placed in contact with another in the same word or from one end of the book to the other? (p. 147)

Thus, parallels can be drawn between Joyce’s writing style, use of imagery, language and visual and the ubiquitous, subjectivities

of selfie posts. HumGIS *Selfie Bricolage* mappings provide a means to repurpose and reboot *Ulysses* as a contemporary interactive, free and indirect discourse (blending the ‘third person’ lens of the camera, and the ‘first person’ of the selfie subject) and digital media text (Figure 2.3).



Source: Reprinted from Travis (2015b), with permission from the author Charles Travis.

**FIGURE 2.3:** *Ulysses* as a contemporary interactive free indirect discourse digital media text.

For instance, Leopold Bloom muses in the novel's *Calypso* episode, 'Good puzzle would be to cross Dublin without passing a pub' (Joyce [1922] 1992), and a tweeter (Figure 2.4) in a pre-Bloomsday celebration on 30 March 2014 repurposes Joyce's text by posting 'A good puzzle would be to cross Dublin without passing a Starbucks!' Budgen (1972) posits that:

Joyce once famously [*boasted*] that his [*objective*] in [*writing*] *Ulysses* was 'to give a picture of Dublin so complete that if the city one day suddenly disappeared from the earth it could be reconstructed out of my book.' (p. 69)

Ironically, the HumGIS Selfie Bloomsday surveys illustrate that Joyce's book is annually being reconstructed (partially by selfie posts) in the city of Dublin. Joyce's depiction of the city in 1904 is based upon the perceptions, experiences and intersecting labyrinthine journeys across the city of 22-year-old student Stephen Dedalus and 38-year-old advertising salesman Leopold Bloom from 08:00 to 16:00 on 16 and 17 June 1904.



Source: Reprinted from Travis (2015b), with permission from the author Charles Travis.

**FIGURE 2.4:** Flickr, YouTube and Twitter Bloomsday selfie posts.



The HumGIS social media Bloomsday surveys conducted on 16 June 2014 revealed that the locations with the highest selfie activity were near ‘Davy Byrne’s Public House on Duke Street in Dublin and Joyce’s Martello Tower in Sandycove’ (Travis 2015a:942). The activities recorded by Travis (2015a:945–947) were as follows:

- I. **Davy Byrne’s Pub** (*Lestrygonians*, 13:00–14:00)
  - **12:50 Nassau Street/Spar Shop/Porterhouse:** There are a lot of people in Dublin wearing funny hats. It must be Bloomsday.
  - **14:29 Duke Lane Upper:** Bloomsday in Dublin.
  - **17:15 Duke Lane Upper:** There are about 50 quiet elderly ladies getting rowdy in Davy Byrnes.
  - **17:25 Davy Byrne’s pub:** ‘Bloomsday at Davy Byrnes can’t be beaten’.
- II. **Joyce Martello Tower at Sandycove** (*Telemachus*, 08:00–09:00)
  - **06:46 Sandycove:** ‘A Grand day for a skyte ‘round Dublin #Bloomsday’
  - **13:48 Sandycove:** ‘Not even Marilyn Monroe’ forgets #bloomsday. Sun is shining (sp) and it’s a day where we remember one of Ireland’s most famous writers.’ (Figure 2.5)
  - **19:43 Sandycove:** ‘Warm sunshine marrying over the sea [...] & the views are epic.’

Travis (2015a) adds:

The tower and the pub were also key sites on 16 June 1954 when writers Patrick Kavanagh, Flann O’Brien and Anthony Cronin inaugurated the first official Bloomsday celebration in an ill-fated attempt to re-create Stephen Dedalus’s journey across Dublin in a horse-drawn carriage. Commencing at the Martello tower in Sandycove, the literary sojourn meandered to a few public houses on its way into the city. Either due to boredom, drink, acrimony, or a combination of the three, the celebration imploded at Davy Byrne’s pub on Duke Street, the site of Leopold Bloom’s Gorgonzola cheese lunch in the *Lestrygonians* episode. (p. 942)

A composite image (Figure 2.6) harvested during the survey reveals the posting of a black and white photograph of Kavanagh



Source: Reprinted from Travis (2015b), with permission from the author Charles Travis.

**FIGURE 2.5:** 13:48 Sandycove Joyce's Martello Tower Bloomsday selfie post.

and Cronin dating back to 6 June 1954 on 'the first Bloomsday juxtaposed with a celebration outside Davy Byrne's pub on Bloomsday 2014. It seems that Joyce's identification of the *Oesophagus* as the body organ symbol for this episode was apt', remarks Travis (2015a:942). In *The Making of Ulysses*, Budgen (1972) recalled that watching Joyce composing his novel:

[W]as to see an engineer at work with compass and slide-rule, a surveyor with theodolite and measuring chain, or more Ulyssean perhaps, a ship's officer taking the sun, reading the log and calculating current drift and leeway. (p. 123)

Homer's *Odyssey* was Joyce's primary influence. However, Budgen's maritime metaphor is apt. After reading *Ulysses* in April 1920, the poet Ezra Pound declared the novel a magnificent new *Inferno* in full sail (quoted in Read 1970). The medieval poem about Dante's descent with the Roman poet Virgil to the centre



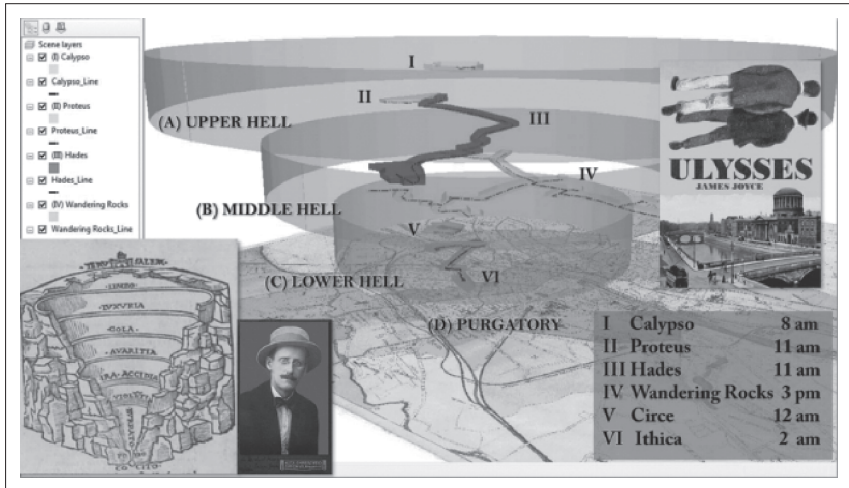
Source: Reprinted from Travis (2015b), with permission from the author Charles Travis.

**FIGURE 2.6:** Bloomsday 1954 and 2014.

of hell also served as a structuring device for *Ulysses*. Joyce consulted a paperback edition of the *Inferno* to reference the poem’s literary and historical sources, people, places, events and geographical locations (Helsing 1968; Reynolds 1978; Slade 1976). Joyce, Travis (2015a) explains, then narratively:

[P]lotted (contiguously with his Homeric structural device) the paths that Bloom (as Virgil) and Dedalus (as Dante) create across the city on 16 June 1904 as a symbolic descent down through three levels of hell, to the foot of Mount Purgatory, where on the doorstep of Bloom’s house on Eccles Street in the early morning hours of 17 June, the pair gain a vision of the constellation of paradise. (p. 930)

The *Ulysses* GIS *deep mapping* model shown in Figure 2.7 visualises, plots and transposes multi-temporal and spatial geo-narratives from Homer’s *Odyssey* and Dante’s *Inferno* on a



Source: Reprinted from Travis (2015b), with permission from the author Charles Travis.

**FIGURE 2.7:** GIS Deep Map *Ulysses* Model of *The Odyssey* and the *Inferno* in Dublin.

digitised 1903 *Thom's Map of Dublin* (the map Joyce used himself when composing the novel). The model draws in part on the view of GIS as an inquiry space and provides a mapping frame to analyse and interpret geo-narratives 'in terms of three main elements: action and interaction (personal and social), time (past, present, and future), and space (physical places or the storyteller's places)' (Kwan & Ding 2008:449). Engaging Mikhail Bakhtin's 'Forms of time and of the chronotope in the novel' (1981) in such an 'inquiry space' aids the analysis of a GIS *deep mapping* model of Joyce's novel by hermeneutically extirpating the architectonics of the *Odyssey* and the *Inferno* which he buried in the structure of *Ulysses*. Bakhtin (1981) named the intrinsic connectedness of the temporal and spatial relationship expressed artistically in literature, the *chronotope* (literally 'time-space') stating:

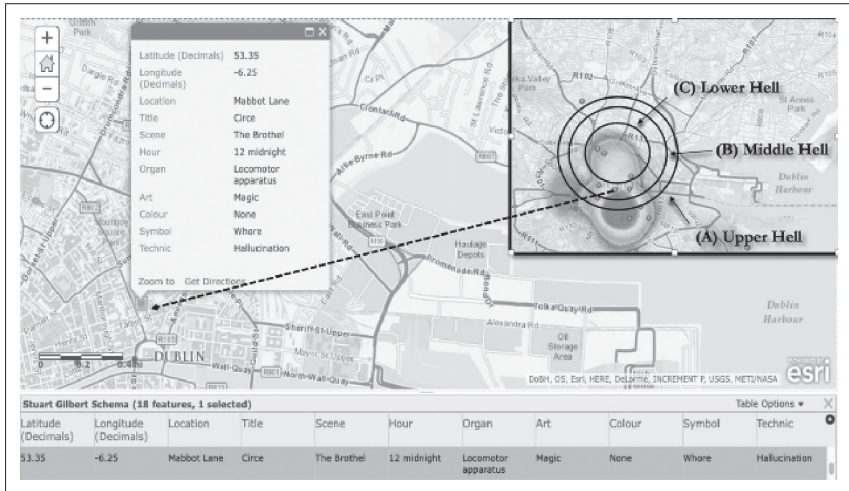
This term [...] was introduced as part of Einstein's Theory of Relativity [and] we are borrowing it for literary criticism almost as a metaphor [...] What counts for us is the fact that it expresses the inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space). (p. 84)

Avrom Fleishmann (1967:378) observes that it is a 'striking historical coincidence' that *Ulysses* was written (1914–1921) in the same year as *General Theory of Relativity* (1915–1917). The *chronotopes* in the 18 episodes of *Ulysses* can be viewed as 'optic[s]' through which to read Joyce's work as a series of 'x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system' from which it springs. Joycean *chronotopes* reveal the Western 'phenomenology of historical space' that 'carefully differentiates each historical moment' in the novel's 18 episodes (Bakhtin 1981:425–426; Hirschkop 1989:13).

In contrast to Homer's heroic geography, Dante's theological *terza-rima* envisions a medieval Catholic cosmology where *chronotopes* act as the eschatological function of an ecclesiastical globe, cleaved by nine levels of an inverted cone fissure corkscrewing down to the pit of hell. Discussing Dante's *Inferno*, Bakhtin (1981:157–158) notes 'the temporal logic of this vertical world consists in the sheer simultaneity of all that occurs,' instigating a 'struggle between living historical time and the extra temporal other-worldly ideal'. The suture lines connecting *Ulysses*' 18 episodes unfold 'spasmodically' like 'a line with 'knots', providing the novel with a 'distinctive type of temporal sequence' (Bakhtin 1981:113). Providing a spatiotemporal heuristic stitched from the narratives of the *Odyssey* and the *Inferno*, GIS deep mapping of Joyce's novel allows us to consider the vagaries of human behaviour over the course of Western history and the breadth of its geography. The episode in *Ulysses* most closely associated with mental health and hygiene issues and an urban descent into acute madness in the novel is *Circe*.

Composed as a theatre script, the *Circe* episode depicts Bloom and Dedalus' separate paths converging at Bella Cohen's brothel in 'Nighttown'. We can see from the Bloomsday 2014 survey snapshot in Figure 2.8 that the *Circe* episode corresponds to the middle level of hell in the GIS Deep Map *Ulysses* Model. Travis (2015a) notes that:

[/]n the previous episode *Oxen of the Sun* which occurs at 10 p.m., both men find themselves in separate company at the National Maternity Hospital on Holles Street. Bloom is visiting Mina Purfoy



Source: Reprinted from Travis (2015b), with permission from the author Charles Travis.

**FIGURE 2.8:** *Circe*, the brothel of madness.

who is in labour, and Dedalus, on a drinking spree with Trinity College medical students, sets out from the hospital on an absinthe-fuelled pub crawl before heading to Dublin's north-side brothel district. Bloom, a friend of Dedalus's father, follows the stumbling student through the Amiens Street Railway Station (now Connolly) into the north-inner-city red-light district with the ironic aim to save the younger Dedalus from lechery and corruption. In the brothel, Dedalus is terrorized by an alcohol-induced hallucination of his mother's rotting corpse rising from the grave. (pp. 936–937)

He smashes the chandelier in Bella's parlour with his ashplant walking stick, and Joyce writes that 'Time's livid final flame leaps and, in the following darkness, the ruin of all space, shattered glass and toppling masonry' ([1922] 1992:683). Stephen flees Bella's brothel, and Bloom is left to haggle over the damaged chandelier. Rushing out of the brothel out into the street, Bloom finds Dedalus in a heated argument with the British soldiers Carr and Compton. With a crowd gathering, Dedalus receives a punch from the soldiers for his exhortations (Travis 2015a:937). Like the damned in the *Inferno*, phantasmagorical voices in *Circe* hint at

military conflagrations that will raze the city during the 1916 Easter Rising (Joyce [1922] 1992):

(DISTANT VOICES: Dublin's burning! Dublin's burning! On fire, on fire!) (*Brimstone fires spring up. Dense clouds roll past. Heavy Gatling guns boom. Pandemonium. Troops deploy. Gallop of hoofs. Artillery ...*). (p. 694; *emphasis in original*)

Travis (2015a) further explains how:

[*The Dublin constabulary*] arrive, people disperse and Bloom tends to the injuries of the younger man. Bella Cohen's was based on the infamous Becky Cooper brothel located in the red-light district known as the Monto in Dublin. Famous throughout Europe from the early 19th century, Catholic tradition and constabulary tolerance conspired in 'Nighttown' to allow whole streets of houses to be used openly as brothels. (p. 937)

Writing in the journal *Australasian Psychiatry*, Robert Kaplan (2002) observes that:

[I]n the *Nighttown* chapter, madness abounds in every form, from the mentally disabled to the maniacally grandiose. The chapter was deliberately written in a shadowy, hallucinatory style with characters undergoing multiple transformations. (p. 173)

In addition, Alison Torn (2011) notes that by engaging with more ancient chronotopes (such as those in play in Homer's *Odyssey* and Dante's *Inferno*), modernist linear conceptions of time-space are rejected, and meaning and recovery are constructed from illness, chaos and distress.

In a contemporary digital mapping of Ulysses on the streetscapes of 21st century Dublin, *Flickr* and *YouTube* recorded the highest number of selfie and SNS posts mapped during the HumGIS Bloomsday survey on 16 June 2014 (74 and 41, respectively). The heat mapping of these numbers in Figure 2.9 illustrates that the circle of upper hell from the GIS Deep Map of *Ulysses* correlates with the highest cluster of social media activity on the day. This location also corresponds with the Bloomsday celebration posts from Davy Byrne's pub location in the *Lestrygonians* episode of *Ulysses*. In Dante's *Inferno*, one can



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**FIGURE 2.9:** Social media and selfie ‘heat map’ with transposition of the levels of hell from hell charted in GIS Deep Map *Ulysses* Model. Inset of Upper Hell schema from Dante (1974).

see from the inset, ‘The Gluttonous’ occupy a ring in upper hell, and it is ironic that the social media and selfie posts of Bloomsday imbibing coincides with this level of hell from the GIS Deep Map *Ulysses* Model. Dissolving the Kantian distinction that creates an epistemological wall between the disciplines of history and geography, the multiple lenses of GIS, *deep mapping*, the *chronotope*, SNS and the selfie help illuminate Betty Nowviskie’s (2015) argument that:

[P]icturing histories anew will require us to go beyond big-data algorithmic analysis and visualization. If we seek a rich and humanistic [*digital humanities*] capable of meeting more than the technical challenges of our massive geo-temporal datasets, we must develop design approaches that address recent theoretical mergings of background and foreground, space, and time. (p. 12)



## ■ **Public Mental Hygiene and the Anti-Selfie: Charles Bukowski's 'Dirty Realism' and Skid Row, Los Angeles**

The brushstrokes of 'dirty realism' coloured the work of the Los Angeles 'Skid Row' poet and writer Charles 'Hank' Bukowski. From *Flower, Fist and Bestial Wail*, his first full length collection of poetry, to his final *Pulp*, Bukowski's lyrical use of 'Dirty Realism' humorously painted the impoverished lives of prostitutes, drinkers, bums, writers and 'miscreants of every description' (Madigan 1996). Exploring the 'belly-side of contemporary life' (Buford 1983), Bukowski's poetry and prose focused on 'local details, the nuances, the little disturbances in language and gesture' drawing attention to the:

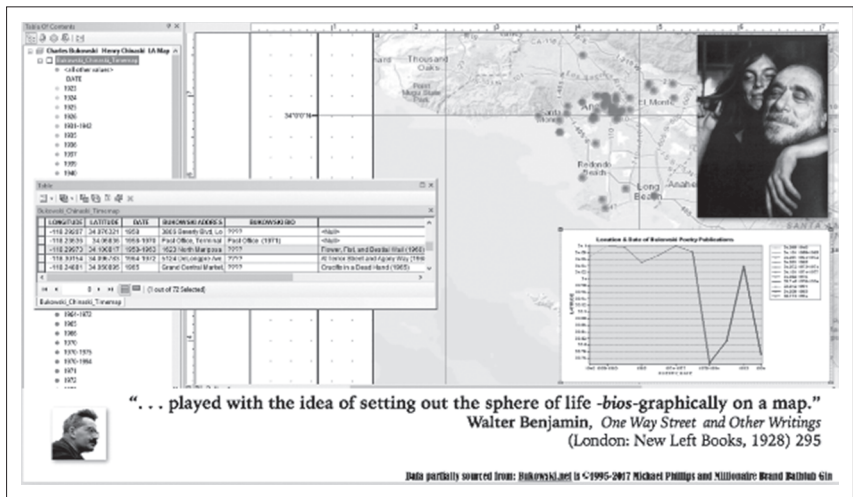
[U]nadorned, unfurnished, low-rent tragedies about people who watch daytime television, read cheap romances [...] drink a lot and are often in trouble: for stealing a car, breaking a window, pickpocketing a wallet. (p. 4)

Born in Andernach, Germany, Bukowski moved with his family to South-Central Los Angeles when he was three years old. Growing up, Bukowski suffered an extreme case of acne and was bullied by his father and his classmates. An old brownstone near 21st Street and La Brea Avenue housed the local library of his childhood and provided him with a haven in his early teens where he discovered and learnt to admire the writers Sinclair Lewis, D. H. Lawrence and Ernest Hemingway. After Bukowski's first taste of alcohol as a teenager (provided by his friend William 'Baldy' Mullinax, who appears in the semi-autobiographical novel *Ham and Rye* as 'Eli LaCrosse'), Bukowski realised that drinking was 'going to help me for a very long time' (2009). He graduated from Los Angeles High School and attended Los Angeles City College for two years, taking courses in art, journalism and literature, before dropping out at the break of the Second World War. In the 1940s and 1950s, he bummed around the US working as an

itinerant labourer (depicted in his 1975 novel *Factotum*) before returning to California. As Debritto (2013) notes:

[I]n 1967 Bukowski began writing for the alternative Los Angeles paper *Open City*. Bukowski's work was published alongside 'coverage of student unrest, the New Left, black power, civic and police corruption, the draft resistance, drug information, and adverts for sexual contacts and services' and he garnered minor cult fame because of his raw, screaming, profane and provocative poetry and prose. (n.p.)

As a result, Bukowski became known as the 'Skid Row poet' because of his depiction of seedy urban landscapes, populated by the unemployed, by drunks and by prostitutes. As the HumGIS map illustrates (Figure 2.10), he produced much of his poetry along 34°0'0" (Degrees/Minutes/Seconds [DMS]) latitude, as it runs through East Hollywood and the other grittier parts of Central Los Angeles. This location coincides with Suzanne Stein's 'social' street photography exhibit, *Downtown Los Angeles: Skid Row*. Stein's work provides a visual counterpoint to Bukowski's poetry, in addition to documenting how the de-institutionalisation



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**FIGURE 2.10:** Charles Bukowski's 'Skid Row Latitude' of 34°0'0".

of the mentally ill over the past 20 years has caused city centres, particularly in San Francisco and Los Angeles, to become outdoor psychiatric units.

Francesca Cronan (2016) writes:

[H]oping that her photographs will ‘expose’ the way the marginalized are treated by society, Stein wants people to register the obvious: victimising those on the edge is part of what leads to homelessness and drug abuse in the first place. Ignoring the issue only makes it worse, and so we must confront it head-on. (n.p.)

In many ways, Stein’s work speaks to the emergence of anti-selfie culture which according to Alise Tifentale and Lev Manovich (2016) is the digital snap:

[S]hows person’s body *but not her/his face* [...] By not displaying the author’s face, these photos clearly signal



Source: Cronan, F., 2016, Awards, Skid Row, Downtown, Los Angeles, viewed 11 October 2018, from <https://www.lensculture.com/articles/suzanne-stein-downtown-los-angeles-skid-row>. © Suzanne Stein (used under fair use conditions).

**FIGURE 2.11:** The anti-selfie ‘Jerry, Jerry’ from downtown Los Angeles: Skid Row.

their goal – to show person's participation in a situation or an experience. You are not the disembodied eye observing the world from the distance as in Renaissance perspective, but the body that is part of the pictured world. (p. 15; *author's added emphasis*)

Anti-selfie culture, it seems, is a reaction against the ubiquity of the selfie trope influenced by Kim Kardashian. Instead of objectifying the subject, it shifts the habituated perceptual focus of the selfie and its digital memories and asks questions like '[w]hat is the difference between selfie and non-selfie (anti-selfie, as it were)? Where is the division between a self and non-self (un-self)? The body and the environment?' (Orlova 2016:3). Drawing on the work of Marcel Proust, Samuel Beckett ([1930] 1970) notes that the process of disentangling the act of perception from memory and habit is:

[L]onger and more difficult than the turning inside out of an eyelid, and which consists in the imposition of our own familiar soul on the terrifying soul of our surroundings. (pp. 40–41)

Stein's visual style illuminates this dimension of the anti-selfie perceptual foci: images of the marginalised, and cast-off, that act as a counter-aesthetic to the narcissistic foci of selfie culture. Stein describes the way she shoots as a 'visceral reaction' to what she sees in front of her. 'Something will grab me: sometimes an emotional pull, sometimes an aesthetic one. It's an energy, which usually revolves around one person', she adds (Cronan 2016). Skid Row Los Angeles has been acknowledged as 'Buk territory' and, like Stein's visual documentation, Bukowski's work distils the personas and places in his poetry and prose from his various experiences and guises as a Skid Row bum, wage-slave in dead-end jobs, post-office employee and charity-case suffering from alcoholic psychosis and liver malfunction (Madigan 1996). Bukowski moved to the seaside suburb of San Pedro in 1978 but lived for most of his 73 years alongside the 'Skid Row latitude' of 34°0'0" as it bifurcated the sweltering, smog-filled belly of downtown

Los Angeles. His piece, *Nut Ward East of Hollywood*, describes navigating the milieu (Bukowski 2008):

We finished the wine and then walked down to Shakey's and drank the deep brown beer by the pitcherful and watched the old-time fights - we saw Louis get dumped by the Dutchman; the third Zale-Rocky G. fight; Braddock-Baer; Dempsey-Firpo, all of them, and then they put on some old Laurel and Hardy flicks. (p. 31)

Bukowski reflected literally on what had happened in his life and his experience living in the bottom rung of the American society. The following lines from the poem *The New Place* illustrate Bukowski's (1976) own 'sense of place' regarding this lowest rung:

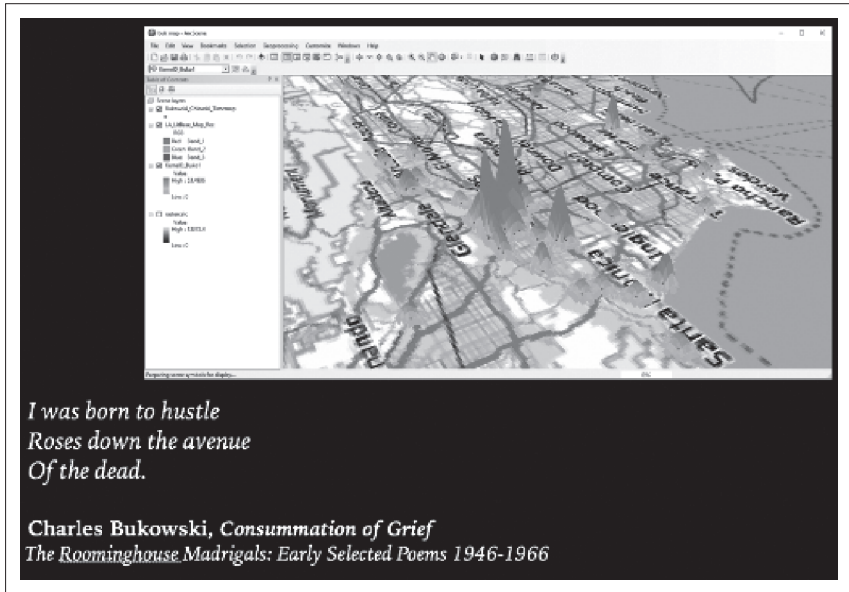
the manager wears all white  
has a 52 inch color tv  
and sits in the garden with her  
x-alcoholic husband and speaks  
of the price of red rose potatoes. (p. 37)

The visual topography depicted in the HumGIS map in Figure 2.12 illustrates the predominant locations of Bukowski's life experiences and poetic production. The highest and lowest 'peaks and canyons' of his life were lived along the anti-selfie 'Skid Row latitude' of 34°0'0" (DMS) and is captured by Bukowski's (2009) poem *Consummation of Grief*:

I was born to hustle  
Roses down the avenue  
Of the dead. (n.p.)

In *My Kind of Place* (1978), Bukowski describes what it is like to be one of the *habitués* of Skid Row, living under the famous hillside sign that signifies to the world the illusory American dreamland:

I can see the 'Hollywood' sign on the mountain  
and I walk the streets in the late afternoons  
dressed in blue jeans and a  
black t-shirt.  
it's warm and easy and there's not much to do.  
the black whores take up most of the tables at the STAR BURGER  
and I walk past ZODY'S  
carrying a 6-inch switchblade in my pocket. (pp. 96-97)



Source: Reprinted from Travis (2015b), with permission from the author Charles Travis.

**FIGURE 2.12:** Charles Bukowski's Skid Row latitude 'peaks and canyons of experience'.

Bukowski claims that when he started reading literature almost nothing he found 'related to me or the streets or to the people around me' (Rhodes 2009:398) and as a result disavowed the 'senses of place' espoused by the American literary schools of his generation (Debritto 2013):

Those Black Mountain School snobs, let them smell their own turds! The Kenyon boys, let them write their celluloid senseless inoffensive poems' [...]. [T]o me; the entire poetic scene seems dominated by obvious and soulless and ridiculous and lonely jackasses [...] from the university group at the one end to the beat mob at the other [...] they go from creators to being entertainers. (p. 23)

Despite Bukowski's conviction that academics are 'parasites on the cerebral who rung texts out to dry to satisfy moribund preconceptions' (Malone 2003:43), his work has outlined the affective and deplorable public mental hygiene dimensions of

the city (such as in Los Angeles and San Francisco) with all its warts and human problems, often elided in the *homo economicus* model of rationality that anchors much of the contemporary SmartCity techno-discourses.

## ■ Conclusion

The selfie (in visual or discursive form) serves as a geo-locational datum of memory, immortalised by computer code and the silicon chip. It is part of the SmartCity discourse. Both visually and discursively, the GIS surveys of both selfie and anti-selfie cultures provide a lens with which to parse and critique the SmartCity discourse. Within both cultures, the images captured provide an urban digital spoor (often coded with latitude and longitude by smartphone and camera GPS units) with which to track and plot the intimate nooks and crannies of the affective, narcissistic and mentally roiling city. The geo-locational ability of smartphone produced images, such as selfies and social media posts, provide us with human coordinates in space and time. GIS provide us with a means to harvest, map and model such data to track and plot the affective, and psychological dimensions of urban space, with an eye towards public health interventions regarding mental hygiene, place perception and language. Lefebvre (1991:194–198) warned of the *cyberanthrope* who ‘disqualifies humanism in thinking and action,’ by purging the ‘illusions of subjectivity: creativity, happiness, passion’ and severely treating ‘the dramatic, the historic, the dialectic, the imaginary, the possible-impossible’ by living ‘in close proximity with the machine’. Both Joyce and Bukowski’s works (and their respective depictions of Dublin and Los Angeles) provide a means to inoculate our cyborg, GIS engagements. In *Ulysses*, Joyce magically transforms Leopold Bloom ‘into a kind of Luddite Lord Mayor of Dublin’ who delivers an imaginary speech denouncing capitalists and their machines (Meadowsong 2010):

Machines is their cry, their chimera, their panacea. Laboursaving apparatuses, supplanters, bugbears, manufactured monsters for mutual murder, hideous hobgoblins produced by a horde of capitalistic lusts upon our prostituted labour. (p. 59)

On the other hand, Bukowski has been described as the ‘only major post-War American writer who has denied the efficacy of the American dream’, and his work is viewed as ‘typically individualist, anti-formal, anarchistic’ in its critique of the ‘Protestant work ethic, American market capitalism, and how these things affect the individual and society’ (Madigan 1996: 447–461). We can draw upon literary and digital texts in GIS, as Siu and Goodchild (2001) suggest:

[B]y reconceiving GIS as media, we can transcend the instrumental rationality currently rampant among both GIS developers and GIS practitioners and cultivate a more holistic approach to the non-linear relationships between GIS and society. (pp. 387–390)

Indeed, in our digital age, texts include verbal, visual, oral and numerical data, and manifest as maps, prints, music, archives of recorded sound, films, videos, computer-generated and stored information, and everything from epigraphy to the latest types of discography (McKenzie 1999; Muri 2016).

Therefore, Bakhtin’s literary theory can be operationalised by GIS media to facilitate data analysis that provides chronotopic perspectives on how society, place, space and time are enmeshed in large, crowd-sourced digital age text collections (Adams & Gahegan 2016). By drawing upon GIS, the selfie and literary theory and techniques can be utilised to facilitate holistic SmartCity approaches with innovative and novel means to address issues concerning public affect and mental hygiene. As Sharon Mattern observes (2016), such an approach draws upon ancient and established precedents:

[W]riting and urbanization developed concurrently in the ancient world, and those early scripts – on clay tablets, mud-brick walls, and landforms of various types – were used to record transactions, mark territory, celebrate ritual, and embed contextual information in landscape. (pp. 310–331)



In similar ways (Mitchell 2003), GIS selfie and literary deep mappings of writers like Joyce and Bukowski could contribute to:

[C]ities and buildings like films [*being*] scored by famous composers with the soundtrack electronically edited, on the fly [*plotting*] everything of relevance at a particular location (for example, a historic site or a crime scene) [*by allowing such data types to be*] retrieved and arrayed to provide a comprehensive, electronic *mise-en-scène*'. (pp. 123-124)

# The Selfie as Articulation of, and Response to, Indifference(s)

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## ■ Introduction

This chapter explores the ways in which the selfie can be regarded as an articulation of, and response to, various indifferences. Slightly skewed, this first sentence might rather read as follows: Indifference is a layered concept with many meanings across different contexts and environments, and the rise of the selfie – currently the ultimate act of visual individual self-representation on social media – plays a role in exposing indifference, responding to and articulating indifference. The selfie positions the individual as the central figure in exposing,

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responding to and articulating indifference. Selfie culture is the realm of the post-cosmetic; here, the private must be made public, and the polished personas people cultivate so carefully must reveal some measure of empathy (Lovink 2011:13).

To say that social network sites and social media enjoy great visibility and cultural-economic prevalence in many contemporary (predominantly Western) societies is at once stating the obvious as much as underestimating the sheer proliferation of forms of social media data capturing and sharing. Those who support the democratising of the Internet as a way of making knowledge and opportunity accessible will hail social media as a platform of communication. As Fuchs (2014) explains:

[C]ommunication is certainly an important aspect of a society free of dominations. It is, however, in capitalism also a form of interaction, in which ideology is, with the help of the mass media, made available to dominated groups. Communication is not automatically progressive. (p. 19)

Communication is not a neutral process free from the restrictions and prescriptions of ideology; communication occurs through social media in specific 'techno-social systems in which technological structures interact with social relations and human activities in complex ways. Power structures shape the media and the social relations of the media' (Fuchs 2014:49).

In terms of social relations and power, Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013) state that:

[S]ocial network sites 'often operate as the digital equivalent of gated communities, protecting participants from online contact with people outside their social circle as much as enabling easier and quicker communications with their friends and families'. (pp. 192-193)

Social media can be insular and can result in constrictive in-group/out-group dynamics which occur to the detriment of the individual user, who is further entrenched into a false sense of community with online 'friends' while loosening his or her hold on what happens outside of this community.

Of course, according to Marwick (2015), there is much sharing in these groups as:

[7]he ability to replicate digital photographs, the integration of cameras into mobile phones, and the popularity of sites like Flickr, Imgur, Facebook, and Instagram facilitate and encourage sharing photos with others. (p. 142)

Of all the content being shared, selfies are the most visible, and the most culturally prominent. As Holiday et al. (2016:184) explain, the digital selfie has a prominent communication purpose, and it is more readily shareable than any other photographic genre.

If communication is not neutral, and selfies have a communication purpose across social media and social networking sites, then selfies are certainly not neutral. If a selfie depicts a young man eating breakfast at a local artisanal bakery (*#bestbreakfastever*, *#avoforever*, *#happyplace*, *#blessed* and so forth), there are also values that are being communicated. Often, these images of self-representation evoke associations of exaggerated indulgence; it is not sufficient to have breakfast, but every breakfast must be framed as the best breakfast ever consumed by me, the taker of the selfie. It is little surprise that cultural critics see the selfie as the most powerful expression of contemporary narcissism (Goldberg 2017:2).

A selfie is a 'self-portrait typically taken with the front-facing camera of a smartphone, and shared through social media, effectively automating the social contact once required to procure efficiently a photograph of oneself' (Goldberg 2017:2). Even when critics note that selfies can have positive, productive functions – such as the production of new social relationalities – those critics feel the need to concede that even in those instances selfies can be associated with expressions of narcissism (Goldberg 2017:3). In addition to the approaches to selfies already outlined above, Goldberg (2017:4) adds that a more academic approach can consider the selfie as having 'radical political agency, of speaking for oneself'. This point is central in understanding the selfie in relation to Badiou, as I will show later in the discussion.

There is a rise in scholarship on selfies. As Patricia Routh (2015) describes it:

[T]he word 'selfie' summarises a particular kind of cultural and photographic practice that is motivated by a combination of the agency and aspirational biases of the selfie producer and where they prefer to share on social networks. (p. 4)

Routh's definition foregrounds the individual as creator of the selfie, and as an individual who anticipates a specific audience. Selfie creators and their audiences are constantly on their mobile devices, negating the already outmoded idea of a difference between being online and offline. As Przybylski and Weinstein (2012:244) reported following two controlled experiments, even just the presence of mobile communication technology is enough to disrupt or disturb human relationships. Individuals' phones have become intrinsic parts of themselves and of their social networks to the point where even interpersonal intimacy – traditionally the domain of privacy and non-intrusion – is intermittently interrupted by mobile phone use (Przybylski & Weinstein 2012:238).

Particularly, on online platforms such as Instagram, selfies have taken the form of advertorial imagery, or saleable objects (Abidin 2016:7). Marwick (2015:138) confirms that on Instagram, users' selfies 'obsessively document outfits, cars, vacations, and landscapes; and [they] fill their posts with hashtags like *#instafamous* and *#followforfollow*'. Halpern, Katz and Carril (2017:115) find that image sharing – specifically selfie sharing – on platforms such as Instagram is the sharing of a much idealised, enhanced and even fantasy-based persona. These idealised images cannot perfectly align with the selfie taker's lived reality, and for this reason 'problems [arise] from a tension between the picture-taker's self-perception and [a] partner's perception of the picture-taker as influenced by the selfie' (2017:115). Evidently, selfies – taken, shared, commented upon and diverging from lived reality to often favour an ideal or enhanced image – are as maligned as they are celebrated.

The chapter firstly introduces, contextualises and then discusses the selfie, social media and notions of indifference with due reference to recent publications such as *Selfie* (Storr 2017)

and *Filling the Void: Emotion, Capitalism & Social Media* (Gilroy-Ware 2017). Then, I discuss the selfie in relation to *global structural indifference* and *localised interpersonal indifference*. By tracing the selfie through these indifferences, the selfie and I arrive at a more hopeful point: the selfie as read through Alain Badiou's notion of indifference (cf. Watkins 2017). Badiou's notion of indifference is very different to the earlier indifferences, and I will demonstrate how it is in relation to this latter indifference that the selfie exists as an object of fascination and contemplation. I bring the selfie into conversation with Badiou's notion of indifference to see which new readings and understandings of the selfie can these linkages offer. The chapter is not a detailed interrogation of Badiou's oeuvre, or a critical engagement with the range of his concepts, nor does this chapter offer a substantial introduction to Badiou's philosophy. My use of Badiou here is limited to what Badiou – meaning Badiou's thought – can bring to selfies, with an emphasis on the selfie in relation to indifference.<sup>19</sup>

## ■ Social Media, Selfie Culture and Indifference

Self-representation is never politically or aesthetically neutral, and selfies themselves have recently been examined from overtly political positions, including but not limited to frameworks of phenomenology and surveillance studies, but also with reference to key figures such as Paul Virilio (cf. Fuggle 2015). Grant Bollmer and Katherine Guinness (2017:157) suggest that when one discusses the selfie, one should be more thoughtful – 'slower' – in one's analysis. The authors put forward a phenomenological approach to selfie studies that encompasses aspects such as

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19. Previously, Carolin Gerlitz (2016:21) briefly brought Badiou into social media studies, emphasising standardisation, valorisation and social media platform specificity; these platforms 'enable specific socio-technical conditions for data valuation' (2016:33). The brief inclusion of Badiou in Gerlitz's (2016) study is rather oblique, as the article – while an informative study which positions 'multivalence as a key characteristic of platform data' – focuses on big data matters of platform multivalence (2016:35).

'slower' approach, and they highlight that the selfie should first and foremost be considered as a 'relational practice that defines a figure as distinct from a background'. For Henry Giroux (2015:155), social media have contributed to a reconceptualising of freedom: where freedom was once closely tied to the individual's realisation of his or her social responsibility, it has more recently become 'an exercise in self-development'. Giroux (2015:156) sees those individuals who are participants in this self-development exercise as constantly seeking self-gratification, instead of consciously pursuing the actualisation of a just society. Seen this way, selfie culture can offer a distraction from political actuality. Even when contemporary technologies are ostensibly utilised towards a community or society instead of emphasising the individual, these technologies can only offer a reaffirmation of the individual's complacency in an existence which is overall characterised by consumption and commodification. It is worth quoting Giroux (2015) at length here, as he details several criticisms of selfie culture before also highlighting how selfies can be politically acute:

Selfie culture pushes against the constructive cultivation of fantasy, imagination and memory, allowing such capacities to deteriorate in a constant pursuit of commodified pleasure and the need to heighten the visibility and performance of the self. The culture of atomisation and loneliness in neoliberal societies is intensified by offering the self as the only source of enjoyment, exchange and wonder. How else to explain the bizarre behaviour of individuals who have their faces altered in order to look good in selfies? (p. 159)

Here, Giroux describes a position from which selfies are the enemy of the imagination, and where selfies anchor their practitioners in themselves as products and performers of neoliberalism. Giroux (2015) continues:

Selfie culture is increasingly shaped within a mode of temporality in which quick turnovers and short attention spans become the measure of how one occupies the ideological and affective spaces of the market, with its emphasis on speed, instant gratification, fluidity and disposability [...]. [7]he cheapening of subjectivity and everyday life are further intensified by social identities now fashioned out of brands, commodities, relationships, and images that are used up and discarded as quickly as possible. (p. 160)

Giroux emphasises that selfies are shaped in time and operate in short time spans of instantaneity in a culture of regular and consistent disposal. Finally, Giroux (2015 [*author's added emphasis*]) acknowledges that there is more to selfie culture than a reckless succumbing of one's image to the mechanisms of neoliberalism and self-inflation:

There is another trajectory of selfie culture at work that refuses the retreat into a false sense of empowerment, and *embraces modes of self-representation as a political act intent on redefining the relationship between the personal and the social in ways that are firmly wedded to social change* [...] For example, that are women of colour, transgender and disabled people, who are using selfies to promote communities of healing and empowerment, while also challenging a culture of cruelty that marks those who are different by virtue of their age, disability sexual orientation and race as disposable. (p. 163)

Crucially, Giroux touches on a timely and conceptually vital point: selfies can be politically productive on the basis of difference, where those individuals and groups marked by larger society as different can respond and challenge existing hegemonies. These selfies can then be read as images of resistance, images that in a culture of image disposability can promote awareness not necessarily only by their individual qualities but also by their sheer volume. These selfies respond to political indifference, the experience of being ignored, silenced and otherwise marginalised by dominant power. Clearly, selfie culture can serve as articulations of anti-indifference. I use 'anti-indifference' here rather than awareness or political consciousness as the selfie, and the mass collection of selfies in selfie culture, to foreground the selfie's challenge to different kinds of political indifferences. As Warfield (2016:7) describes it, 'selfie production often reveals a kind of agency that emerges as the result of small shifts and reconfigurations of gendered apparatuses of bodily production'. Here, Warfield (2016) cites Karen Barad's:

[A]gential realist discussion of touch [*which*] provides a material discursive treatment of phenomena and thus attention to the politics of measurements and categories involved in explications of social media phenomena. (p. 8)



Selfies are central to 'identity work and the construction of authenticity in online environments' (Lobinger & Brantner 2015:1848). Here, selfies provide 'a detailed visual characterization of the represented self, and assuring authenticity is an important function of self-photographs on SNS' (Lobinger & Brantner 2015:1849).

Social media sites, where users post and share selfies, collect voluntarily submitted information from users. These sites collect not only users' product preferences and media habits but also their images – the selfie as involuntary betrayal of identity for the sake of site compliance. At the time of writing in March 2018, the Cambridge Analytica scandal had just broke. News outlets worldwide reported on Cambridge Analytica's use of Facebook users' personal information to steer the 2016 US election in favour of Donald Trump. The debacle demonstrated how politically strategic and manipulative social media can be in terms of (dis) information dissemination and privacy violation; by implication, the selfie operates politically in this context of confused and antagonistic authenticities. Selfies have a political function, and are posted, shared and liked across social media platforms that are not divorced from (party) politics. Selfies, according to Senft and Baym (2015), remind us:

[T]hat once anything enters digital space, it instantly becomes part of the infrastructure of the digital superpublic, outliving the time and place in which it was originally produced, viewed and circulated. (p. 1589)

The notion of the superpublic points to an extensive social media framework of platforms and 'shares' which is overall beyond the individual user's control. The superpublic is, however, where socio-entrepreneurial individuals share self-representations that garner substantial attention. A *New York Times* headline on 20 March 2018 read, 'How researchers learned to use your Facebook "Likes" to sway your thinking' (Collins & Dance 2018). The article reported that Kim Kardashian fans who 'like' Kardashian's online photographs (such as selfies) display high levels of extraversion, high levels of conscientiousness and a minor measure of open-mindedness.

Kim Kardashian is a multi-millionaire businesswoman with considerable cultural prestige and capital, and millions of online followers across various platforms.

It is telling that the *New York Times* article would open with a reference to Kardashian, who has a multitude of online followers and who has long been a highly visible target for those directing their invective against social media users' (and Kardashian's) supposed narcissism. As Vivienne (2017:129) reminds us, 'mainstream commentary tends to attribute selfies to narcissistic tendencies among overindulged young people, especially women'. The kind of digital activity enacted by Kim Kardashian, and the visibility and popularity of this activity, positions her as an influencer, an individual who can shape taste and opinions (and, of course, consumption habits and preferences). This ostensibly superfluous activity is, for all its self-promotion and cynical entrepreneurship, a form of labour. Abidin (2016) describes:

[P]roduction and curation of selfies as a form of tacit labor: a collective practice of work that is understated and under-visibility from being so thoroughly rehearsed that it appears as effortless and subconscious. (p. 10)

The integration of the online into the offline (or vice versa) results in a more continual performance of labour, or as Geert Lovink (2011:14) puts it, 'every minute of life is converted into "work"'. For those who yearn for fame, digital production – or digital labour – is aspirational production. In aspirational production (a form of digital labour), users deliberately create the formal impression that their images are captured by professional photographers at high-end events (Marwick 2015:156), making the mundane exciting.

The criticism of the narcissism of selfies is but one dominant, mainstream negative response to social media use and selfie sharing. As Giroux and others above have made it clear, however, selfies are not simply expressions of narcissism, or of indifference to politics and/or to the world. In the recent past, certain selfie

trends emerged to demonstrate that selfies can be political. As Clay Shirky (2011:30) confirms, social media have emerged as an important coordinating mechanism in major political movements across the world, specifically when used in support of civil society. While there are the numbingly self-explanatory funeral selfies and after-sex-selfies (the selfie taker as indifferent to the presence of death and mourning; the selfie taker as indifferent to the privacy and assumed sanctity of sexual intimacy), for instance, there are also selfies that raise awareness about crucial human rights issues (Iqani & Schroeder 2016:407).

During the *#marchforourlives* protests across the US on 24 March 2018, selfies were shared to raise awareness about gun control and arms legislation in response to the American school shooting epidemic. Put differently, selfies taken and shared by survivors of the most recent American school shootings demonstrated how these images can resist indifference. In this context, the indifference would be the indifference of gun lobbyists, legislators, senators and other authority figures to young people's lives. Indifference indicates preference; these figures' perceived indifference to lives lost in gun violence indicates a preference for the material gain incurred by maintaining the status quo (current legislation, acts of shaping public perception to be more positive about firearms in the public sphere). There is a similar resistance to indifference in the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement, where selfies were taken and shared to raise awareness of the social injustices perpetuated against black Americans. At this point, it is crucial to understand indifference as a context-dependent deliberate strategy by those in positions of power to seemingly ignore the plight of the American youth. This indifference derives from a specific political position, and not from any kind of unconscious, or 'accidental', ignorance. Indifference is not ignorance; it is deliberate. Writing from an experience of Tamil refugees in Bangkok, Sumugan Sivansesan (2016:40) writes that the photos published of the refugees were indeed a recognition of 'the possibility of community against the mechanisms of indifference'. These imagistic actions

towards awareness as opposed to indifference are aligned with Badiou's project of an emancipatory politics.

Scholars and writers still choose to foreground the ways in which selfie culture (or social media as a whole) subvert individual agency. These criticisms must be kept in mind, and held accountable, when thinking of selfies and indifference. In *Filling the Void: Emotion, Capitalism & Social Media* (2017), Marcus Gilroy-Ware examines the ways in which social media use occurs to fill a void in its users or, put differently, how social media sites exploit human unhappiness for its own gain. As the title indicates, the prescient Gilroy-Ware (2017:6) anticipates the Cambridge Analytica furore, and his concerns are economic as well as affective and social: '[y]our selfies and other materials are stored in privately owned databases whose owners grant themselves permission to use them in whatever way they choose, including in advertising'. Here, selfies are simply part of the larger collection of images posted and shared on social network sites, usually accompanied by the appropriate hash tag such as, somewhat inexplicably yet perfectly sensibly, *#selfie*. Gilroy-Ware's focus is primarily on the consumption of social media content, and what users give up or compromise to belong to such a site. Social media consumption habits are linked to processes of alienation and fit the logic of neoliberalism (Gilroy-Ware 2017:88, 91).

In contrast to Gilroy-Ware's (2017) predominantly Cassandrian engagement with social media, Will Storr's *Selfie* (2017) focuses specifically on the idea of the self, firstly as a concept and secondly in terms of how the self is portrayed or represented online. While occasionally writing autobiographically, Storr provides a thematic overview of key events and developments that have shaped the way we think of the self, and it is significant that his chapter on 'The Perfect Self' is immediately followed by a chapter titled, 'The Digital Self' - in late capitalism, perfection is most often created for and found online. Like Gilroy-Ware, Storr (2017:294) is concerned that social media 'is a deeply neoliberal product that has gamified the self' and where self-representation - or one's appearance - has become a crucial marker of how users measure self-worth.

Indeed, much recent scholarship on social media sites used for selfie sharing have emphasised the capitalist imperatives of these sites. Crano (2018:2) frames this point in terms of ‘machinic enslavement and placed within the context of emerging exploitative techniques of neoliberal capitalism’. Drawing on the Barthesian notion of the photograph and its wound, Crano (2018:5) questions whether the digital photo could have a similar kind of Barthesian weight or wound and finds that photographs shared on social media sites ‘defies the patient, personal engagement evinced by Barthes’ [sic] meditations’. Crano (2018:5) describes this lack of patient engagement with the shared digital image as evidence of indifference: the photos that users look at on social media do not make a difference to their own lives as individual and individuating subjects; in addition, in the social media sphere, ‘time seems to pass without recognition’. Once again, scholarship highlights the relationship between selfie and time, a point I revisit in light of Badiou later in the discussion.

In academic circles, too, the passage of as well as the presentation of time is problematised. Contrary to what seems to currently be the case, scientists and researchers should (Geman & Geman 2016):

[S]pend more time on each project, be less inclined to join large teams in small roles, and spend less time taking professional selfies. Perhaps we can then return to a culture of great ideas and great discoveries. (p. 9386)

The authors above lament the contemporary academic condition of competition for limited resources while chasing incentives. In this context, a ‘professional selfie’ refers to academics spending more time announcing new ideas instead of devoting that time to properly and optimally formulating these ideas within a quality-driven research context (Geman & Geman 2016:9384).

Considering the above, indifference can be located in global structural indifference and localised interpersonal indifference. Both indifferences are equally political. The former has a clear macro-political dimension, while the latter suggests an almost passive-aggressive disregard of other people. As I have shown,

the ubiquity of the selfie has resulted in criticism of the selfie as narcissistic, superficial and frivolous; there are many instances in which a selfie constitutes moments of perceived indulgence, as when subjects take ‘duck face’ selfies and ‘mirror selfies’, all of which may call into question the perceived authenticity of the selfie (Lobinger & Brantner 2015:1849). While not discounting this criticism, I offer an additional framework for selfies in an age of considerable regular sociopolitical upheaval, where the selfie can be seen as central to emancipatory politics. My focus is not on evaluating the selfie taker’s intent but to present a reading strategy: to discuss how the selfie is not simply, possibly, the articulation of indifference(s), or against indifference(s). These indifferences include notions of global structural indifference (such as the indifferent Western response to art [in Lewis 2015]), but mostly politically overt indifference which foregrounds inequalities and difference) and localised interpersonal indifference, as expressed between individuals who know or have at least ‘seen’ each other virtually, online.

Indifference is generally associated with a lack of empathy (Nixon 2013:38–39). In her study of indifference, Nixon (2013:42) confirms what one already intuits about the articulation of indifference: indifference as a cultural phenomenon is subtle and heterogeneous, and the context in which indifference is performed, read or perceived is crucial in determining the nature and meaning of an articulation of indifference. Against the capitalist dimensions foregrounded earlier, performing indifference could be a form of consumer resistance, yet the performance of indifference as a calculated act – pretending not to care or have empathy – is strenuous (Nixon 2013:113, 121). Nixon (2013) positions indifference in negative terms:

Indifference in a culture of consumption lacks any sense of collective responsibility for the welfare of others; the inactivity it produces allows both neo-liberalism to expand largely unhindered and only weakens activists’ attempts to thwart it. Evading controversy or wilfully ignoring it, indifference means people accept the social world they construct as an unchangeable reality and do nothing. (p. 146)

As indifference is a strenuous performance of ‘doing nothing’, it can be profoundly negative in the ways in which it sustains the status quo and does little to disrupt or undermine inequality and injustice. If indifference is marked by inaction and a lack of empathic response, indifference of this nature must be done away with and should be replaced with committed action towards the greater good of the collective. In popular media, the indifferent figure has been unfairly but predictably stereotyped as a young female. This figure is further framed as politically naïve and credulous. In her illuminating *The Selfishness of Others: An Essay on the Fear of Narcissism*, Kristen Dombek writes (2016:62, [author’s added emphasis]) that ‘[t]his is the story of the self-absorbed millennial, *indifferent* to the sick and dying, *indifferent* to us’. Dombek reminds us that the narrative of selfish, self-absorbed youth predates the construction of consumption categories such as ‘the millennial’. The indifference Dombek (2016) describes here is an indifference towards other individuals which is rooted in an excessive self-interest exacerbated by social media use. This, however, is a *perceived* indifference, a *read* indifference which is by no means necessarily intentional on the part of the performer of indifference. As the *#blacklivesmatter* and *#marchforourlives* protests demonstrate, millennials are indeed politically conscious, and as such are aware of a context greater than their individual selfies.<sup>20</sup>

## ■ Possible Pathways Between Selfies, Indifference and Badiou

In this chapter, my position is that selfies are an art form, and that selfie culture can have political function and value insofar as selfies contribute to an emancipatory politics. In addition, selfies

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20. Dombek’s (2016) chapter on ‘The Millennial’ reveals how misguided such perceptions and readings can be. The author foregrounds the deliberate theatricality of millennial behaviour on reality TV, for instance, as part of an ‘apocalyptic moral drama’ in which the ‘selfish rich girl’ is condemned for her narcissism by viewers (and in online fora, users) who are allowed to be morally good and appropriately empathetic in comparison to the ‘spoiled subject’ (2016:84), who exists to be mocked and belittled.

are clearly *products of (their) time* in the sense that they have a paradoxically ephemeral yet longitudinal dimension. Selfies are also temporal in the sense that selfies present *the subject of the selfie, the selfie taker, in time*. These positions are by no means novel and are explicitly informed by the discussion above. I will now layer these statements with Badiou's writing on art, politics, time and indifference. I am not assuming an authorial position in which I write 'from Badiou's view', or where I 'give voice' to what Badiou might say about selfies. Instead, I hope to bring central ideas from Badiou's work in alignment with selfie culture with the aim of seeing what questions, queries and tentative positions arise from this alignment. In this sense, I make no grandiose claims about a 'philosophy of the selfie', an 'ontology of the selfie' or anything similar. My project is exceedingly humble in that it is indeed limited but holds the possibility of larger future intellectual endeavours for questions around what is fascinating about selfies, and what contemplations they provoke.

Alain Badiou's most important work is – unarguably? – *Being and Event* (2005a). The ideas introduced in this book are elaborated upon, and revisited, in *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event II* (2009). The scope and details of these projects fall beyond the aims of this current study, and I will also spend limited time on the criticism of Badiou's work. I presently discuss Badiou only in relation to the key notions of selfies and indifference. For critical overviews and responses to Badiou's thought, please see the authoritative Peter Hallward's *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (2003) as well as Hallward's edited volume *Think Again: Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy* (2004a). Badiou's influence on philosophers other than Hallward is visible in Badiou's consistent duelling with other continental philosophers such as Jacques Rancière. Badiou's philosophy on and of the event, specifically, has had a marked impact on the thinking of Slovenian philosopher and YouTube sensation Slavoj Žižek. According to Hallward (2004b), criticism of Badiou tends to focus on the following:

[H]is sharp distinction of truth and knowledge; his identification of ontology with mathematics and consequent critique of the ontologies



of Heidegger and Deleuze; his strictly somatic understanding of political quality and his consequent subtraction of politics from social or economic mediation; [...] his distinction of subject and individual; [...] and his idiosyncratic understanding of love and sexual difference. (p. 1)

While cognisant of the above points and responsive to them, in Hallward's (2003:xxi) view, Badiou remains, 'perhaps the only serious rival of Deleuze and Derrida for that meaningless but unavoidable title of "most important contemporary French philosopher"', inviting favourable comparison to Badiou's own intellectual mentor Jean-Paul Sartre. Hallward (2003) hails:

Badiou's project [as] one of the most remarkable, most original, and most powerful contemporary efforts to renew an engaged, progressive caption of philosophy [...] To my mind his philosophy is much the most inventive, the most thought-provoking, of his generation. (p. 322)

Badiou is known for his emancipatory politics, his political consciousness and his personal reflection thereon includes the infamous French protests of May 1968 and an indebtedness to Maoism. Badiou's political ideal is the communist ideal, but any kind of totalising action (of totalisation) is unethical. Given his communist inclination, Badiou is suspicious of democracy. Indeed, the community is that which is the contemporary inexistent – that which has not yet become or been made manifest as a post-eventual consequence. In political practice, one of the most unethical acts is what Badiou terms the Thermidorian act. This occurs when the faithful subject – the subject who proclaimed the event – rejects the revolution as a political cause. Badiou (2003) describes the contemporary world as vulnerable, precarious:

[W]e must not allow the global acceptance of the themes of liberal economy and representative democracy to dissimulate the fact that the world the twentieth century has given birth to is a violent and fragile world. (p. 41)

This is the world in which selfie culture came into being: selfie culture exists in this world of 'dramatic crises and paradoxical events' (Badiou 2003:41) and cannot merely be reduced to a

practice of image sharing which is inherently narcissistic and otherwise indifferent.

Badiou (2005b:9) conceives of four conditions of philosophy, or truth procedures, of which art is one. For Badiou, 'artistic truths', writes Elie During (2010:87), 'necessarily take the form of artistic procedures within particular – yet essentially indefinite – artistic configurations'. Art is singular in that it produces its own truths, and art is immanent in that it is similar in scope and identity to the truth it produces (Badiou 2005b:9). An event, for Badiou, brings real change in that it makes truths appear: the possibility of a sweeping break with the patterns of the present moment occurs. 'Every event', explains Badiou (2003:97), 'is an infinite proposition in the radical form a singularity and a supplement'. The truth that follows the event is a truth that is re-actualised over time, and as such can be described, as Badiou does, as universal. Selfies are recognisable as such across cultures and geographies because selfies will always show a human head/face – even as the face constantly changes, offering billions of variations – in a form (the selfie aesthetic) that suggests that the subjects had created this image of themselves. As artistic practice, selfie culture has shown how art 'is capable of producing truths that exceed the theoretical or practical knowledge attached to the particular artistic canons of a historically given configuration of the arts' (During 2010:83–84). Selfie culture is profoundly temporal, as discussed above. In his *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Badiou (2005b) describes art as 'trebly finite' and explains that:

Art [...] is trebly finite. First of all, it exposes itself as finite objectivity in space and/or in time. Second, it is always regulated by a Greek principle of completion: It moves within the fulfilment of its own limit. It signals its display of all the perfection of which it is capable. Finally, and most importantly, it sets itself up as an inquiry into the question of its own finality. It is the persuasive procedure of its own finitude. This is, after all, why the artwork is irreplaceable in all of its points (another trait that distinguishes it from the generic infinite of the true): Once 'left' to its own immanent ends, it is as it will forever be, and every touch-up or modification is either inessential or destructive. (pp. 10–11)

A selfie is trebly finite in the manner discussed in the above quote, a specifically temporal artwork completes in itself. The selfie taker is the subject of the selfie: the subject is not a wholly formed, integrated entity, but is dependent on the production of the selfie. As Hallward (2003:xxvi) explains, 'a truth comes into being through the subjects who proclaim it and, in doing so, constitute themselves as subjects in their fidelity to the event'. There are three types of subjects. Here, one must be cautious to not think of the subject as an individual but that the subject is what the individuals are capable of being.

It is the first type of subject, the faithful subject, who proclaims the new truth brought on by the event in the wake of the event-trace. Crucially, the faithful subject decides towards the production of a new reality, that is, a sweeping break with the patterns of the present moment. The second type of subject, the reactive subject, fears the event and its truth implications; this subject does not remain true to this truth and settles, unethically, for the complacency of his/her present. The third type of subject, the obscure subject, understands the necessity of the production of a new reality, and also understands that the previous reality cannot be prolonged into the future. However, the obscure subject chooses to resist change and to manufacture a new reality by way of dogma and totalisation.

Truth and change – profound change, not cosmetic change – are inextricably linked. The faithful subject commits to truth, and truth implies change. Truth, says Badiou (Badiou & Hallward 1998:122, *emphasis in original*), is dependent on its own production, as truth is a 'pregiven [inexistent] transcendent norm, in the name of which we are supposed to act, but as a *production*'. This production necessitates change in subjects who ethically commit to it. In *Infinite Thought*, Badiou (2003:139) equates truth to a transformation, specifically the transformation of the logic of a situation. Truth is made by the subject, and it is 'declared, composed and upheld by the subjects it convokes and sustains' (Hallward 2003:xxv). Not only do selfies as emancipatory political act *produce* truth, they also speak to the four modes of

truth which Badiou identifies as revolution (linked to politics – the selfie as a reaction to indifference), passion (linked to love), invention (linked to science – the selfie as made possible through technological innovation and experimentation) and creation (art – the selfie as ‘legitimate’ art form and practice).

If selfies are not events themselves, selfies can be read as event-traces, for the event always leaves a trace of itself. It is the event-trace that demands a response to the event. This response relates to notions of indifference on the part of the subject. If an event has taken place and an individual pays it no heed, this individual is *indifferent* to the event, as a response to the event. For this reactive subject, as Badiou (2003:141) calls it, the event is not important – in other words, the reactive subject does not proclaim the significance of the event. From the start, this subject does not have faith in the truth of the event and is not faithful to it, that is, is not committed to the changes this truth necessitates.

Optimistically, selfie takers who are constituted into being by way of their selfies as acts of participating in emancipatory politics are faithful subjects who have responded to the event with anti-indifference: they are faithful and committed to the change that must occur. The selfie here offers a response to global structural indifference: the selfie resists sociopolitical complacency and complicity in the aftermath of the event, where the event can be an important protest challenging existing cultures and legislation around gun ownership, to cite an example introduced earlier in this chapter. Crucially, Badiou does not conceive of politics as the realm of power but rather as the realm of thought. The relevant truth procedure here is clearly not only politics but also art (as in selfie culture). Here I bear witness to the militant fidelity of the youth who document and perform their commitment to a political cause, often at personal cost (specifically privacy and anonymity).

Selfies by faithful subjects proclaim the truth of the event, and they additionally offer a response to localised interpersonal indifference: producing the truth of the faithful subject who

ethically abandons a set path or situation to fully embrace the alternative which has presented itself. A relationship selfie, or relfie, demonstrates the abandonment of the former for the new; it does not mean that the previous romantic relationship ceases to exist as that love, too, amorous and certain as it surely once was, continues to exist in its historical and current significance. The relevant truth procedure is not only love but also art (in selfie culture).

Given how young people currently commit to an emancipatory politics (often inaccurately referred to as 'political correctness' by the alt-right), it is encouraging and timely that Badiou (2017) most recently addresses the youth, and specifically young women, in his concise publication *The True Life*. Here, Badiou recognises that young women – who, I may add, make up the majority of selfie takers and sharers on social media – have an imperative future-oriented role to play in political society. Current trends and research foregrounds women's political participation in social media. In her needs-based study of women bloggers who utilise social media and their motivations for doing so, Gina Chen (2015:37) identifies recreation, information and the need for affiliation and self-disclosure as key reasons for social media involvement. These reasons are not, of course, necessarily disassociated from political activity on social media. Referring to political events in Egypt and Morocco, Loubna Hanna Skalli (2014:246) describes the ways in which 'social media have started to transform ways in which young women express their generational consciousness, do politics and participate in the ongoing transformations in their societies'. In this 'cyber activism', social media provide ways for young women activists to present their specific modes of resistance in fighting for their rights (Skalli 2014:249).

Women utilised social media for cyber activism during the Arab Spring, with far-reaching results: social media were used to pursue and activate social change even if offline spaces were not as conducive to such pursuits as online spaces of 'contained empowerment: liminal sites where normative rules are suspended

in favor of generating alternative norms' (Newsom & Lengel 2012:38). Clearly, women have driven much of the political activity in the social media sphere and have to an extent taken ownership of the political capacities of social media and selfies. Indeed, in examining South African women's self-representation on Instagram, Jessica de Aguiar Pereira (2016:97, 98) finds that young women who take and share selfies are taking charge of the production of their social media selves, enabling processes of self-exploration as well as resistance to dominant narratives which promote idealised female bodies and appearances.<sup>21</sup>

Exactly how Badiou's thought can align with the feminist concerns of younger women who are adept at strategically using social media and selfies will for the moment remain a topic for subsequent study outside of the current chapter. For present purposes, Badiou notes that 'negative, consumerist freedom [...] creates disorientation and fear', and that the youth will have to face the challenge of creating a more positive freedom (2017:29). The youthful subject needs to oppose the 'destruction of the symbolic in the icy water of capitalist calculation' (2017:41-42) and to further resist the reduction of the women in society to 'the logic of marriage' (2017:54).

While the young women and men in *#marchforourlives* proclaim and perform their *faithfulness* to the event and its truth in response to the perceived *indifference* of those in power, these selfie takers are also waiting in anticipation for (subsequent) events, which in itself is a politically productive subject position (cf. Watkins 2016:90-91). While the anti-gun protesters have

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21. It was maybe in a similarly empowered spirit that in 2013 some Tunisian Muslim women took selfies of themselves wearing the hijab in response to FEMEN's International Topless Jihad Day. While FEMEN's call for women to share topless photos in solidarity with other women across the world against female oppression and the silencing of critics of patriarchy, such 'acts of solidarity authored by naked female bodies in the West can be read as tools of colonial, racist, and Islamophobic feminism. Ultimately, such campaigns promote alienation rather than a united front' (Eileraas 2014:49).

FEMEN is a self-described extremist atheist feminist activist group; see <https://femen.org/about-us/>.

been compelled by the event (the tragic loss of life in a horrific school shooting) to commit to change, others have chosen to note the event as important, but to remain otherwise indifferent to it. The event, says Bensaïd (2004), is:

[7]he storming of the Bastille, it is the October Revolution, just as it is illegal immigrant workers *taking to the streets in order to become agents in their own right, in order to break out of their status as clandestine victims*. (p. 97; author's added emphasis)

Selfie culture has become, and should continue to be, a constituent part of these events in demonstrating fidelity to events and their truths.

## ■ Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the ways in which selfie culture has been framed as excessive, narcissistic and indulgent navel-gazing. I also noted that many cultural critics have duly noted the social function of the selfie culture. Finally, I posited that selected ideas from Alain Badiou can help us to meaningfully rethink selfie culture as indeed not only an art form and truth procedure but also as a response to the event, while it exists in itself as an event-trace. In this scenario, selfie takers and sharers are demonstrably faithful subjects committed to a political cause who, unlike reactive subjects, realise the truth of the event and the necessity of change. I also highlighted the significance of time in relation to selfies. If Being is 'the countable stability of an incomplete ever-changing situation' (Watkins 2017:7), events themselves are 'quality-neutral, which is another way of saying indifferent. Time, then, as a form of radical interruption of an event into the sequence of worlds, is, for Badiou, in-differently different' (Watkins 2016:91-92). Overall, Badiou offers a way of explicitly positioning the potential of selfie culture as and in emancipatory politics.

# The Leadership Persona in *#FeesMustFall*: A Platform for Self-Presentation

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## ■ Introduction

Universities around the globe offer a prism through which to perceive the larger context of the society surrounding them. This is no different in the South African landscape. A landscape, as Catsam (2009:170) puts it, that has long bore the scars of a nation segregated by cultural conflicts and colonial thought patterns that culminated in the apartheid regime between 1948

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and 1991. With democracy still in its infancy, South Africa is still plagued with the consequences of earlier conflicts. These conflicts are situated in inequality and the fight for freedom, an economic struggle that finds its 'apparent resolve' in education as stated by Pillay (2016:157) in 'Silence is violence: (critical) psychology in an era of Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall'. Tertiary education is beyond the reach of most of the country's citizens and many more are refused access owing to a disadvantaged background.

The inequality that obstructs the liberation of the South African youth plunged the sociopolitical landscape into disarray in October 2015, when tertiary students all over South Africa participated in the liberation movement: *#FeesMustFall* (Pillay 2016:155). This campaign saw the rise of a '*fallesc* revolution' (Pillay 2016:158), which in turn gave rise to a power struggle between student leadership organisations and the university management on a scale that has never been observed before in South African history.<sup>22</sup>

The predominant platform on which the *#FeesMustFall* campaign occurred was social media, where the protest went from an institutional protest to a national movement in a matter of days (Ludski in Pillay 2016:155). Those in leadership positions became major role-players in the public domain and part of the power struggles. An array of questions arose with regard to the performances of these key players during the protests. As the movement gained momentum, it transferred from national to international media that followed the protests worldwide. Owing to the elevated attention, leaders on both sides, both university management and student leaders, were subjected to intense media scrutiny and soon became household names in the subsequent protests. October 2016 saw some of the largest

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22. *Fallesc* refers to different protests in support of the fall of a colonised South African landscape based in racial inequality, among others *#RhodesMustFall*, *#FeesMustFall* and *#AfrikaansMustFall*.

tertiary institutions in South Africa being closed by violent demonstrations related to this movement.

In what follows, I want to trace the role of leadership persona as performed by student leaders as well as university management within the power struggle for free, decolonised education that took place under the banner of the *#FeesMustFall* movement. Attention is paid to leaders in the performance of their leadership persona on public platforms. The influence of visualities and the part it plays within the construction of power is evaluated alongside the attempts of student leaders to produce countervisualities (Mirzoeff 2011) to destabilise the colonised perspective of power maintained in South African universities. The influential role of the media and its effects on the performances of the leadership persona are also considered.

## ■ Leadership Persona: An Extension of Power?

Persona is defined by Marshall and Barbour (2015:1) as ‘strategic masks of identity’. It is by incorporating a political strategy that the leadership persona wears a mask. This specific guise that persona takes on in terms of leadership is what I refer to as the leadership persona. When considering the role of the leadership persona as a performance, it is vital to consider leadership and persona separately first.

Leadership is defined in terms of McDowelle’s (2009) description as:

[O]ccur[ing] when one or more personae engage with others in such a way that leaders facilitate a course of action to be followed in conjunction with followers with a specific or general goal in mind. (p. 1)

Delimiting leadership is important to accurately determine how leadership is enacted as well as how leadership is acknowledged. A contributing factor to the consideration of leadership is the leadership identity. Leadership identity refers to the extent to

which an individual identifies as a leader and integrates the leadership role as a crucial part of who he or she is (Priest & Middleton 2016:37). A leader can thus be an individual who finds himself/herself actively engaged with others to affect the actions and doctrines of a group.

It is this ability of a leader to affect the actions and doctrines of followers that connects leadership with power. A definite relation between leadership and power exists. This connection is also undeniable in the South African context. The public outcry through disobedience and the critical questioning of society that followed the 2014 national elections in South Africa have become a clear indication of individuals testing the power and authority of their leaders.<sup>23</sup> Pillay suggests: 'Broader discursive trends of disrupting power relations in recent years have "allowed" citizens to be brave' (2016:156). Pillay's statement is justified when considering Chumani Maxwele – a student leader and activist in the *#RhodesMustFall* and *#FeesMustFall* protest – throwing faeces (Figure 4.1) at the statue of Cecil John Rhodes (1853–1902) on 9 March 2015.<sup>24</sup> This is an act of defiance towards the management at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and the power they (and all other institutions of higher learning) exert over higher education in South Africa.

The fact that the Rhodes's statue was chosen as a 'token' of leadership offers significant insight into the power and authority that is associated with leadership. The power vested in leaders has a far-reaching effect on the psychological development of the leadership identity. The development of the leadership

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23. The national elections of 2014, according to De Vos (2014:3), saw civil unrest and political turmoil in South Africa owing to the overarching themes of poverty, governmental corruption and unregulated funding of private political parties that caused the African National Congress (ANC) (the ruling party) to lose notable support within the provincial elections to opposition parties, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and the Democratic Alliance (DA).

24. Cecil John Rhodes PC was a British businessman, mining magnate and politician in southern Africa who served as Prime Minister of the Cape Colony from 1890 to 1896. He used his wealth to promote the British colonisation of South Africa.



Source: Verbaan, A., 2015, 'UCT student in poo protest', Cape Times, viewed 20 February 2018, from <https://www.iol.co.za/capetimes/news/uct-student-in-poo-protest-1829512>. © Brenton Geach (used under fair use conditions).

**FIGURE 4.1:** Chumani Maxwele throwing faeces at the statue of Cecil John Rhodes, 2015.

identity as a self-concept (Priest & Middleton 2016:38–39) entails that leaders recognise that power is vested in them through the title of leadership. Being named a leader establishes authority in the individual, not exclusively based on the leader's capacity for success but also significantly because of the socially constructed idea that a leader should be endowed with authority. It is this social construct of the vested power in leaders that similarly vested the statue of Rhodes with power. The power residing in the statue is not necessarily owing to the nature of the statue or even exclusively by the person represented in the statue, but more so because of the fact that the statue represents leadership.

The above-mentioned incident offers a notable example of how heroic leadership was traditionally perceived, as opposed to how it is perceived by student leaders. As described by Thomas

Carlyle (1795–1881) (in Mirzoeff 2011:3) leadership authority is afforded to an entity or individual through visualisation.<sup>25</sup> Understood in the light of Priest and Middleton’s ideas of the leadership identity, society bestows the statue with heroic leadership. This means followers bestow power on leaders because they are leaders. The statue became a symbol of leadership through the power that it exerts over others. Mirzoeff offers ‘the ability to assemble a visualisation manifests the authority in the visualizer’ (2011:2) as a rationale to justify the ability of leaders to manifest power through their ability to organise the social relationships through visualities. The example of Chumani Maxwele, through the association of power in the Rhodes statue, supports the finding that there exists a clear relation between leadership and power, especially within the South African context through the way leadership can affect actions and doctrine.

## ■ Persona

Marshall and Barbour (2015:1–2) explain persona as a mask of identity that is used in a social environment to aid individuals in the understanding of ‘self-construction, constitution and production in social settings through the consideration of identity plays and performance’. From Marshall and Barbour’s etymological discussion<sup>26</sup> of the concept of persona, it can be derived that the mask that individuals incorporate in their identity performance serves to convey selected aspects to an audience. This locates the performance of persona as a strategic form of

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25. Thomas Carlyle, an English historian, ‘[...] named the term Visuality as such in 1849 to refer to what he called the tradition of heroic leadership, which visualised history to sustain autocratic authority’ (Mirzoeff 2011:3).

26. Marshall and Barbour discuss the etymological roots of the word persona to be derived from Latin, which closely resembles the word mask. The discussion traces the word’s roots further back to the Etruscan origins which also provides reference of a mask. The origins of the word are important in reference to the manner in which persona is used to describe a mask of identity.

communication where the individual chooses elements of the identity to communicate on a public platform. The performance is considered strategic because the individual actively selects which traits of identity to mask and which to showcase.

The above-mentioned strategic nature of persona is further elucidated by Jung (in Marshall & Barbour 2015:3–4) when he explains the persona as ‘a mask that feigns individuality’. Marshall and Barbour (2015:3–4) expand on Jung’s argument stating that persona ‘is derived from the social environment: it is constructed from the interaction between the social and the individual and stands for the individual in the social’. The social climate influences the choices of the individual when deciding on which identity elements to mask in the presentation of a persona.

The persona thus becomes a tool for the individual to navigate a social environment. A social environment sets certain expectations on the individual, and the individual uses the persona to meet these expectations by presenting his/her identity in such a way that it meets the requirements of the surroundings. Goffman (1959:39–43) offers a perspective on the persona as such a tool through his explanation of the performance of self. He describes this performance as a series of roles and characters with a front and backstage that is performed in social surroundings. The personality performs these roles as a presentation because these performances allow the personality to implement an effect on circumstances. The personality learns that certain performances are accepted by society, while others are not acceptable. By navigating the relationship between the performances and the social environment, the persona is established by forming a public identity that performs on centre stage. Goffman’s performance is linked to persona through the public identities that are performed. The leadership persona is the performance of a specific public identity, which can be delineated as a role that leaders play in public environments. These roles can thus be applied as personas (Marshall & Barbour 2015:4–6).

The digital era acts as a catalyst for the development of persona through the establishment of a personal need for expression of the public self (Marshall & Barbour 2015:1). A persona is created when the online self and the public self merge. The online identity has become an extension of an offline persona through the creation of an avatar (Teo 2015:n.p.). Teo offers the definition of an avatar as 'a public profile of the self-identity to present a chosen image'. The creation of an avatar is a persona performed in an online social environment by curating an idealised identity.

By creating an avatar, the online user presents an image of himself/herself to the digital social surroundings he/she is immersed in. This image is a persona as it presents a self-representation where certain identity traits are carefully selected and presented as a public performance. The image that is created is important because this image offers a wide array of aspects that influence the relationship between the performance and the public self, as would occur in real-life (RL). Van Dijck (in Teo 2015:n.p.) argues that the way individuals present their online selves forges the associations that they link to the image of the self. This statement suggests that there is an agency in this image of the self and read with Jung's account (in Marshall & Barbour 2015:4) persona stands-in for the individual in social surroundings and is endowed with power. This power applies to a public performance as well. The individual can, therefore, use the persona to maintain control within their social surroundings by masking some aspects of their identities to meet the needs of the specific social environment.

Leadership thrives on the social influence of the persona. As described earlier, a large part of leadership is concerned with influencing the actions and doctrines of others. Leadership can, therefore, be considered a persona - leadership persona. Leadership only exists through its public recognition, following the argument of Priest and Middleton on leadership identity (2016:38-39). As a social construct, leadership is profoundly influenced by public surroundings and needs to be maintained to

meet the needs of the public. Leaders thus mask the elements in their identities that do not contribute to maintaining their status and does not fulfil the requirements set by the audience.

## ■ Celebrity News

The digital era encourages the staging of highly visible selves which, through the power of social media, has become a manner of self-publication or self-branding instantly communicated to a worldwide community.<sup>27</sup> The current state of the digital era reminds of the newspapers and journals of the 20th century that saw the manifestation of the first celebrity through publishing or reporting on the self. Celebrity is defined by Rahman (2011:263) as 'a state of being well known to a wider public and establishing influence over such a public'. Marshall (2014:154) links persona to self-publication and the expansion of the public reach through the persona. Persona can, therefore, be related to celebrity studies (Marshall 2014:157).

The expansion of the public reach stems from the increasing importance to expressing individuality in the 20th century which was the birthplace of celebrity news. Celebrity news is suggested by Turner (2014:145) to be a descriptor for the reporting and commentary on celebrity. Turner (2014:148) further notes the importance of celebrity news in the current context and concludes that celebrities perform themselves in celebrity news, by increasing their reach and thereby their influence. Celebrity news influences the relationship between the celebrity and the audience. Celebrity news is not independent, it is heavily mediated by celebrities, and consequently it is a subjective performance to an audience.

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27. Hedman (2017:n.p.) describes self-branding as establishing an identity on social media platforms that is definable by the followers on social media to the extent where followers become expectant of certain traits and aspects of the branded person in a way similar to the expectations of a brand loyal customer of consumer goods. In the celebrity sense, Teo (2015: n.p.) describes a similar construction of professional gamers, who produce online avatars that become a brand, with expectations that succeed the actual individual.



It is through the understanding of celebrity news and the associated influence that a highly visible self has on the public that leadership personalities started to explore the avenue of celebrity. Celebrity studies proved that through the presentation of the celebrity, members of the public began to model themselves on these idealised images.<sup>28</sup> This resulted in a movement within the political landscape to increase the celebrity status of political candidates, and so world leaders became celebrities, exploiting their celebrity status to their benefit (Marshall & Barbour 2015:9).

As mentioned earlier, the ability of social media to influence the political persona has a strong influence on the performance of the leadership persona. Social media platforms, initially a manner of self-publication, have evolved into a medium that is mediated by the public, much like celebrity media as suggested by Turner (2014:145). Harlow's discussion on the Rosenberg video<sup>29</sup> (2012:225–226) as well as the discussion by Bonilla and Rosa (2015:8–9) provides a strong indication of this occurrence. This exposure contributes to the political celebrity persona and focuses attention on the performance of the leadership persona. It offers the leadership persona a platform in the public eye that can increase its influence through exposure much like the celebrity news media.

The influence established through celebrity, primarily in consideration of political celebrity, placed the leadership persona comfortably within the realm of public influence. Marshall (2014:160) suggests the term presentational media to describe the immediate influence the celebrities have on their own image on social media platforms. Removing the mediating influence of traditional media society's manner of consuming celebrity news

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28. Celebrity studies concern themselves with the analysis of celebrity (as a social construct), celebrities and celebrity culture.

29. Harlow (2012:225) refers in her article to a video that surfaced in 2009 in which Rodrego Rosenberg blames Alvaro Colom (the Guatemalan president) for his murder. This video led to significant activism on social media, especially on the Facebook platform.

is reorganised through performances that are performed, produced and exhibited by the individual. Presentational media influences how the self is situated within current media transactions. Considerable influence exists in presentational media through their ability to create micropublics.<sup>30</sup> These smaller public units ‘form affect clusters’ (Marshall 2014:160) as they are composed through communal interests or beliefs online that become vital in the maintenance of celebrity.

## ■ Affect Clusters

Affect is a pre-rational moment in the representation of self (Marshall 2014:162). Affect cannot be controlled or manipulated as such. There are however communalities in the way groups of people are affected. These communalities are not necessarily coordinated with purposive and rational alignment but rather organised around clusters of sentiment. By considering these communalities, the public can be grouped in spectrums of activity and engagement.<sup>31</sup> This is vital for the performance of persona. Individuals affected in an analogous manner or affect clusters of micropublics provide the persona with guidelines as to how to adapt to the need of the group he/she is performing to. This, in turn, strengthens the support from this group and allows for the persona to exert more influence, a particularly attractive concept to the leadership persona. Marshall’s statement ‘affect organises, both intra- and inter-corporeally and is crucial to social responsiveness’ (2014:162) supports and eloquently

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30. Marshall (2014:162) describes micropublics as micro-communities that form from affective communities. He states that these communities are groupings of people that are affected in the same way by a specific action or occurrence. These micropublics can thus be grouped in the manner in which they organise themselves as a common ground, therefore leading to communities or publics that the leadership persona can perform to with positive outcomes.

31. Social movements as described by Juris (2012:271) in his conclusion on the *#Occupy* movement builds an aggregation of networks. These networks connect micropublics and thus allow better access to the affect clusters by having pre-grouped like-minded individuals connected to one another.

summarises this thought, allowing an understanding of the movement between the pre-social and the (social) self.

The leadership persona uses the influence that is gained from understanding the groupings of individuals in these affect clusters to provide a group to perform to. When the leadership persona of political leaders is performed to an audience in such a way that it allows the persona the ability to influence the micropublic, it provides the leaders with a manner of grouping micropublics in such a manner that they can be combined into a greater public that increases the political support of the leader which in turn will increase the power that such a leader can wield.<sup>32</sup> Understanding the movement between the pre-social and (social) self as Marshall describes it (2014:162) therefore affords the leadership persona a way to access public influence, and thereby to gain power.

Political celebrity, therefore, maintains a significant effect on the performance of the leadership persona. The leadership persona is applied to the individual (who is representative of an organisation or grouping) to mask the elements of identity that will prove detrimental to a specific cause (when understanding them as an affect cluster) while allowing the contributing aspects to be presented to the public. This becomes a performance of leadership in a public arena. This public performance of the leadership persona creates a public image through the celebrity it manifests. This image is presented, maintained and adapted to ensure that the individual remains a 'persona grata' (Marshall 2014:166) in the public eye which allows the associated influences to persist. All of this entails a cautious performance of the self in the public eye (Goffman 1959:106), with an insistent need to be

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32. Political support of the leadership persona is increased through the grouping of micropublics into a greater public as this grouping allows the leadership persona to perform to and thereby influence more individuals. These individuals strengthen the powerbase of the leader through their political support (the belief that they have in the performance of the leadership persona that leads to votes cast in elections).

aware of the persona and how the persona is read by the public, it is performed to.

## ■ Power of Images

Image plays a vital role in the construction of the persona and power. Power would, therefore, seem to be underlying to leadership persona and explicitly linked to the image. In a predominantly visual society where individuals are bombarded by images on a regular basis, it would make sense that there is an immense power vested in the image (Mitchell 1996:72). The power of the image extends to such a degree that it develops authority over the viewer, an ability that proved to be the cause of oppression and segregation emphasised with colonial rule that dominated most of the world in the previous centuries. It is within this authority that the leadership persona's performance plays a notable role in the struggle for authority among leaders. From a decolonised perspective, power is no longer absolute, which leads to power being challenged, eventually leading to power struggles that play out between leaders. Images play a key role in these power struggles.

Before considering the power of the image, a differentiation should be made between the two meanings of image. Image indicates the picture not only as a physical object (Mitchell 1996:71) but also as a psychological construct<sup>33</sup> (personality) (Turner 2014:146) that refers to a public image that is performed by the individual. Mitchell (1996) provides perspective to the

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33. When referring to the image as a psychological construct, the author refers to image in terms of Turner's description of the celebrity image. Image in this sense is thus the performance of a tailored persona to a specific public platform with a specific intent in mind. It should be noted that Mitchell (1996:71-72) discusses that the physical image has a physical and a psychological effect on the viewer (what happens when a viewer looks at an image); this should not be confused with the construction of the celebrity image (the performance of a celebrity personality).

discussion of physical and psychological image through his statement:

The claim that we live in a society of spectacle, surveillance, and simulacra is not merely an insight of advance cultural criticism; a sports and advertising icon like André Agassi can say that 'image is everything' and be understood as not speaking only about image but for image, as someone who is himself seen as 'nothing but an image'. (p. 73)

Both interpretations influence power and the discussion below considers both when studying the role of the leadership persona's performance in a power struggle. It is essential at this stage to note that the physical and psychological guises of the image mutually impact each other.

Priest and Middleton (2016:43) define power as the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behaviour of others or the course of events. When researching the ability of images to exert control, there are two aspects that deserve to be mentioned. The first aspect is the effect the image has on the viewer, this fact leads to a range of psychological triggers that is established by effect on the individual (Mitchell 1996:72). It is this aspect that allows images to become tools in challenging power. The second of these issues, which may also have the most subversive outcome, is the authority that is vested in the image (Mirzoeff 2011). There is power vested in this authority, and this may lead to an image being co-opted for oppressive purposes.

The impact that the image has over the viewer, Mitchell (1996) comments on the subjectivity of pictures saying that:

Pictures are things that have been marked with all the stigmatisation of personhood: they exhibit both physical and visual bodies, they speak to us, sometimes literally, sometimes figuratively. They present not just a surface, but a face that faces the beholder. (p. 72)

This means pictures are not neutral objects; they are objects that convey meaning and affect their viewers. Power is vested in this ability of the creator of a picture to encode the picture with signs and symbols to convey a message to the viewer.

Mitchell problematises this in his discussion of what do pictures really want (1996:82) and draws a conclusion that images want 'equal rights with Language'.<sup>34</sup> Leaders are to some degree guilty of attempting to turn images into language, assuming that the same messages can be conveyed through the image of a leader (consider, for example, the posters used in political campaigning), than can be conveyed when the same leader addresses individuals directly (in, for example, a campaign speech). The ability of the creator to use the image to convey a message is however limited to some degree. Mitchell, in his discussion of the power of images (1996:74), sheds light on the fact that the creators of images are not in full control of the images they create. When considering audiences' reactions and how images move individuals to action, this power can be partly harnessed (specifically through the micro-communities that images inevitably create) as a tool to affect viewers and encourage certain actions. Mitchell (1996:73-74) further justifies that images are not only messengers but that they have agency: 'this sort of criticism proceeds by exposing images as agents of ideological manipulation and actual human damage'.

Mitchell's presentation of the effect that pictures have on the audience, both through their ability to communicate the intention of the creator as well as through their ability to impose agency, falls well within the bounds of the definition of power presented by Priest and Middleton confirming the power of images. With this power in mind, the argument can be made that images are contenders when authority is challenged, and that power can in fact be challenged through images. A fundamental way in which images can establish or challenge power is through their ability of representation, standing in the place of someone or something when that someone or something is not there in that specific

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34. 'Pictures want equal rights with language, not to be turned into language. They want neither to be levelled into 'history of images' nor elevated into 'history of art' but to be seen as complex individuals occupying multiple subject positions and identities' (Mitchell 1996:82).

moment of time. Boehm (2012:16–17) suggests that images do not only represent but that they represent with a surplus, adding to what is on the surface by inciting effect from the viewer based on their own interpretation and subjectivities. This allows for a more significant power in the image as it allows for power in excess of the intention of the creator essentially creating the power of self-presentation in images (Gadamer in Boehm 2012:21).

The link between both the psychological and the physical aspects of images refer to the persona. The leadership persona in its pursuit of authority and thereby power, through its political roots, has become a performance of an image. The leadership persona presents an image to society with the intention to influence culture to become followers and thereby lead society in achieving specific goals. In this process of performance, the image created by the leadership persona takes up a similar guise to the physical image in its ability not only to represent but also to reconstruct to such a degree that it represents with a surplus, according to Boehm (2012:16–17).

By considering both elements of the image, namely, the physical and psychological, it can be concluded that power is enshrined in both elements, which provides them with the capacity to either confirm or challenge power. In a discussion of this the following example is useful: on 30 May 2017, a photo from ‘controversial’ photographer Tyler Shields (Figure 4.2) was published of American comedian Kathy Griffin holding a bloodied prop of US president Donald Trump’s head (Li 2017:n.p.). This image and others like it were presented in protest of Trump’s presidency. The *#NotMyPresident* movement formed part of many national and international protests raging over the presidential election of Donald Trump. The image was published following a sequence of highly contentious statements<sup>35</sup> made

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35. The statements specifically refer to statements made about sexual violence towards women and Mexican border control, as well as policies attacking Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Other (LGBTQ+) rights in US congress as outlined in the New York Post article (Li 2017).



Source: Li, D., 2017, 'Kathy Griffin photographed with 'beheaded' Trump', *New York Post*, viewed 09 June 2017, from <http://nypost.com/2017/05/30/kathy-griffin-photographed-with-beheaded-trump/>. © Copyright 2018 NYP Holdings (used under fair use conditions).

**FIGURE 4.2:** Tyler Shields, *Kathy Griffin demands Trump's head*, 2017.

during his presidential campaign and post-election as well as a series of policies implemented by Trump since his election in November 2016, which had many liberal US citizens in revolt (Li 2017:n.p.). The idea of images providing a platform to incite activism is echoed by Harlow (2012:237–238) in her consideration of the active social media protests encouraged by the Rosenberg video.

This case offers an ideal example of how power is vested in and challenged by celebrity through the image that is performed. Trump used his celebrity status in his election campaign to perform a leadership persona in the political context of the USA. This performance was heavily based on a personality he constructed on conservative and economic values, which encouraged most voters to act and Trump was subsequently elected as president. Trump, therefore, used images as tools in



establishing power through the authority vested in the president of a democratic nation. The Griffin image (Figure 4.2) provides a challenge to the power of Trump's performance through a separate performance that makes a very clear statement against his power.

Figure 4.2 is only an example, of the protest on various social media platforms, which heavily rely on physical images to portray messages of authors. Images such as these are very effectively used by individuals challenging power. In this image, Kathy Griffin sends an unequivocal political message, but this message supersedes representing the views of the specific individual and creates a presence of its own derived from (as discussed by Boehm [2012:16–17]) the resistance movement of Trump's presidency. Through these resistant subjects the physical image becomes more than a representation of Griffin in protest of Trump; it becomes a representation of social resistance against tyranny and socially unjust practices.

## ■ A Visual Revolution

When considering the *#FeesMustFall* movement in terms of the performances of leadership personas, the role of the power struggle becomes evident. The leaders for the sake of my analysis are the vice-chancellors of each of the chosen universities as well as the student leaders that lead student protests. Attention is also paid to the ability of micro-communities<sup>36</sup> to affect the performance of the leadership persona (Marshall 2014:162). This is done through examination of the influence celebrity news and self-publication has on actions of individuals (Turner 2014:148).

Catsam (2009:170) describes the *#FeesMustFall* protest as a national revolution taking place at most public tertiary institutions

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36. In the case of *#FeesMustFall* the micro-communities referred to broadly will equate to the students that actively partook in the protests; to narrow this down, even more reference is made to the political societies (clubs in the case of UCT) that played a crucial part in following the student leaders that played leading roles in the movement.

on the post-apartheid South African sociopolitical stage. These institutions are still plagued with the remnants of apartheid, white privilege and inequality, according to Catsam. For the sake of my discussion, three universities are selected to illustrate the hypothesis that the leadership persona performed has the ability to influence power and authority. The universities considered are the UCT, with Dr Max Price as Vice-Chancellor and Principal, as the initiation point of the *#RhodesMustFall* movement on 9 March 2015 that gave rise to the *#FeesMustFall* movement in accordance to Pillay (2016:155). To allow a more holistic perspective the University of Witwatersrand (Wits), with Prof. Adam Habib as Vice-Chancellor and Principal, described by Pillay (2016:155) as a 'radical South African University' is considered together with the UP, with Prof. Cheryl De La Rey as Vice-Chancellor and Principal, which is described as a 'conservative university' (Pillay 2016:156).

A further critical component to be noted when considering the illustration of this hypothesis is the subjectivity of the author and the readers. It is my opinion that the effect of the *falless* movement impacts all South Africans evoking a subjective response to the events. The impact of this movement was 'an occurrence that had a national impact equitable to Sharpeville', in accordance to Ludski (quoted in Pillay 2016:155), substantiating the fact that most – if not all – South African citizens are likely to view this occurrence mediated by their own opinions and experiences.

## ■ Leadership Personas Performed

The performance of a leadership persona through each of the leaders in the images below was captured and published by mass media, in printed form as well as online. The argument can be made that each of the leaders performed their individual personas in these images by presenting themselves in a conscious light to the camera with the intention of 'accessing public influence' (Marshall 2014:162). As described earlier, accessing public

influence is a tool that allows leaders access to power. When the representation of a leader is considered to access power, ‘visualities’ (as defined by Mirzoeff 2011)<sup>37</sup> come into play.

Before considering the visualities of the *#FeesMustFall* movement, it is important to note that mass media (Marshall & Barbour 2015:11) is also subject to different forms of mediation. This entails that the way mass media and online avatars are understood is subject to the audience’s views. Turner (2014:144) indicates that the need of selling newspapers and magazines influenced by public opinion mediates the light in which celebrity news is published. Therefore, the consideration of the presentation of the leadership persona can not only be considered by the leader performing or the microcommunity consuming, but also by the mass media publishing the persona.

When considering the images circulating (specifically during the 2015–2016 period of *#FeesMustFall*) in which the leadership personas are portrayed, it reminds very clearly of the complexities of visualities described by Mirzoeff. The complexes of visualities are defined as ‘The production of a set of social organisations and processes that form a given complex and the state of the individual’s psychic economy’ (Mirzoeff 2011:5). Pye (2005: 37–38) in her discussion of organisational sense making provides seven distinguishing characteristics<sup>38</sup> that assist followers in

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37. Mirzoeff (2011:2) offers a definition of visibility as ‘that authority to tell us to move on, that exclusive claim to be able to look’. It can be deduced that visibility is created when an individual claims authority of the right to look and restricts this right in other individuals. Mirzoeff (2011:3) rightfully mentions that the authority of visibility is created, ‘Visibility sought to present authority as self-evident, that division of the sensible whereby domination imposes the sensible evidence of its legitimacy’. This means that authority does not merely exist, although it is easily accepted owing to the socio-historic background of oppression, a fact very well exploited in the colonising of Africa, South America and India (Munro 2014:412). Visibility extends further than the visual; it constructs power that is based in human psychology that creates the need in individuals to be subjected in the common psyche, a ‘believe in Leadership as a requirement to function’ (Priest & Middleton 2016:45).

38. The seven distinguishing characteristics are: Grounding in identity construction, retrospective, enactive of sensible environment, social, ongoing, focused on and by extracted clues and driven by plausibility rather than accuracy (Weick in Pye 2005:38).

making sense of the leaders they follow. These characteristics, analysed from Pye's discussion, are clearly visible and aid in understanding the visuality performed by the vice-chancellors. The vice-chancellors are represented in the above images in a very similar format. They present a formalised identity, in a setting that is clearly constructed. They are presented in poses that are modelled, within a setting that shows them in isolation, dominating the image. Their images are all represented as controlled, orderly and neat. The representation of the vice-chancellors dismisses the chaos that is present on any residential university campus. The representations of the vice-chancellors can be well summarised by Pye in her statement, 'sense making is focused on the extraction of cues from the social environment presented in an ongoing way to incite the understanding of followers'. The vice-chancellors are represented in a manner that, in the opinion of the author, shows the well-manicured idea of Western academia, a contrast between the civilised world of the educated compared to the unruly chaos of the uneducated.

Mirzoeff (2011:14) defines the Imperial complex as 'linking centralised authority to a hierarchy of civilization in which the "cultured" was necessary to dominate the "primitive"'. The portrayal of the leadership personas of the vice-chancellors from each of the universities were done in a very composed setting, clearly Westernised in a manner that creates order and the 'civility' that Mirzoeff refers to. The student leaders<sup>39</sup> and protesters perform in a different setting amidst the turmoil of protests that they are taking part in, a reference to the 'primitive'. The notion of student leaders not following the hierarchal lines expected of leadership, with clearly defined roles and positions (Pillay 2016:158), further added complexity to the situation. The divergence of the leadership personas enacted by students performing leadership roles in the protests from the clearly

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39. When referring to student leaders, it is important to note that leadership roles were 'not finite but organic, reorganising constantly with a varied array of students assuming leadership positions when necessity called for them to do so' (Pillay 2016:158).

defined hierarchy of the vice-chancellors creates a significant difference between the vice-chancellors and the student leaders. This enforces the visibility of the civilised having to dominate the primitive, strengthening the 'hierarchy of mind' (Mirzoeff 2011:14) and so the dominance of the Westernised colonial power against the uncivilised.

The Imperial complex leads to a visibility in the minds of the micro-communities (thus the students and staff members associated with each of the universities) by giving the vice-chancellors the natural authority to rule. This leads to the understanding arising that leadership personas in the position of accepted power (the vice-chancellors as the 'protectors of the academic sanctity of an otherwise uncultured South Africa' [Pillay 2016:158]), have an absolute right to govern the students to get them to assimilate to the 'civilised' and thus superior culture. In the portrayal of their own leadership personas, the student leaders create a counter-visibility in their attempt to challenge the authority given to the 'civilised'. This was done to regain their 'right to look' (Mirzoeff 2011:2) through their rights to their own bodies by their right to live. Jackson and Parry state in (McDowelle 2009:3) that 'surviving in modern South Africa without the colonised understanding of a western education is impossible'. When the counter-visibility presented by the students is considered in the light of the above statement the student leaders, through grieving the inability of their peers to study and thus 'surviving', challenge the authority of the vice-chancellors. This act creates a counter-visibility by insisting that individuals in South Africa unable to study because of fees are worth grieving (Du Preez 2015:420).

It is through the conflict of visibilities and counter-visualities that power struggle arises between leaders in the South African landscape. The student leaders pose a counter-visibility, through challenging the Westernised norm of education and the access to education via the performance of their leadership persona as part of the *#FeesMustFall* movement. The vice-chancellors posed the visibility of academia to justify their authority. The struggle is

created through student leaders challenged to long-held norms of authority by the vice-chancellors in the *#FeesMustFall* movement. This challenged the power construct and led to a power struggle between university authorities (represented and managed by the vice-chancellors) to keep universities open and students (represented by the myriad of student leaders) to close universities during *#FeesMustFall*. By leaders confronting other leaders through the performance of Western norms as visibility and a challenge to Western norms as countervisuality, a revolution arises. This revolution is based in the colonial acceptance of academic sanctity and the Africanised construct of Ubuntu that challenges the fact of restricted access which poses the revolution not only against power but also against colonisation (Pillay 2016:159).

## ■ A Framed Revolution

As mentioned earlier, the mediating factor of the media in representing the leadership persona must be brought into consideration when the performance of micro-communities is evaluated. Micro-communities in terms of the *#FeesMustFall* movement consist of the student and staff groupings within individual universities. It is from these micro-communities that the performance of the leadership personae confirms and gains authority. As described earlier in terms of the political celebrity afforded to the leadership persona when performed to influence the micro-communities, both the vice-chancellors and student leaders were enabled to invoke their power through the support they received from students and staff members in agreement to their cause.

The power struggle that arose from student leaders challenging university management for free, decolonised education in the *#FeesMustFall* movement can be considered as the so-called ‘cultural war’ (Dubin in Du Preez 2015:420-421). In the South African landscape, the *#FeesMustFall* movement enjoys prevalence in news and celebrity media. The leadership on both

sides were publicised, and the national community actively participated in forming the celebrity persona that shaped the public opinion in the sphere of social media. This idea is supported by the findings of Valenzuela (2013:935) considering the relationship of news media in protests. A further supporting consideration is the manner in which social media replicates news media. Harlow (2012:239) mentions that social media replicates the mediated publication of news media by the manner in which individuals are mobilised in forming online protests.

The images in Figure 4.3 – Figure 4.7 serve as examples of the representation of the leadership persona in national and international media. The media captured student leaders in the performance of their leadership personae as they actively partook in the protests for free education. These and similar images circulated through international media worldwide. These images provide a striking example of the power held by



Source: Hammond, M., 2017, *UCT's new student admission policy explained*, viewed 11 May 2017, from <https://www.news.uct.ac.za/article/-2014-07-03-ucts-new-student-admission-policy-explained>. ©University of Cape Town, 2018 (used under fair use conditions).

**FIGURE 4.3:** Dr Max Price, *UCT's new student admission policy explained*, 2017.

the image. Firstly, in terms of the image in its physical guise (Mitchell 1996:71), where viewers of the image are confronted with what the protests looked like, and by doing so allowing ‘power over the beholder’ (Mitchell 1996:76) as these images in the media constructed people’s opinions on the occurrence of *#FeesMustFall*. And secondly, in its psychological guise (Turner 2014:146) as student leaders performed their leadership personae to strengthen their image as leaders forwarding the cause of free education. The ability of the image in both forms to effect students and staff of each university (the micro-communities) lies at the centre of the use of images in the construction of leadership persona.

Compared to Figure 4.3 – Figure 4.5, a very composed representation of the front stage performance, the images in



Source: Jones, A., 2016, ‘Habib Sit down’, *Wits Vuvuzela*, pp. 2-3, viewed 10 May 2017, from <http://www.witsvuvuzela.com> (used under fair use conditions).

**FIGURE 4.4:** Prof. Adam Habib, *Habib Sit Down*, 2016.





Source: Nel, R., 2016, 'Will fees fall?', *Perdeby*, viewed n.d, from <https://perdeby.co.za/sections/news/tuks-news> (used under fair use conditions).

**FIGURE 4.5:** Prof. Cheryl De La Rey, *Will Fees Fall*, 2017.



Source: Kierman, A., 2017, 'Showdown looms as university fees are set to rise', *City Press*, viewed 10 May 2017, from <http://city-press.news24.com/News/showdown-looms-as-university-fees-are-set-to-rise-20160814>. © 24.com (used under fair use conditions).

**FIGURE 4.6:** UCT, Wits and UP student leaders protesting.



Source: Hauser, C., 2017, "'Fees Must Fall': Anatomy of the Student Protests in South Africa", *New York Times*, viewed 10 May 2017, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/23/world/africa/fees-must-fall-anatomy-of-the-student-protests-in-south-africa.html>. ©Siphiwe Sibeko (used under fair use conditions).

**FIGURE 4.7:** Student leaders mid-protest: *Fees Must Fall: Anatomy of the Student Protests in South Africa*, 2017.

Figure 4.6 and Figure 4.7 present a bleeding in of the backstage into the front stage performance of the persona (Goffman 1959:39–43). Both the front and backstage performances of the persona contribute to the celebrity of the leadership persona, as they present a 'state of being well known to a wider public and establishing influence over such a public' (Rahman 2011:263). The representation of the backstage however presents a challenge to Turner's (2014:145) concept of celebrity, as this is no longer celebrity news but projects into news media. The projection into news media adds weight to the performance; it is no longer just entertainment but becomes noteworthy as serious news. Although the news media has a legitimate effect on the establishment of power, its hyper-visibility becomes a political

tool as described by Du Preez (2015:427). The question beckons whether the publication of the backstage, as in Figure 4.6 and Figure 4.7, still fulfils the requirements posed by Marshall (2014:154) as self-representation. For the sake of this study I will consider the effect that the representation of the backstage has on the micro-communities as an extension of the identity created through the leadership persona and therefore deem it to fall within the scope of self-representation.

As described above, the performed leadership personas through the visualities and countervisualities created produces a dichotomy with the opposing leadership personas on each side. The visualities and countervisualities are framed in a specific scopic regime, not unlike the opposing scopic regimes referred to by Du Preez (2015:420) in her analysis of the media coverage of the Marikana Massacre. The battle for hegemonic dominance in the case of *#FeesMustFall* firmly placed the student leaders (leading the *#FeesMustFall* protests) against the vice-chancellors. It is through this frame created by celebrity, news and social media that the public was flooded with performances of the leadership persona from both the vice-chancellors and the student leaders.

The flood of images creates hyper-visibility, leading to a post-panoptic visibility – a situation described by Du Preez as ‘Too much to see’ which she then attests to leading to a generation of ‘so many images and visualisations [...] no single instance can be decisive’ (2015:426). This leaves the public effectively blind to the performance of the leadership persona. The barrage of images causes ‘apathy’ as referred to by Goffman (1959:39–43). This arises when performance does not result in the performer’s expected outcome. A contributing factor to the apathy referred to by Goffman is confirmed by Morozou (in Valenzuela 2013:926) as ‘slacktivism’,<sup>40</sup> a construct supported by Bonilla and Rosa (2015:5–6). The use of social media to promote mobilisation is

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40. Also known as social media activism.

proven to be effective in better reaching the masses (Vulenzuela 2013:926), but social media activism decreases the actual physical engagement of activists. This in turn entails that the effectivity of the image to move individuals to action is inhibited.

The definition of leadership (McDowelle 2009:1) specifically refers to the engagement between leader and follower that allows the leader to influence the follower. When the leadership persona is thus performed on a public platform that is oversaturated with the performances of leadership personas through hyper-visualisation, the leadership persona's ability to effect followers is highly reduced. The apathy evoked in followers, therefore, causes impotence in the leadership persona, by removing a leader's ability to influence. This, in turn, causes confusion in the leadership identity, as the persona cannot fulfil its socially constructed mandate.

The apathy that the *#FeesMustFall* movement experienced, as indicated by Pillay in his comparison of the organisation of the march (2016:155) and his concluding remarks regarding the 'unwillingness to continue the battle by ignoring the fight students fight' (2016:158), practically reflects the findings of Du Preez (2015:426) considering post-panoptic visualisation and hyper-visualisation. Further echoing Du Preez, Juris (2012:272) also states that although the 'broader networking of # movements allows better sustainability', information can be highly mediated and movements<sup>41</sup> can bleed into one another causing confusion. The visibility of the leadership persona digresses into invisibility - this was evident in the later stages of the movement during 2016, where the images of the vice-chancellors (Figure 4.3 - Figure 4.5) as well as the images of student leaders (Figure 4.6 and Figure 4.7) were basically ignored. The leadership persona of the vice-chancellors as well

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41. Juris uses the example of *#OccupyBoston* that started the same day as a march organised by the right to the city coalition. Media coverage of these movements confused images and inadvertently linked the movements. This occurrence can be considered in the same light as the complex blend of the fallst movements.

as the participating student leaders lost the exploitation of celebrity news as described by Turner (2014:148) and Marshall (2014:162).

The revolution that progresses through the *#FeesMustFall* movement where visualities are pitted against countervisualities is nuanced by the complexities of the scopic regime that the media used to frame it in. Du Preez eloquently presents this complexity in the statement 'Therein lies the complexity: the fact that no one institution or power is in control of who sees what means that new visibility is uncontainable and representable' (2015:427). She furthers this argument with a quote of Virilio (in Du Preez 2015):

There is no such 'fixed sight', and consequently automated vision is a poor substitute for the complexity and duration of human vision that relies on memory, intentionality, motility and mobility. (p. 425)

It is through these complexities that the media creates another visuality. The media representation of the revolution - by means of the scopic regime it is framed in - takes away the right to look, by presenting the public with too much to see, creating blindness much like the case of the Marikana Massacre that Du Preez (2015:424) suggests through the 'war of images' (Mitchell in Du Preez 2015:427-428).

The visuality created by the scopic regime mentioned above supersedes the visualities and countervisualities created by the leadership persona. The framing of the power struggle as discussed earlier, by the media, in itself is thus responsible for forming a visuality. This visuality is established as a construct of Western norms used to present the self-evident authority legitimised by, among others, the Imperial complex (Mirzoeff 2011:3, 13). Mirzoeff (2011) offers the explanation of the right to look in this context as:

You, or your group, allow another to find you, and, in so doing you find the other and yourself. It means requiring the recognition of the other to have a place from which to claim rights and determine what is right. (p. 1)

It is exactly this right that the scopic regime created through post-panoptic visualisation infringes on. By being overexposed to the performance of the leadership persona, followers become blind to the persona (through the apathy as explained earlier). The blindness that is caused by the hyper-visualisation prevents the ability of the leadership personas to allow others to find them. In consideration of Mirzoeff's (2011:1) statement above, the inability to allow others to find the leadership persona essentially blinds the leadership persona from finding the 'other' and thereby preventing the leadership personas from claiming the right to look.

In justification of the statement above, I offer the example of the images (Figure 4.3 - Figure 4.7) portraying the vice-chancellors and the student leaders that partook in the *#FeesMustFall* movement. Through the media, the ability of the leadership persona to represent itself is lost. The performances become mediated and in so doing shifts the focus from the original movement of *#FeesMustFall* to a much bigger, more generic movement of civil unrest in South Africa. This blinds the public to the power struggle that is specifically occurring between the visibility of the vice-chancellors and the countervisuality presented by the student leaders protesting through *#FeesMustFall*.

It is through the 'uncontainability' (Du Preez 2015:427) created by the scopic regime of the media that the power struggle between the leadership personas is virtually ignored through over-visualisation. The media has thus moved past the point of being a tool to aid the leadership persona (Marshall 2014: 161-163), by rather turning the leadership persona into a tool that supersedes the celebrity media representation into a viral 'media spectacle' in international media.

Munro substantiates the above findings by his consideration of the power of colonialism. He offers colonialism in 'South America and Africa' (2014:410) as a 'Disembodied power construct created not by an individual but by the collective

consciousness'. If this is brought into perspective using the views of McDowelle (2009:1), transformative leadership 'plays the essential trump card in decolonising the colonised'. It can thus be argued that through the performance of the power struggles created by the visualities and countervisualities presented by the leadership personas – for example, in the case of the vice-chancellors and student leaders in *#FeesMustFall* – the complexes of visualities can be challenged, and power can be reclaimed by reclaiming the right to look. This will however only be possible if the overarching visuality, that is, the scopic regime created by the media, can be opposed by a countervisuality. A countervisuality that can be arguably offered by a specific student leader, Chumani Maxwele, with the statement he made while throwing faeces at the statue of Cecil John Rhodes on 09 March 2015 to '[d]ecolonise your minds comrades and you will throw off the shackles of oppression' (Pillay 2016:155).

The argument above states that the author offers as countervisuality to the visuality of colonialism an understanding that a decolonised perspective can allow individuals to combat the blindness created by the panoptic visualities the media frames revolutions in, allowing individuals to consider the visualities that occur in front of them, unmediated by the influence of mass media. In the case of *#FeesMustFall*, it can therefore be argued that by breaking the collective consciousness affording power to the disembodied construct presented by Munro (2014:410) through adopting a decolonised perspective suggested by Catsam (2009:170), micro-communities will take back the right to look and therefore will present a countervisuality to the media's framing of their revolution. In turn, this will allow micro-communities the ability to perceive the power struggle the leadership personas undertake in the presentation of visualities and countervisualities, bringing the situation back into perspective. This perspective will allow leadership personas the tools they need to wage the power struggle and combat the complexes of visualities and eventually claim back the 'right to look' (Mirzoeff 2011:22) by claiming again the right to grieve

(Du Preez 2015:420) those that do not have access to tertiary education as indicated above.

## ■ Conclusion

As a platform to perceive the context of a nation, the universities in South Africa delivered a stellar performance to research and consider the sociopolitical and socio-economic states of South Africa through the consideration of the microcosms they form. As per Catsam's (2009:170) description, the scars of national segregation through cultural conflicts and colonial thought patterns to the extreme of the apartheid regime between 1948 and 1991 are still very visible. The author would like to add to these scars by proposing that the South African landscape bares further scars, injuries of the cultural wars – the wars of images, suggested by Mitchel (in Du Preez 2015:427-428) – that have been waged in South Africa for many years.

It is however through these scars that the South African youth have started carving out their identity. An identity represented by many personas. As Marshall and Barbour (2015:1-2) suggest, individuals mediate their identity through numerous 'masks' in a public performance that culminates in the presentation of the self through constructed personas. This is made very clear by considering the leadership persona, one of the performances that the South African youth presented most often in the paradigm of the fallest movement.

Through the performance of their leadership personas in a volatile political climate, fallests started to reclaim their identity – an identity that had been stripped from them through centuries of oppression and inequality. According to Mirzoeff (2011:6-9), one could argue further that the colonial mindset predates the settlement of South Africa by hundreds of years into the onset of slavery in the ancient world. The history is an important aspect to keep in mind when considering the performances of the leadership persona as it has many long-reaching effects to the current day.



Irrespective of the timeline in which African, South American and Asian people were stripped of their identity and by so doing their humanity (Munro 2014:424), the South African youth is facing numerous challenges that contribute to their struggle to reclaim an identity. These challenges include navigating the way they perform their personas, specifically considering the leadership construct in South Africa, the mediation of the media and the extreme complexities that go hand in hand with confronting visualities and the complexes that Mirzoeff (2011: 13-22) suggests accompany these visualities.

The leadership persona, through all its guises, with the elements that lend power and authority to it, as well as the elements that attempt to limit power, has a lasting impact on a global society. As an extension of identity on a highly politicised international stage, Goffman's 'performance of the self' (1959: 39-43) has turned into the performance of a nation, as South African individuals have launched a revolution against colonial norms to reclaim an identity that was taken from them by the actions of a few youth leaders performing their personas in the revolution for a decolonised South Africa. There will, however, be little progress in confronting visualities with relevant countervisualities until South Africa can adopt a decolonised perspective that allows a countervisuality to the Western norm, allowing Africans the right to their person and thereby the right to look. Until then, the faces of a revolution may remain blinded images manipulated by overexposed identity which denies the individual the right to look.

# **PART 2**

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## **Digital Scholarship**



# Visualising the Return Pathways of Patients to the Grahamstown Lunatic Asylum

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## ■ Introduction

In David Wright's (1999) research on the movement and discharge of patients from county asylums in mid-Victorian England, he raises a challenging line of enquiry by asking, 'What happened to patients after discharge?' (Wright 1999:108). The difficulty of embarking upon such an investigation is mainly because of the fact that an asylum's casebooks contain very

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little information about the ‘after-life’ of discharged patients (Andrews 1998:262). One possible means to explore Wright’s enquiry is to investigate the casebooks of the patients who were readmitted to an asylum. The casebooks of these patients provide partial insight into the ‘after-life’ of an individual, and they offer an opportunity to explore the circumstances that precipitated a patient’s return to an asylum and the quality of the relationship between a patient and their family, as well as opening up the possibility of considering the extent to which an asylum offered a form of relief, refuge and welfare for the patients. This chapter seeks to pursue the aforementioned research opportunities by embarking upon an investigation of the casebooks of the Grahamstown Lunatic Asylum (GLA), from 1890 to 1907, to explore the narratives and pathways of patients who were readmitted to the asylum.<sup>42</sup> These pathways include not only patients who were discharged ‘recovered’ from the asylum, but also those who were ‘relieved’ into the care of friends and family and those who were transferred to several other asylums of the Cape Colony.

The GLA was established in 1875 in Grahamstown,<sup>43</sup> a small frontier town situated on the eastern reaches of the Cape Colony. The GLA was part of the Colony’s network of asylums established for the care and custody of the insane (Swartz 1996:27). The network consisted of Robben Island Asylum (1846), the GLA (1875), Port Alfred Asylum (PAA) (1889), Valkenberg Asylum (1891) and Fort Beaufort Asylum (FBA) (1894). A key feature of the Colony’s asylum network was racial discrimination and segregation (Swanson 2001; Swartz 2015).

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42. The chapter follows several studies that share an interest in tracing the various pathways to and from an asylum (see Edington 2013; Mills 2000; Sadowsky 1999; Smith 2014; Swartz 2015). More broadly, the chapter can be positioned within the field of mental health geographies. Research in this field largely follows two focus areas, namely, the epidemiology of mental ill-health and the geographies of mental health facilities (Philo 1995, 1997, 2005). In terms of the latter focus area, see Du Plessis (2012, 2013) for an investigation of the GLA’s setting and landscape.

43. The institution still exists today but is now known as the Fort England Hospital.

For example, at the GLA, white patients were segregated from the rest of the patient body. In this segregated context, white patients received a regimen that offered access to leisure activities, less laborious labour and better provisions, facilities and food (Swartz 1996, 2015).<sup>44</sup>

Each of the Colony's asylums was intended to have a distinct character and was designated to function for a specific patient population. Valkenberg Asylum and the GLA were envisaged as hospitals for the treatment of recent and acute cases of insanity; Robben Island catered for the chronic, dangerous and criminally insane (see Deacon 1999); PAA housed chronic cases (see Swanson 2001); and FBA was reserved solely for chronic black patients (see Swanson 2001). Unlike the other asylums in the network, Valkenberg Asylum and the GLA were never exclusively reserved for acute cases but admitted patients suffering from various mental illnesses across a broad spectrum of stages.

Dr Thomas Duncan Greenlees,<sup>45</sup> the medical superintendent of the GLA from 1890 to 1907, attempted to 'refine' the patient profile of the asylum by embarking upon an intensive programme of transferring patients who were chronic to the PAA and the FBA. Although both institutions housed chronic patients, the PAA was reserved for the transfer of docile and demented patients whose chances of recovery were very remote (G36–1892:57). The FBA was originally reserved exclusively for black male chronic patients, but in 1897, a separate division was established to extend the admissions to include black female patients. The chronic patients who constituted the patient body

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44. For further discussion of the GLA's practices of racial discrimination and segregation, see Du Plessis (2014, 2017).

45. Thomas Duncan Greenlees (1858–1929) was born in 1858 in Kilmarnock, Scotland. He studied medicine at Edinburgh, graduating with an MB, CM in 1882, and an MD in 1901. Before taking up the post at the GLA, he had considerable experience working in British asylums: he was the assistant medical officer at the City of London Asylum at Stone (1882–1884), the Counties Asylum at Carlisle (1884–1887) and the City of London Asylum at Dartford (1887–1890) (Plug 2014).

of the FBA had a propensity to be violent and troublesome. Thus, from the above descriptions, Greenlees was able to transfer chronic black male patients who were quiet to the PAA and those who were violent and riotous to the FBA. However, transfer of violent white chronic patients was not an option, and it was only in 1897, with the opening of the black female ward at the FBA, that it was possible to transfer black female chronic patients who were violent. Generally, this meant that belligerent white patients, and black women until 1897, had to remain in the GLA until their behaviour was deemed docile, quiet and controllable. The exploration of the return pathways of the patients discussed in this chapter provides a spotlight on the GLA's chronic patients who encountered multiple transfers between various asylums.

Apart from the aforementioned programme of transferring chronic patients, Greenlees's tenure at the GLA tailored discharge routes via the Chronic Sick Hospital (CSH) 'for the further care of convalescent patients from the Asylum who have no homes to go to' (G36-1892:56).<sup>46</sup> Moreover, it is also important to underscore that the pathways for patients to enter and leave the GLA were controlled, shaped and sanctioned by the set of principles and priorities that Greenlees upheld during his term of office (Du Plessis 2015). Together these points informed the decision to delimit the exploration of the chapter to the period of Greenlees's superintendence.

To aid the analysis offered in this chapter, I used GIS to visualise the pathways of eight patients who repeatedly returned to the GLA.<sup>47</sup> By visualising the pathways,<sup>48</sup> two findings

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46. For a discussion of a discharge route via the Chronic Sick Hospital, see the discussion of Mfundo Ramasodi's case outlined in the subsequent section.

47. Although the casebooks of the GLA are in the public domain, the chapter retains the anonymity of the eight patients by using pseudonyms.

48. For similar studies that use GIS to visualise, chart and map literary and historical texts, see Travis (2010, 2013, 2014). For studies that use GIS to map present-day health care facilities for the purposes of examining spatial accessibility, see Bhana and Pillay (1998) and Luo and Wang (2003).

became apparent. Firstly, the visualisations illuminated that the pathways for each patient contained unique contours and some specific sites. In order to understand and explore these aspects, the casebooks of each of the patients were consulted. The ensuing investigation of the casebooks foregrounds how a patient's readmission is set within their broader life story while also considering the role of the asylum in offering refuge to the patients. Secondly, a pattern emerged in the GIS visualisations for the patients who required lifelong care, namely, that they encountered numerous transfers between institutional sites. To understand and 'explain the historical processes that form[ed] these patterns' (Gregory & Ell 2007:118), the annual reports of the asylum proved to be a valuable resource.

## ■ '[N]o one [...] would or could direct him home'

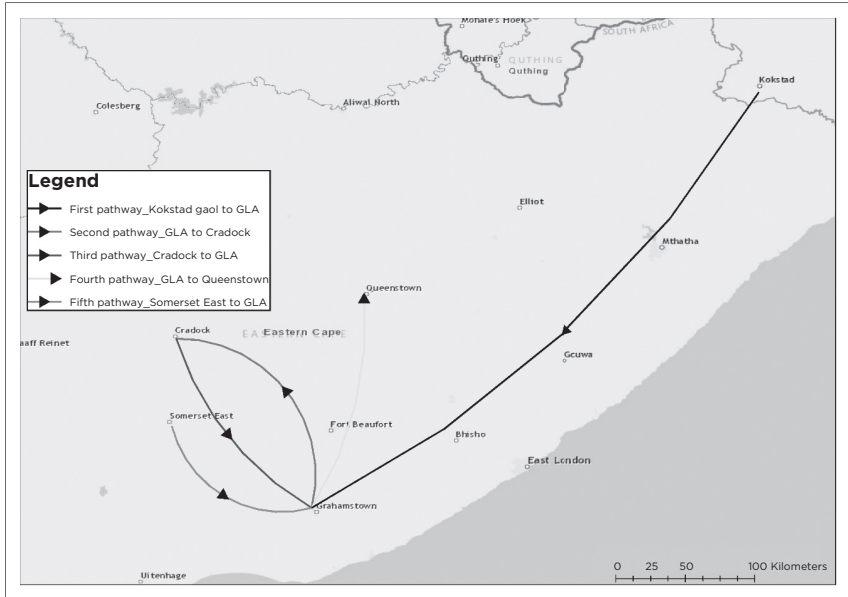
The casebooks of Mfundo Ramasodi present a wealth of information on the hardships, misfortune and torturous travails that led to his repeated pathways back to the asylum (Figure 5.1). To underscore the vivid individual narrative of Mfundo's case, I will provide an extensive summary of the casebook entries. Mfundo was certified insane and confined in January 1891 to a gaol in Kokstad. In September 1891 (HGM 2:293),<sup>49</sup> he was transferred with six other inmates to the GLA. In March of 1892, Greenlees (HGM 2) pronounced that Mfundo was:

[Q]uiet, very industrious and quite free of excitement. He still has occasional fits of laughing but as he has such a cheerful expression and happy look, and as he converses quite rationally and answers questions sensibly there seems little the matter with him. (p. 293)

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49. The chapter makes extensive use of quotes and information obtained from the casebooks. Thus, to avoid repetitive and identical citations in my discussion, I only cite the first instance in which a casebook reference is used.





**FIGURE 5.1:** Mfundu Ramasodi's pathways.

Soon thereafter he was employed at Greenlees's home in the stables. During this period, he remained well and was later discharged 'recovered' in May 1892, with a train ticket to Queenstown, via Cradock.

About a week after his discharge, Mfundu returned to the asylum and reported that the railway authorities in Cradock had removed him from the train and instructed him to walk back to Grahamstown. Greenlees issued him with a new ticket to Queenstown, and he was sent back to the train station. Sadly, Mfundu did not fare any better during his second trip (HGM 3:33). Mfundu lost his way back home, as 'no one rendered him assistance on the way nor would or could direct him the right way home'. Several weeks later, he was found - in the vicinity of Somerset East - wandering in the veld in a starved condition, having survived off locusts and herbs. He informed the individuals who found him that he had come from the asylum.

Mfundo arrived back at the asylum on 01 August 1892 in a dreadfully 'starved and miserable looking' condition. Although he conversed rationally and answered questions coherently, he did not have the 'happy smile or pleasant laugh' that had formerly 'irradiated his countenance'. By mid-August, he was employed again at Greenlees's stables. Towards the end of August, Greenlees (HGM 3) submitted a report on Mfundo's status:

I am of opinion he is no longer of unsound mind. [...] As it seems impossible sending him to his house somewhere near Kokstad without necessary considerable expense, if the Court will authorise his discharge, I propose admitting him to the Chronic Sick Hospital pending his obtaining work locally, or being able to go home. (p. 33)

On 10 September 1892, Mfundo was discharged recovered and was admitted to the CSH. The GLA was closely linked to the CSH. The CSH was established in 1882, where Greenlees was appointed as medical superintendent from 1890 to March 1903 (Burrows 1958:343). The hospital functioned to care for the 'chronic sick of the colony' (G24-1894:67), but Greenlees also made use of vacancies at the CSH to admit the GLA's 'convalescent homeless patients until employment is found for them' (G36-1892:56).

In Mfundo's case, the outside world was a hostile colonial environment, where state employees removed him from a train, while civilians did not volunteer their support to assist or direct him. In contrast, the asylum offered him respite from the strife and toils of his failed trek home – the asylum offered food and shelter, and it was thus a means for him to regain his physical health and strength. Equally significant is that the asylum, on his discharge, offered him accommodation at the CSH. This provision offered Mfundo the chance to either start a new life in Grahamstown or return home via a path of his own choosing.

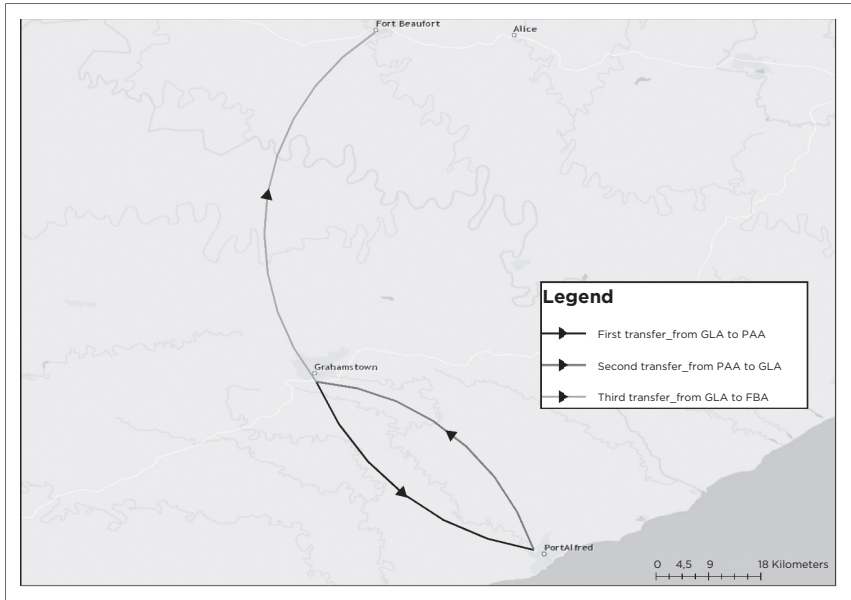
In sum, for Mfundo, the GLA functioned along the lines of a sanctuary that offered food and shelter while at the same time ensuring that the provision for resettlement – in the form of admittance to the CSH – was a key element in his discharge.

Yet, such functions of the GLA were made possible by, and were contingent upon, specific features evidenced in the readmission casebooks of Mfundo, namely (1) the presence of mental illness was non-existent and (2) he was physically and mentally capable of returning to work and life in the outside world. In the course of the following section, it becomes evident that once a patient's context is foreshadowed by chronic insanity and the absence of a family or the means for the patient to support themselves, the GLA took on a different function.

## ■ Caught in a Tide of Transfers

As previously indicated, Greenlees embarked upon an intensive programme of transferring the GLA patients who were suffering from chronic mental illness to various other asylums, so as to purposely create a patient profile that fitted the intention of the GLA, namely, a place for acute and recent cases of insanity. By instituting a large number of transfers, Greenlees (G28-1898:2) created a 'rapid circulation' of the patient population from the GLA to the Colony's network of asylums. By reviewing several of the visualisations presented in this chapter (see Figure 5.2 – Figure 5.4), it becomes evident that Greenlees's account of the 'rapid circulation' of patients was never that of a one-way flow of patients from the GLA to the Colony's network of asylums. Instead, certain chronic patients spent a duration of their lives caught in a tide of transfers between the GLA and various other asylums.

Throughout her first period of institutionalisation at the GLA (1892-1895), Grace Sibanyoni (HGM 16:201) had recurrent attacks in which she would become restless, excited and dirty in her habits. This was followed by periods in which she was industrious in her work and was well behaved in her conduct. Even though the assistant medical officer of the asylum, Dr Walter Adam, diagnosed her with 'recurrent mania', which proved that she was not suffering from a subdued form of mental illness, he proceeded



**FIGURE 5.2:** Grace Sibanyoni's pathways.

to seek the permission of the under colonial secretary (UCS) to transfer her to the PAA. Even more startling is the fact that Adam's testimony of Grace is jarringly at odds with the patient profile deemed suitable for the PAA, that is to say, patients who were non-violent and docile. Adam reported to the UCS that Grace 'is dirty in habits, is very restless and destructive, talks foolishly, is active and flighty'. Although the UCS approved the transfer in April 1895, it is rather unsurprising that Grace was retransferred to the GLA in November 1897 (HGM 18:35) on the grounds that she was 'inclined to be violent', as well as 'dirty and destructive'. On returning to the GLA, Greenlees echoed such descriptions by pronouncing that Grace was 'violent, noisy, destructive and very dirty in habits'. The casebooks relate that Grace remained a troublesome patient who was always getting 'out of hand', and eventually, in October 1904, she was transferred to the FBA.

Grace was never a suitable case for transfer to the PAA, yet both Adam and the UCS proceeded with her discharge. I believe that this case points to a number of coexistent reasons that may have overruled the requirements for the transfer of patients to the PAA. One reason may have been the constant 'want of room' (G27-1896:19) at the GLA, which meant that new patients that were assigned to the GLA were likely to spend a significant time in gaol hospitals waiting for a vacancy to open up at the asylum. In many ways, Greenlees (G27-1896:20) lamented gaols as a transit route to the asylum, as he held that 'the longer an insane person is kept away from Asylum treatment, the less chance there is for that patient to benefit from treatment'. Grace's transfer thus may have been motivated by prioritising the admittance of new cases in acute and initial stages of mental illness that held a greater prospect of recovery. A second possible reason was the high cost of maintaining patients in 'the complicated and expensive machinery of an asylum', which Greenlees (G16-1895:66) admitted was an enormous burden on the Colony. A means to reduce the cost of asylum treatment to the Colony was to transfer the chronic cases to the PAA, where 'the cost of maintenance is very properly expected to be a good deal lower than in hospitals receiving recent cases of insanity and better class patients' (G16-1895:156). The daily cost per patient was approximately 25% cheaper at the PAA than at the GLA (G55-1904:83).<sup>50</sup> In sum, while Grace's behaviour and symptoms of insanity would have precluded her transfer to the PAA, there were possibly other factors that may have favoured her transfer. Grace's chronic status may have made her a prime candidate for a transfer to the PAA, so as to make room for new patients at the GLA and to reduce costs to the Colony.

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50. This is calculated from the 1903 'Report of the Inspector of Asylums' (G55-1904:83) that tabulated the daily cost of maintenance for the GLA and the PAA over an 11-year period, from 1893 to 1903.

Nkami Bawuti (HGM 18:205) was admitted in March 1901 by the resident magistrate of King William's Town, with very little information contained in the medical certificates as to her history and the context of her committal. The paucity of information in her admission records is matched by the dearth of the entries for her time at the asylum. After only five brief entries, which pertained to her physical health and intake of food, Nkami was transferred to the PAA in September 1901. Nkami was retransferred to the GLA in April 1902 (HGM 20:1). She was sent back on the grounds that the PAA could not manage her, as she was 'violent and dangerous'. From Nkami's return to the GLA until her transfer to the FBA in October 1904, she remained impulsive and violent.

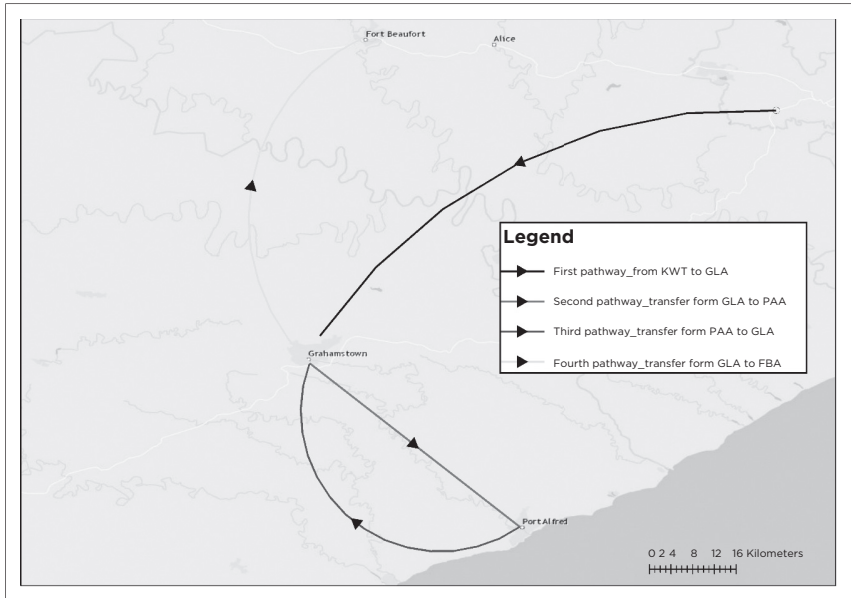
On one level, Nkami's transfer to the PAA could have been motivated by the continual lack of accommodation for new patients at the GLA. To elucidate, Greenlees in 1900 matter-of-factly stated that the GLA operated 'in a 'hand-to-mouth' fashion - always full, and to secure a single vacancy we have to secure an empty bed in some other asylum' (G41-1901:82). Nevertheless, Greenlees's statement does not explain why black patients, like Nkami, were transferred at a faster rate and with a higher proportion of numbers than white patients (Du Plessis 2017:16-17). I suggest that this may have been the result of Greenlees increasing the asylum's capacity for the admission of more white patients, while at the same time reducing the asylum's facilities for accommodating black patients. For example, a new ward was initially constructed for black patients, but on completion in 1899, it was reassigned for white patients and consequently increased the asylum's capacity for accommodating such patients (G25-1900:7). Apart from this development, Greenlees's tenure is characterised by a sustained focus on increasing the suitability of the asylum for the admission of white paying patients. A new block 'for gentleman paying the highest rates of board' was opened in 1899 (G25-1900:4), and in 1904, Greenlees opened a specially designated villa residence for white female paying patients (G57-1905:70).

Greenlees's focus on increasing the capacity of the asylum to accommodate white patients may to some extent be based on attracting and gaining paying patients as a means to please the cost-conscious authorities. The profits obtained from the paying patients were credited to the asylum and thus led to a drop in the total costs for all patients. For example, Greenlees (1905:223) enthusiastically revealed that over a period of 15 years, from 1890 to 1904, the average cost per patient amounted to £57 17s. 0.<sup>3/4</sup> d per annum, but after deducting the receipts from paying patients, the actual cost to the Colony was reduced to £39 2s. 3.<sup>1/2</sup> d. Greenlees thus valued paying patients 'as a source of revenue' (G27-1896:25) and as 'a legitimate means for assisting in reducing the total cost of the upkeep of the Asylum' (G32-1906:73).

Grace (Figure 5.2) and Nkami (Figure 5.3) drifted between asylums, until they were all later transferred to the FBA. As chronic patients, they most likely spent the remainder of their lives within the confines of the FBA. For these women, could we consider the possibility that their institutionalisation offered a form of welfare support? This proposition may hold some merit when, in the course of the following discussion, it becomes apparent that the women had dismal prospects for a life outside of the asylum. Leading up to their admittance to the asylum, the women had a background characterised by misery: Grace was repeatedly apprehended by the colonial authorities for 'wandering about with no viable means of existence', and Nkami was admitted without any contact details of a friend or relative. Throughout the years of their institutionalisation at the GLA, none of the women were visited by their family or friends. Without a connection to family, the women had no possibility of being discharged 'relieved'<sup>51</sup> into the care and protection of a

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51. The term 'relieved' 'connoted relief from symptoms of insanity, without the belief that the insanity had been cured. Those relieved were therefore presumed to be more vulnerable to the return of insanity at some future date than those seen as recovered' (Melling & Forsythe 2006:105).



**FIGURE 5.3:** Nkami Bawuti's pathways.

loved one. Furthermore, any other options for release were most certainly excluded, owing to the violent behaviour of the women: Nkami frequently fought with her fellow patients by using her nails and teeth to attack them; Grace's recurrent attacks of mania meant that her behaviour remained unpredictable – she could become violent without any provocation. The women were unresponsive to the treatment methods offered at the GLA, and they remained mentally ill and at risk of harming themselves and/ or others.

For these two women, institutionalisation was a refuge that saved them from a destitute existence in the slums and on the fringes of the outside world. Yet, not all the Colony's asylums offered the same components of welfare or sheltered care. For Andrew Scull (1996:15), the full scope of sheltered care aims to 'satisfy the basic human need for a roof over one's head and



enough to eat, for occupation, for the embrace of a community that cares'. While all the institutions offered a place to stay and food to eat, it was the aspects of occupation, recreation and a general interest in the well-being of the patients that were sorely lacking in the PAA and the FBA. As under-resourced facilities, the PAA and the FBA did not have the means to supply more than the minimum standards of care (Swanson 2001:137). Both of these institutions were earmarked to 'provide cheap custodial care for the chronic insane' (Swanson 2001:16), and one means for reducing costs was shrinking the size of the asylum staff to that of a skeleton staff that were largely unqualified and ill-equipped to provide care for the patients (Swanson 2001).<sup>52</sup> Consequently, this led to a decline in medical and nursing attention (Swanson 2001:139), and this was manifestly evident in the high number of injuries, accidents, deaths and infections at the asylums. For example, at the FBA, the staff battled to keep the patients and the asylum clean and sanitary, and this led to recurrent outbreaks of infectious diseases, as well as enteric fever, typhoid and tuberculosis becoming endemic threats in the wards of the asylum (Swanson 2001:140). At the PAA, neglect of and indifference towards patients by the staff was reflected in an extremely high death rate and an equally high accident rate, with as many as 36 accidents being reported in a 6-month period (Swanson 2001:142).

Although the GLA practised racial segregation and various forms of discrimination against black patients, it nevertheless still offered a regimen that attempted to ensure that the black patients did receive an adequate degree of attention to safeguard them from injuries, harm and general neglect. At the GLA, Greenlees conceived of nurses and attendants as surveillance channels for a patient's conduct, compliance with institutional

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52. A further means of cost-cutting at the FBA and the PAA was to reduce the rations and restrict the diet for the black patients - this mainly took the form of maize meal being served on most days and at each and every meal time. In 1909, this resulted in an outbreak of scurvy at the FBA (Swanson 2001:141).

rules and reporting on their mental state and physical well-being. The exact workings of this last point can be illustrated by the following quote:

The attendants are expected to observe the changes which take place in the mental condition, health, or habits of the patients, and to report any new feature, especially any threatening language, any depression of spirits, any suicidal tendency.<sup>53</sup> (n.p.)

Potentially, such an instruction presents a suitable approach to identifying the early onset of deteriorating physical and mental health, as well as establishing early interventions for the care and treatment of patients. In this light, the gaze of the asylum surveyed the patients for states of fatigue, anxiety, stress and despair to deliver an efficient and rapid intervention for the afflicted patient. The annual reports and casebooks of the GLA abound with cases of the nurses and the attendants informing Greenlees of black patients choking, suffering from various ailments and in need of medical attention. In the majority of these cases, Greenlees was able to assist the patient before serious injury or death took place. In Nkami's case, on admittance to the asylum, it was noticed that she was passing blood in her stools, and it soon became apparent that she had contracted dysentery in King William's Town. She was immediately placed under medical treatment and confined to bed. Although the subsequent casebook entries contain no information as to her life history, they do provide details about her physical health and her intake of food following her bout of dysentery. Both Grace and Nkami were to varying degrees violent and frequently besmeared in dirt, and they thus constantly faced the prospect of injuring themselves or other patients, as well as contracting infectious diseases. These aspects are in many ways 'the reality of asylum life for long-term patients' (Terbenche 2005:48), and the ability of the GLA to ensure that no grievous bodily harm came to the women

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53. Colonial Office correspondence, 1892, 'Government Notice No. 267 (CO7170)', Western Cape Archives and Records Service.

and that they maintained their physical health and well-being might to some extent point towards the care and attention offered to them by the staff of the GLA.

The PAA and the FBA resembled carceral institutions, where the priorities were the management, control and discipline of inmates, rather than creating a palliative care environment for patients with severe and unrelenting mental disturbances. While the GLA offered glimpses of a humane and caring environment, the economics of the asylum – cutting of costs through transferring chronic patients to cheaper facilities, while viewing white paying patients as ‘a source of revenue’ – meant that Grace and Nkami were eventually excluded from the GLA, left out of the full scope of sheltered care and consigned to inadequate facilities, which increased their likelihood of contracting contagious diseases, encountering physical harm and being subjected to an untimely death.

## ■ ‘Has been here repeatedly before’

The 44-year-old farmer’s wife, Johanna Visser (HGM 16:175), was incarcerated in late August 1891 for attempting to assault her relatives with the intent to ‘do dangerous bodily harm’. Johanna’s husband testified that she had tried to stab him and injure their children. While in gaol, Johanna was visited by the resident magistrate of Aliwal North, who certified her insane and ‘not in a fit state to stand her trial’. The magistrate’s verdict was informed by the findings of the medical certificates, which indicated that Johanna ‘labours under delusions’. Johanna was transferred to the GLA in October 1891. Her admittance marked her fifth attack of insanity. Her first attack occurred when she was 24 years old. Soon after admittance, Johanna’s excitement gave way to a calm and industrious temperament. In December 1891, Greenlees deemed her to be ‘as well as she has ever been’, and in January 1892, when Johanna expressed a desire to return home, Greenlees started the discharge procedure. Johanna was discharged recovered in February 1892.

Johanna returned to the GLA in June 1895 (HGM 17:98). Her committal was sought on the grounds that she had ‘threatened to kill her husband and children’. On arrival at the GLA, Johanna informed Greenlees that she was ‘glad to be back again’. For the first month of her institutionalisation, Johanna was violent and persisted in a delusion that she had neither a husband nor children. Her delusions soon ceased, and by the end of 1895, she was improved mentally. Although Johanna was showing signs of improvement, Greenlees did not consider her fit for discharge. Johanna was suffering from recurrent mania: when well she was ‘quiet and very industrious’, but when in a manic state, she was ‘inclined to be violent’. Individuals suffering from recurrent forms of insanity did not necessarily remain in the GLA. As previously indicated, Greenlees recommended that such patients be discharged ‘relieved’ into the care of their family. However, such discharges were contingent upon the family offering a supportive and stress-free environment for the care of the patient. Greenlees acknowledged that Johanna ‘seems not to get on smoothly’ at home in Aliwal North. Consequently, the option for a discharge pathway of ‘relieved’ was ruled out. Without the prospect of discharge into the care of her family, Greenlees transferred Johanna to the PAA in August 1896.

Johanna was discharged ‘recovered’ from the PAA in July 1897. From her first day at home, ‘she did not strike her friends as being sane’, and as the days progressed she steadily grew worse. In particular, she would often take to ‘running naked in the streets, relieving herself in bed and being violent’. Johanna reverted to the delusion that ‘she has no husband’, and her family eventually sought her committal when she began assaulting people. Johanna was readmitted to the GLA in August 1897 (HGM 18:18). Johanna’s acts of violence continued in the GLA, where she was often ‘in the wars’ with the other patients. Her violent and aggressive behaviour eventually subsided, but she remained unimproved mentally. Johanna was transferred to the PAA in July 1899.

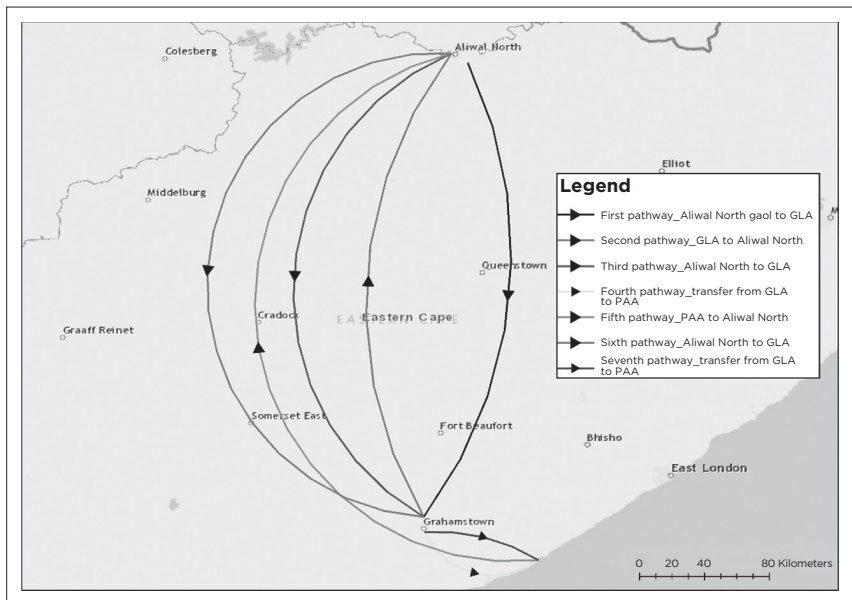
For Patricia Prestwich (2003:85), the reasons and decisions of a family to commit a patient to an asylum ‘were complicated,

never fully articulated, and often unrecorded'. While Johanna's casebooks do not provide an inclusive view of the array of reasons that her family sought to commit her to the GLA, they do indicate that her violent assault of family members and her aggressive behaviour constituted some of the factors. In this way, it is clear that Johanna's committal was not based on punishment for transgressions of female impropriety but was initiated by the 'real hazards which were presented by the individual as they were seen to lapse into insanity' (Melling & Forsythe 2006:116).

Although Johanna's unstable relations with her family and home meant that a discharge from the GLA as 'relieved' was certainly not possible, it is plausible to suggest that Johanna may not have been overly concerned with or interested in returning home. Johanna in 1895 was 'glad to be back' at the GLA. The reason for Johanna's contentment is never explicitly mentioned, but it could be suggested that Johanna was unable to cope with being back home again. While at the GLA and the PAA, her manic and acute attacks of insanity eventually passed into milder forms, and during her first periods of institutionalisation her mental health had improved to the degree that she was discharged on several occasions. In contrast, when at home, Johanna's improved mental condition did not last long, and she soon reverted to forceful and furious attacks of violence and aggression. Thus, Johanna's case may illuminate that not all patients coped with the transition back to home life, and that being transferred back to an asylum was in most instances the only option available (Coleborne 2010:14).

It is also worth exploring that Johanna's recurrent mania meant that she was perhaps suffering from a form of mental illness that could be 'ameliorated but never entirely cured' (Kelm 1994:188). If so, the GLA may have offered her a form of respite from situations in the outside world that would have aggravated her condition, and in doing so, it offered her a semblance of a sanctuary, which may not have been obtainable under the care

of her family. On the one hand, Greenlees was certainly sensitive to the role of the GLA in offering a sanctuary. Greenlees recognised that Johanna's family contributed to her psychological stress, and thus he did not seek to discharge her into their care. On the other hand, his sympathy did not extend to keeping her at the GLA. In the casebooks for her 1897 committal, Greenlees stated that Johanna '[h]as been here repeatedly before'. One might hope that such a statement would be followed by an acknowledgement by Greenlees that Johanna's return pathways to the GLA (Figure 5.4), her drifting between asylums and her chequered and ultimately ill-fated return to family care was a result of the GLA purging itself of chronic patients who required lifelong care and reassigning their welfare to subordinate asylums. Unfortunately, such a statement, which would concede that the GLA's system resulted in retransfers back to the asylum,



**FIGURE 5.4:** Johanna Visser's pathways.

was never recorded. Instead, the statement is simply followed by a cross-reference to the casebook for Johanna's previous institutionalisation.

## ■ Moving to and fro Between Family and Institutional Sites of Care and Custody

Nthabi Tshabalala's (HGM 16:317; HGM 17:35) casebooks demonstrate that some chronic patients encountered multiple community and institutional sites during the course of their lives (Figure 5.5). After an extended period of care provided by her family, Nthabi was moved to and fro between gaol and the GLA, was discharged into the care of the family, was readmitted to the GLA and was ultimately transferred to the PAA.

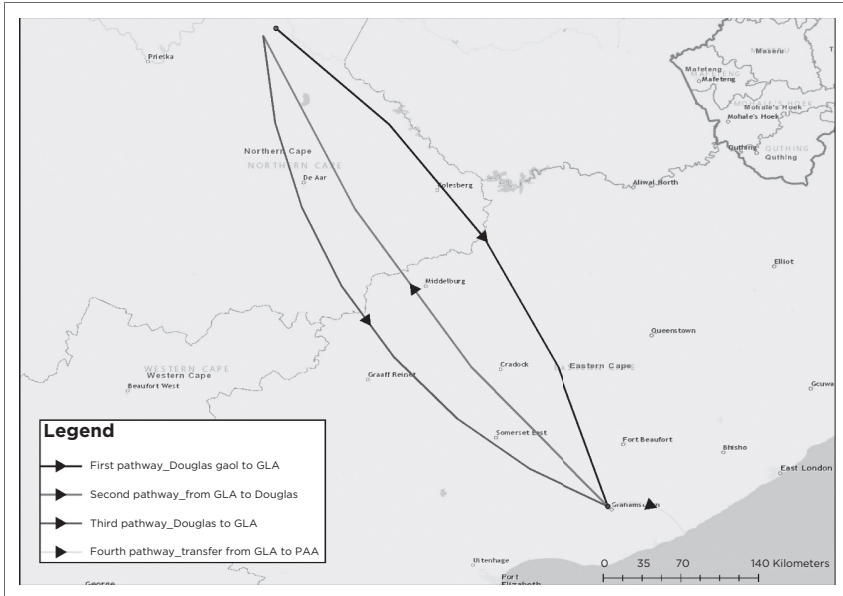


FIGURE 5.5: Nthabi Tshabalala's pathways.

From the age of 40 (HGM 16:317), Nthabi suffered from mental illness and was taken care of by her family for roughly nine years. Nthabi's period of family care ceased when her husband was struck dead by lightning. Following this event, her symptoms of insanity became more pronounced, and she was no longer able to work or take care of her children. She was eventually confined to a gaol hospital, while she waited for a vacancy to open up at the GLA. In June 1893, after two months at the gaol hospital, she arrived at the GLA. The medical certificate indicated that she presented 'rambling incoherent senseless talk', but she did not present this behaviour during her time at the GLA. Adam reported that from admission, Nthabi was 'quiet, well behaved, industrious, and shows no signs of insanity'. Nthabi was discharged recovered in May 1894 and returned to her home in Douglas.

After only one day at home, Nthabi 'appears to have lost all control of herself', and she behaved 'indecently and dangerously', by threatening to harm her neighbours and trying to set fire to a number of houses. Nthabi was readmitted to the GLA in July 1894 (HGM 17:35). In contrast to her first admission, where she showed no signs of insanity, Nthabi was now in a state of continual restlessness, 'constantly on the move', annoying the other patients, and 'quite irrepressible'. By August 1895, she was transferred to the PAA.

Nthabi's case shows an array of responses, roles and degrees of involvement of one particular family in dealing with insanity (Coleborne 2010:2; Swartz 2015:114). Nthabi's family provided her with an extended period of care during her initial onset of insanity. However, once her milder form of insanity passed into a severe state, where she could no longer perform her core labour and motherly duties, the family opted for asylum treatment to care for Nthabi. On Nthabi's discharge and return to her family, the members of the family seem to have been somewhat unwilling to manage her relapse into violent expressions of insanity.

Nevertheless, one cannot assume that Nthabi was completely content about having been discharged to her home in Douglas.



Widowed and unable to support herself or her children, Nthabi faced an adverse domestic context and significant levels of psychological stress, which would certainly have made returning home undesirable. Evidence for this line of reasoning is available in the casebook of her readmission to the GLA. Adam reported that Nthabi was fond of playing practical jokes, she would often festoon herself with weeds and all sorts of recycled paraphernalia, and she had an inclination to destroy her clothes. Nthabi was quite 'irrepressible', and thus Adam struggled to control the aforementioned behaviour. However, one recourse that proved effective in managing her behaviour was for Adam to threaten to send her back to Douglas. Whenever she was threatened with this prospect, Nthabi's mischievous demeanour would be supplanted by more self-restrained behaviour. The GLA may have offered Nthabi a 'refuge from the treacherous and harsh world outside' (Finnane 1996:90), but this was short-lived. Her chronic status meant that she was transferred to the PAA, where she would most likely encounter abuse and neglect, rather than a haven from suffering, strain and stress.

## ■ '[S]he is constantly relapsing when sent home'

In October 1895, Gillian Hall (HGM 17:54), a 45-year-old housewife from Port Elizabeth, was admitted to the asylum for the second time.<sup>54</sup> She entered the asylum with a hoarse voice. Gillian informed Adam that her voice was hoarse from obeying God, whom she claimed instructed her to shout and sing continuously. As the instruction came from God, she was unable to stop. For the first two months of her institutionalisation, Gillian continued to shout and often interfered and quarrelled with the other patients. Nevertheless, Gillian's unruly behaviour soon gave way to an improved state, in which she '[c]onducts herself quietly

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54. Gillian's first admission to the GLA was from March 1889 to November 1891.

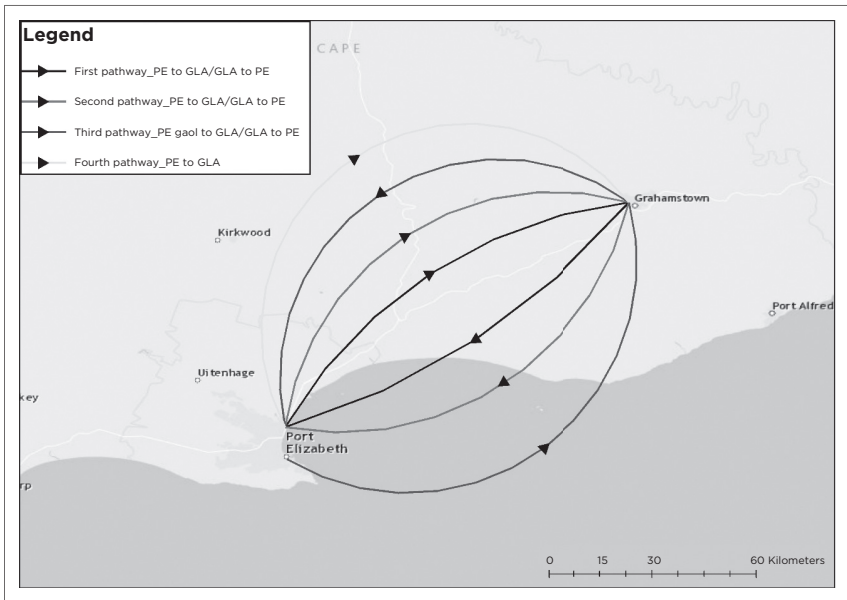
and correctly, works well and gives no trouble'. Gillian remained improved for several months, and by May 1895, Adam (HGM 17) concluded that:

[S]he is quiet and well behaved, converses rationally, and is desirous of being sent out again. Her friends were written to asking if they had any objection to her discharge, and there being no reply, she was today discharged recovered. (n.p.)

Following her discharge, it was only in October 1902, when Gillian began to destroy furniture, strip naked and become violent, that her family sought to commit her to the GLA. Owing to a lack of room at the GLA, she was sent to a gaol, pending her transfer to the asylum. She remained in gaol for six months, before she was admitted to the GLA on 17 April 1903 (HGM 21:93). The following day, Greenlees reported that 'she is quiet, working in workroom; expresses no delusions and seems convalescent'. It is thus plausible to suggest that Gillian's attack of mania abated during her prolonged incarceration at the gaol. In May, Gillian was considered ready for discharge, and accordingly, Greenlees requested one of her friends to collect her from the asylum and take her home. The unnamed friend arrived a few days later but was 'not over anxious to have her'. On 06 June 1903, Gillian was discharged recovered and was escorted home by her friend.

Gillian was admitted for the fourth time to the GLA in April 1904 (HGM 22:7). Her committal was precipitated by her strange habit of wishing to go outside naked, and her delusion that her sister was poisoning her food. Gillian informed Greenlees that she was glad to be back at the asylum, and she complained of 'evil treatment by her sister'. Although she was loquacious and emotional when talking about her grievances against her sister, for the first few months of her institutionalisation she was well behaved and a cheerful worker. During this period, Greenlees reported that he received word from Gillian's brother, who was 'very anxious to have her permanently kept here - either as a Servant or in my house! As he says she is constantly relapsing when sent home and a great trouble to them all there'. Suffering from recurrent mania, Gillian's repeated pathways to the asylum

(Figure 5.6), and her oscillation between recovery and relapse was too much for her family to cope with. Even though a description of Gillian's character portrayed her as a '[q]uiet and industrious woman when well', her family was not willing to offer her a safe haven only for her to relapse into an attack of mania. Thus, the family enquired whether Greenlees was willing to keep Gillian, when well, as an employee at either the asylum or his home. The family's comments indicate that Gillian's fourth admission marked a breaking point in their ability to cope with her mental illness (see Coleborne 2009:66), and accordingly, they petitioned for her to 'belong' to the GLA (Coleborne 2010:125).<sup>55</sup>



**FIGURE 5.6:** Gillian Hall's pathways.

55. Gillian's institutionalisation continued long after Greenlees's tenure as superintendent ended. However, further discussion of her time at the GLA is beyond the scope of this chapter.

## ■ ‘Clever man at trade but a ne’er-do-well’

Lewis Bowie (HGM 7:115), a single immigrant in his early thirties, came to the attention of the police authorities as a vagrant clad only in rags on the streets of East London. On being questioned, Lewis expressed delusions of exaltation that he had been made ‘King of South Africa’ and was about to marry a princess. He was admitted to the GLA on 31 March 1902. While the police authorities did not know much about Lewis’s history and his current circumstances, once he was admitted to the asylum, it was established that he was a clerk and was originally from Kent, England. The casebook indicates that Lewis professed to hearing voices while in East London, but a few weeks after admittance to the asylum, he no longer heard voices, and he felt much better. Lewis was assigned work duties to assist the asylum’s clerk. It soon became evident to the asylum’s doctors, however, that Lewis was (HGM 7:115) ‘[n]o good as a clerk as he is full of delusions and has a very exaggerated idea of his own importance and capabilities’. Although Lewis was removed from his clerical duties, after maintaining an improved mental state for an extended period, he was discharged on 12 July 1902.

In early May 1903, Lewis was readmitted to the GLA (HGM 7:209). The casebook does not contain any information about the circumstances that led to his certification as a lunatic, but it does indicate that he was labouring under ‘delusions of grandeur and of identity’, which were brought on by a bout of heavy drinking. On admission, Lewis greeted the asylum staff ‘as old friends’ and confessed to drinking fairly heavily over the previous few days. In the first week of August 1903, Lewis requested his discharge. Although Lewis had been in an improved mental state for several weeks, Greenlees considered him to be ‘of weak will power and unable to resist temptation’, and he thus only consented to the discharge request when Lewis agreed to journey to Cape Town to board a ship to return to England.

Considering Lewis’s repeated pathways to the asylum (Figure 5.7), Greenlees may have recommended Lewis to return home so that his family could provide a safety net to prevent any future acts of uninhibited drinking. However, Greenlees may have also insisted on a return home so that Lewis’s family could safeguard him from a future of depravedly drifting the streets of the Colony. To substantiate this suggestion, Greenlees was of the opinion that Lewis was a ‘[c]lever man at trade but a ne’er-do-well’. The term ‘ne’er-do-well’ connoted an idle, lazy and irresponsible individual who failed to do well in life (Kain 2015:76). More specifically, in colonial discourse, Jennifer Kain (2015:75–76) identifies how it became a slanderous term reserved for such persons who were immigrants. Drawing on Kain’s work,<sup>56</sup> I contend that Greenlees

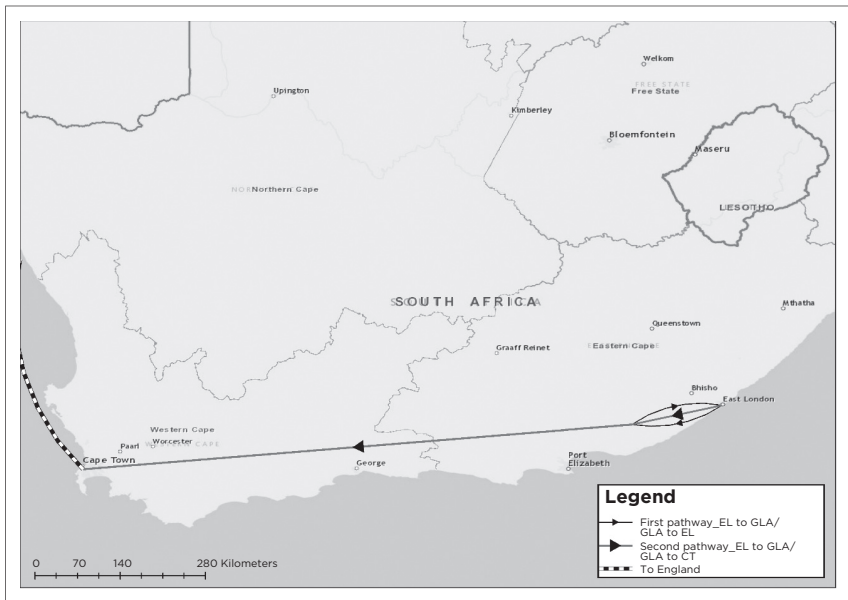


FIGURE 5.7: Lewis Bowie's pathways.

56. Kain (2015) carefully unpacks the various meanings of the term, focussing specifically on the 19th-century colonial context within the Australasian regions.

may have deployed the term to pronounce Lewis to be an immigrant who was lacking in character and who was not likely to succeed in the Colony.<sup>57</sup>

## ■ ‘[T]he farm he lived at was a very dull quiet place’

Schalk Voster (HGM 4:34), a farmer from Cradock, was admitted to the GLA on 28 February 1895 for seeing imaginary people. A few days afterwards, he appeared to be fully recovered, and by the end of March 1895, when his son arrived at the asylum to request his father’s discharge, Adam consented to the application. Shortly after his arrival home, Schalk requested that he be sent to the asylum, as ‘he was afraid of himself’. Although he remained acutely depressed and constantly appealed to his family for poison or a ‘knife to destroy himself’, it was only once he attempted to shoot himself that his family sought to admit him to the GLA. In August of 1895, Schalk (HGM 4:77) returned to the asylum.

Schalk explained to Adam that his relapse was brought on by the fact that ‘the farm he lived at was a very dull quiet place. Having nothing to do he soon became ill again’. Schalk’s statement not only allows us to see how a patient was able to explain the cause of his own relapse, but it also identifies a common theme in the casebooks of farmers admitted to the asylum. To elucidate, loneliness, boredom and isolation were shared characteristics in the casebooks of farmers who found their way into the GLA. Although Greenlees and the annual reports of the asylum never explain how the dreary and wearisome settings of farms could trigger mental illness, the casebooks do indicate that the asylum’s doctors aimed to

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57. In the colonial context, which prized masculine stamina, strength and settledness, young immigrant men, like Lewis, who were unsettled in their movements and unstable in their occupations, were regarded as examples of ‘flawed masculinity’ (Coleborne 2011:46).

prevent future relapses by advising the patient to relocate to a different setting. For example, before Schalk's discharge from the asylum in January 1896, Adam instructed his wife to make arrangements for him to live in a different place. His wife organised for him to dwell in Somerset East, where 'he will be freed from surroundings that unpleasantly affect him'.

Sometime thereafter, Schalk returned to Cradock, and by August 1896 (HGM 4:141), he was back at the asylum, having attempted to take his life on several occasions. During this third period of institutionalisation,<sup>58</sup> further details regarding Schalk's past came to light. He was originally financially well off but had gradually 'lost everything through failure of [his] wife's relatives'. Not only did this cause him much distress, it also resulted in him having to leave his old home and move to the farm, which featured in the reason for his second return to the asylum.

What thus became evident is that Schalk's domestic life entailed 'unhappiness and burdensome responsibilities' (Coleborne 2015:129), which in the long run made it necessary for him to move from his home. In his new surroundings, Schalk was unsettled, and it is possible to suggest that as he was cut off from his established support networks and was faced with the lonely lifestyle and bleak setting that came with his occupation as a farmer; Schalk found himself in a space that stifled his mental well-being.

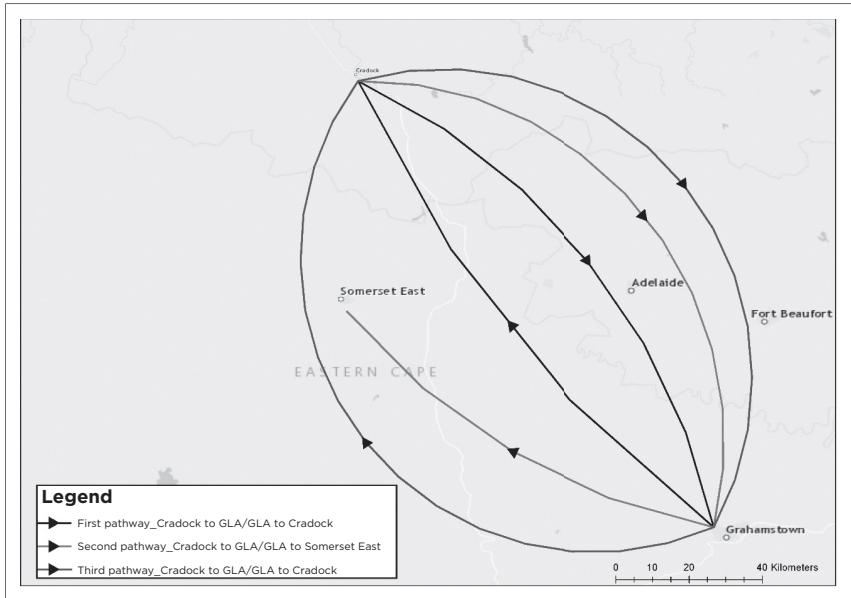
Bronwyn Labrum (2012) suggests that discussions on 'migration' are:

[N]ot just about here to there, country to country, either in the present or in the past. It is also about return journeys and circulation. It is about moving from rural to urban areas. It is about willing and forced travels. (p. 313)

Along these lines, the casebooks of Schalk (Figure 5.8), an Afrikaner born in the Colony, persuasively map moments of

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58. This period ended on 25 December 1896 when he was discharged recovered from the GLA.



**FIGURE 5.8:** Schalk Vorster's pathways.

'migration' in his life story: an undesired exodus from his home to an isolated setting, which preyed on his mind and well-being. Furthermore, Schalk's return movements to the asylum can be deemed to constitute periods of migration; the asylum became a compass point during his bouts of despair and distress.

## ■ Conclusion

For David Bodenhamer (2007:107), GIS offers the humanities a 'powerful tool in the [...] analysis of evidence' that 'does not replace the scholarly or expert narrative as much as it aids it: it finds patterns, facilitates comparisons, enhances perspective, and illustrates data'. In this chapter, the GIS visualisations aided an understanding of the 'multiple views' (Bodenhamer 2007:100) of the patients' return routes to the asylum. While the visualisations identified the unique contours and specific sites presented in



each patient's pathway, in order to tell the 'story' (Gregory & Ell 2007:118) of the context and circumstances that led to a patient's readmittance to the GLA, the casebooks were consulted.

In the process of exploring the casebooks to foreground how a patient's readmission is set within their broader life story, the chapter identified that there are a number of shared narratives in the contents of the casebooks. Featuring in the majority of the cases were adverse domestic circumstances, poverty, grief, psychological stress and trauma that contributed to the patients' pathways back to the GLA. In light of these shared narratives, readmission to the GLA may have provided a form of relief, refuge and welfare for the patients. Yet, there was wide variation in the extent to which the asylum offered each of the patients' shelter from troubled circumstances and a refuge from the travails of mental distress.

Mfundo, faced with the many hurdles that obstructed his journey home, returned twice to the asylum. Not only did the GLA offer Mfundo with provision during his physical recovery but also provided him with an option of resettlement in Grahamstown. The provisions that Mfundo received from the asylum and his discharge pathway must be viewed in terms of him being regarded as a sane person who was capable of finding work. For Schalk, his institutionalisation in the asylum could be figured as a momentary migration to seek solace from recurrent attacks of mental suffering. To substantiate, as Schalk had a family that was devoted to accepting him back into its fold when he recovered, his various stays at the asylum were only temporary. For other patients suffering from recurrent insanity, like Gillian, whose families declined to care for them during periods of recovery, institutional care was not a momentary migration but a lifelong sentence.

In the GIS visualisations for the patients who required lifelong care, a pattern emerged that they encountered numerous transfers between institutional sites. For these patients, either destitute, homeless or without a family open to their return, the

GLA offered a place of safety, sustenance and support. Although Greenlees was sensitive to providing refuge and welfare provisions at the GLA, these offerings generally did not continue for patients who required lifelong care. Most of these patients were abandoned by the GLA and transferred to the FBA and PAA. In sum, the transfer of patients who required lifelong care illuminates the 'inhospitality' (Glass 1993:129) of the GLA to offer these patients with a permanent 'safe haven' (Glass 1993:146).



# Digital Humanities Meets Sensory Ethnography: Using Digital Resources to Understand Multisensory Experiences in a Public Place

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## ■ Introduction

DH appear to have nestled itself quite snugly into academic courses, conferences and scholarly publications across the globe. As Hughes, Constantopoulos and Dallas (2016:150) point out, over the last 20 years there has been a proliferation in funding for the development of research projects in this field as well as the creation of academic positions in newly established DH centres in a wide variety of institutions worldwide. No longer merely the latest catchphrase in academic conversations, DH has solidified into an interdisciplinary field which, although understood differently by various theorists and practitioners, and even though no consensus has yet been reached over its disciplinary status, is likely here to stay.

Precisely what is meant by this ‘vibrant and rapidly growing field of endeavour’ (Schreibman, Siemens & Unsworth 2016:17) depends on who you ask, of course, with definitions of what constitutes DH ‘as prolific as the field itself’ (Hughes et al. 2016:151). In their preface to *A New Companion to Digital Humanities*, Schreibman et al. (2016:17) stress that their outlook on DH in that volume is not so much that academics in the humanities are doing work with computers, but that they are ‘doing the work of the humanities, in digital form’. In other words, DH does not only refer to the use of computational modelling or the analysis of so-called ‘big’ data produced in humanities research, but also, more importantly, it includes ‘the cultural study of digital technologies, their creative possibilities, and their social impact’ (Schreibman et al. 2016:17).

Travis (2015:927) sketches three waves that have taken place in the history and development of DH so far. The first wave was primarily focused on the digitisation of historical, literary and artistic materials and included the development of online research methods. The second wave focused on computing quantification exercises for the humanities and saw the development of ‘digital parsing, analysis, and quantification projects’ (Travis 2015:927). In the current third wave, humanities discourses are shaping the

design of coding and software applications which has also entailed greater 'transdisciplinary encounters' across traditionally distinct academic disciplines (Travis 2015:928).

The Internet has significantly changed the way we live, communicate and, in our academic environments, conduct research. The *internet of things* (IoT) has meant that wireless communication has entered our personal and professional lives with virtual *things* and *objects* – such as mobile devices, among others – that facilitate seamless communication across virtual networks (Atzori, Iera & Morabito 2010:1). One of the reasons for the explosion in research framed under the umbrella term 'DH' has to do with increasing advances in the functionality of these networks and the accessibility of networked digital tools on the web (Hughes et al. 2016:151). This developing infrastructure is making it increasingly easy to create online environments in which generating, analysing and sharing content and ideas is relatively easy, quick and engaging. The dynamic world of Web 2.0 has meant that users can produce content and work collaboratively in online environments. Moreover, newly emerging digital research methods have led to the creation of interactive work environments where scholarly research and pedagogy can be created, analysed and published by means of computer-based techniques (Hughes et al. 2016:151). These new research methods and techniques have, in turn, given rise to researchers across disciplines working collaboratively on projects entailing the development of new forms of communication.

The project discussed in this chapter specifically sought to explore new ways of doing visual research in the humanities in a digital era. The aim was to investigate how digital research methods (a tricky term that is explored in more detail below) can be utilised to create and analyse the data produced through questions asked from within the field of the humanities and then disseminate the research findings in a way that extends the 'creative possibilities' of digital technologies, as described by Schreibman et al. (2016:17), for research in visual culture studies. At the same time, the project aimed to introduce graduate

students enrolled in the Honours programme in Visual Studies at UP to digital research methods.

The project centred around the participants' multisensorial – or more-than-visual – experience of a public space. It also sought to explore the ways in which sensory experience could be captured, represented and analysed using digital tools. Taking into consideration the interests of the students and their accessibility to the site of investigation, the project investigated the multisensorial experience of a public space on their university campus – the Student Centre and Piazza – a site that is easily accessible to all the students in the group. Using a mixed-methods approach, we utilised digital methods and tools to:

- gather data
- construct a digital archive comprising audiovisual material collected during the data gathering phase
- present the findings of the research in interactive, multimedia, hypermedia essays.

The mixed-methods approach included a questionnaire answered using photographs and voice notes, and a photo-elicitation discussion that was audio-recorded. These data were uploaded to an archive created in Scalar which is an interactive digital platform that allows users to author and publish digital scholarship online. Finally, the students – who should perhaps be described as participant researchers – created accessible, interactive, multimedia, hypermedia essays that presented their findings in response to the question: how sensory experience affects the way in which space is produced at the UP-Student Centre and Piazza. This chapter begins with a brief reflection on what might be considered digital research tools and then discusses tools that were used in the project. Thereafter, in an attempt to provide context for the general framework of this enquiry, I discuss how sensory experience and embodiment more generally give shape to the production of place. Lastly, I discuss the advantages of working digitally in the humanities as it emerged in this project.

## ■ Digital Humanities in Action

Most, if not all, researchers today use some form of digital technology to carry out their research. From searching through online journals and reading e-books to simply using a computer to write up research, it may seem that everyone is now using digital methods in one or the other way. According to Rogers in his book, *Digital Methods* (2013), however, digital methods specifically investigate the web and how it organises its data. Digital methods examine ‘natively digital objects’ (Rogers 2013:1) which only exist on the web (such as blog posts and Wikipedia edits and the posts on various social media platforms) and use web-based techniques to analyse this web-based data. According to this view, digital methods might analyse the tags, likes, reshares, favourites, follows and comments (on social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, Flickr, YouTube and Twitter) as well as hyperlinks on blog posts and so on (see, for instance, Highfield & Leaver 2016). These kinds of investigations reveal not only a great deal about how the web is organised but also about how social and cultural life are changing in response to the increasing ubiquity of digital technologies in everyday life. On Rogers’s definition, methods that analyse data that are not natively digital simply cannot be classified under the rubric of digital methods. Researching images in digital repositories, as many digital humanists are doing (Sherratt 2011), would therefore not be considered a digital method. In addition, ‘digitised versions of pre-digital methods’ are also not ‘properly digital methods’ (Rose 2016:291) according to Rogers’s definition.

Hughes et al. (2016:152), on the other hand, define digital methods differently. Digital research, they believe, ‘involves the creation of an academic workspace where scholarly methods assume the form of computer-based techniques that can be used to create, analyse, and disseminate research and pedagogy’ (Hughes et al. 2016:152). Stressing the interrelation between content, method and tools, Hughes et al. (2016:151) quote the definition of digital methods in the humanities that was proposed



by the art-humanities.net at King's College, London, in 2007. Owing to the usefulness of this definition, it is quoted below (Hughes et al. 2016):

'Methods' refers to the computational methods used by artists and humanists. Computational methods are defined as the following:

1. The term 'method' broadly denotes all the techniques and tools that are used to gain new knowledge in the various academic fields that constitute the arts and humanities.
2. A method is a computational one if it is either based on ICT (i.e. database technology), or critically dependent on it (i.e. statistical analysis).
3. Methods are used in the creation, analysis and dissemination of digital resources. (p. 151)

Their understanding of digital research methods is not quite as narrow as Rogers' in that doing research on digital repositories (for instance, digitised photographs or manuscripts) is also accommodated within their definition. According to this more generous conception of digital methods, ICT methods are considered to both 'enhance existing research methods' (Hughes et al. 2016:153) and allow for the creation of new ones depending on the research question that is being asked. Thus, the mixed-methods used in our project (which is discussed in more detail later) – such as the use of mobile phones to take photographs, voice notes to record responses, digital recordings of a group discussion and the creation of an archive – would all be recognised as digital research methods. Furthermore, the publication of the findings on a multimedia hypermedia platform equally falls within the ambit of digital research methods and DH as defined by Hughes et al. (2016). While analyses of big data can produce insightful new knowledge about a wide variety of topics of interest to researchers in DH, our project aimed to work at the level of close qualitative descriptions focussing on relatively small data, but still using digital tools to accomplish the task. In the next section, I take a closer look at ethnographical methods as these formed the basis of our research. I explore some of the ways in which ethnography (both autoethnography and sensory ethnography) meets DH.

## ■ (Auto)ethnography

Ethnography is a method that is used to understand the ways in which social and cultural practices are given particular meanings. Traditionally concerned with recording what people say and observing what people do, ethnographic methods are useful for bringing a place and its people alive by producing ‘thick descriptions’ of particular situations (Varis 2016:3). Ethnographic research is a learning process where knowledge is gathered in the field through experiencing with others (Varis 2016:3). The project I describe in this chapter took an ethnographic and more specifically autoethnographic approach in that its primary aim was to closely describe and then interpret some of the ways in which place is perceived and invested with meaning by focussing especially on individual students’ multisensorial interactions with the UP-Student Centre and Piazza.<sup>59</sup>

Autoethnography, as a type of ethnographic practice, describes and analyses personal experience to contextualise and understand these experiences within broader cultural contexts (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011). It therefore focusses on both self and context (Pitard 2016). A combination of autobiography and ethnography is used to both ‘do and write autoethnography’, rendering this method ‘both process and product’ (Ellis et al. 2011, *emphasis in original*). One characteristic that sets autoethnography apart from other research methods is its rejection of the kinds of ‘master, universal narratives’ which more often than not emerge in research when the ‘facts’ and ‘truths’ that scientists find are closely linked to ‘the vocabularies and paradigms [they] used to represent them’ (Ellis et al. 2011). Most importantly, autoethnography seeks to produce ‘meaningful, accessible, and evocative research’ in the

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59. A digital ethnographic approach may be somewhat different to the way in which ethnography and digital tools were used in the project I describe. Digital ethnography or e-ethnography (Kunming, Spotti & Kroon 2014) studies technologically mediated cultures and communication and seeks to understand ‘locally specific digital practices’ (Varis 2016:4). There are many ways in which digital ethnography is conceptualised, and not all use digital tools to conduct their research. For example, Nemer and Freeman (2015) used a digital ethnographic approach to understand the production and experience of selfies in a marginalised group of teens in Brazil by using traditional interviews to gather data.

hope that the research will ‘deepen our capacity to empathize with people who are different from us’ (Ellis et al. 2011). Moreover, instead of avoiding their subjectivity, emotions and influence on the research, autoethnographers embrace these as very much part of gaining an understanding of a particular situation.

Some researchers use vignettes (also referred to as anecdotes) in their autoethnographic research (Pitard 2016). Vignettes are a useful method for analysing lived experience as they provide a window into a situation and can enable readers to reach a deeper understanding of the issue being investigated. Preferring the term anecdote, Van Manen (2014:250) explains that ‘what makes [them] so effective is that they seem to tell something noteworthy or important about life’. In autoethnographic research, the anecdote ‘give[s] voice to the unconscious, deep and pathic sensations experienced in the reduction moment’ (Pitard 2016). Vignettes are short and simple stories that describe a single incident or a moment of experience (Van Manen 2014:252). They should provide concrete details and may include precise quotations to show who said and did what at a particular time (Van Manen 2014:252). Vignettes are usually recorded in journals (cf. Pitard 2016) and document the autoethnographer’s immediate responses (both physiological and emotional). In our project, vignettes were recorded as voice notes on mobile phones. To guide the vignette in a specific way, students were given questions to respond to. Among these were the following: What do you usually do when you are here? Is there anything you really like or really hate about the Piazza and its surrounding spaces? Comment on anything you notice about the particular way in which you use the space.<sup>60</sup>

In ethnographic practice, researchers have begun to reflect more closely not only on their research subjects’ embodied and sensory experiences but also on their own multisensorial involvement in going about their research. Describing *sensory* ethnography as

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60. Some of the questions drew from Degen and Rose’s (2012:10) research in Bedford and Milton Keynes.

‘a developing field of practice’ in *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, Pink (2009:10) grapples with the ways in which ethnography can be practised with the multisensoriality of experience as its starting point. She avoids discussing sensory modalities or categories – in other words, individual sense organs – separately, opting for an approach that considers the notion that multisensorial experience is ‘fundamental to how we learn about, understand and represent other people’s lives’ (Pink 2009:7). As a qualitative research practice, sensory ethnography is a ‘reflective and experiential process through which understanding, knowing and (academic) knowledge are produced’ (Pink 2009:8). Furthermore, it is concerned precisely with the kind of knowledge that is not immediately visible when observing research participants or during interviews, methods that are both ‘classically’ used to gather data in ethnographic practice. For Pink (2007a), sensory ethnography is not merely a method for collecting data. Rather, it is:

[A] process of creating and representing knowledge (about society, culture and individuals) that is based on ethnographers’ own experiences. It does not claim to produce an objective or truthful account of reality, but should aim to offer versions of ethnographer’s experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced. (p. 8)

Experiential and evocative elements of ethnography are a very important part of this process. As Alex Rhys-Taylor (2018) confirms, sensory ethnography does not ‘do away with the visual or the spoken word’; rather, it pays ‘a heightened attention to other aspects of experience that have hitherto been unrecorded’. These often ineffable, invisible and taken for granted aspects of our emplacement in particular environments are what sensory ethnography attempts to describe. Its emphasis is on our situatedness in environments and investigates how we make sense of our relationships to environments, especially as these relationships are mediated by digital technologies (Pink 2015:154).<sup>61</sup>

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61. See, for example, Aaron Hess’s (2015) discussion of how mobile technologies – especially as they are used to produce selfies – mediate and shape the spaces that we inhabit.

## ■ Multisensory Experience and Place

The embodied and multisensorial experience of place has recently been foregrounded in cultural geography and by ethnographers interested in the sensory sociality of place (Borer 2013; Degen & Rose 2012; Degen et al. 2017; Pink 2007b, 2009, 2015). Their understanding of the intersection of multisensory experience and the production of place is aptly summed up by Feld and Basso (1996:91) who writes that ‘as place is sensed, senses are placed; as places make sense, senses make place’. This turn towards the senses in understanding the construction of place can be contextualised within a broader wave of sensory scholarship that has gained momentum in research across many disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. Over the past two decades, growing interest in the multisensoriality of all experience has roughly coincided with the emergence of DH. For visual culture studies – the interdisciplinary field within which the project discussed here was designed – the ‘sensory turn’ or the ‘sensuous revolution in scholarship’ (Howes 2005:ix) has led to a reappraisal of the dominance of the visual in this discipline. Halsall (2004:118) and Marks (2011:240), for instance, have berated visual culture studies for over-prioritising the visual in its approach to its objects of investigation. Earlier, in 1996, a special issue of the acclaimed journal *October* asked scholars working in various disciplines that cross paths with visual culture studies to answer questions surrounding its emergence, nature and scope. Now referred to as the *October questionnaire*, the answers to those questions indicate that some of the respondents were already wary of its (over)emphasis on the visual. For instance, the art historian Thomas Crow (1996:35) argued that visual culture studies ‘perpetuates the narrowness entailed in modernism’s fetish of visibility’ and the film scholar Tom Gunning (1996:49) pessimistically identified the ‘greatest limitation’ to visual culture studies as ‘the reification [of] a division of the senses’. Likewise, referring to the field of architecture, Lavin (1996:50) worried that the ‘isolation of the image’ in visual culture studies would render a substantive analysis of architecture,

which cannot easily be disciplined ‘according to the logic of the visual’, all but impossible. In the field of art, Cherry (2005:5) later concluded in *Art: history: visual: culture* that one of the main difficulties facing the critical analysis of art is the lack of methodological approaches that address forms of art ‘that contest, refute or renegotiate visibility’. More recently, Duncum (2012:183), the prolific writer on education and visual culture has argued that ‘visual culture [...] tends to [...] side line consideration of senses other than the optic’, calling for a better emphasis, particularly in pedagogy, on both art and visual culture not as primarily visual but rather as multisensory phenomena.

Indeed, if one were to reflect on its name only it could easily be assumed that visual culture studies privileges the visual and neglects the ‘other’ senses in the same way that Western philosophy has categorised and hierarchised the senses according to their alleged (in)accuracy in accessing knowledge about the world. In the sensory hierarchy established in Western culture and philosophy, sight and hearing enjoyed a higher status than smell, taste and touch.<sup>62</sup> These ‘subordinate’ senses have also been referred to as the ‘proximal senses’ (Diaconu 2006:2; Marks 2011:239) as they require an intimacy with their object which vision and hearing – the so-called ‘distance senses’ – presumably do not. This hierarchy goes back to Aristotle’s organisation of the senses from most to least important: vision – hearing – smell – taste – touch (cf. Stewart 2005:61). Aristotle regarded seeing and hearing as the higher philosophical senses which give access to ‘sensitivity’. Since Aristotle’s formulation of the hierarchical division of the sensorium, vision and hearing, which do not require actual contact with the material world, have been linked to philosophical contemplation and abstraction and have thereby been awarded ‘supreme philosophical honours’ (Jonas 1954:507).

Many researchers – not only in visual culture studies but also in several fields touched by the sensory turn, such as anthropology, film studies, cultural geography, architecture and material culture

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62. In diverse cultures, the senses are hierarchised differently according to their specific needs. See Constance Classen’s (2005) study of the sensory hierarchies of non-literate cultures.

studies – stress that all experience is at once multisensory: our senses are interconnected, interrelated and work in consort (Duncum 2012:187; Pink 2009:2). This means that our visual experience is affected by the information our bodies are receiving from the ‘other’ senses: hearing, touch, taste or smell. Similarly, what we hear, touch, smell and taste is affected by what we see. According to Gibson’s (1966, 1986) ecological approach, the senses operate as parts of perceptual systems. At various times and contexts, different sensory modalities come to the fore more strongly or recede into the background, a process Feld and Basso (1996:93) describes as the blurring of individual sensory modalities into synesthetic experience. Moreover, the common assumption that there are only five senses was refuted some time ago. Gibson (1966:3), for instance, includes ‘heat, effort, lightness [...] weight and speed’ as well as spatial perception and kinaesthesia – the muscle sense – in the human sensorium. Similarly, Pink (2011:268) argues that the constructed categories of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching merely provide a convenient way in which to communicate about experience. People often use ‘*extrasensory*’ categories (Pink 2015:25, 115) (*author’s added emphasis*) – such as ‘freshness’ in Pink’s research – to describe their sensory perceptions. In the project discussed later, the inadequacy of the culturally constructed sensory categories soon became evident. Although we initially intended to tag the photographs in our archive according to the five senses, these labels proved to be too limiting descriptors of what the photographs conveyed for each participant.

Urban environments are sensorially saturated spaces. The range of sensory stimuli that people encounter in a city – smells, sounds, tastes, textures and sights – all carry symbolic meanings. These meanings shape the way in which people interact with and the connection they feel to place. In the spirit of Georg Simmel’s and Walter Benjamin’s writing at the beginning of the 20th century, for Michael Ian Borer (2013:966) the senses can be used as a lens for studying people’s experiences in cities in order to ‘identify the ways that culturally embedded and embodied individuals use their

senses to make sense of the cities where they live, work and play'. Both Simmel ([1907] 1997) and Benjamin (1997) maintained that people's experiences in the growing bustling cities of the late 19th century were fundamentally corporeal and sensuous. The changes taking place in the urban landscape at the beginning of the 20th century deeply affected modern consciousness. In *The Metropolis and the Mental Life* ([1903] 1971), Simmel noted people's sense of alienation in these new cities with their fast-paced activities. He contrasted the sensory overload of cities with the slower pace of rural life and argued that people had to adapt to these new urban environments. Such adaptations included the way in which people related to one another.

Influenced by Simmel, Benjamin also recognised urbanism as a distinctly corporeal and sensuous experience. He noted that, through their active involvement with a place, individuals begin to generate shared meanings. These meanings become layered onto a place or embedded into them through continual social interaction. From this interaction and sharing meanings with others, place identity and place attachment emerge. In sensory studies of urban spaces, attention is given to the lived everyday sensorial practices of being in a city and understanding how those practices influence interpretations of a city. Thus, everyday experience is the starting point.

Borer (2013) finds it useful to differentiate between sensorial experiences in the city by separating the five bodily senses to discuss the city's five 'sensescapes'. He discusses seescapes, soundscapes, smellscapes, tastescapes and touchscapes in order to show how sensory experience produces social and cultural life (Borer 2013). But not all scholars concerned with the sensory experience of cities agree that experience can be separated according to strictly constructed sensory categories. For instance, in their analysis of two UK cities with distinct sensory environments, Degen and Rose (2012) find it imperative to understand different people's *in situ* corporeal experiences of a space by looking at how the *full* human sensorium – including, but not prioritising, sight – and in combination with the moving



body, is involved in shaping perceptions. In that project, the authors concluded that it is not so much the visual design elements that shape people's experiences of designed environments, as urban designers and policymakers imagine. Rather, people's bodily mobility – their walking practices – and their memories of previous encounters with both the places in question as well as similar places play a significant role in shaping their perceptions of those places and creating a particular 'sense of place' (Degen & Rose 2012:4) that cannot be reduced to isolated sensory perceptions. In their research, Degen and Rose (2012) found that people's walking practices are fundamental to their interactions with urban environments. In the following section, I explore walking as a practice that produces place.

## ■ Walking as Place-Making Practice

Walking is fundamental to the way in which we move through and perceive environments. Ingold (2004:330) argues that 'it is surely through our feet, in contact with the ground (albeit mediated by footwear), that we are more fundamentally and continually "in touch" with our surroundings'. Michel de Certeau (1984:97) observed that urban spaces are given their specific shape through the practices of the pedestrians who walk through them. Walking practices 'weave spaces together', he argued (De Certeau 1984:97). It follows then that walking is a place-making activity that involves an intimate connection between our bodies and the environments we move through. Casey (1996:44) draws attention to two essential characteristics of places: on the one hand, the experiencing body is central to the production of place, and on the other, place itself possesses a 'gathering power' in that it draws bodies and things as well as time and space together. He argues that 'far from being static sites, [places] are themselves continually changing in accordance with their own proper dynamism' (Casey 1996:44). This means that place is produced in many different settings which include not only physical locations (houses, gardens, streets, shopping

malls and so forth) but also movement itself. Pink (2007b:245) argues that walking through a garden path or walking through a foreign county, for instance, are place-making activities. The physical, multisensorial body ‘determines place’ as people experience place through their multisensorial engagements with specific environments (Pink 2007b:245). Place is thus produced through the amalgamation of seeing, smelling, hearing, touching and the creation of textures in the environment itself as people leave their footprints on it, breathe out air into it and make sounds as they move. Furthermore, drawing on Casey’s (1996:44) contention that place possesses a ‘gathering power’, Pink (2007b:245) suggests that ‘things, persons, social encounters, experiences, discourses, reflections and more are gathered together as components of that place-as-route’. The route – or better, the walk – is thus in itself generative of place. In addition, walking is an activity in which people may (potentially, at least) share and empathically understand each other and their environments. Lee and Ingold (2006:69, *emphasis in original*) have emphasised ‘the sociability that is engendered by walking *with* others’ because this activity involves ‘a physical co-presence, emphasised by common movements, [which] is also important in ethnography as we attempt to live and move as others do’.

An example of a project which attempts to bring the reader/recipient to a closer understanding of how others live(d) and move(d) is ‘The changing feel of Smithfield: exploring sensory identities and temporal flows’ led by Monica Degen at Brunel University, London. This digital resource contains links to interactive or ‘evocative’ maps containing images, written information and audio reconstructions of what the Smithfield Meat Market might have been like at various times in the past and today<sup>63</sup>. Smells, sounds and textures are visualised and labelled on some maps while others allow users to (virtually) follow the walking route of a fictional persona on his or her daily routine through the market. On the website, the project is described as an

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63. See <http://sensorysmithfield.com>

attempt 'to experiment with different ways of communicating and visualising the various temporal flows, sensory engagements and fluctuating atmospheres that characterise the Smithfield Market area over a 24-hour period' (Sensory Smithfield n.d.:n.p.). The interactive digital resource allows a wide audience to gain a sense of the nuanced and elusive character of the market.

Another project that aims to document the multisensorial and embodied everyday activities at a site is the short film of Billingsgate Fish Market in London that was produced by Dawn Lyon and her team. Through an audiovisual montage of time-lapse photography and sound recordings combined with text, the film makes visible those aspects of market life that are generally elusive. The unique 'rhythms, patterns, flows, interactions [and] temporalities' (Lyon 2016) which give shape to its particular atmosphere provide the viewer with a close sense of the complex and nuanced nature of this space.

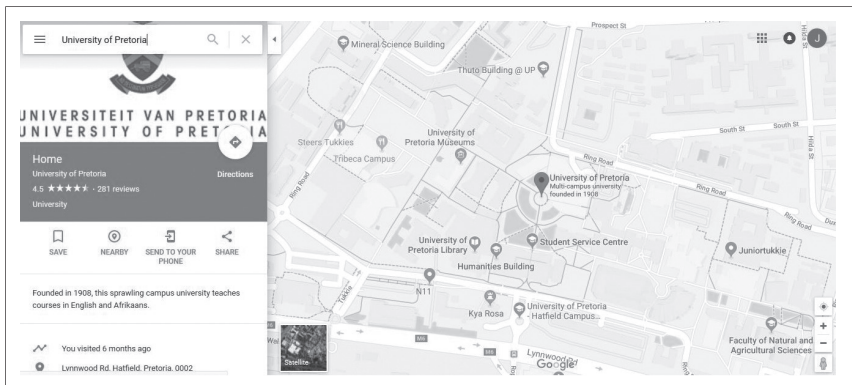
Although the project I am discussing here took a different form to that undertaken by Degen and her team working at Brunel University as well as Lyon and her team at Billingsgate Fish Market, there are also some conceptual affinities between the projects which all set out to understand particular places as primarily sensory domains and show how multisensory experiences produce particular places.

## ■ Sensing the UP-Student Centre and Piazza

In this project, DH meets sensory ethnography. Eleven students – all of whom were enrolled in the Honours programme in Visual Studies in the Department of Visual Arts at the UP in 2017 – participated in the project which was entitled: 'Sensing the UP-Student Centre and Piazza'. The project comprised four stages. During the first stage, the students took an autoethnographic approach and provided feedback about their experience of the UP-Student Centre and Piazza in response to a list of questions.

The feedback took the form of photographs and voice notes – or, vignettes – recorded on mobile phones during a walking exploration of the area. This area, which saw a massive refurbishment in 1995, can be described as one of the main hubs of student life on the UP campus. A Google Maps search for the UP places the red location pin directly in the centre of the Piazza which attests to the ideological importance of this area (Figure 6.1).

The Piazza area consists of paved walkways with a distinct radial pattern, grassed lawns and a small raised concrete seating area in an amphitheatre on the south-eastern side. There are a few benches for seating on the northern side. Buildings occupy the north-eastern side with several walkways connecting the exterior and interior spaces. The built structures house a large food court with food kiosks and communal seating areas with tables and chairs, a smaller more intimate coffee shop, ATMs, bathrooms, a travel agency, a photocopy business and a book store. The students were invited to explore the whole area.



Source: Google Maps, 2018, 'University of Pretoria', viewed n.d., from <https://www.google.com/maps/place/University+of+Pretoria/@-25.7545894,28.2298145,17.25z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x0:0xa7083bed5b42c902!8m2!3d-25.7545492!4d28.2314476>.

**FIGURE 6.1:** The University of Pretoria located on Google Maps with the location pin in the centre of the Piazza.

Guided by the university's policy of informing research participants about the nature of the research they engage in, the students were first briefed on what was required of them, what the benefits would be to them, how their privacy would be protected and what their rights were as research participants. The ethical implications of the project were carefully explained as photo-elicitation was used as a data gathering tool in the second stage of the project. During the second stage, students were asked to each choose a photograph they had taken that was particularly meaningful to them or that very aptly expressed their response to one of the questions asked in the first stage. During the group discussion, the photograph was projected on a screen and, guided by an interview schedule, an informal conversation took place about each photograph. This discussion was audio-recorded on an iPad.

As the photographs that were taken would be published on a website, we discussed the ethical implications of taking photographs of other people. Guided by Mitchell's (2011) discussion of using photographs as a research tool in *Doing Visual Research*, we discussed ways in which photographs could be taken that avoided revealing people's identities. Mitchell (2011:21) points out that taking pictures of people is not the only way to bring a point across. Objects are symbolic subjects and evoke all sorts of meanings depending on the way they are used or what people do with them. For example, in one of the projects Mitchell (2011:21) describes, a community health care worker photographed a row of hairdryers hanging from their hooks in a hair salon to avoid photographing specific people with HIV and AIDS. This image connoted their absence from the beauty salon because 'they are sick at home or they are no longer alive' (Mitchell 2011:21). In the UP project, Molly's<sup>64</sup> photograph of donuts is evocative of all sorts of associations with this sweet treat (Figure 6.2).

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64. Each participant chose a pseudonym which they recorded alongside all the media uploaded in the archive. This allowed for the protection of their privacy beyond the group, but not within the group. In other words, any outsiders exploring the archive cannot identify the participant.



Source: Photograph taken by Molly. With permission from the photographer.

**FIGURE 6.2:** Photograph taken by Molly for question 4.



Source: Photograph taken by Louise. With permission from the photographer.

**FIGURE 6.3:** Photograph taken by Louise for question 3.

Depending on personal taste, it can connote either a delicious snack or a stomach-churning, sickly-sticky pastry. If, however, photographing people is necessary and unavoidable, a close-up of a pair of hands can be used, as Louise has done (Figure 6.3), or a shot from the knees down. Other ways to achieve the same effect include photographing people from a distance, or with their backs turned. Alternatively, faces can be blurred or pixelated when publishing the photograph.

When using photo-elicitation, images are actively created as part of the research project. In addition, as Rose (2016:308) points out, this visual research method is a useful way in which to get answers to questions that may have nothing or very little to do with the visual or the visible. In research concerned with urban environments and landscapes, for example, photographs ‘can convey something of the feel’ of these places and they can also ‘capture something of the sensory richness and human inhabitation’ of these places (Rose 2016:308). For this reason, photo-elicitation has become increasingly popular in research concerned with both the everyday uses of urban spaces and the

sensory experience of these environments (cf. Degen, Taylor & Silver 2018; Pink 2007b, 2015).

Discussing the photographs that were taken on the walk and asking questions that focused on what they meant to each student generated ‘rich talk’ (Degen & Rose 2012:11). The images enriched the students’ recorded responses to the questions on the questionnaire, and the guided questions used in the discussion prompted talk about all sorts of associations that had not been thought about previously. As Rose (2016:315) points out, photo-elicitation ‘encourages talk that is more emotional, more affective, more ineffable’ and can generate various kinds of knowledge than talking about an issue can produce on its own. Listening to the responses of other members of the group resulted in the students reflecting on their own responses to the questions and how these might differ from the other participants. Photo-elicitation is also a useful way to elicit reflection on things that happen in everyday life that are generally taken for granted (Rose 2016:316), like walking through UP’s Student Centre and Piazza. Although nine of the 11 students had used this space regularly, they had not reflected on it in the way the questionnaire encouraged them to do. For instance, Adeline said that she had not previously noticed design aspects of the Piazza and was particularly drawn to the lines and geometric patterns (Figure 6.4).

In the third phase of the project, the research participants became the researchers. They uploaded all the material – the recorded voice notes, the photographs and the photo-elicitation



Source: Photograph taken by Adeline. With permission from the photographer.

**FIGURE 6.4:** Photograph taken by Adeline for Question 8.



discussions – to an archive that had been created in Scalar.<sup>65</sup> Scalar was chosen as the home of this project as it allowed us to collaboratively build an archive of the data that had been gathered, analyse that data and then write up and present the findings all on one platform. It also allowed each student to create their own interactive reflection essay which could directly reference the sound-recordings and the images in the archive in the fourth stage of the project.<sup>66</sup> Scalar offers various visualisation tools, including annotations, mapping and timelines that allow users to structure the project in multiple ways. These tools allowed us to create a collection of accessible, interactive, multimedia, and hypermedia essays that describe and attempt to understand a group of students' distinct sensory engagements in the UP-Student Centre and Piazza by reflecting on not only the visual characteristics of that space but also on the multiple sensory modalities that operate in this experiential field. These media-rich essays are linked to the archive which means that the reader or user can easily navigate between the narratives and the data in the archive in a non-linear manner. Tags were used to group specific topics related to key themes. The following tags emerged through a group discussion: 'see', 'odour', 'flavour', 'sound' and 'feel'.

## ■ Reflections on the Project

In this project, taking photographs was a form of ethnographic note-taking rather than a means to visually record data. The photographs are evocative of the 'sensory and affective dimensions of location as experienced through the subjectivity of the research participant [...].' (Pink 2011:272). In other words, when students wrote their reflection essays they were re-experiencing the material

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65. The project can be accessed at: <http://scalar.usc.edu/works/vkk-757-archiving-ups-piazza/index>

66. The reflection essays can be accessed at: <http://scalar.usc.edu/works/vkk-757-archiving-ups-piazza/discussions-concerning-the-archive>

and sensory elements of being in the UP Piazza and the photographs are not merely visual data from which meanings are interpreted from an outsider's perspective. Moreover, a reflexive ethnographic approach was taken in this project which enabled all the participants to be co-producers of knowledge through their encounters with others – on the experiential walk, during the photo-elicitation discussion and when writing up the reflection essay. In this way, knowledge was produced through collaboration in both face-to-face and digital environments allowing the participants to gain a deep understanding of each participant's multisensorial experience of the site under investigation. As Pink (2011:271) argues, 'The practice of sensory ethnography involves the researchers' empathetic engagement with the practices and places that are important to the people participating in the research'. This means that sensory ethnography is less interested in observing what others are doing but focusses on producing knowledge through participating with people in a shared activity.

In this project, the ethnographic methods of talking and walking were combined with image making, a method that has been explored extensively by Pink (2007, 2015). Taking this approach means that knowledge is produced 'with others, in movement and through engagement with/in a material, sensory and social environment' (Pink 2011:272). The use of audio(visual) recording meant that elements of the experience could be represented including 'the memories and imaginaries related to [this experience]' (Pink 2011:272).

The project was experimental and speculative from the start and problems were continuously ironed out. Despite the difficulties encountered along the way, some remarkable insights were revealed through this process. The photo-elicitation discussion took an interesting turn when Adeline spoke about her personal movement through the space which does not actually follow the visual lines towards the centre of the Piazza. In fact, she rarely goes to the centre of the Piazza. Instead, she always walks around the outskirts because she feels as if she is being watched when she crosses the centre. Jane agreed, stating

that 'I walk around it, instead of through it'. Likewise, Loretta said that 'I don't want people to pick on me [...] I prefer not to be seen'. As Pink (2007b) notes:

[P]aths and routes are not simply functional routes that connect one place to another but are meaningful sensory and imaginative places [in] their own right that interact with and are contextualised by the sensescapes of which they form a part. (p. 246)

In this case, it was particularly the students' sense of being seen that affected the route they take through the Piazza. On the other hand, Calliope and JP confessed that they walk straight through the Piazza if that is the shortest route to where they are going. A new insight emerged about this group of students' self-awareness in the spaces they use and showed that it is not only the types of activities that people do that affect their routes through spaces as suggested by Degen et al. (2017) in their analysis of Smithfield and Degen and Rose's (2012) analysis of Milton Keynes and Bedford. Instead, people's movements are also influenced by their perception of their own visibility – their sense of being on visual display – in particular spaces, whether this visibility occurs through human eyes or the eyes of surveillance cameras. Although overall the students were impressed by the visual characteristics and the design elements of both the interior and exterior spaces, their comments about being watched or being on display also hint at feelings of anxiety when moving through the space.

Many students commented on the overwhelming sounds and smells in the area. In her reflection essay, Louise notes that many students described the inside of the student centre and food court area as 'loud, noisy and chaotic'. She also noticed that many students used technologies such as mobile phones, iPod and ear phones to 'sound out' unwanted noises and protect themselves from their frenzied surroundings. They also commented on the overwhelming mixture of food smells inside the food court as well as the smell of smoke in the area close to the building. It was interesting to note that, based on these negative sensory experiences, several participants preferred to

eat and socialise at other places on the campus. These alternative spaces were compared to the Student Centre and Piazza confirming what Degen and Rose (2012:22–23) found in their research on Bedford and Milton Keynes. That is, the way in which the students experienced UP's Student Centre and Piazza provoked memories of past experiences of other places, resulting in judgements being made about those places. And, interestingly, the students were especially unimpressed by the sounds and smells (and even the tastes) at the food court. Thus, 'sensory encounters with one place were mediated by memories of another' (Degen & Rose 2012:23), leading to a distinct distaste for the food court and its immediate surroundings based on their sensory experiences there and the associations they have made with the area over time.

## ■ Conclusion

The way in which scholars in the humanities, and particularly visual culture studies, go about their research is transforming and the methods we use must keep pace with these broader changes. Although the project described above did not use a large data set or use data mining techniques or other computational tools to answer the research question, it enhanced research in visual culture studies in at least two ways. Firstly, the emphasis in the project on the experiential, the embodied and multisensorial ways in which the students interacted with a space they were all generally familiar with, or had memories of, shifted the attention that we normally give to the visual negotiation of the world around us. This compelled the students to think differently about how we do visual culture studies. Secondly, it rendered the results of the research digitally accessible – and relatively quickly – in a publishing format that has no print equivalent. The hyperlinks to photographs, voice notes and annotations create a non-linear and rich understanding of the participants' experiences of the chosen site. Moreover, the methods used in the project led to an elevated level of

engagement with the data for the participant researchers and, we hope, for those who interact with the site. In further research projects, the digital technologies themselves that were used in the project – the mobile phones, computers and data projector – could be explored for all these invite particular corporeal and sensorial engagements. As Pink (2015:152) notes, as touch, sound and vision are brought together when we use these technologies, ‘their use in sensory ethnography calls for further theoretical development and practical experimentation’. Another kind of experimentation that may be used in future projects could be the incorporation of videos that might express the atmosphere of the place in question in even more lively ways, thus adding another layer to the already rich possibilities of using digital resources in visual studies research. Finally, the continuous development of new apps and other IoT technologies means that future projects might benefit from apps such as ArcGIS, for instance, which allows even greater interactivity and may lead to new insights being reached about the multisensorial experience of place.

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# The Bigger Picture: What Digital Humanities Can Learn from Data Art

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'We've got all these gizmos, but what does that say about us?'  
(Dubois in Off Book 2011)

## ■ Introduction

Why DH? What does it mean? What does it really say about us as human beings? What is it missing? During the third annual New Perspectives in Digital Humanities conference at King's College, London, these fundamental questions surrounding the

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development of digital scholarship emerged as an underlying theme. The conference, which annually explores new developments in the field of digital humanism and visualisation across disciplines, brought together a variety of scholars from around the globe to discuss DH as a technology, a practice and a concept. While the conference generated fresh ideas and showcased exciting projects based on digital scholarship, it became clear that more often than not the ominous ‘but why?’ question still lurks in the background when contemplating digital scholarship.

Simply stated, scholars and academics applaud each other’s digital projects and digitally born findings, yet they are often left wondering what the actual essence of these digital projects is. Yes, it is exceptional to be able to map data digitally, and yes, certain results could only be produced using digital tools, but why? Why create a digital project? What is the contribution of this digital field? Is it merely the humanities’ answer to the digital age? Or could DH be more impactful to its audience? In other words, can DH have more significance and thus more influence in contemporary society or is it strictly bound to an academic audience? Moreover, how do we achieve a broader reach in this field? In truth, when leaving any DH proceedings, one may be overwhelmed by the effect of technology on academia but underwhelmed by its impact on society and the individual viewer. It is therefore vital to start considering the bigger picture surrounding digital scholarship.

This chapter presents a possible bigger picture for DH, in response to these questions, showing that digital scholarship has the potential to generate robust reactions, as well as suggesting that this capacity needs to be cultivated to make DH relevant and impactful in contemporary society. The extending capabilities of digital scholarship are explored to reveal the bigger picture of DH and its relationship to self-understanding and society.

To establish the extended meaning of digital scholarship, I examine the work of so-called ‘generative artists’ or ‘data artists’, who explore personal data and big data by making it accessible, exciting and useful. By creating digital visualisations from personal

(big) data, and creatively using these visualisations, data artists' digital projects become culturally and emotionally powerful. By examining selected projects (e.g. 'A more perfect union', 'The Wind Map' and 'Dear Data') and their compelling impact, the potential of using digital scholarship as a medium and methodology can be highlighted. The projects not only technologically think through and represent academic research but also create an affective and cultural response in the viewers who engage with the projects. By discussing the expressive power of the visualisations contained in the projects, it is argued that, if digital scholarship applies itself in this manner, it potentially offers agency and potential, especially with regard to the understanding and unpacking of the self in contemporary society. Thus, by examining selected artworks and projects, I wish to show that by following a similar approach, the DH can enhance its contribution.

My argument is mapped out as follows:

1. I picture the current state of digital scholarship, my understanding thereof and its ongoing possibilities and limitations
2. secondly, I present a big picture of current data artworks and data visualisation projects, considering their evocative impact on society
3. finally, I offer a potential bigger picture for digital scholarship by considering these two fields in relation to one another, indicating what DH can learn from data artworks to contribute meaningfully to contemporary society.

As a result, the analysis also addresses vital themes concerning the digital age, such as data humanism, the self as data and the importance of DH.

## ■ Picturing Digital Scholarship

Since its conception, the humanities have relied on print as its primary form of knowledge creation and circulation (Burdick et al. 2012:121). However, subject to the current postmodern and digital shift in society (rooted in boundless technology, digital information



and new media), the nature of the humanities has evidently changed alongside the fast developing, technologically driven world. Accordingly, the humanities now also rely on computational methods, digital tools and information technologies to make sense of the human society and culture. This has resulted in new scholarship, research and practices situated in the non-print world, which is referred to as DH. Not a clear-cut field or discipline, DH is instead 'defined by the opportunities and challenges that arise from the conjunction of the term *digital* with the term *humanities* to form a new collective singular' (Burdick et al. 2012:121). Thus, it can range from researching digital methodologies to critically engaging with digital scholarship itself. This broad spectrum has caused certain challenges and disagreements within the field, such as finding an explicit definition to describe the discipline. In addition, establishing clear methodologies and assessments to follow within this new manner of thinking, as well as verifying how to ensure academic viability in the digital realm, has proven to be problematic and often results in contested discussions.

The challenges of DH, however, are not unfamiliar to the academic field. Ever since the so-called 'first wave of digital humanities' in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Schnapp, Presner & Lunenfeld 2009), scholars have extensively considered and deliberated the DH. Owing to its interdisciplinary nature, the field has been defined, re-defined, unpacked, re-packed, shaped and reshaped several times and in various contexts. Most importantly, the field has been explored to such an extent that it is now considered its own intellectual undertaking 'with its own professional practices, rigorous standards, and exciting theoretical explorations' (Hayles 2011:43).

Although the deliberation of what constitutes the DH proves to be an interesting one, it is an extended discussion that I do not wish to elaborate on here.<sup>67</sup> Instead, as mentioned, my primary focus is not on *what* constitutes DH, but rather on *why* engage

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67. For a detailed review of the digital humanities, see Liu (2012) and Berry (2011a, 2011b).

with DH. In other words, when picturing DH, I choose to focus on the impact or the possibilities of digital scholarship. Burdick et al. (2012:121) list the following as critical effects of DH:

1. diminishing the divide between the humanities, arts, social sciences and natural sciences
2. extending the reach of scholarship in the humanities to a broader audience and making a social impact on this new audience
3. developing new research methodologies and re-establishing forgotten forms of enquiry
4. creating a new generation of humanities scholars who are trained theoretically as well as in a project-based manner (practically)
5. improving both the calibre and perceptibility of the humanities.

What is interesting to note regarding these potential outcomes is how DH mostly contributes or is considered in relation to the humanities. Therefore, the two fields cannot be considered separately from one another. Rather than being considered a new or distinct area, it can be argued that DH is a natural extension and aid to the humanities, as it 'has entered a transitional state when it is capacious and multifaceted enough to serve as a credible *allegory* of the humanities of the future' (Liu 2012:28, original emphasis). As a result, the two fields are undeniably entangled, and we should be mindful of this in our critical studies and digital endeavours. It is also then worth contemplating whether (or then for how much longer) these two entities can still be treated as separate units if they are so closely related. Consequently, any DH endeavour must not forget its relation to the humanities. In its most basic form, a DH project must reflect on aspects of being human, convey its relation to humanity and contribute to our picture of what it means to be human.

Moreover, my principal concern is with Burdick et al.'s second listed key influence. It is argued that the DH can make a social impact on an audience ranging beyond the field of academia. In addition, they also mention that future digital humanists 'have the potential to transform the content, scope, methodologies

and audience of humanistic inquiry' (Burdick et al. 2012:123). What these points highlight is the fact that a DH project can have a powerful, transformative impact on the individual interpreting the digital project, as well as the social environment and society it finds itself in. Although theorists do not always illustrate or elaborate on exactly how this can be achieved, they do establish that digital scholarship has an agency that extends beyond the borders of educational institutions, to which the 'non-digital humanities', in contrast, are often confined (Geiger 2006:50).

Similar to what Burdick et al. mention in their second outcome, theorists often argue that the key to the potential agency of DH lies in its ability to reach a wider audience. Through visualisation techniques and easy accessibility, DH can make scholarship available to a broader audience, extending beyond the peripheries of restricted journal access and exclusive academic institutions, knowledge and understanding (Presner 2010:12). Thus, DH is not just about expanding borders regarding its reach but also in terms of the manner in which it reaches its audiences. DH projects create platforms for academic research that is engaging, collaborative, impactful, comprehensible and effective, that (Presner 2010):

[A]re not limited to conventional humanities departments and disciplines, but affect every humanities field at the university and transform the ways in which humanistic knowledge reaches and engages with communities outside the university. (p. 3)

It is possible that the potential sense of agency possessed by the DH is also a result of defining digital attributes of the projects themselves. For a DH project to be considered 'born digital', it naturally implies that technology or computation forms part of the main research question: '[t]o mediate an object, a digital or *computational* device requires that this object be translated into the digital code that it can understand' (Berry 2011b:1, *emphasis in original*). This transfiguration of research into digitally mediated knowledge results in a power to enforce a new unfolding of reality (Berry 2011b:2). Heidegger's assertion in *The Question Concerning Technology* (1977), that technology holds an undeniable power

and its own autonomous impact on ontology, then also applies to digital scholarship. Within the realm of DH, the digital, computational and technological aspect of a project then brings the Heideggerian power of technology (*technē*) with it, as Berry also confirms above. The digital nature of the projects establishes a certain sense of power. Therefore, the DH's agency stems not only from the content, manner and reach of the scholarship but also from its digital and technological essence. Following classic McLuhanism, the digital and technological medium of digital scholarship is (part of) the power and message of this field. In other words, the specific digital and technological medium influences how the message of a project is received and gives that message acute personal as well as social capability.

Despite being able to pinpoint the sources of the so-called 'power' of DH, it appears as if projects have yet to cultivate and embrace this potential and agency to its fullest. Which, in turn, results in a sentiment of limitation (of sorts) when assessing the DH, as I came to experience during the *New Perspective* conference. This sentiment is also shared with other analysts of the field. In his report and critique of the DH 2.0, Liu (2012:24) argues that DH is missing a certain 'something'. In addition to development that needs to take place in areas, such as new media forms, methods of close analysis in large-scale projects, data aesthetics and interpretation (Liu 2012), it is also suggested that larger shortcomings exist. Liu (2012) explains this deficit in the following way:

[7]he digital humanities are not yet prepared to accept their likely future responsibility to represent – both by critiquing and advocating – the state of the humanities at large in their changing relation to higher education and the post-industrial state. (pp. 24–28)

Thus, for Liu (2012:28, 30), the underwhelming response to the DH can be ascribed, in part, to its inability to change perceptions of the humanities and in its perceived absence of serving the larger society. This view is also supported by Berry (2011b:17) who argues (following Heidegger and Kant) that DH has a philosophical obligation towards humanity, and to society at large.

Digital scholarship can adhere to this responsibility by harnessing its influence as well as critically considering the digital nature, in other words, computational code, of its methodology (Berry 2011b:17).

Hence, based on this brief discussion, as well as my first-hand experiences, I would like to picture the DH as a fascinating area of the computation of human sciences, with several positive effects, one of which includes the power to influence and make a lasting impact on society. Therefore, DH holds the potential to contribute to society at large, by providing a meaningful experience to viewers, inspiring others and communicating intensive, well-researched information in an affective, useful as well as influential manner. However, despite having this immense potential, the domain is yet to accept it fully. Perhaps, a manner to contribute to and extend the discussion of the potential of the DH (in order to encourage further embracement) could be to add to the specific conversation of how to do so.<sup>68</sup> *How* exactly are digital humanists supposed to construct projects that have a broader impact on society? It might be evident that the power of digital projects lies in their scope, accessibility and digital characteristics, but how should these attributes be elevated? I argue that, just as the humanities took an interdisciplinary turn towards information sciences to incorporate the digital realm (Koltay 2015), they should once again turn to expertise in a similar capacity to gain insight on how to create impactful projects. Currently, data art and big data visualisation master the technique of dissecting information and presenting it in an accessible and captivating manner, while having an effective impact on society. It might be helpful to analyse these artworks and consider what can be gained from them, to establish how to adapt the DH to have comparable results. What follows is

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68. Although some theorists, such as Lothian and Phillips (2013), Presner (2010) and Berry (2011b), unpack the power of the digital humanities and provide possible steps in how to achieve such a potential, it is still a discussion that (cont.) needs further deliberation in terms of practical application. In addition, this conversation is extremely limited in a South African context and society – a community that could benefit immensely from such social transformation and influence.

a brief exploration of selected artworks that succeed in getting the mix between data and efficacy right.

## ■ **Creating a Big Picture: Big Data and Data Art**

The 21st-century society is drowning in data (DuBois in Off Book 2011). Almost every active technological device, social media site, digital historical archive and web-based source produce unstructured digital content, which can reveal valuable information of the behaviour of social groups, society and individuals. The accumulation of this immense amount of digital data is often referred to as ‘big data’ – a term describing the large data sets – that has become popular in several industries including financial management and social sciences (Rodríguez-Mazahua et al. 2015:3074). According to Boyd and Crawford (2012:663), big data is characterised not only by its volume but also by its ‘capacity to search, aggregate, and cross-reference large data sets’. Consequently, they define big data as a cultural, technological and scholarly phenomenon that uses advanced technology to compute and analyse large data sets, based on the assumption that large data sets provide better insights and generate more knowledge (Boyd & Crawford 2012:663). The analysis of big data has spread to such an extent that social analytics now use big data to understand the cultural environment (Bail 2014:465), owing to data’s ability to highlight values, provide critical understanding of concealed estimates and reveal new insights and challenges (Chen, Mao & Liu 2014:172).<sup>69</sup> As a result, using big data analytics in the business industry has become a fundamental economic asset, a currency of sorts,

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69. Another example of the big data revolution is the development of big data digital humanitarianism, which includes adding digital techniques (such as crowd sourcing, social media analysis and data production and processing) to traditional humanitarianism (Burns 2015:480). Burns (2015:485) shows that this development of big data in humanitarianism creates several new social and political implications, including reinforcement of broader socio-political divides, which need to be addressed, and points to the overall critique on the use of big data in society.

becoming just as important as capital, labour or gold (Chen et al. 2014:175). Moreover, as institutions posit the means to decode large sets of data, they also hold a sense of control over the individual who is unable to do so.

As society becomes driven by big data, it becomes increasingly essential for the individual to understand the self as immersed among the trails of big data and try to make sense of the existing trail of digital information (DuBois Rudder in Off Book 2011). It is pivotal that individuals are equipped to understand these data sets independently of large corporations' deductions. Institutions using big data sets to analyse consumer behaviour can often produce misleading results or manipulate results to persuade and influence behaviour (Crawford in Off Book 2011). Therefore, who is in control of big data and how it is handled requires critical consideration (Boyd & Crawford 2012:664). This critical look at big data has recently been exposed in an advertisement forming part of Investec bank's *More than Data* campaign. In the commercial series, the bank reveals that profiling of consumers through big data analysis can often be inaccurate, arguing that human beings cannot be defined and surmised to their digital data trails. In other words, human beings exceed their data. Thorp (in Off Book 2011) explains that the treatment of big data as an objective source of information is also often erroneous, as data are:

[H]uman, and they are messy, and they are the result of the human measurement, and they carry bias and error and they carry stories and tragedy and beauty and all these things, they are a record of us in some ways. (n.p.)

Thus, it becomes crucial that big data sets are studied beyond the objective scope of social analytics, business institutions and computer sciences and that their ideological assumption of being inherently accurate (owing to its size) and neutral is questioned.

The rise of big data has also infiltrated the realm of academic research (Kitchin 2014:1). From a scientific point of view, big data opens up a new epistemological approach that allows researchers to apply a large number of methods to make sense of data, rather than just testing one particular theory or hypothesis

(Kitchin 2014:2). In other words, the results and insights are ‘born from the data’ (Kitchin 2014:2). In addition, the DH has embraced the opportunities of big data ‘to develop more sophisticated, wider-scale, finer-grained models of human life’ (Kitchin 2014:7). By means of big data analysis, DH has been able to access previously isolated and evasive data, present so-called ‘more objective’ research based in large numbers and link various unstructured data within the realm of the digital (Kitchin 2014:7). However, similar to the way in which the use of big data in a societal capacity is critiqued, a large amount of criticism surrounds the application of big data within the academic realm. For instance, Boyd and Crawford (2012:666–673) question the intelligibility and philosophies surrounding big data, the so-called ‘neutrality’ of large numbers that include bias and error, the sources of big data that are not necessarily a representative sample, as well as the lack of contextualisation, ethical accountability and restrictive access of big data. Comparably, Kitchin (2014:8) argues that big data analytics in the DH is questionable, as it is ‘poor at capturing and deciphering meaning or context’ and creates ‘the impression that interpretation does not require deep contextual knowledge’. Like Thorp, Kitchin (2014:8) argues that human societies and human life are too complex and ‘messy’ to be reduced to objective data sets. In turn, Burns (2015) shows that big data analysis is limited with regard to social relations and humanitarianism. Burns, along with Kitchin, Boyd and Crawford, emphasises that DH scholars should address these limitations in their research.

Commenting on the current state of big data in society and academia, data art and data visualisation projects often question the underlying ideologies of large-scale data sets and address the above-mentioned critiques against big data. Data artists create artworks or projects using big data analytics and visualisation techniques in a digitally accessible format, which can also be exhibited as installation pieces. They create artworks that are expressive, thought-provoking, emotionally impactful and influential in society. To a certain extent, the artworks are similar to what Lev Manovich (2017:55) refers to as cultural analytics, which is ‘the analysis of massive cultural data sets and flows using computational



and visuali[s]ation techniques'. However, where Manovich's cultural analytics focusses on using data analysis to represent culture (2017:55), data artists concentrate on representing beauty, humaneness, quality and the aesthetic experience. By using data as their medium, data artists are making an affective impact on society and individuals, while questioning what it means to be human in the digital age (Crawford in Off Book 2011).

Although data artworks could be regarded as part of the field of DH, they differ significantly from digital scholarship. Firstly, data artists are usually regular (non-academic) individuals skilled in computation who derive and share their research on social networks and other public platforms. For example, data artist Jer Thorp works for the *New York Times* and describes himself as an artist and a writer. In other words, his work is not reserved for an academic environment. Secondly, in a similar fashion, the goal of data art is not to generate new knowledge (as is the case with DH) but rather to inform a greater sense of the self and promote understanding and response in society. Finally, following an essential difference between social computing and DH, data art focusses on data sets consisting of thousands to hundreds of millions of items and relations (big data), while DH still tends to only focus on hundreds to thousands of items (so-called 'small data', which is more accessible, actionable and comprehensible) (Manovich 2017:57).

Even though data art does not form part of the realm of DH, these two areas do however also show some similarities. A research question drives both fields, namely, to analyse data through computational methods and to represent the findings in a digital (often visual) format. Based on this similar methodology, I suggest that the DH can learn from such artworks and artists and reflect upon opportunities and ideas yet to be explored in the field. Hopefully, through such an exploration, the DH can enhance its social impact and become more relevant to the broader system of society. What follows is a brief unpacking and discussion of three data art projects, with emphasis on what the DH can learn from each of the selected artworks.

## ■ A More Perfect Union – R. Luke DuBois

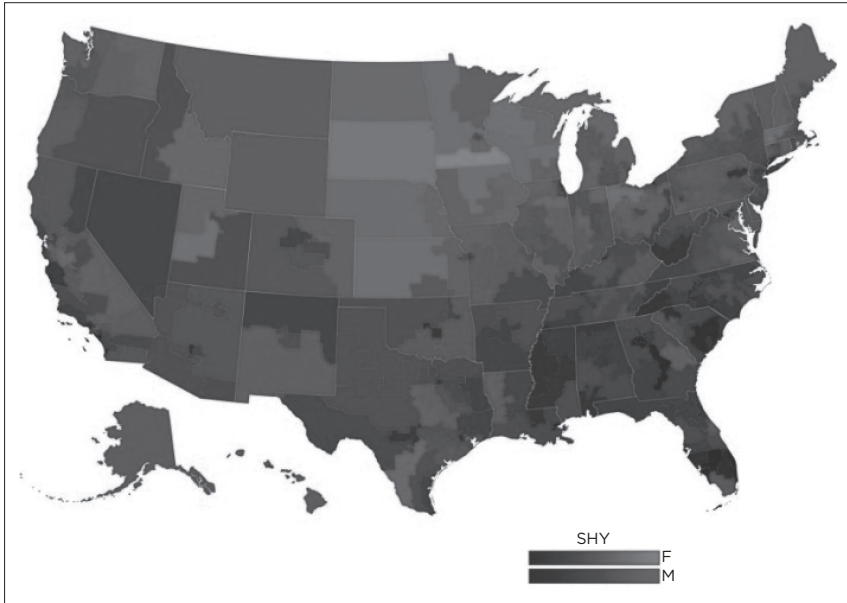
In *A More Perfect Union*, artist and composer R. Luke DuBois (in *Off Book* 2011) designed a census based on subscribers' big data, downloaded from the online dating site *OkCupid*. The data entail all the information of the dating profiles available on *OkCupid*, which is about 20% of the population of America. On a visual map of the US, he replaced every city name with the word most in that particular city's online dating profile descriptions (Figure 7.1).<sup>70</sup> For example, New York is replaced with the word 'now' – as in 'right now I am working as a waiter', while Los Angeles's word is 'acting' (DuBois in *Off Book* 2011). DuBois also created colour-coded maps, coded by the number of users in each district who use specific words (Figure 7.2). By looking at the maps, viewers become aware of the prevalence of certain



Source: *Off Book*, 2011, *Generative art – Computers, data, and humanity*, YouTube video, viewed 03 December 2017, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0OKIGil83s>.

**FIGURE 7.1:** Still from DuBois's *A More Perfect Union* (2011) – a map encoded with prevalent words used on *OkCupid* in specific cities in America.

70. To view DuBois's *A More Perfect Union* (2011) see <http://sites.bxmc.poly.edu/~ludedubois/perfect/32NYC.html>



Source: Off Book, 2011, *Generative art - Computers, data, and humanity*, YouTube video, viewed 03 December 2017, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0OK1Gii83s>.

**FIGURE 7.2:** Image from DuBois's *A More Perfect Union* (2011) – a map showing the use of the word 'shy' on *OkCupid* in specific cities throughout America.

descriptive words used throughout the site, for example, 'shy', 'funny' and 'lonely'. The digital maps can then be accessed as 'infographics' and are exhibited as installation artworks. In addition to presenting a view on the overall way American citizens describe their identities, *A More Perfect Union* also allows the viewer to come to a more meaningful understanding of American self-identify. For instance, by studying the words most used, it becomes clear that, on dating sites, American typically describe themselves in a more negative manner – using words such as 'lonely' more often than words such as 'funny' (Clendaniel in Off Book 2011). DuBois (in Off Book 2011) explains that he hopes his artworks inspire society to reconstruct political discourse in a different manner – based on the individual's hopes, dreams and personal descriptions, instead of financial income, language or marital status.

To a certain extent, *A More Perfect Union* shows similarity to Manovich's *Selfiecity*.<sup>71</sup> Both projects attempt to map and digitise self-representation, questioning the position of the individual amidst a large availability of cultural data and information. They are also similar in the fact that they create, what Hochman (2014) refers to as 'imagined data communities', which groups people together in relations that do not exist outside of the data. However, the projects differ in intention. Created as an artwork, DuBois (in *Off Book* 2011) argues that the intent of his project is to make the viewer feel and respond affectively. In contrast, *Selfiecity* is a cultural analysis that aims to uncover the complexities of a specific social phenomenon through a variety of digital methodologies (Tifentale 2014); it does not place emphasis on the individual viewer's personal response. As a result, *Selfiecity* leaves viewers to interact with visualisations that they do not necessarily understand, relate to and needs further analysis and unpacking (Caplan 2016). *A More Perfect Union* therefore addresses a key shortcoming of *Selfiecity*; it allows the individual viewer to negotiate his or her standpoint in relation to the visualisation, by completely understanding his personal position in relation to the image and stake in the data.

When interacting with and interpreting DuBois's digital map, the viewer becomes increasingly aware of the self and develops a sense of understanding. The images are visually impactful, but it can be argued that the actual affect of the artwork lies in the data that it is dealing with and the characteristic of the data used to remap America. Once the viewer becomes aware that the data used to create the artwork are personal data derived from an online dating service - usually considered to be intimate information - the artwork becomes more influential. The fact that the content is an individual's personal thoughts and feelings has an impact on the interaction with the artworks. Putting visuals and statistics to particulars that are often only based on viewer's

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71. *Selfiecity* is an immersive project lead by cultural theorist Lev Manovich that visualises a sample of 3200 selfies in various ways, largely based on demographic data. The project can be viewed at <http://selfiecity.net>.

personal intuitions provides specificity and clarity while generating conversation concerning the self that is acute and refreshing in contemporary society (Rudder in Off Book 2011). In addition, once the viewer recognises that they share a personal connection with the source of the data, they form a sense of trust and personal relation to the artwork. Thus, it is the sense of portraying the personal that enhances the artwork. It can be argued that this level of intimacy often goes missing in selected DH projects, not in terms of their content, but in the manner in which the content is presented, as researchers aim to maintain an academic and objective approach. Rieder and Röhle (2012) argue that such an ideal of objectivity, enhanced by the technology of a digital project, is one of the greatest challenges of the DH. Kitchin (2014:9) also maintains that the DH cannot ignore the intimacy of 'what it means to be human and to live in richly diverse societies and places'. If applying the personal to DH, would it be possible to consider creating digital components for academic studies that present a personal point of view, which viewers can relate to? Would it be possible to share not only content matter relating to the self but also content that probes into the viewer's personal aspects of being human – content that the viewer identifies with? Could DH projects similarly present their findings to show the viewers how the research conclusions impact and relate to their personal notions of being and society?

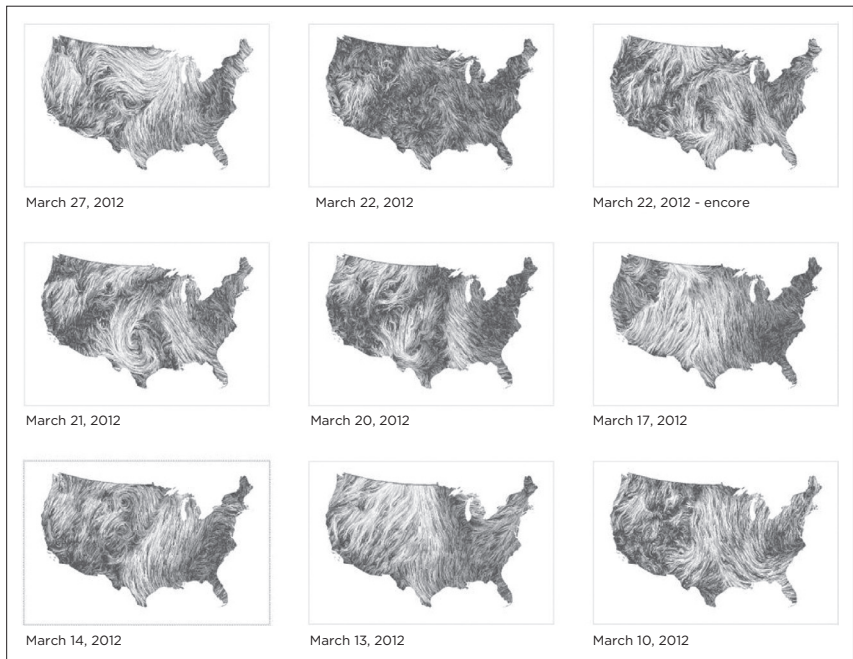
## ■ The Wind Map – Martin Wattenberg and Fernanda Viegas

Another data artwork is *The Wind Map* by Martin Wattenberg (2012) and Fernanda Viegas. By drawing real-time data from the National Digital Forecast Database, *The Wind Map* presents a visual image of the motion of the wind flow over the USA.<sup>72</sup> Viewers can, therefore, watch the patterns of the wind in current time. Forming a kind of digital archive of the wind, the application

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72. *The Wind Map* (2012) is available at <http://hint.fm/wind/>.

also allows viewers to refer to the wind patterns of past days (Figure 7.3). As an ‘artistic exploration’ (Wattenberg 2012), the wind map is not only accessible digitally but also has been exhibited on various platforms, including in the Museum of Modern Art (New York). Watching the movement of this invisible force of energy that surrounds everything on earth becomes an emotionally charged experience, which is described as ‘enchanting’ (Popeson 2013) and ‘awe-inspiring’ (Souppouris 2012). In addition to being a stimulating artwork, it has also become a useful source for other societal groups. Wattenberg and Viegas (in Wattenberg 2012) note that they have ‘been surprised by the kinds of things people use it for: bird watchers have tracked migration patterns; bicyclists have planned their trips [...]’.



Source: Wattenberg, M., 2012, *The Wind Map*, viewed 12 December 2017, from <http://www.bewitched.com/windmap.html>.

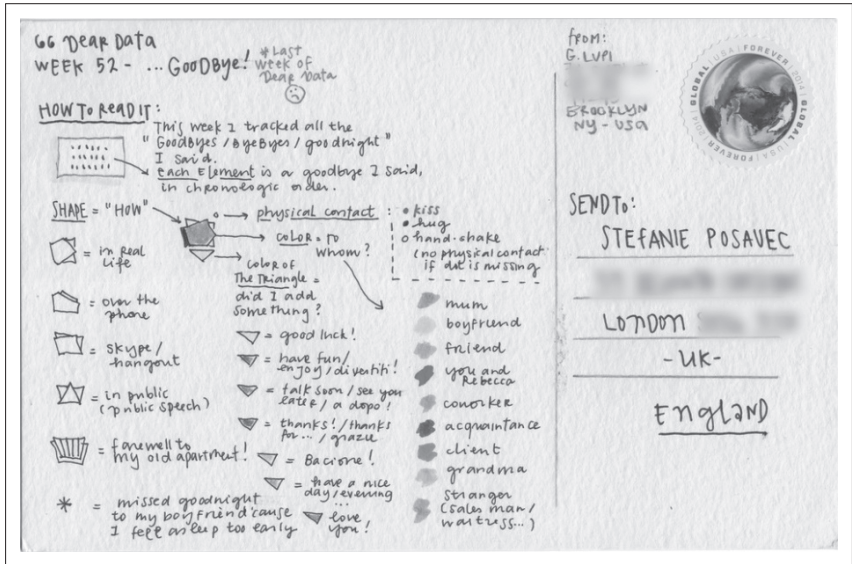
**FIGURE 7.3:** Still from *The Wind Map* (2012) – showing various wind patterns in actual time across America on specific days during March 2012.

The artists attribute the success and power of the project not only to its appealing visuals but also to the real-time attribute and context of the artwork (Wattenberg in Off Book 2011). When looking at the visualisations, viewers react emotionally, as they are interacting with an image showcasing what is happening at that moment in time (Wattenberg in Off Book 2011). Another aspect of the project, which contributes to its evocative power, is the fact that the computation of wind patterns makes the invisible visible. Firstly, by literally presenting the invisible force of the wind visibly, viewers become more aware of that which is unseen. Secondly, the invisible is made visible by giving a variety of people access to material that is usually reserved for scientific research. In turn, because of this access, various people have been able to use this source to their benefit as well.

Consequently, the DH can learn from this computational artwork and consider adding real-time aspects to their projects. Several existing DH projects are often presented as a final accessible product. Many digital sites do not seem to be updated and remain dormant for extended periods of time. Could the DH incorporate real-time research into their projects, by constantly generating new research and results, to have lasting and inspiring effects on society? Moreover, could the DH focus on making that which cannot be seen in society (or perhaps is kept hidden) visible? By doing so, could the field open a world of knowledge to be used in new and exciting ways by communities?

## ■ **Dear Data – Giorgia Lupi and Stefanie Posavec**

Giorgia Lupi and Stefani Posavec created *Dear Data* (2016) as a so-called ‘personal documentary’. For a year, the two information designers would collect hand-drawn personal data about their lives on postcards and send it to one another (Figure 7.4). The collection became a means for transmitting data of a personal nature through observation as well as hand-drawn data visualisation. The collection became such a profound visualisation



Source: Lupi, G. & Posavec, S., 2016, *Dear data*, viewed 03 December 2017, from <http://www.dear-data.com/theproject>.

**FIGURE 7.4:** An example of postcards containing visualisations of data collected sent to one of the creators of *Dear Data* (2016).

that it turned into an artwork of data and is now also published.<sup>73</sup> According to the designers (Lupi & Posavec 2016):

[I]nstead of using data just to become more efficient, we argue we can use data to become more humane and to connect with ourselves and others at a deeper level. (n.p.)

In other words, the moving postcards translating personal data promote a sense of being human, and it is this aspect that captivates its audience. The personally collected data are considered to be so-called 'smaller data', which Boyd and Crawford (2012:670) highlight as increasingly significant in the realm of big data. The data captured by the postcards, similar to DuBois' *A More Perfect Union*, are also of a personal nature. The project captures the designers' personalities as well as intimate

73. The various components of *Dear Data* (2016) are accessible from <http://www.dear-data.com>



data shared not only with one another but also with people all over the world. They (Lupi & Posavec 2016) describe the project:

[A]s though we were keeping a shared diary within a weekly rhythm, where we used this tool – this material – to compose a portrait of the other person through these weekly fragments of her nature. (n.p.)

Thus, this data-centred project removes the instrumentality or technical approach from data visualisation and adds more meaningful and thoughtful approaches to represent the humane aspects of the data. It is this aspect that Lupi (2017) refers to as data humanism. Echoing Investec's *More than Data* campaign, data humanism is:

[A] new renaissance where we can question the impersonality of a merely technological approach to data, where we are ready to reconnect numbers to what they really stand for: which are – more and more – our unique lives. (n.p.)

Owing to its humanism, the project has reached far beyond its initial objective of sharing data, between two people, in an intimate manner. Lupi and Posavec's unique approach to data, that is, focussing on its imperfections, has turned the notion of data and conversing about personal data into a more accessible as well as relatable thought and exemplifies that 'the size of the data should fit the research question being asked' (Boyd & Crawford 2012:670). It has also reached a broad community and sparked conversation about the individual's personal engagement with data, beyond the designers expected circles (Antonelli in Lupi & Posavec 2016). In addition, the two designers also argue that the strength of their project lies within its interdisciplinary nature, arguing that *Dear Data* 'might be art, it might be communication design, it might be data visualisation, it is probably all three: but its interdisciplinary qualities are an asset, not a failing' (Lupi & Posavec 2016).

Perhaps, another discipline that *Dear Data* includes is the realm of DH. DH has often been critiqued for its loss of humanism, as it uses technological computation (Boyd & Crawford 2012; Burns 2015; Kitchin 2014). Kirsch (2014), for example, argues that '(d)igital humanities becomes another name for the obsequies of humanism'.

In addition, DH projects, such as *Selfiecity* and *Phototrails*, have often been accused of evoking an image of society that does not reveal individual and actual positions of humans in the world (Caplan 2016). It might then be valuable for the DH to, quite fittingly, also embrace its humanism, including a sense of imperfection and being human in its projects. If DH also welcomed its already existing interdisciplinary characteristic, while arguing for a human touch in the processing of its data, could it reach a wider audience and generate conversation concerning the self-situated within an information-driven society?

## ■ Presenting the Bigger Picture: Digital Humanities and Data Art

The brief analyses of data artworks reveal that there are specific data art characteristics, which can be assimilated into DH. As mentioned previously, there exist certain similarities between digital humanity projects and data artworks, especially their shared digital nature and research-oriented approach to data, which allows the two fields to study and learn from one another. What I aim to present in the ‘bigger picture’ of this chapter is a further elaboration on what DH can learn from data art, prompted by the above exploration. By assimilating these attributes, the DH could possibly accept its social responsibility and become more meaningful to the individual and its broader community, while simultaneously addressing some of the key concerns regarding the use of big data within the academic field.

It is important to note that I am not suggesting that the DH should attempt to become art or that academics approaching digital scholarship should now attempt to become artists. There is still room for differentiation between the two fields, each with its place in society. What I am suggesting, however, is that digital humanists should study these creative thinkers and follow similar approaches in their work, adding characteristics of what makes data art successful, to make DH matter more within a broader community. To borrow Will Gompertz’s (2015) phrase, I am, to a

certain extent, then encouraging digital humanists to ‘think like artists’ towards unveiling and offering a bigger picture for future DH projects.

Based on the discussion of the above artworks, some of the attributes that DH can place more emphasis on, in its pursuit to ‘think like an artist’, include personal content matter, real-time access, making the invisible visible through data visualisation, data humanism, interdisciplinary nature and collaboration, as well as the sublime or anti-sublime. The attributes and their relation to DH are presented below.

## ■ Personal Content Matter

Data artworks that include content relating to the individual’s correlation with society and being, that are usually intimate, prove to have a significant impact on viewers. This is evident in viewers’ emotive response to artworks such as *A More Perfect Union* or *Hard Data* – another of DuBois’s projects – that elicits stirring and visceral responses (Raviv 2015). DH should not hesitate to incorporate this aspect of intimacy into its endeavours as it is inherently part of the humanities. Whatever the content studied by a digital humanist, it will innately concern some aspect of being human. Therefore, it should be effortless to structure a project in such a way that the human(e) element is stressed. Thus, if viewers interact with a DH project, they should be made aware that they are interacting with data or research that relates to them personally in whichever manner. DH projects could therefore explicitly show *how* their projects relate to communities or affect notions of the self. In doing so, the project is also contextualised to a further extent.

Furthermore, DH could also place additional emphasis on the personal aspect of their projects by interacting in a more detailed manner with its data. Leemans (2013:151) argues that the critical problem is that ‘too often digital humanities research still operates apart from data. In digitising the data, too little attention is paid to the kinds of questions researchers ask’. Accordingly, there is a

need for researchers to interact with their data in a more meaningful way. One way of doing so could be by identifying as well as reflecting the relatable nature of the data. Digital projects could, for example, explain the data's relation to their community or choose to use data applicable to the community, instead of an already existing, unspecific data set. For instance, as an alternative to analysing data from a global study group, data can be drawn and examined from various social media platforms. When extracting data from a social media platform, it can be filtered to limit the extracted data to a specific geographical location or community on that social media platform, resulting in a community-specific data set. In this way, a personal and relatable narrative is developed for the viewer, and a clear context is provided (Leemans 2013:151), instantly creating a more meaningful trajectory and critical reflection for the viewer.

## ■ Real-Time Access

The real-time aspect of data artworks also proves to be valuable in a digital scholarship project. Digital scholarship often presents a project in its most finalised version. In other words, once the research has been completed, the results are shown digitally. By transforming digital projects into platforms that are constantly updated in real time, with current and newly generated data, they become dynamic, responsive and unrepeatable (Uricchio 2017:132). Generated by algorithms, the so-called 'live' or 'on-demand' digital projects encourage user interaction and personalisation. Thus, viewers could become more involved and affected by DH projects if they included a real-time component. Uricchio (2017) explains that projects with a real-time nature compel viewers:

[7]o ask what it means to be human [...] [,] to reflect on the nature of our automated cultural gatekeepers [...] [, and] to consider the future of shared experiences. (p. 132)

Therefore, if DH focuses on actual time, it may add a more personalised meaning and experience to the field. In turn, it would

also extend and alter the research being conducted, providing new, ongoing and unique results. In doing so, a DH project will have more impact and provide an experience for society, and not just academic viewers. Finally, similar to *The Wind Map*, the project then also becomes a digital archive for the data captured over an extended period of time that could be useful to society. Consequently, incorporating a real-time aspect in DH can be valuable and vital in highlighting the impact of the research to a broader audience.

## ■ Making the Invisible Visible

Based on the above data artworks, it is evident that data artists can make the invisible visible to society. This capacity is compelling and results in emotively important projects. To cultivate a similar effect, DH can also concentrate on making what is unseen, seen. A possible manner of doing this is by emphasising on visualisations and using digital visualisation tools, which ‘make visible and operable that which was previously invisible; they make new relationships appear’ (Kennedy & Hill 2017:774). Visualisation is a language that makes that which is beyond perception, recognisable to human cognition (Hapern in Kennedy & Hill 2017:774). By paying attention to the visual design as well as how digital humanist research and data is visually presented, DH can aid in making additional information evident to those outside of academia. In addition, visualisation holds a profound sense of power in knowledge production and decision-making. Therefore, if DH extensively engaged in the visualisation (including the visual aspect) of their projects, they could amplify the reach of their projects. However, it is important to note that meaning needs to be attributed to visualisation. Visualisations must be interpreted, evaluated and analysed to reveal patterns and meanings (Masson 2017:32). Only by discovering their significance can visualisation make the invisible, visible.

## ■ Data Humanism

The artists of *Dear Data* argue that meaningful and thoughtful visualisations prompt an inquiry into the existing impersonal and

technical approach to data and digitisation. Lupi (2017) therefore argues for a humanistic approach to data – or ‘data humanism’ – where the emphasis is placed on data being accessible and unique to everybody. A topical question currently in the field of DH often involves searching for the humanities within DH (Graham 2017; Heuser & Le-Khac 2011; Kaplan 2015). Often, DH manifests in empirical data, visualisations and statistics that seem to eliminate the critical and complex discussions associated with the humanities (Heuser & Le-Khac 2011:79). By taking a data humanist approach to digital scholarship, DH can emphasise the narratives behind the data presented digitally and not the technology used to present the research. Moreover, as DH is so closely intertwined with humanities, it should find this approach feasible and intuitive. Emphasising the human aspect of research then also makes the depicted information relatable and distinctive to the individual. Lupi (2017) argues that to take a data humanist approach to research, data should be considered as the start of a conversation and not the end. To highlight the humanist aspect in DH, the context and the intricate background of the study should be provided, while the humaneness behind the data should also be revealed as part of the digital project. In addition, the researcher could also focus on a smaller data sample. In doing so, the research will evoke a greater sense of empathy (Lupi 2017). In a similar fashion to *Dear Data*, the DH could also reveal the imperfections and human qualities in the collecting, processing, analysing and display of data (Lupi 2017), using data bias and error as an opportunity instead of an obstacle. DH, owing to its relation to the humanities, is suited to follow a similar approach and in doing so could also address the problems of self-identification through data in society as well as aid in revealing the complex nature of data (as suggested by Thorp above). By embracing data humanism, the DH can aid in the objective to portray data as more humane and, moreover, empower its own academic field.

## ■ Interdisciplinary Nature and Collaboration

Through the inclusion of digital research tools and tools specifically designed for data investigation, research within the

humanities and DH has become inherently collaborative. Typically, digital humanists are required to collaborate with other scholars as they do not always possess the necessary skills to create a digital project. Owing to this interdisciplinary attribute, a digital project involves an association of scholars from different fields and thus various views on how knowledge is produced and expressed (Masson 2017:26). These dissimilarities between scholars in terms of expertise working in collaboration on a DH project have on occasion led to conflict and discrepancies. The conflict is often based on fear that an interdisciplinary project will weaken the humanities' expertise of critical interpretation (Masson 2017:26). However, an interdisciplinary collaboration also holds potential and advantages, including further verifiable results, development of emerging methodologies as well as research tools and creation of research that show increased support for humanist researchers (Masson 2017:26). Despite the advantages and critique against interdisciplinarity, the DH cannot avoid collaboration, as digital scholarship requires skilful interdisciplinary cooperation (Van Schie, Westra & Schäfer 2017:185). In analysing data artworks, it becomes clear that the selected digital artworks also have a multidisciplinary nature, combining art, big data, visualisation and technology. Furthermore, data artists also embrace their collaborative nature and in doing so incorporate a wider audience and create a compelling project. If DH, therefore, considers its interdisciplinary character not as a necessity, but an advantage, perhaps it could also prove to be more meaningful to society. Although DH already places a significant amount of emphasis on collaboration, it could embrace an interdisciplinary approach even further. For example, when constructing a digital project, digital humanists should not only collaborate when necessary or when a specific skill is required but also purposefully incorporate different realms within their research process to generate impactful results. Corresponding with data artworks, by welcoming the liminal spaces of the DH, consciously collaborating with various scholarly fields and by being interdisciplinary, digital scholarship can stand out, be noticed and influence outside of the academic community

through its very nature of not being precisely tailored to a specific field (Lupi & Posavec 2016).

## ■ The Sublime or Anti-Sublime

Finally, the last aspect that the DH can acquire from data artworks is perhaps more philosophically based – a consideration of the sublime within the digital realm.<sup>74</sup> It becomes evident that data artworks and artists reflect on the notion of the digital sublime. First identified by Mosco (2005), the digital sublime refers to the possibility of the technological and digital realm to transform everyday life into the quality of greatness that is the sublime. Digital technology is believed to hold the potential to exceed all possibility of calculation, maintaining a myth that the digital can transform and revolutionise information and society into a world that far outreaches our imagination. To a certain extent, the digital sublime is a “nostalgia for the future” that will never be’ and yet ‘the ideologically charged stories told in its name create meaning and action in social and economic life, shaping the horizons of reality for citizens’ (Hutchins 2015:498). The popularity of big data and its possibilities is evidence of this digital sublime as it promotes unmatched insights that can only be produced by technology (Hutchins 2015:505). In turn, it is argued that the vast mathematical analysis of big data produces visualisations that hold a certain sublime beauty ‘with their intricate clusters of nodes and webs or explosions of line and colour’, which is never complete (McCosker & Wilken 2014:161–162).

In contrast, Manovich (2002:11) argues that data artworks hold a sense of an anti-sublime as they aim to portray the unimaginable visibly and tangibly (once again making the invisible visible). He argues that data artists aim ‘to map such phenomena into a representation whose scale is comparable to the scales of human perception and cognition’ (Manovich 2002:11). It is then this

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74. The philosophical approach responds to Boyd and Crawford’s (2012) critique (mentioned above) against big data, which argues for an understanding of the underlying philosophies and systems of knowledge at the root of this epistemological shift.



anti-sublime ideal of data art that moves the viewer emotionally (Manovich 2002:11).

Owing to its digital nature and correlations with data artworks, DH can be interpreted as either being part of the imaginary digital sublime, a phenomenon with a potential to access a world that might never be achieved, or being part of an anti-sublime notion that evokes emotional reaction by creating a sense of that which was unimaginable. No matter which assumption DH wishes to be a part of, it should be aware of its association with the sublime, which holds profound consequences for its endeavours. By recognising the connection with the sublime, the DH can produce influential projects that take cognisance of the underlying aesthetics.

## ■ Conclusion

DH is an emerging field of scholarship that involves computational research and publication. As a newly found domain of knowledge production, the field of digital scholarship becomes a highly considered subject, to establish the field's place in academia as well as society. What becomes clear when discussing DH is that the mode of scholarship has an immense potential to impact communities and promote a sense of self-understanding. Although, as I have argued often, DH projects do not seem to embrace this possibility to its fullest, they often focus on presenting and digitally processing research, while the overall impact on society and the individual viewer may appear limited. It is therefore argued that digital scholarship should take the necessary steps towards embodying its potential agency to become more meaningful. In other words, the bigger picture of DH is to create projects and research that are accessible, impactful and capable of exerting influence in society and developing a sense of self-understanding in the digital age. This chapter suggests that the DH could embrace and develop its affective power, by looking towards the work of data artists, who use big data analytics to create emotively powerful

digital artworks. In discussing the artworks, it becomes evident that some of the critical notions attributed to the success of data artworks include personal content matter, real-time access, making the invisible visible through data visualisation, data humanism, interdisciplinary nature and collaboration, as well as the sublime or anti-sublime.

Accordingly, the DH could consider the issues discussed as additions, focal points or points of influence within their projects, to become more meaningful to a broader audience, especially outside of academic institutions. Furthermore, incorporating these attributes also addresses key concerns regarding the use of big data within the DH, such as context and data bias. Perhaps, if notions of accessibility were made more prominent in digital scholarship, it would be feasible to see the bigger picture that digital scholarship can work towards. To explain how data artworks make the invisible visible, it can be equated to seeing a city from a bird's-eye-view, such as from a high-rise building or aeroplane. The view provides a new picture of familiarities, revealing new insights. Similarly, DH can afford a bigger picture of society, to evoke new insights and prompt reflection on the notion of the self and what it means to be human in the digital age.

As a final remark, I would like to consider digital scholarship as well as data artworks following visual culture theorist W.J.T. Mitchell's consideration of 'What do pictures really want?' (2005). Mitchell argues that images should not just be considered as inert objects that convey meaning, but as animated beings with desires, needs, demands and drives of their own. Within contemporary society and the field of the digital, is it not possible to then also consider digital projects, both those existing as scholarship and those existing as artworks, as entities that not only signify meaning but also act as platforms with their own aspirations. In analogously looking at digital projects the same way as Mitchell looks at images, it might be possible to consider not only the power of the DH but also the bigger picture - what do these projects *really* want?



# Digital Technologies and Art Museums in Gauteng

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## ■ Introduction

This chapter aims to make a constructive contribution to the debate about fundamental difficulties facing selected art museums in the Gauteng Province, South Africa, regarding the use of digital technologies. Such challenges are concerned with the incorporation of digital technologies as marketing, communication and education tools within the art museum spaces. The discussion offered here provides workable solutions and seeks to identify and evaluate the roles of art museums in the Gauteng Province. Such roles are linked to the incorporation of digital technology in

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museum spaces as enhancement tools for museum exhibitions and good practice as well as audience development. The museum institutions investigated in this study are Wits Art Museum (WAM), Pretoria Art Museum (PAM), Edoardo Villa Museum (EVM) at UP and the Johannesburg Art Gallery (JAG).

In recent years, museums around the world have shown an increased inclination to what is often described as ICT exploration which involves efficient digital technology applications. Scholars such as Beardsley et al. (2010) opine that the use of digital technology interconnects the world. It is through such notification that many international museums have access to information and can establish good technological networks for progressive business goals, corporate governance and best practice.<sup>75</sup> Beardsley et al. (2010) are of the opinion that the ICT industry is ideally positioned to help build a more socially sustainable future for the world to benefit economically. This opinion is further acknowledged by Ribeiro-Neto and Baeza-Yates (1999) who believe that it has become a norm that various organisations are incorporating digital technology as part of their day-to-day business practices to capture data, market and communicate with their clients. Based on the latter statement, it can be proposed accordingly that the pivotal tool for the proficiency of modern art museums is the incorporation of a functional technological infrastructure that can be used in diverse ways to market, communicate and disseminate information about the collections in art museums.

## ■ Brief Overview of Art Museums

The definition of a museum, according to the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Statutes, adopted by the 22nd

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75. ICT includes any communication device, such as radio, television, computer and network hardware and software. Information communication technology uses both analogue systems and digital streaming. For this analysis, digital technology and ICT are combined under the common phrase digital technolog[y]ies.

General Assembly in Vienna, Austria, on 24 August 2007 (ICOM n.d.), states that:

A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for education, study and enjoyment. (n.p.)

On the contrary, an art museum is seen as a building or space for the exhibition of art, usually in the form of art objects from the visual arts.<sup>76</sup>

In South Africa, particularly in Gauteng, the following art museums, namely, WAM, PAM, EVM and JAG, seem to lag behind the international art museums, such as the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York; the Rijks Museum, Amsterdam; the Tate Gallery, London; and the Louvre Museum, Paris, that evolved to become both disseminators of digital information and distributors of electronic art images through virtual tours in the digital world. The art museums in Gauteng seem to also lag behind other South African institutions such as the South African Resource Heritage Agency (SARHA) with regard to the incorporation of digital technology practices, such as embedded information systems, virtual reality applications and Google cultural institute that is an art project that collaborates between the project's architects and selected art institutions.<sup>77</sup> In many instances, South African art museums struggle to change their roles and functions from being collectors and preservers of non-inclusive art collections to become collectors and preservers of demographically representative and democratically inclusive

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76. Throughout history, works of art have been commissioned by religious institutions and monarchs and displayed in churches, temples and palaces. They were private collections but sometimes made available for public viewing. From the 17th century, private museums were established and were open to the public. In the second half of the 18th century, many private collections of art were nationalised and opened to the public. Art museums eventually became generators of information about artworks which were made available for all to see.

77. See <https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/about/artproject>.

objects and works of art that support social and national cohesion (Rankin & Hamilton 1999:3). Also, to rectify a skewed history of inclusion and exclusion in South African art museums, this chapter supports the incorporation of digital technology at art museums in Gauteng so that the concerned museums can be marketed to audiences irrespective of geographical location.

## ■ Digital Technology Processes

Examined literature reveals that since the beginning of the Internet era (the 1960s), digital technology developments have expanded vastly (Captain 2012). Such an expansion plays a fundamental role and facilitates the link between business to business, business to people and people to people. Ashton and Robertson (2000:21) elaborate further by stating that the advent of the Internet and modern technological applications such as 360-degree virtual and reality tours, blog spots, social media platforms and interactive websites<sup>78</sup> prompted a re-evaluation of the roles and functions of art museums. The mentioned roles and functions include, among others, research, documentation of art objects, art management, art administration, art education, community outreach roles, social media connections and the dissemination of electronic art information.

Although the use of digital technologies may prove beneficial, the challenges of incorporating them into an existing system should also be stressed. In this regard, it can be argued that digital technology requires specialised skills that are not commonly part of a museum curator's expertise. Furthermore, the implementation of the digital information dissemination roles is very often derailed by the lack of adequate budgets.

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78. Web 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0 are interfaces whereby 1.0 is a single-way application through which the user reads the information as a primary programmed data; 2.0 is an interactive interface application whereby the user can respond to the published information. Good examples are blog pages and users' feedbacks and contact pages. 3.0 is the application that incorporates virtual tours and social media as secondary interfaces.

These skills and digital technology implementation need to be acquired through specialised training on technology applications, which is expensive and which most South African art museums cannot afford.

Many information institutions across the globe continue to advance the functionality of ICT using digital television, cyber-connected radios and advanced computer processors and smart cell phone applications (Othman et al. 2011:93). Such technological developments are designed to convert a dearth of information into information opportunities and bridge the digital gap in South Africa. The acknowledgement of the benefits of the Internet by the South African government has significantly narrowed this digital gap within the communities. Metropolitan municipalities in South Africa, such as the City of Tshwane, City of Johannesburg and Ekurhuleni municipality, are focussing on rolling-out programmes that provide and implement free Wi-Fi connections to the public. This is done to enable the government to communicate with the people electronically and allow the citizens to freely surf the net for information (Mphidi 2008). This is a huge improvement for South Africa, as in the past all government communications with the people were via public meetings, the print media, radio broadcasts and street haulers. Fortunately, communication is presently through electronic means and emails to the people (Mphidi 2008). Mphidi's and Kamal Othman's statements are further endorsed by Stock and Zancanaro (2011) who state that:

Technology can play a crucial role in supporting museum visitors and enhancing their overall museum visit experiences. Visitors coming to a museum do not want to be overloaded with information, but to receive the relevant information, learn, and have an overall interesting experience. (p. 11)

Conceivably, after the digital gap has been narrowed, art museums like all other institutions utilise the Internet as part of digital technology, probably to compete and succeed globally. Global competition is an international phenomenon that links the world through the World Wide Web (WWW), economic and trade



channels, among others. For South Africa, globalisation is a process that became eminent after the country was subjected to global trade sanctions before 1990 in retaliation to its apartheid policy that violated human rights. A global effect further manifested itself when the international community welcomed South Africa back to its fold and invited the country to resume sporting relations and financial trading. Seemingly, this was done as a token of respect acceptance of South Africa's intentions to establish a democratic government in the early 1990s. Consequently, after 1994, South Africa as a country was reaccepted as a global trader and had to comply with the demands of the global economic forces that deal with the increased trading competitions as well as the pertinent terms and conditions (Akello 2013).

It is not surprising that in the current millennium and the present information economy, globalisation has a refined meaning. This new meaning has now diversified ICT and digitalisation regarding open information and electronic interconnections network that is facilitated by the Internet (Zembylas & Vrasidas 2005:66). The global digital technology infrastructure has the potential to uplift institutions such as art museums and enable them to maintain a competitive edge globally in the information age.<sup>79</sup>

It is eminent that the world has merged to become a single global village through the widespread usage of digital technology as a subset of ICT. It is within such a global village that the incorporation of digital technology has helped global art museums such as the MoMA in the USA to reach the highest standards in museum marketing, communication and information dissemination.<sup>80</sup> This also facilitated the visitors to

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79. Information communication technology as a global tool has turned the world into a single village with fast communication channels. Art museums can also benefit from this.

80. Museum of Modern Art links with the world through a structured digital technology art lab that respects social and ethics protocol. Available: <http://breannamegsykes.weebly.com/applying-social-and-ethical-protocols-and-practices-when-using-digital-technology/moma-art-lab>.

the Tate Museum in the United Kingdom to be educated through digital technology applications such as online and virtual galleries (Cere 2008:14).<sup>81</sup> In South Africa, the advantages of online communication have been put to good use by the South African Heritage Resource Agency (SAHRA) based in Cape Town that connected with the public through South African Heritage Resource Information Systems (SAHRIS) (Smuts, Mlungwane & Wiltshire 2016) and the Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory based in Johannesburg that published Mandela's archives online.<sup>82</sup> The advantages of digital technology as explored by the MoMA, the Tate Museum, SAHRA and Mandela Centre of Memory make a compelling case for similar responses by art museums in Gauteng. If art museums in Gauteng fail to embrace optimal digital technology incorporation, they will continue to lose ground on maintaining the highest digital technology applications and communication standards. As a result, they would not be able to reach out to art audiences in the province and further afield.

## ■ The Roles and Functions of Art Museums

In the process of dealing with the importance and challenges of the implementation of digital technologies in art museums, it is critical to consider the roles of museums in the society. The fundamental roles and functions of art museums are best expressed by Keene (1998:22) as follows:

- The research role: this deals with the analysis of works of art and the creation of academic information as well as scholarly reviews.

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81. Online galleries offer the museum audience opportunities to engage with museum exhibitions remotely by making online exhibition viewing and making downloads of research information. See <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/>.

82. See <http://archive.nelsonmandela.org/home>.

- The information dissemination role: whereby art museums are concerned with the sharing of information through multimedia publications that address audience enquiries. It is also concerned with general information gateway activities.
- The education role: here, art museums offer the public lifelong learning opportunities by structuring education programmes for schools and general museum audiences.
- The exhibition role: this is about displaying works of art in the museum space so that the general audience can enjoy and understand the exhibits.

These roles and functions of art museums demand that art museum curators know and understand all information aspects that need to be accessed by the museum visitors and ensure that such information is authentic (Lankford 2002:143). I agree with Hooper-Greenhill (2000) who summarises the roles of museums and streamlines the roles museums play in the modern society by stating that:

[7]he modernist museum adopts a particular stance towards its visitors. The communicative aim of the modernist museum is to enlighten and to educate, to lay out knowledge for the visitor such that it may be absorbed. The information offered is that of the academic discipline from which the collections are viewed. Thus, in art galleries, the paintings are grouped to materialise 'art history'. The educational aim of the museum is to transfer or transmit information about art history. (p. 14)

Seemingly, the information dissemination activities may best be enhanced through the incorporation of digital technology in museums as discussed in the next section.

## ■ Information Dissemination Through Digital Technology in Art Museums

One of the fundamental roles of museums is information dissemination. In modern times, information dissemination can be realised through digital technology functions. According to Fyler (n.d.), information dissemination refers to the distribution

of information through written or oral means to keep the public informed about concerning topics. For him, such information deserves to be of quality and should be put in context by the distributor.<sup>83</sup> It is argued that the role of information dissemination in art museums is of fundamental importance because exhibited works of art are synonymously equivalent to library books. They possess valuable information that stands to be retrieved by the end users.<sup>84</sup> It is equally notable that digital technology has made it possible for information in libraries to be disseminated electronically. Concept akin to that explored by libraries can be utilised by art museums, whereby museums can make use of digital technology to distribute information about the artworks on display. Such distribution can be facilitated through electronic monitoring devices and online newsletters. However, as mentioned before, the implementation of digital dissemination methods is quite often derailed by the lack of adequate budgets at South African art museums.<sup>85</sup>

Rey and Casado-Neira (2013) emphasise that the exploration of ICT and digital technology by modern societies is not a new phenomenon. They argue that the explored benefit of ICT must be extended to facilitate and benefit the relationship between museums and the public. However, a known challenge facing art museums around the world and in South Africa is the lack of proper digital technology budget allocations. Under the current financial constraints, South African art museums continuously struggle to stay abreast with necessary computer software and hardware upgrades, which is an expensive exercise given the fact that art museums operate under tough financial conditions (Rey & Casado-Neira 2013:1422). Despite the highlighted economic challenge, Rey and Casado-Neira (2013)

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83. What does dissemination of information mean? See <http://references-definitions.blurtit.com/35904/what-does-dissemination-of-information-mean>.

84. Museum end users refer to day-to-day museum visitors and distant museum audience.

85. Reference is made to these museums: WAM, PAM, EVM and JAG.

are optimistic that ICT holds an essential role in the field of education and museums.

Other technological benefits and barriers are highlighted by Poole (2007:1) who states that ICT provides art museums with an effective set of tools essential for both the day-to-day management of their museums and responding to the general user's information needs. Poole (2007:1) further adds that there are other challenges such as high purchasing costs, unpredictable technology infrastructure breakdowns and ongoing digital technology maintenance. It is, therefore, evident that sophisticated digital technology infrastructure could create a new set of problems even while it aims to solve others for various institutions.

It can, therefore, be stated that digital technology challenges vary from institution to institution. Computer monitors and workstations installed at other art museums, including the McGregor Museum in Kimberley,<sup>86</sup> are limited to only one user at a time. This limitation poses a challenge to the visitors' time and flow through the exhibitions at the museum. This adds another negative dimension to the information dissemination role because only a meagre number of visitors would be able to watch lengthy multimedia video clips regardless of its high quality and the immense information it presents (Dierkings & Falk 1998:63). It is common knowledge that most art museum visitors prefer to learn about works of art on display at their own pace rather than being rushed through a multimedia video clip (Dierkings & Falk 1998:66).

It would be ideal for museum curators to undertake a feasibility study that conforms to the information dissemination role, before embarking on drastic changes regarding the procurement of digital technology devices at local art museums. Such a feasibility study is aimed at preventing art museums from investing in non-customised and non-essential digital technology products.

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86. See <http://www.museumsc.co.za/home.html>.

Poole (2007:1) suggests that the following strategic digital technology assessment questions can serve as a self-evaluation guide for art museums in general:

- Who will be using the digital technology equipment?
- Which of the art objects in art museums need to be enhanced using digital technology?
- How much digital technology utilisation experience does the end user or visitors have?
- Is provision made for technical support of digital technologies?
- Is there a budget earmarked for digital technology service and maintenance requirements?

These questions also appeal for the provision of persons with specialised roles and responsibilities in art museums. Poole (2007:1) classifies these persons as follows:

- Digital technology ambassador: someone who is familiar with technology equipment.
- Digital technology manager: someone who will assume decision-making responsibilities about digital technology.
- Digital technology administrator: someone who will be responsible for the ongoing maintenance of the functional digital technology equipment.
- Digital technology technician: someone who can deal with queries and respond to troubleshooting regarding technical problems relating to the digital technology equipment.

The information dissemination and educational elements in art museums are therefore dependent on excellent management of digital technology infrastructure.

## ■ Educational Elements in Museums

The purpose and role of museum education are to enhance the visitors' ability to understand and appreciate museum collections. The American Association of Museums in 1992 identified the educational role of museums as the core to museums' service to

the public.<sup>87</sup> In a formal report, the American Association of Museums states that due diligence should be exhibited by museums while performing the most fruitful public service of providing an educational experience in the broadest sense. For the American Association of Museums, the public education responsibility of museums has two sides, excellence and equity. The American Association of Museums reveals that excellence and equity are not isolated issues but inclusive concepts that are based on a benefiting drive that endeavours to enrich the public's knowledge through public exhibitions, museum-based publications and public relations.

In response to the educational role, it is argued that the fundamental quest of most art museums is to attract and educate visitors by any possible means, whereby these museums share their educational value to information seekers (Hooper-Greenhill 2000:11-15). The educational role can be achieved using digital technologies in museums. Furthermore, the incorporation of digital technology in art museums places them in an advantageous position to promote and market works of art inside and outside the museum premises. Such a concept is bound to popularise works of art in the communities, which in turn inculcates a culture of art appreciation within the concerned art societies and museum visiting communities who have access to ICT and the Internet. The active incorporation of digital technology systems and strategies is likely to make art education information more readily available at local art museums, given the fact that curators act as the sole gatekeepers of art information in museums (Keene 1998:88-87) in a world inclined towards uniformity.

As hard copy documentation is slowly but surely being replaced by electronic documentation the world over, the incorporation of digital technologies in art museums has

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87. Excellence and equity. Education and the public dimension of museums. A report from the American Association of Museums, 2008. Published by MetLife Foundation. Available: [http://www.depts.ttu.edu/museumttu/CFASWebsite/5333/Required%20Readings%202011/Hirzy\\_Excellence%20&%20Equity.pdf](http://www.depts.ttu.edu/museumttu/CFASWebsite/5333/Required%20Readings%202011/Hirzy_Excellence%20&%20Equity.pdf).

become inevitable, as they are expected to fall in line with the changing times (Borgman 1999:234). Such paper documentation conversions are explored by acclaimed museums such as the Smithsonian museum by taking the lead in substituting hard copy catalogues with e-catalogues.<sup>88</sup>

Digital technology explorations also stimulate museums to reflect society's many educational interests by creating new platforms for information dissemination, education development as well as public relations engagements. One of the traditional tools used to assess plural interests and dissatisfaction at art museums is the visitors' book, in which visitors enter their comments and evaluations about the value of the information the set exhibitions provide. In contrast to the traditional approach is the modern approach, whereby virtual tours of art museums become more popular, resulting in most art museums receiving lesser walk-in visitor volumes (Tendenci, n.d.), because modern visitors find the online museum education versions and electronic art viewing more accessible and convenient. This calls for museums to adopt new social and educational initiatives that would maintain the clients' volumes and the connect between the museums and their clients.

The adoption of technology application in modern museums is currently setting new trends in the field of museum education. Johnson et al. (2013:8) contextualise the benefits of such trends as embedded in the New Media Consortium (NMC) Horizon report (NMC 2013)<sup>89</sup> as follows:

- Cross-institution collaboration is growing as an important way to share resources. Museums are [*increasingly aware*] of the ways in which content, including but not limited to unmediated collections data, may be seen and used in the broader networked environment.

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88. Smithsonian Institution Research Information System. See <http://www.siris.si.edu>.

89. The NMC Horizon Report: 2013 Museum Edition is a publication of the New Media Consortium and the Marcus Institute for Digital Education in the Arts ([www.nmc.org](http://www.nmc.org)).



- Collection-related rich media are becoming increasingly valuable assets in digital interpretation. Museums are beginning to see the value in developing formal strategies for capturing high-quality media documentation at every opportunity [for educational information dissemination purpose].
- Digitisation and cataloguing projects continue to require a significant share of museum resources. Museums are distinguished by the [*type of collection*] they keep and interpret. There is an increasing understanding among museum professionals that visitors expect to be able to readily access accurate and interesting information and high-quality media.
- [*Expectations for the museum patrons and other*] social engagement are profoundly changing [*the*] scope [*of museums*], and [educational] relationships. More and more, museums are integrating emerging technologies and approaches, such as social media, open content and crowdsourcing, as a means of engaging their communities both internally and externally on a deeper level. Embracing these innovations means that museums are providing patrons with more immersive opportunities to become part of the content.
- Increasingly, visitors and staff expect a seamless experience across devices. Visitors expect museums to provide [*effective and efficient*] range of digital resources and content and want the experience of interacting with that content to be consistent across their devices.
- More and more, people expect to be able to work, learn, study and connect with their social networks wherever and whenever they want. This trend links to the global approach through which mobile access to information is changing the way we plan everything from outings to errands.
- The need for data literacy is increasing in all museum-related fields. It is factual that most individuals are at risk of being left behind the digital divide, and libraries and museums have the opportunity to reach [*out to these communities*] to ensure people gain the digital literacy skills needed to succeed in the 21st century. (n.p.)

Based on considerations of the above trends, museums are taking more and more literacy initiatives by forming broad-based partnerships with the communities, thus addressing educational issues by inviting schools to the museums as part of educational tours. This initiative is aimed at improving public education activities and visitor volumes in museums, and it can be efficiently facilitated through digital technology applications (Bloom & Mintz 1990).

On the contrary, visitor volumes at South African art museums indicate otherwise. According to the South African statistical report, the number of trips undertaken by South Africans who travel for leisure, tourism, including museum tourism, has declined (StatsSA 2017). This statement is substantiated by Yoshiara (2008) who attributes the lack of interest in museum visits to the legacy of apartheid and its influence on the repression of museum appreciation and visits among the previously disadvantaged societies. Based on this reference, one may infer that the culture of visiting art museums in the current information age and society still needs to be developed and promoted locally and internationally through digital technology explorations. Lessons are learnt from American museums notably the MoMA, which recognises that its audience is composed of different societal dimensions. These societal museum marketing dimensions prompted the MoMA to form formal and informal relationships with schools, universities, libraries, civic groups and social service organisations, and encouraged curiosity in art by distributing tangible and electronic educational publications to their audience groups<sup>90</sup> to optimise museum visits. The educational role of museums further promotes lifelong learning, and marketing often achieves the stimulation of such learning by promoting 'virtual museum tours' to various audiences and by engaging such audiences in art debates on social networks. This line of argument is supported by Simon (2010) who states that:

Virtual tours are great news for museums, both in the physical and virtual world. While Web developers scramble for object catalogues

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90. See <http://www.depts.ttu.edu>.

upon which to base new online ventures, cultural institutions can tap into pre-existing stories and connections between visitors and collections. And that needn't happen solely on the Web. Objects can become the centre of dialogue in physical galleries as well. This chapter focusses on how to make this possible in two ways: by identifying and enhancing pre-existing social objects in the collection, and by offering visitors tools to help them discuss, share, and socialize around the objects. (pp. 128-129)

Furthermore, Parry (2013:228) acknowledges that a critical role is played by digital technology in museums that triangulates the interaction between learning, media and play to benefit museums as cultural institutions. Such triangulation also enables museums to identify cultural authorities that can develop and enhance the heritage and cultural interests.<sup>91</sup> Their expertise enables them to inform the visitors about the past, present and future through interpretations and transfer of knowledge assimilated over the decades. New Internet technologies are challenging this model of 'museum as authority'. New technologies enable visitors to become active participants in the museum experience – contributing to knowledge and creating their meaning within museum spaces. A primary, new mode of museum communication is the web: a portal to a new world for those who visit – and do not visit – the museum. The possibilities for virtual interpretation are nearly endless, but many museums struggle with balancing this new technology and their age-old role as authorities (Komarova 2015). It is for this reason that Parry (2005:334) highlights that a museum must strike a good, balanced relationship between technology and historical practices. Parry (2005) acknowledges that digital heritage that is commonly known as digital cultural heritage is imminent in the 21st century. Parry (2005), however, warns museum curators not to depend entirely on technology but to use technology to enhance museum practices.

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91. Cultural development: A response to the challenges of the future? A symposium organised within the framework of the 35th session of the General Conference of UNESCO in collaboration with Sciences Po and with the support of the Government of the Kingdom of Spain. Paris, 10 October 2009.

For Maria Komarova (2015), the major questions are: How are museums utilising their websites? How are visitors engaging with the museum online in relation to the statement mentioned above? and How is the use of digital technology in art museums in Gauteng bound to assist in creating wonderful digital media experiences for museum visitors? It is therefore imperative to have such an experience. Othman et al. (2011) states that:

It is important for art museums to embrace new technologies to engage and stimulate the visitors' interest during art exhibitions. However, the use of information communication should not be regarded as a replacement of the curatorial functions but rather as an alternative to connect and engage audiences with displayed exhibits. (p. 93)

As far as the educational role of art museums is concerned, Morrissey and Worts (2000:161) state that if the technology is too advanced for the recipient audience, it may alienate some museum visitors and favour others. In order not to compromise the educational role of art museums, visitors may continuously be oriented on the use of technological interfaces, as both sophisticated and less sophisticated museum audiences may not be aware of the available benefits of digital technology interfaces in art museums. Visitors may also be unaware of the amount of information and knowledge they stand to gain to increase their understanding of the works of art on display (Dierkings & Falk 1998:59). This can be perceived as an educational enrichment experience achieved through digital technology interfaces. There is furthermore an additional challenge to the above-stated educational and technological benefits for art museum visitors in Gauteng. When referring to 'local', it is constantly evaluated according to Western standards, while its African and South African contexts are overlooked.<sup>92</sup>

It is noteworthy that art museums, in general, have continued to explore alternative ways to diversify art education, communication

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92. The evaluation and assessment of museums in South Africa are generalised using Western models of functional museum accreditation.

and marketing through showcasing artworks to reach more audiences. To achieve these, museums have options to use various DH applications through online social media networks, such as Twitter, WeChat, WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook, as well as numerous WWW social networks and web blogs. These, in turn, create possibilities for online exhibitions, interactive multimedia art shows, interactive web interfaces, as well as online educational programmes (Bearman & Trant 2000:3).

## ■ Advanced Educational Component and Art Museums

It can be proposed that digital technologies may become the standard infrastructure for all art museums in South Africa whereby guests not inclined artistically can learn about the displayed works of art through the assistance of self-guided tours that are facilitated by digital technology applications. Other digital interventions ideal for art museums include educational recordings of conversations and interviews of visual artists that are pre-recorded as movie clips (mp3 and mpeg4)<sup>93</sup> digitally played alongside displayed works of art in a looped format. This educational input is essential because it can assist museum visitors to gain insight of the artists' production perspectives through their pre-recorded artwork analysis.

Harper and Moyer (2007) state that 'by dismissing the artist's voice as interpreter, art museums are indirectly throwing out everything else the artist might say in helping the viewer to understand the artworks'. They further add that the non-inclusion of the artist's interpretation of a work of art on display is equivalent to losing a valuable opportunity to visualise the inside process of making the artwork and understanding the artist's

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93. Mp3: A means of compressing a sound sequence into a very small file, to enable digital storage and transmission. *Mpeg-4* is a method of defining compression of audio and visual digital data.

rationale towards the created masterpiece. For Harper and Moyer (2007:6), readers and listeners of the artist's interview receive insight into the creative world of the artist, his or her influences and stimuli, as well as his or her interaction with the materials and ideas, and on how different materials are used to develop into a visual form.

Most artworks in art museums may be contextualised by creating a video in which the curator and/or the artists explain the depiction of artworks, so that end users, particularly museum visitors, can understand the narratives presented by artworks on display. Consequently, it can be argued that the incorporation of digital technologies in art museums may create a platform for art innovation and diverse art education, with the understanding that art is a complex subject that requires a creative mind for interpretation and conceptualisation in the art museum space (Jensen 2001).

Concerning the above statement, it is essential for art museums in Gauteng to embrace information communication technologies and deploy interactive high-definition monitors in museum spaces alongside displayed works of art. As a result of the evident success of digital technology infrastructure and the popularity of smart mobile device applications, most art museums are in an advantaged position to share educative information and promote the culture of art understanding and art appreciation, thereby diminishing misconceptions that art museums only draw interest from elite societies and are of secondary importance to the public whose primary interest is at the lower end of Maslow's scale of needs (Maslow 1943), as the need for shelter and food is a higher priority in South Africa.

## ■ Art Museums and Information Sharing

There seems to be a significant challenge regarding the use of digital technologies in art museums, given the fact that web

blogs and other related information sites such as Wikipedia are not standardised and are unregulated, and are therefore perceived as sites with unreliable content.<sup>94</sup>

Given the above statement, Hooper-Greenhill (2003:152) suggests that art museums have significant roles to play with regard to reliable information sharing. In her view, it is the educational role that faces severe challenges in museums. These challenges include art museum audiences accessing non-verified information from trusted art museum e-information platforms through downloads. Most people trust content from Internet sources and are keener to use Internet content these days than in the early days of the Internet.

Another information sharing benefit of digital technology in art museums relates to people with visual disabilities and the physically challenged. Nightingale (2005:42) is of the opinion that digital technology audio playback applications should be used to pre-record descriptive and analytical information about works of art. Such information sharing recordings should be placed in art museum spaces to benefit and educate the visually impaired and physically challenged art museum visitors to enhance educative information and act as self-guided tours for the physically challenged individuals. This information sharing approach could be achieved by using digitally accessible editorials, as well as supported audio touchscreen points that are installed at available art museum spaces (Simon 2008:41). Pan et al. (2007) in their paper entitled 'Developing web-based tourist information tool using Google map' reports that First World art museum websites around the world offer navigated 'virtual tours' and 'Google map-based tours'. These tours enable web browsers to view works of art remotely.

Examples of suitable museum practice and the utilisation of international museum digital technology trends can be benchmarked against the British museums (Loran 2005) that

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94. The reliability of Wikipedia information has been contested for many years.

use technology infrastructure to attract new audiences. At the UK museums, technology is used to reach out to people who are disadvantaged to visit the museums remotely and is used to entice those individuals who are not inclined to attend exhibitions (Loran 2005). The Tate Museum, for instance, uses the Internet to reach out to global audiences. In South Africa, similar online communication, marketing and education have been faintly established by SAHRA that introduced the SAHRIS in 2011. This digital development created opportunities for information seekers to access necessary information remotely. Also, SAHRIS facilitates online contact forms and e-information for heritage resource agency inventory which is in the form of a database and repository enquiries (Smuts et al. 2016).

Contrary to British museum websites, the Tate Museum Internet options and SAHRIS, art museums in Gauteng seem to be limited and compromised as far as ‘virtual tours’ and ‘Google map-based tours’ (Gere 2004) are concerned. If one compares this with the EVM,<sup>95</sup> which runs its website as a non-interactive web-application with no open access to self-guided 3D virtual tours, the difference becomes obvious that EVM’s public education abilities are limited.

## ■ Opportunity of Introducing Digital Technology in Museum Exhibitions

Digital technology has proven to be of great significance in Britain and the USA by digitising art collections and making digitised contents electronically accessible to the public in general. This valuable potential is yet to be realised in South African art museums, whereby digital technology can be used to improve education, communication and marketing strategies for art museum exhibitions. Unfortunately, this opportunity might not materialise in South Africa at a fast pace in the near future,

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95. The EVM is a division of UP Arts Museums based at the University of Pretoria.



despite the fact that throughout the world ‘information’ has become an important commodity in the business world, with the USA and other First World countries enjoying information sharing and educational benefits of the technology commodity (Fahy 1995:82). However, certain sections of the South African public sector have already experienced an increased recognition of the importance of digital technology that empowers communities in general and stimulates the need to learn and gain basic knowledge through, for example, the Internet and free Wi-Fi.<sup>96</sup>

According to the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (2001):

*[In South Africa information technology is starting to offer the] opportunity to improve the flow of information between citizens and government, thereby building dialogue and [significant social] participation. What has been called ‘e-government’, offers access to information and the opportunity to comment on issues, policies, and laws. It is thus a critical tool in the expansion of public participation [and closing] the [digital divide. The] opportunities presented by the Internet in respect of public [involvement] are self-evident. (n.p.)*

Based on this line of argument, one can concur with Fahy (1995:82) that the advent of modern technology has presented art museums with lucrative opportunities to develop their information sharing and public education roles. This also guided the public to acquire the educational riches offered by art museums through the developing Internet infrastructure. Such new technologies might benefit South African museums in the sharing and education roles and the audience development role. For Fahy (1995:84), there is growing emphasis on increasing access to archives and information on works of art and art museums in general. The incorporation of relevant ICT in all art museums seems to be the ideal way in which to fulfil the digital technology needs.

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96. Free Wi-Fi connections in selected areas of the metropolitan municipalities, such as Tshwane, Ekurhuleni and Johannesburg. Wi-Fi is a facility allowing computers, smartphones or other devices to connect to the Internet or communicate with one another wirelessly within a particular area.

Digital technology applications such as quick response (QR) codes<sup>97</sup> and video kiosks are gradually gaining popularity as support structures at art exhibition venues across the globe. The popularity of QR codes also promotes the use of technological applications in art museums by introducing interactive exhibition tours for visitors with smartphones (Walsh 2009).

It is worth mentioning that the use of QR codes is being replaced by more sophisticated modern technological applications such as augmented reality mobile applications and the Google Maps application that deal with the 3D interactive virtual tours and videography that are popularly used by modern art museums all over the world. Through QR codes, visitors to art museums are granted the opportunity to have an enhanced art education experience. They can learn from the exhibits as they are brought alive through an interactive digital technology mobile application that uses the scan-and-save technique. Once scanned, the QR application redirects the end user to a video that is a pre-recorded clip, text or website (Wheeler 2011).

Although QR codes are slowly getting popular in South Africa, most international museums are finding the systems to be helpful, fascinating and innovative to the end users. A project at an American museum showed that the use of mobile phones by museum visitors at international museums increased visitors' interest in the exhibits (Wheeler 2011). Newer museum applications are readily available at overseas art museums such as the Tate Britain Mobile Guide app. The app is downloadable on smart mobile devices, and it features:

- detailed information on artworks on the walkthrough British art displays
- curators' commentaries

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97. A QR code (abbreviated from Quick Response Code) is the trademark for a type of matrix barcode (or two-dimensional barcode), first designed for the automotive industry in Japan. A barcode is a machine-readable optical label that contains information about the item to which it is attached.

- opinions from a range of other commentators
- background information about British history and art history.

The Tate Britain Mobile Guide application (App) is one example that is used as an audio guide by visitors at the Tate Britain Museum. The self-guide app has options for visitors to listen to the commentaries by peers and critics while viewing the image of the artwork discussed on a smart mobile device while the commentary is played.<sup>98</sup>

## ■ Managing Digital Technology Incorporation in Art Museums

A digital technology management plan for art museums is the ideal way to deal with a technology incorporation strategy and problems. Strategic management in art museums is defined as a set of actions and decisions designed for the formulation and monitoring of plans to achieve short-, medium- and long-term objectives (Pearce & Robinson 2000). Goodstein, Nolan and Pfeiffer (1992) state that strategic planning is the process by which the decision-makers of art museum environments envision the future and develop the necessary procedures and operations to achieve that envisaged future. Using suitable digital technology strategic management, art museums are in a position to transform their existing mandates to serve the knowledge base of their audiences profitably.

The fundamental reason for introducing digital technology strategic management is to transform the 'face' of art museums by using digital technology to create functional educational outputs and to implement a successful art museum knowledge base. This is in line with the constructivism theory that states that

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98. The Tate Britain Mobile Guide app is an audio guide app that is produced to accompany the exhibitions at Tate Museum, whereby visitors can walk through 500 years of British art, seeing and studying various masterpieces. See <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/apps/tate-britain-mobile-guide>.

learning can be achieved through a shared social experience (Giesen 2005), thus expanding the information, knowledge and education bases of museum audiences.

This discussion can be summarised by stating that the benefits of incorporating digital technology in art museums include the following: the use of digital cataloguing of the works of art, the e-Marketing of the art museum contents, the use of electronic information sharing and public education, and assisting art museum curators with administrative and operational activities. Another observation made is the use of 'virtual tours' that form part of innovative processes in art museums to offer information sharing solutions regarding educating the public. However, the key challenges are the following: visitors' inexperience and lack of expertise of using digital devices, financial constraints of art museums regarding the purchasing and maintenance of digital technology infrastructure, security and copyright of published artworks.

## ■ Conclusion

This chapter presented a range of discussions around the pros and cons on the incorporation of digital technologies in art museums in the Gauteng Province. The fundamental argument indicates that the incorporation of digital technology in art museums may yield the following benefits:

- providing increased knowledge for visitors
- presenting a unique identity for the art museum through digital technology
- providing new experiences for art museum visitors
- offering unique virtual tours experience.

As mentioned earlier, this contribution focused on the incorporation of digital technologies as communication, educational and marketing strategies in art museums in the Gauteng Province of South Africa. Reviewed literature indicates

that art museums in South Africa are not on par with other international art museums with regard to the dissemination of information to those seeking it such as researchers, scholars and diverse audiences.

The chapter, therefore, recommends that South African art museums in Gauteng join the 'digital technology incorporation drive'. Not only would these benefits be effective for sharing knowledge, but they may also make the time management more of museum audiences efficient and could serve to bridge traditional and modern approaches, whereby virtual tours of art museums create new forms of best practice. These new practices would diminish the museum statistics of walk-in visitors as contemporary audience would find the online museum education versions and electronic art viewing more accessible and convenient. To address this dichotomy of e-versions versus tangible versions, and to stay abreast with museum visitor volumes and statistics (Voorbij 2010), it is worth acknowledging that museum website visitors' statistics counters are now being accepted as an alternative mechanism to indicate the popularity of museums and their ability to reach out to various audiences remotely.

Based on the evidence that incorporation of digital technologies carries obvious benefits, this study supports the rationale that technology incorporation interfaces at art museums may broaden the culture of art appreciation, art awareness and art education in many societies, thereby making positive contributions to local and global art knowledge. To broaden the scope of technology incorporation benefits at museums, local art museums need to launch rigorous campaigns to promote the culture of art appreciation and information sharing within their immediate environments and societies. They also need to widen educational initiatives in the South African context through a digital technology infrastructure. The information sharing concept promoted by digital technology, the Internet and social media applications (Apps) appears

to be valid options for art museums in Gauteng to reduce information poverty among art museum audiences in general. It is therefore through the technological incorporations that art museums in Gauteng can diversify their information sharing strategies and begin to render customised services to a bigger audience.



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This scholarly book engages with selfies, digital images, texts and voices. Working through digital humanities and image studies methodologies, the book resulted from a research project that explores intersections between selfies, social media use and other digital images, texts, voices and platforms including geospatial technology. Questions addressed by this volume focus on the following: Why are selfies so popular and how do they participate (if at all) in the traditional artform of self-portraiture? What is the gender preference of digital image and text production and platforms? Can selfies, digital images, texts and voices act as agents of democracy? How do the technological affordances steer digital use? What do selfies, digital images, texts and voices and their use indicate of human–technology interactions? How should we understand representations and use of selfies, digital images, texts and voices phenomenologically? This is a cohesive scholarly work, which is a good primer of South African engagements and international collaborations with the digital arts and humanities. The book highlights interesting case studies in the digital humanities and methodologies and focuses on digital ‘voices’, learning to articulate the digital arts and humanities pataois.

**Prof. Charles Travis, Assistant Professor, Geography and Geographical Information Sciences, University of Texas, Arlington, United States of America; and, Research Fellow, Trinity Centre for Environmental Humanities, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland**

This scientific manoeuvre represents big picture stuff: questions of ontology and being – especially social being as exemplified in social media – hermeneutics and the face of knowledge itself are discussed. As it stands, South Africa, and in a larger sense sub-Saharan Africa, seemingly arrives late to the ‘digital humanities’ party. The arguments are impressive, the diverse array of projects presented is commendable and, ultimately, they should prove eye-opening for readers from the Global North. Commenting as it does on issues at the borders of the Global North and Global South, the book provides glimmers of hope in an era of surveillance, gross inequality and growing authoritarianism.

**Prof. Angel D. Nieves, Digital Humanities Area of Excellence, University of San Diego, California, United States of America**



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