

## **Some notes on the language game of dark leisure**

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## Some Notes on the Language Game of Dark Leisure

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## CRITICAL COMMENTARY

### Some Notes on the Language Game of Dark Leisure

#### Introduction

As T.S. Eliot pithily told us in his famous poem, *The Naming of Cats*, naming is a difficult matter, absolutely not a holiday game. In leisure studies, as in sociology and the other social sciences, naming is a language game of primary importance. It not only conjures a term (or a combination of terms) by which an activity, category of experience, group of people, phenomenon, trend, or any other subject or object of thought associated with leisure (past and present) is known, but it also signifies a method of description, of conceptualisation, of classification, and, obviously, of labelling.

In this critical commentary, I am interested in the naming of the phenomenon of 'dark leisure', not just as an academic subject matter in leisure studies, but as a particular impulse of twenty first century freedom. As this special issue attests, of all recent developments in leisure studies, perhaps no event has registered a more widespread impact than the growth of interest in this phenomenon. There are articles and book chapters aplenty about its many manifestations but none of these attempt to spell out in any precise detail what it amounts to. This article should be read as an attempt to spell out what this something might be. As far as I know, it is the first attempt to do so. I have searched the literature for something of its kind and found nothing, except a number of general representations that have emerged from research on dark leisure which suggest that this phenomenon constitutes a body of theory and concepts that rest on four core assumptions (see for example Spracklen and Spracklen (2012) and Stone and Sharpley (2014)). First, it arises in connection with leisure that is perceived as 'deviant' or 'abnormal'. Second, it tends takes place in 'new communicative (dark) spaces' and/or liminal settings of social ambiguity which reach out towards alternative communitas-type realities. Third, it is appealing to those individuals and groups fascinated with death and/or are bound together through their interest in dark (often gothic) popular culture, whether focused on fashion, decoration, travel, film, music etc. And fourth, certain moral

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3 implications often arise as a result of dark leisure activities. Given these varied  
4 understandings, it is important to explore the theories and concepts used in more detail.  
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8 I am not talking about offering anything so bold as a definitive interpretation, but something  
9 more modest: a guide to what it is about dark leisure that makes it attractive to certain  
10 academics and ordinary people alike. I shall argue that a number of themes can be identified  
11 as recurring elements surrounding the phenomenon of dark leisure. The similarities that the  
12 reader will find here are in the pattern of what Wittgenstein gave the name *family*  
13 *resemblance*: what makes the members of a family look alike is not that there are some  
14 characteristics which appear in all of them, but rather that each member resembles some of  
15 the others in one way or another, and that not one of them looks wholly different from the  
16 rest. When I say in the following discussion that dark leisure is ‘abnormal leisure’ (Rojek  
17 2000), ‘heterotopic’ (Foucault 1984), and so on, I do not point at some common essence that  
18 all of them share, but at their *family resemblance*.  
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28 To keep up the family metaphor, what I am proposing is that dark leisure must be interpreted  
29 pragmatically rather than definitively. With respect to this idea, reference must also be made  
30 to Wittgenstein’s other key idea of *language games*. Wittgenstein knew that metaphors are  
31 important for clarifying understanding, not only because they use language in magical and  
32 enlivening ways, but also because they are edifying and enlightening. To this end the idea of  
33 *language games* is concerned with the way in which words can only be properly understood  
34 in the context of their use. This last observation notwithstanding it is nonetheless challenging  
35 to address critically a ‘family’ whose members are so different in kind, and so numerous, that  
36 it would be difficult to get to know them all personally in such a short commentary as this  
37 one. To approach this task, then, I will only offer a brief critical discussion of some of the  
38 members of the immediate family. Before I do this, however, we need to discuss some  
39 fundamental issues that arise when trying to think critically about the word ‘darkness’.  
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## 49 **Darkness**

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53 It would be impossible, in the space of a short essay, to do anything like justice to this word.  
54 But it is worth drawing up a brief inventory of the family characteristics that make it  
55 distinctive. ‘Darkness’ is known to all cultures; and there has been and survives a  
56 semantically equivalent word in every culture, referring to an absence of ‘light’. But for time  
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3 immemorial this juxtaposition has hardly ever been a neutral one. As St John says in the New  
4 Testament (Chapter 3, verse 19): '*Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds*  
5 *were evil*'. Here 'darkness' is the absence of 'light' in the same way that 'evil' is the absence  
6 of 'good'. These seductively reassuring propositions of dualism suggest that the structure of  
7 reality is binary and our knowledge of the world is essentially always a double. As Derrida  
8 (1992), the great French philosopher, famously pointed out, within this system of thought one  
9 part of that binary is always more important than the other, that one term is 'marked' as  
10 positive and the other negative. Derrida argues that all binary pairs work this way; one term is  
11 always valued over the other, given special *presence*, which is always favoured over *absence*.  
12 What this tells us is that word 'darkness' says that the condition of the thing to which it  
13 applies is not what it ought to be, or what it is *normally* expected to be. It is sinister or evil,  
14 gloomy or dismal, ignorant or unenlightened, and as such denotative of some kind of  
15 deformity, malfunction or aberration. In other words, in most if not all cultures, 'darkness'  
16 means *abnormality* of the normal state of human affairs. To this extent 'abnormality'  
17 signifies those kinds of leisure activities and interests which are condemned by the 'value  
18 consensus' as 'wrong', while implying that they also need to be censured or socially  
19 controlled.  
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### 32 33 **Abnormal leisure**

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36 Among the first degree relatives of the dark leisure family, it would make sense then to  
37 identify first *abnormal leisure* (Rojek 2000). This idea might be understood as the  
38 designation for all that is strange and deviant, unbridled and tempestuous, and which in many  
39 cases are likely to be infractions of the criminal law. It also constitutes the outlandish leisure  
40 pursuits that we are illicitly attracted to, but also fear and dare not try to fathom, but are often  
41 nonetheless fascinated enough to try out. To this extent, abnormal leisure is the example *par*  
42 *excellence* of the unresolved, disturbing forms of our desires and fantasies, which are  
43 explored to good effect by Ken Kalfus (2006) in his post-9/11 novel *A Disorder Peculiar to*  
44 *the Country*. This novel, which is a not so simple story of adultery, demonstrates how the  
45 psychology of domestic attrition stands for the paroxysm, the whole dying world of USA  
46 security, as New Yorkers indulge in 'terror sex' in order to gain social advantage, and where  
47 the highest thrill is to bed somebody who has survived the twin towers or served emergency  
48 duty in its aftermath. Here, focusing on the pleasure that people derive from what makes  
49 other people suffer, Kalfus gives us a Freudian explanation. What forms in this process is the  
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3 *death drive*: people die as a result of an extreme act of terrorism, and others derive a sexual  
4 pleasure out of it.  
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8 Borrowing a concept or two from Freud and contextualizing his core argument around the  
9 concepts of liminality, edgework and surplus energy, Rojek (2000) outlines three key types of  
10 abnormal leisure: wild, invasive, mephitic leisure. Rojek's first category involves limit-  
11 experiences through edgework and as such tends to be opportunistic in character. It involves  
12 the individual's self-absorbed desire for instant gratification. The experience of 'limit' is the  
13 name of the game with *wild leisure* which includes deviant crowd behaviour such as rioting,  
14 looting and violence, particularly at sports events. Rojek also suggests that new technology  
15 presents individuals intent on pursuing *wild leisure* with ever more opportunities for instant  
16 gratification, typically in the form of video clips of anything from violence in sport to  
17 genocide, which present individuals with the vicarious 'delight of being deviant' (Katz 1988).  
18 To borrow an insight from Susan Sontag (1965, 215), such abnormal leisure activities often  
19 offer the satisfaction 'of extreme moral simplification – that is to say, a morally acceptable  
20 fantasy where one can give outlet to cruel, or at least amoral feelings.'  
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31 *Invasive leisure* focuses on abnormal behaviour associated with self-loathing and self-pity  
32 and the ways in which disaffected individuals experience anomie and personal alienation  
33 from the rest of society, losing themselves in drink, drug or solvent abuse in order that they  
34 can 'turn their back on reality'.  
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39 As with *wild leisure*, *mephitic leisure* encompasses a wide range of pursuits and activities,  
40 from mundane encounters with prostitutes to the buzz of murdering through serial killing.  
41 Why Rojek calls these leisure pursuits mephitic is that they are generally understood to be  
42 'noxious', 'nasty', 'foul' and 'morally abhorrent' by most 'normal' people, because they  
43 cause major offence to the moral order of things. To this extent mephitic leisure experiences  
44 involve the individual's self-absorbed desire for gratification at the expense of the self and  
45 others. What Rojek is alluding to here is that the *death drive* is just as important to  
46 understanding leisure as the *pleasure principle* (Freud 1995a). In other words, we often act in  
47 complete disregard of our self-interest and the interest of others in order to act out  
48 compulsions that we do not understand. Moreover, there are occasions when we will sacrifice  
49 anything and everything (even life itself) for our particular enjoyment.  
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3 At the core of Rojek's thesis is a rather unsettling message about the persistence of violence  
4 in leisure. A good example here might be blood sports which sees some people hunting  
5 animals because they enjoy killing them. What this suggests is that, for some people, the 'hot'  
6 blood of the hunt is some kind of compensation for the 'cold' bloodiness of modern life.  
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8 What this tells us is that we might look back at what previous generations did with horror, but  
9 the glorification of violence and its enjoyment is still very much a part of modern leisure.  
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11 Freud (1995b, 775) suggested as much in the first section of his famous essay *Civilisation*  
12 *and Its Discontents*, when he took Rome to be a useful metaphor for the processes of modern  
13 civilisation. Like Rome, Freud suggested, modernity might be evolving towards a newer and  
14 better society but it could not entirely shake off its past. Modernity carries with it, beneath its  
15 modern foundations, the ambivalence of its own historicity. As Freud put it, 'nothing which  
16 has once been formed can perish – that everything is somehow preserved and that in suitable  
17 circumstances (when, for instance, regression goes back far enough) it can once more be  
18 brought to light'. What Freud's analysis suggests is that at one level there is with the  
19 emergence of modernity *progressive* affirmation of civilisation; but at another it has 'buried  
20 in the soil of the city or beneath its modern buildings' the *regressive* means of decivilisation.  
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### 31 **Leisure values**

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34 A second matter, then, I would identify in relation to dark leisure is the concern with *values*,  
35 especially moral and ethical values. There is an 'ethical' divide about the relative merits of  
36 abnormal leisure in leisure studies. Criticizing Rojek's work, Aitchison has argued that  
37 'violence, abuse and violations of human rights may well play a part in exploitative leisure  
38 relations but these acts themselves are not acts of leisure – they are acts of violence and  
39 should be named and researched as such' (quoted in Rojek 2000, 167). However, throughout  
40 his publishing career, Rojek has refuted all the axioms of leisure as it is normally understood  
41 in leisure studies. This 'ideal' kind of leisure may be claimed as the norm in leisure studies,  
42 with alternatives drawn from the 'dark side' rejected as immoral and therefore, strictly  
43 speaking not leisure, because of their dereliction of leisure's proper role which is to edify,  
44 bring individuals together in communities, and so on. However, what this 'ideal' ignores is  
45 the necessity to take seriously the totality as part of the story of modern leisure and not just  
46 the bits we happen to think are good and proper.  
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3 In Rojek's view abnormal leisure may belong to the forbidden and the deadly, but is simply  
4 not true that we need be wholly opposed abnormal leisure experiences, even when we feel  
5 they are morally suspect. We need to engage with them if we are to understand their meaning  
6 for those involved. Hannah Arendt (1963) coined the expression 'banality of evil' in order to  
7 bring to our attention the shocking ordinariness of such activities. In the light of Arendt's  
8 perceptive observation we should recognise that Rojek is merely tearing off leisure studies'  
9 veil of respectability to reveal what lurks in the hearts and minds of a good many men and  
10 women, which enables him to say something important about the infinite playfulness of the  
11 human mind. The mirror image this holds up to us may not be an ideal picture - it can  
12 frequently be dreadful and upsetting, and often even morally repugnant - but it *is* leisure all  
13 the same.  
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23 For all the strengths of Rojek's analysis, however, he does not give sufficient consideration to  
24 two important issues. First, he fails to recognise the fact that in its contemporary usage  
25 abnormal leisure is often complicated by its tendency to come in commodity form. Second,  
26 and related to this first issue, while foregrounding the way the death drive takes precedence  
27 over the power of the pleasure principle, leading some individuals to seek suffering rather  
28 than pleasure, he never discusses the wider implications of this for understanding abnormal  
29 leisure. It is to these two issues that we must now turn.  
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### 35 **Leisure, deviance and consumptive deviance**

36 Drawing on the topic of sport and using the term *deviant leisure*, rather than *abnormal*  
37 *leisure*, Blackshaw and Crabbe (2004) argue that since the 1990s the demarcation between  
38 'real' deviance and that which has been produced for consumption has blurred as the  
39 abnormal has been turned into yet another marketable commodity. In other words, so called  
40 'deviant' behaviour in sport is, as they put it, 'often just surface, flow and performance  
41 without the exit wounds'. This is abnormal leisure staged for consumption and the sense of  
42 the spectacular that is often involved, but also the mass and the calibre of the audience for it,  
43 since it is through marketized images, 'confessionals' and rumours of celebrity 'deviance' in  
44 sport that our desires for the 'deviant' Other tend more and more to be fulfilled. In a culture  
45 in which consumption is paramount, consuming 'deviant' sport becomes yet another lifestyle  
46 choice. The consumption of 'deviance', or what Blackshaw and Crabbe call 'consumptive  
47 deviance', seeks to capture a sense of the phantasmagoric nature of existence which eludes  
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3 people in the mundane quotidian of their everyday lives. These phantasmagoria, they suggest,  
4 have become part of the high altar of consumer capitalism.  
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7 In other words, consumer capitalism now 'needs' irrationality and impulsive behaviour, and  
8 as such, the concept of abnormal leisure simply reflects the dynamics of our contemporary  
9 lived condition – it is, paradoxically, the norm. Drawing on the work of Bauman (2000), they  
10 argue that today the societal conventions associated with Freud's (1995a) concept of the  
11 *reality principle* which involved forsaking the irrational and postponing pleasure through the  
12 constant suppression of the desire for the transgressive and the 'deviant', might be considered  
13 to have been replaced by a 'precarized' hybrid existence which is both more intense but at the  
14 same time much less sure, lacking a distinctive singular feel. Since whilst the label of  
15 abnormal was easily applied in the producer based capitalism – with its requirement for self-  
16 discipline through the values of Protestant work ethic –in our era of 'liquid' modern  
17 consumer capitalism the ideal consumer is not a coherent and self-disciplined *individual* with  
18 a fixed identity, but somebody who can identify with an endless supply of commodity goods.  
19 Somebody who is also always open to new desires and new fantasies including the seductive  
20 allure of abnormal leisure which nourishes the desiring and fantasizing impulses which are  
21 both acknowledged and necessary to sustain the mediated capitalist consumer-based  
22 economy. Consumerism prospers because it is best placed to furnish human life with the  
23 necessary distractions to divert our attention from the oppressive awareness of our mortality.  
24 In so doing it homogenizes the abnormal by melting together consumption and deviance.  
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37 This does not mean that all the categories of consumptive deviance are at bottom all the  
38 same. On the contrary. They could not serve their adherents as guides to living if they did not  
39 embody within them the distinctive qualities which differentiate them from other kinds of  
40 leisure. The point is that now that deviant behaviour has no need for indirection, now that its  
41 sense of aberrancy has been eased because the *pleasure principle* no longer remains in the  
42 shadow of the *reality principle* (Blackshaw and Crabbe 2004, 85) and its place in society  
43 adumbrated if not secured, it has become ripe for consumption.  
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50 What this suggests is that today dark leisure might also be considered as something that  
51 provides consumers with a passport, which allows them to relatively safely transgress the  
52 boundaries of the permissible, allowing unmitigated access to what is conventionally  
53 repressed or forbidden. Rojek (2000, 191) argues that this kind of leisure turns us into shock-  
54 connoisseurs, seeking the next thrill, as we 'play at being deviant and engage in what Katz  
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3 (1988) describes as ‘the delight of being deviant’’. It is the vicarious sense of having done  
4 something bad that feels rather cool that matters. In other words, the dangerous enjoyment  
5 people get from dark leisure doesn’t just capture the euphoria of ‘deviancy’, it also provides  
6 the romance of it. Sloterdijk (2012, 52) argues that nothing is more normal today than  
7 removing ourselves from any kind of normality. This kind of life practice is perhaps best  
8 encountered in ‘the shadow worlds of reverie’ Foucault called heterotopias.  
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### 13 **Heterotopic leisure**

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16 In contrast to the homogenizing tendencies of consumptive deviance in which dark leisure  
17 emerges as a kind of entertainment, those who seek dark leisure in heterotopia are after  
18 heterogeneity and spiritual experience. There is an abstraction from time and space which  
19 corresponds to a Bergsonian time of subjective experience that replaces objective time  
20 experience. Here the existence is the mystery – the secret, the unknown known – not the  
21 meaning and purposes of leisure, that is of true significance.  
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28 As I argue in Blackshaw (2017), too complex for rational interpretation, yet at the same time  
29 seemingly a *tabula rasa* for all individuals’ desires, heterotopias are ‘disturbing’,  
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33 probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to  
34 name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy  
35 ‘syntax’ in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also  
36 that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one  
37 another) to ‘hold together’. This is why utopias permit fables and discourse: they run  
38 with the very grain of language and are part of the fundamental dimension of the  
39 *fabula*; heterotopias ...desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very  
40 possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism  
41 of our sentences (Foucault, 1970, xix).  
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49 In an article *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, first published in 1967, Foucault  
50 (1984) identifies two main categories of heterotopia. There are the pre-modern heterotopias  
51 of crisis, otherwise known as ‘elsewhere’ places which tended to be relegated to the margins  
52 of modern societies. Foucault has in mind here privileged places such as single-sex boarding  
53 schools where young boys are taken through a sexual rite of passage that is neither  
54 homosexual nor heterosexual; sacred places such as pilgrimage sites; and forbidden places  
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3 such as brothels. In assessing the ways in which these 'elsewhere' places have been  
4 transformed in modern societies, Foucault offers his second category of heterotopia, which at  
5 their most basic are the places of deviance, such prisons and mental asylums, where those  
6 considered 'abnormal' by the standards of modern norms can be spatially isolated.  
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10 In developing a more elaborate conception of this second category of heterotopia, Foucault's  
11 analysis suggests that these 'elsewhere' places must be understood in relation to the kind of  
12 society in which they occur. Where conventional leisure worlds fit snugly into reality;  
13 leisure heterotopias do not. In any society there are some people for whom the 'real world'  
14 does not resonate with their own experiences. Even though we are indoctrinated into thinking  
15 that 'this way, rather than that' is the right way to live, we tacitly know it is mistaken. In other  
16 words, the 'real world' robs some people of the kind of fullness of life others are able to find  
17 in normalcy. The 'real world' is for these individuals at once too much and not enough. What  
18 Foucault's analysis suggests is that a sense of recompense for a life that is not being lived in  
19 the confines of the 'real world' leads people down the track of heterotopia: reality and  
20 rationality are not on their menus, since what they are after is an unmediated immediacy of  
21 something together out of the ordinary.  
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32 To this extent heterotopias tend to come to life in *pointillist* time, which means they are  
33 experienced as episodic. They constitute sequestered spaces which have their very own  
34 systems of 'opening and closing' that both isolate them from the rest of society and operate to  
35 exclude those who do not have the necessary credentials to enter. In so doing heterotopias,  
36 function by way of opposition; that is they have a tendency to unfold 'between two extreme  
37 poles'. However, heterotopia offers spaces of compensation (rather than the illusion of  
38 utopia) and as such functions in relation to the way that its (deviant) populations understand  
39 they are imagined by the rest of society. In heterotopia individuals do not try to resist reality  
40 so much as escape it – and in so doing creatively find their own place in it.  
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48 Beneath the calm surface of everyday social reality flow strong and deadly currents. Against  
49 sad obscurity, against surrender to societal norms, against normalcy, heterotopia suggests  
50 desire for an alternative kind of knowledge, for another kind of determination, for ragtag  
51 unyielding life, the kind of worlds that provide expression and shelter for the ones who  
52 choose to escape meaning there. Heterotopias are a feast for anyone hungry for otherness.  
53 Their incumbents create spectacular spaces in which 'reality' itself seems to dissolve under  
54 the pressures of desire and we are left with individuals who shape-shift personalities as their  
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3 compulsions are let loose. Whoever seeks out a heterotopia knows that once they arrive  
4 there, they will find a special kind of freedom. For these individuals the world most of us call  
5 the 'real world' is not the real world: *the* real world is an-other world.  
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10 In heterotopia nothing is straightforward. Because hermeneutics is absent words have their  
11 own usages, and nothing is ever never quite settled. Make-believe is pervasive, often the  
12 custom. Leisure heterotopias belong to the 'communities' that create and use them. They  
13 represent alternative kinds of cognitive, social and moral space, emerging not from  
14 established imaginative traditions, but instead from the pursuit of mutual passion, pleasure  
15 and purpose, dignified and elevated by the ingenuity of their sense of invention and the  
16 centrality of this to the lives of those present. Drawing on the two very different examples of  
17 'cruising': car cruising and the gay men who cruise for group sex in Samuel Delany's novel  
18 *The Mad Man* (1994), I demonstrate how leisure heterotopias provide access to radically  
19 different existential possibilities, and thereby expand what is meant or could mean to be  
20 human, by giving reality to what the 'real world' cannot quite grasp, to what it wishes wasn't  
21 there, or to what it fears: death.  
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### 31 **Leisure heterotopias: death and belonging**

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34 Religion once upon a time provided a guarantee against death. However, the importance of  
35 religion as an institution that structures social existence has waned dramatically in modern  
36 Western societies. In their discussion of dark leisure, Stone and Sharpley (2014) point to the  
37 singular importance of individualisation – understood as the interdependency between society  
38 shaping individuals and individuals forming their own society – to this process of  
39 secularisation, which brought with it a rational commitment to robust individualism and the  
40 right to freedom from religion and other traditions and institutions. In their view  
41 secularisation has left modern lives disoriented, not only cut adrift from the comforting  
42 controls of religion but also devoid of any secure moral foundations. The function of dark  
43 leisure is the reconfiguring of morality and the integration of individuals through the pursuit  
44 of their collective interest. As they explain in offering a summative model of dark leisure  
45 tourism experiences:  
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56 First, secularisation and the negation of religion as a traditional dominant framework, in  
57 which meaning and moral guidance is provided, has seemingly left some individuals  
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3 isolated, disoriented and morally confused. Second, as post-conventional societies  
4 cultivate a process of individualisation and moral confusion, individuals seek morally  
5 relative meaning on their own terms and from non-religious and non-traditional  
6 institutions, enabling dark tourism places in the representation of taboo topics to  
7 become contemporary (dark) communicative spaces. Third, individuals collectively  
8 assemble in these new communicative (dark) spaces, resulting, potentially, in both the  
9 provision and extraction of moral meaning about a particular tragic event, which in turn  
10 allows the self to become embodied through a dark leisure experience. Finally,  
11 collective effervescence and its resultant emotional energy is discharged through and by  
12 embodied individuals within these new socially sanctioned dark spaces, whereby  
13 morality is conveyed not only by official interpretation of death or tragedy but also by  
14 the actual presence and emotional engagement of the individual visitor... This  
15 reconfiguration and revitalisation of moral issues through dark leisure is *not* deviant,  
16 nor should it generate discourse about deviance, but instead it should be viewed as a  
17 process of contemporary society in which we renegotiate moral boundaries and ethical  
18 principles through consuming the taboo. Therefore, it is, perhaps, the process of dark  
19 tourism which attracts individuals to consume death in new insulating spaces that  
20 generates a perceived deviance, in addition, or even rather than, the actual death,  
21 disaster or tragedy that dark tourism seeks to represent (2014, 62-3).  
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36 Through this model Stone and Sharpley's key concern is to analyse the prospects of securing  
37 social cohesion in the face of the rapid social changes brought about by individualisation. In  
38 resolving this 'problem', they conceive dark leisure in Durkheimian terms, which in their  
39 view not only reaffirms social integration through 'collective effervescence', but also  
40 provides a forum for helping to resolve moral issues through consuming what the 'value  
41 consensus' sees as taboo. Like Durkheim they also proffer that deviance is actually normal; it  
42 is an important aspect of public discourse, and as such an integral part of the functioning of a  
43 healthy society.  
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51 By contrast, I would argue that analytic attention should be squarely focused on the ways in  
52 which individualisation has radically transformed our relationship with death. In my view it is  
53 the loss of belief in immortality that lies at the root of religion's decline in western  
54 civilisation. It was the spectacular failure of religion to offer modern individuals an effective  
55 solution to the problem of death that led to its decline. And, as we lost our belief in religion's  
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3 ability to provide us with immortality we began to obsess about death. As we have seen,  
4 Freud assumed that the *death drive* controls human behaviour beyond the *pleasure principle*;  
5 it overrides the power of the *pleasure principle* and leads us to seek suffering rather than  
6 pleasure. But in heterotopia the *death drive* also acts as an entrance to another kind of world:  
7 immortality, understood in secular terms. Heterotopia not only facilitates our desire to escape  
8 from the social controls imposed on us by the 'real world' but offers us our own 'private  
9 roads to immortality' (Bauman 1992). As I argue in Blackshaw (2017, 160-1), these tend to  
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18 two approved and practised life-strategies: this of *felo de se* aesthetic design (read:  
19 performativity) and that of *immortalis* interpretation (read: devotion). The former is a  
20 strategy geared towards revelation and the latter is a strategy geared towards  
21 conservation and restoration, of adapting new art forms from older ones. Some  
22 devotional leisure life-worlds may play one up and play the other down; but *all*  
23 devotional leisure lifeworlds deploy these two strategies. The former is positioned as an  
24 individual attribute and tends to surface spectacularly, but it is not fundamentally  
25 personal since all those who practise their devotion together have the potential to share  
26 in its achievement. The latter is positioned as a collective destiny, but it also serves as a  
27 vehicle fit for personal fulfilment.

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36 Underlying such life-strategies is also a longing for some kind of spiritual home, where we  
37 (individuals *de facto*) can belong, where, on arrival, an aggregate of isolated individuals can  
38 become a community of sorts. The sense of 'community' heterotopia generates is defined by  
39 a radical alterity. As Deleuze and Guatarri (1987) would argue, the 'community' experienced  
40 here is 'traversal', very much a plural process of unification, moving beyond the constraints  
41 implied by the distinction between the intelligible and the sensible, between presence and  
42 absence. Transversal unity has an open-textured quality that emerges in democratic  
43 communication that enables shared ways of being-in-the-world that know no boundaries.

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51 What Lyotard (1988) calls the *differend* offers another compelling way of explaining this  
52 present/absent 'community'. In a *differend* there lies something that is beyond mere  
53 description. The question then becomes how to do justice to the something that cannot help  
54 but be missing. Lyotard's answer is that first of all you have to bear witness to it. Secondly,  
55 you appeal to the kinds of *feelings* that enable you to supplement this evidence, the kinds of  
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3 higher pleasure that take you to that extreme where the *pleasure principle* meets the *death*  
4 *drive*. As Lyotard points out, only feelings can bear witness to the *differend*, and in particular  
5 the feeling of the sublime. It is the sublime then that enables those involved to sense the  
6 *presence* of ‘community’ (the feeling of intense, trembling pleasure that is only found in  
7 communion with another human being ) and equally the sense the *impossibility* of  
8 ‘community’ (‘fantasies of closeness, of intimacy, that are way in excess of human  
9 possibility’ (Phillips 2006, 31)). This is the double pulse of this ‘community’, between the  
10 present and the absent, between the ideal and the real, between life and death, between the  
11 world that opens up in the imagination and world of everyday social relations. What  
12 Durkheim once said of religion is true of heterotopian ‘community’: it is conceived of  
13 nothing more (and nothing less either) than strangely organized practices that pay due  
14 reverence to the actuality of ‘being together’, ‘and thereby ensuring that this ‘being together’  
15 can go on without causing too much trouble’ (Raud, in Bauman and Raud 2015, 76).

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26 The central life strategy adopted here is one intent on rekindling the ultimate *experience* of  
27 ‘community’ which just like death itself cannot help but be missing in the ‘real world’. But  
28 those who seek community in heterotopia live for the moment, for the successive ‘now’. As I  
29 demonstrate in my discussion of the gay men who cruise for group sex in Delany’s novel, the  
30 individuals involved strive to squeeze all reality into the present. The kinds of ‘community’  
31 found in heterotopia are always affecting, but also always contingent, aleatory, ephemeral  
32 and indeterminate. In heterotopia, ‘community’ never goes further than its ‘as-ifness’. Here  
33 community envisages eternity, not as permanent fixity, but as ephemeral ecstasy. It is the  
34 experience of *departure* that is the key to understanding heterotopian ‘community’. The key  
35 point is that we do not really know the significance of what we experienced there – the  
36 intense pleasure, the intimate sense of camaraderie – was until we leave. It is the experience  
37 of departure that is the litmus test, as this tells us how big a part of ourselves we are leaving  
38 behind. Heterotopia is somewhere we are always leaving, and we spend much of our lives  
39 trying to regain its experience again. This is why the sense of belonging found in heterotopia  
40 is also best understood in terms of a certain kind of death. Heterotopia might not have any  
41 firm foundations on which to build something more enduring, but it is a different world, one  
42 that has room for someone ‘just like you’. Despite the fact that it is always temporary, it is  
43 always welcoming to people who look and sound ‘just like you’ – people from elsewhere.  
44 The ‘community’ created in heterotopia, if not fireproofing you from death itself, at least  
45 retards the flame of exclusion. In the ‘real’ world this is something that is never going to  
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3 happen. Nothing else can provide the supremely comforting sensation of existing in the midst  
4 of something temporary conjured to feel so absolute.  
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## 7 8 **Conclusions**

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10 What the foregoing discussion has suggested is that naming is a form of ‘objectivation’ and  
11 that dark leisure is the contemporary name for what leisure scholars have over the years  
12 variously called ‘abnormal leisure’, ‘deviance’, ‘consumptive deviance’ and ‘heterotopic  
13 leisure’. The similarities that we have found here are in the pattern of what Wittgenstein  
14 called *family resemblance*. There are, of course, potentially other relatives of this family yet  
15 untouched. By focusing on the ‘objectivation’ side of things, I have said much less about the  
16 ‘subjectivation’ side of things – the constitution of the thinking, speaking ‘I’ – other than  
17 elaborating on what has already been extended from Freudianism and applying some insights  
18 from poststructuralism, and especially Foucault. To return to T.S. Eliot’s poem, *The Naming*  
19 *of Cats*, once again, I shall conclude this critical commentary by saying that the one specific  
20 value on which all these various family members must converge is a name variously  
21 interpreted but one that never belongs to more than one cat.  
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32 And that is the name that you never will guess;  
33 The name that no human research can discover—  
34 But THE CAT HIMSELF KNOWS, and will never confess.  
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36 When you notice a cat in profound meditation,  
37 The reason, I tell you, is always the same:  
38 His mind is engaged in a rapt contemplation  
39 Of the thought, of the thought, of the thought of his name:  
40 His ineffable effable  
41 Effanineffable  
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43 Deep and inscrutable singular Name.  
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51 The simplest way of reading these lines is, of course, to take Eliot’s conclusion literally to  
52 mean that cats cannot speak for themselves. Or perhaps to presume that by finishing the poem  
53 in this way, he is implying that species-specific experience is all we humans have got and that  
54 we need more than our imaginations to get inside the *Umwelten* of cats, in order to  
55 understand how they think. Yet even if that is true (and there is other evidence in the poem  
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3 that leads us to believe it), such a profound ending seems distinctly inadequate as a response  
4 to what has gone before. My own inclination is that what Eliot is getting at is, that by the time  
5 we have read these concluding lines, we should have learned that notwithstanding the  
6 complexity of the names we conjure to explain how living creatures experience their worlds,  
7 the one specific value on which all of these must converge is *freedom*. Specifically, the  
8 freedom we have to identify and express ourselves in our own inimitable ways.  
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14 Eliot's admonition is to educate us to think in new ways about the nature of freedom by  
15 questioning what it is possible for us as scholars to finally 'know' about other subjects. This  
16 alerts us to the dangers of bringing 'objective' interpretations to 'subjective' realities and  
17 offers a word of warning that there is so much more to be done in terms of the  
18 'subjectivation' side of things. In the transgressive inner worlds of dark leisure other things  
19 matter. The imagination is allowed to flourish. Here you alight on constant activity: desire,  
20 fetishist sex, necrophilia, escapology – infinite kinds of eccentricity. What this tells us is that  
21 'subjectivation' gives meaning to what escapes 'objectivation'. This is the measure of its  
22 freedom. These are not worlds that are being arranged into a visible pattern, it is the life  
23 process going on regardless. Those who find freedom there are all of *us*: a multitude of  
24 individuals. We just happen to be leading our own (dark) leisure lives.  
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