



*Interpretive Communities at work and play in the built environment*

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# **Interpretive Communities at work and play in the built environment**

**Luke Edward Bennett**

*Published works submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements of Sheffield Hallam University for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy on the basis of published work*

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# I: List of published works

Ref No	Details of the Published Work
1	Bennett, Luke and Gibbeson, Carolyn (2010) 'Perceptions of occupiers' liability risk by estate managers: a case study of memorial safety in English cemeteries'. <i>International Journal of Law in the Built Environment</i> , <b>2</b> (1), pp.76-93.
2	Bennett, Luke (2010) 'Trees and public liability – who really decides what is reasonably safe?' <i>Arboricultural Journal – The International Journal of Urban Forestry</i> , <b>33</b> , pp.141-164.
3	Bennett, Luke (2011) 'Judges, child trespassers and occupiers' liability'. <i>International Journal of Law in the Built Environment</i> , <b>3</b> (2), pp.126-145.
4	Bennett, Luke (2011) 'The Bunker: metaphor, materiality & management'. <i>Culture and Organization</i> , <b>17</b> (2), pp.155-173.
5	Bennett, Luke (2011) 'Bunkerology – a case study in the theory and practice of urban exploration'. <i>Environment and Planning D: Society and Space</i> , <b>29</b> (3), pp.421-434.
6	Bennett, Luke (2013). 'Who goes there? Accounting for gender in the urge to explore abandoned military bunkers'. <i>Gender, Place and Culture</i> . <b>20</b> (3), pp.630-646.
7	Bennett, Luke (2013) 'Concrete Multivalence – practising representation in bunkerology'. <i>Environment and Planning D: Society and Space</i> , <b>31</b> (3), pp.502-521.
8	Bennett, Luke and Hock, Katja (2013) <i>Scree</i> , Tract Publishing: Sheffield.

## *II: Abstract*

Via a series of case study investigations this programme of studies applies the related concepts of 'interpretive communities' (Fish 1980) and 'communities of practice' (Wenger 1998) to the contemplation of, and interaction with, a variety of seemingly mundane places and structures within the built environment (principally cemetery gravestones, trees, abandoned military bunkers and an industrial hillside). It takes from these and other related theorists a broadly social constructivist concern to show how discursive practices render phenomena known or noticed but also inflects these seemingly idealist notions with a materialist (and pragmatist) sensibility, namely that ideas give significance to matter, but that matter exists anyway, shapes human agency and can act back upon meaning-making. The programme explores and asserts the importance of this co-production, this matter/meaning entanglement (Barad 2007; Hodder 2012) by exploring the 'as practiced' imprint of law and hobbies upon the built environment. The concern is to show both the multiplicity and the robustness of particular ways of engaging with such structures and places amongst certain professional and recreational communities – and also of some of the structural similarities in their meaning-making. Thus we strangely find seemingly counter-cultural 'urban explorers' performing building surveying as a hobby, we find land managers projecting wild 'learned' anxieties onto nondescript (and perfectly safe) assets, and we find local communities excavating rich meaning – in play and reminiscence – in the detritus of a landfill site. The programme thus provides both a practical and theoretical contribution towards understanding how places and structures become feared (as liabilities) or loved (as treasures) and of the logics and processes by which this occurs. It thus contributes to studies of the geographies of law, enthusiasm, exploration and heritage and to the sociologies of lay knowledge, law, organisation and also to material culture studies.

# *III: Critical appraisal of the published works*

## **1. OVERVIEW – WHAT IS THE PROGRAMME CONCERNED WITH?**

### **1.1 Research question**

The eight articles presented here all address the research question:

*“How do individual interpretive communities, in both work and play contexts, make sense of particular normative frameworks and apply them to their engagements with prosaic places and physical structures in the built environment?”*

### **1.2 Aims of the programme**

The aims of the programme have been:

- A. to identify the logics (organised ways of doing and understanding) in use within a variety of professional and enthusiast “interpretive communities” (Fish 1980);
- B. to compare and contrast the logics of these interpretive communities, to identify whether there are substantive differences in how professional and enthusiast communities organise their meaning-making practices;
- C. to consider the role and importance of internet based collaborative forums and of print based media in the formation, circulation and reinforcement of communities’ interpretive frameworks;
- D. to compare and contrast key theories of group meaning-making in the context of the mediation of human/thing and place relations in the built environment;

- E. to compare and contrast processes of translation (theory to practice) within two normative frameworks: occupiers' liability law and urban exploration; and
- F. to consider how the logics of such communities affect inter-community transfers of meaning around objects and places and the consequent implications for consensus formation around matters of liability, access, safety and the valorisation of derelict land and lone structures.

### **1.3 Description of the programme**

This programme of inter-related case study based investigations has during the period 2009 to 2013 enquired into the ways in which stable meanings are found, circulated and sustained by particular groups of actors in relation to certain prosaic portions of the built environment, specifically cemetery gravestones, trees, abandoned military bunkers and derelict land.

The programme's concern has been to elicit the normative (i.e. rule bound and/or pattern forming) practices by which stable framing of objects and elements arise in both work (professional communities) and play (hobby / enthusiast communities), and to show how these framings govern orientation and action towards objects and places.

The investigations have predominantly been undertaken via case study analysis, with varying degrees of researcher participation within the communities being studied. The investigations have also varied in scale of focus. Thus the 'cemeteries' and 'trees' studies were UK-wide, whilst the 'derelict land' study concerned one particular geographical location.

The origins of this programme lie in an unpublished study (Bennett & Crowe 2008) carried out shortly after I moved to SHU to start teaching, following 17 years in commercial legal practice as an environmental lawyer. The 2008 study was commissioned by the Forestry Commission, Sport Northern Ireland and Scottish Natural Heritage, on behalf of the Countryside Recreation Network (a consortium of public sector agencies with access promoting remit over their lands). It was intended as a scoping study, for a proposed larger investigation (but which was not subsequently commissioned) into whether landowner's perceptions of liability risks results in them withholding recreational access to their land. The literature review for the scoping study found no UK research



on this question, and only a handful of North American studies on this subject (principally Gentle et al, 1999 and Wright et al 2002). Intriguingly these studies suggested that the misinterpretation of occupiers' liability laws by land owners was at least in part 'wilful' – in the sense that landowners chose to regard the provisions as being more onerous than either the legislators intended them to be or lawyers interpreted them as.

Our scoping study included telephone interviews of large UK landowner bodies and trade associations. The consensus from the respondents was that anxieties about the so-called 'compensation culture' were overstated and they were not unduly anxious about liability. However, these respondents did suggest that smaller organisations and particular sectorial groups might be infected with this anxiety. This therefore pointed my further investigations in the direction of sectorial case studies and prompted the cemeteries, trees and judges and child trespassers studies (Articles 1-3).

Underlying these studies was a desire to understand how land managers receive (and implement) the commands of occupiers' liability law. It soon became clear that they do not do so in a passive way, instead they act as an audience with some interpretive latitude, who must apply the normative abstractions of this law to the 'messy' reality of their sites and visitors. Thus it was that this programme came to be focussed around a concern with the translation – via processes of interpretation and wider meaning-making – of theory into situated practice.

These initial studies prompted me to think about the operation of normative interpretive frameworks more broadly and therefore the programme widened to consider not just those who manage the built environment, but also those who seek to access its places and physical structures. This led me to a study of the meanings, methods and motives of enthusiasts who seek out abandoned military bunkers (Articles 5-7). The first study (Article 5) for this strand built upon the concerns with internet interpretive communities first explored in relation to tree safety (Article 2) and examined them in relation to bunker-hunting as a hobby practice. Article 6 then revisited this study through the lens of gender (and focussed upon how participants create their identity within the interpretive community through aligning to its codes of representation). Thereafter Article 7 explored bunker-hunting's interpretive normativity as it appears in off-line (non-internet) modes, looking at the dual role (resource and constraint) of genre, tropes and practices of representation.

Meanwhile Article 4 brought in a consideration of the inter-relationship between materiality and meaning, a theme latent within the other studies in the programme. To achieve this Article 4

explored the reciprocal relationship between the twentieth century's bunker imagery and discourse and the actual construction of and dwelling within those places.

Finally, Article 8 examined the meaning-making/materiality relationship in terms of the psychogeographical mode of landscape representation (picking up on theoretical commentary on that subject in Articles 5 and 7, and subjecting it to an empirical investigation). Article 8 was an ethnographic experiment in which I sought to learn, and to competently perform, an interpretive community's mode of representation. Thus my psychogeographical account of a portion of derelict land is presented in Article 8, alongside an examination of community internet forums to see how local residents make sense of this wasteland, and a dialogue with my collaborator in Article 8, photographer Katja Hock, which explores the difficulties of collaborative working across multiple interpretive communities.

#### **1.4 Situating the researcher within the programme**

From the outset this programme of studies sought to investigate how meaning-making is bounded by normative interpretive frameworks and also how those frameworks are actively utilised – tool-like – for the purpose of making relationships with places and physical structures in the built environment.

As Silverman (2006) notes, Max Weber (also a lawyer who turned from legal practice to social research), setting out the rules of the interpretivist methodology, urged researchers to examine their own reasons for choosing their topics of study. In that regard it is perhaps helpful to see this programme as marking a journey for me as a researcher – a journey progressively away from a practising lawyer's concern with doctrinal exactitude towards an embrace of law's limits, the normativity that lies beyond law and of the physicality of the world that law seeks to manage. I had direct experience of law's limits during my years in legal practice, watching clients frame their 'problems' and needs in particular pragmatic project-focussed ways, aligning their site management decisions to the comfort of 'common practice' and demanding legal advice that fitted with their pre-determined resources, expectations and discursive conventions.

Indeed it was even experiences in legal practice that prompted my bunker-hunting study, for I had been involved in military decommissioning projects regarding certain bunker sites, and had seen the strangely heightened emotional attachment that could arise for ordinarily sober and instrumentalist asset managers when associated with these unusual places. I had also – shortly before leaving legal

practice – had a formative conversation with the site manager of an industrial concern who was being plagued by urban explorer incursions. In apologising for his late attendance at our meeting – delayed by the need to meet with his site manager to work out what more needed to be done in order to ensure his company would have no occupiers’ liability risks were the urban explorers to return – he had rolled his eyes and through gritted teeth dismissed these adult enthusiasts as “acting like kids, they need to grow up”, equating their practices with mindless, childish urges and unable (or unwilling) to acknowledge any structure, depth or worth to urban exploration.

At that moment I resolved to hunt out the logics of both land managers and urban explorers.



## **2. ANALYSIS OF THE COMPONENT PARTS**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter summarises each article's contribution to knowledge. It also shows the inter-relationship between the various case studies as they evolved across the programme.

### **2.2 Article 1 – the cemetery safety study**

This case study article explores how the Occupiers' Liability Acts 1957 and 1984's requirement of (in summary) 'reasonable safety' is translated in a particular context, namely amongst the interrelated communities of burial and land management practice. The core propositions and findings of the article are:

1. It shows that law (and its interpretation and application to the physical world) does not occur in isolation. Other factors – the limits of science and technology, affect (bereavement and emotional and symbolic attachment to place) and organisational pressures, conflicting priorities and differences in managerial cultures all have to be balanced alongside assessment of what 'reasonable safety' is, and how it is to be ensured at specific cemetery sites.
2. The prevailing view has it that increasingly cautious interpretive practices lead to the ever stricter control of access to land and structures in the quest for 'adequate' safety provision. This study shows that this 'ratchet effect' theory (Ball & Barrett 2009: 19) is too simplistic, and that counterforces can provoke a relaxation, resisting that ever-tightening effect.
3. The article shows that practices of defensive land management, like the laying down of gravestones, arises not through a premeditated conspiracy to control the public realm, and access to it, but rather that it is the cumulative effect of minor, local interpretations and actions.

4. The article identifies empirical evidence for the existence and influence of “risk entrepreneurs” (RRAC 2008: 1) who affect meaning-making through their advocacy of their interpretations of what the law requires and what is technologically feasible (particularly during prolonged periods of policy vacuum as was the case with the interpretation of cemetery safety in the mid 2000s).
5. But the eventual promulgation of ‘definitive’ guidance on ‘reasonable safety’ for cemeteries by the Ministry of Justice in 2009 (MoJ 2009) did not immediately, quell cemetery manager anxieties or extinguish (or correct) the excessively pessimistic interpretations (compared to those of law and policy makers) of those requirements, which were already circulating within the cemetery managers’ interpretive communities. This highlights the limitations of simplistic transmission models of communication that assume law’s messages to be unequivocally understood and adopted by the audiences to whom they are sent, simply because they have been transmitted.

### **2.3 Article 2 – the tree safety study**

Whilst the case study in Article 1 was historic (looking back across a preceding 10 year span), the case study reported in Article 2 involved observation and analysis of a then on-going debate about ‘reasonable safety’ as it applied to tree safety, and in particular whether a British Standard should be promulgated for the inspection and management of trees in proximity to human habitation and trafficked areas. This ‘live’ case study was selected because in the aftermath of the cemetery safety episode stakeholders appeared to be becoming more organised in their resistance to proposed extra-statutory interpretations of ‘reasonable safety’. The core propositions and findings of Article 2 are:

1. That the circulation of interpretations about what ‘reasonable safety’ means is not confined to a binary of (A) (*Macro*) national level pronouncements (by various competing stakeholder groups) and (B) (*Micro*) local – individual – site level interpretations and pragmatic applications of translated law. In addition there is a third, intermediate, (*Meso*) sphere (C), in which interpretations circulate and stabilise within groupings. This study thus focused in

particular upon the way in which that meso-level was perpetuated via internet forums (specifically here the *Arboricultural Information Exchange* ([http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~skellern/aie\\_news.html](http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~skellern/aie_news.html)), and the posting of details of certain court judgments on the AIE site, which then framed arboriculturalist's perception of the liability climate).

2. This study sought to emphasise the relatively self-contained (self-referential) interpretive world in which lay (i.e. non-lawyer) arboriculturalists (tree surgeons, consultants and estate managers) were – selectively – acquiring their understanding of what the law required of them in their tree management practices.
3. The article was published in *The Arboricultural Journal – the International Journal for Urban Forestry*, specifically in order to give arboriculturalists an opportunity to comment upon my interpretation of their interpretive activities around 'reasonable safety', as this journal was another forum in which that debate was being acted out. In response to the article I subsequently received approaches from three senior arboriculturalists, was invited to address one of their conferences and found a broad agreement within that community for my interpretation. I was also cited in subsequent iterations of the AIE forums' discussions around the 'reasonable safety' and standard-setting issue.
4. Thus, the article marked a turn in my programme towards greater immersion with the subject of my study (interpretive communities) and the networks of stakeholders that subsequently I have been invited into dialogue and participation with, including the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, the National Water Safety Forum, the British Mountaineering Council and the Mineral Products Association.
5. The second half of the article presents an analysis of a key case (*Poll –v- Ascount Morley* [2006] EWHC 2251) on the interpretation of 'reasonable safety' as applied to tree safety management, and examines the rhetorical and other ploys employed by the judge (and by the other actors in the case) to bring about this judgment. It also examines how and why

accounts of that case became picked up by arboriculturalists as a prominent exemplar of the 'ratchet effect'.

## **2.4 Article 3 – judges, the built environment and child trespassers**

Article 3 takes Article 2's case law analysis for a more extensive outing and has as its concern the logics of judges' interpretive practices concerning 'reasonable safety' and management of the built environment's places and structures. The core propositions and findings of Article 3 are:

1. It provides an analysis spanning the last 100 years, of the changing bases of judge's interpretations of when – and to what extent – injured child trespassers should have legal redress against occupiers of land or premises on which they had been injured due to failure to achieve there 'reasonable safety'. This longitudinal analysis was set within a contextual consideration of the change of judicial attitudes towards, and the changing physical character of, the built environment and also notions of risk, personal and parental responsibility.
2. In adopting and applying Pierre Bourdieu's (1987) writing on the "juridical field", the article adopts a theoretical framework rarely applied to socio-legal scholarship despite its influential standing in cultural sociology. Furthermore, it takes Bourdieu's high theory (this was his only attempt at applying his ideas to the sociology of law) and applies it to the prosaic world of occupiers' liability, giving it a rare empirical outing. Specifically, the article is concerned with exploring the evolution of judicial interpretation of 'reasonable safety' in the context of injured child trespassers through Bourdieu's related concepts of 'fields' of knowledge (each largely self-contained and governed by their own homeostatic logics), 'cultural capital' (denoting the rewards attained through demonstrating proficiency in a field's way of doing) and 'habitus', the shaping force (both linguistic and material) by which ways of doing are sedimented – and recursive – within fields.
3. The article combs the canonical case reports looking for judges' rhetorical manoeuvres and also their mention of tacit assumptions and worldviews guiding (via the shaping forces of field, habitus and cultural capital) their decision taking in the cases parading before them across that

100 year span. Specifically, here the article shows the fondness for the judges to justify the positions taken in their judgments by reference to assertions of 'common sense' – rhetorical moves revealing tacit frameworks of shared worldview and sense-making amongst the judiciary.

4. In particular, the article shows how judges have invoked (often with little substantiation) changes in the built environment, public morality, childhood and/or child rearing practices as a justification for 'modernising' (this body of law and its interpretation). This points to the powerful role of figuration and framing of key actor elements within the liability calculus at the heart of this interpretive community's evolving logic.

## **2.5 Article 4 – the bunker, image and materiality**

Article 4 seeks to analyse the link between imagery, ideas and the physical reality of as-built military bunkers. It was proposed (and accepted) as part of a special issue on 'Architecture and organization: structure, text and context' in the management and organisation studies journal, *Culture and Organization*. The study started life as musings on the origins and effects of the managerial metaphor 'bunker-mentality', and grew to become an article that traced the physical history of the bunker as a defensive structure during the twentieth century, the evolution of cultural (and organisational) engagements with the bunker as potential space and the interaction between the two realms: bodies of ideas and (physical) bodies made by practice (i.e. actual bunkers). The core propositions and findings of Article 4 are:

1. It identifies two powerful tropes at work within the ideational realm: the bunker as a place of defeat and degeneration (as typified in Hitler's subterranean last days in Berlin in May 1945) and the bunker as supreme citadel of omnipotent control (as typified in the fictitious war room designed by Ken Adam for Stanley Kubrick's 1964 film, *Dr Strangelove*). It then proceeds to explore the impact of both the myth and the reality of bunkers upon attempts to make sense of events from within the bunker – thus looking at the physical and organisational limits to the "logistics of perception" (Virilio 1989). In doing so the bunker is interrogated as a machine-like place of meaning-making, emphasising another aspect of "situated knowledge" (Haraway 1988) – that it is physically embodied in a location, a task and a view-limiting perspective.



2. The article also traces the iterative relationship between the imagining of the bunker and the building of them. The 'dream' became actualised, and in so doing the realms of the 'possible' became more readily understood, feeding back into subsequent 'dreaming', as a greater appreciation of the physical limits of burrowing underground gained greater purchase in popular culture.
3. There is also a link to the public safety concern of Articles 1-3, in that bunker engineering increasingly wrestled (via engineering limits rather than via interpretation of legal texts) with determining the limits of 'reasonable safety' in terms of the provision of effective shelter to populace and military personnel. Increasingly the limits of what could be done came to be known, with the attendant challenges then of managing the communication of those limits (and the expenditure and other public policy decisions sitting behind them) to a wide variety of stakeholders, each with their own emotional investment in this emotive issue, and with widely divergent degrees of technical sophistication.
4. Article 4 is thus about the emergent (evolving and iterative) normative structuring of a building type, and how that normativity of form was translated within key interpretive communities into actual bunkers. Article 4 thus shows the bunker (and its component matter – sand, cement, water, steel etc) emerging out of an iterative interplay of representation (image, idea, text) and embodied vernacular practice (pragmatic adjustments to the contingencies of environment and spatio-temporal context). It thus shows the translation of the generic to the specific, the discursive framing of an object and the messy interpretation and implementation, working within the ambit of a plurality of interpretive communities.

## **2.6 Article 5 – the theory and practice of urban exploration**

Article 5's study was conceived around the time of Article 2 and shares its concern with the meso-level ordering of meaning-making within an interpretive community via its internet forums. Article 5 however marks a shift from a concern to elicit the logics of interpretation regarding occupiers' liability law, to a concern with the logics of meaning-making by urban explorers (specifically bunker-hunters) who were seeking out these physical structures in order to write about visiting them. The core propositions and findings of Article 5 are:

1. The article grew out of my MRes dissertation (Bennett 2010), which had examined the motives and meaning-making practices of bunker-hunters through an empirical study of 200 on-line accounts of visits by enthusiasts to small abandoned nuclear fall-out underground monitoring bunkers (ROC Posts). As discussed below, Article 5 evolved the study beyond the empirical focus of the dissertation, provoking a 'theory vs practice' debate about the nature of urban exploration. However in making its case, Article 5 was relying on the explicit analysis of the normative structures that had been presented in the dissertation study. The dissertation's analysis had pointed towards recurrent tropes in the on-line accounts, creating stable forms of representation and a clear set of expectations – policed by the forum's moderators – about what valid accounts of urban exploration should look like (in both text and images). Thus, the dissertation had argued (and Article 5 had adopted) the proposition that [www.28dayslater.co.uk](http://www.28dayslater.co.uk) forum was operating as an interpretive community for this hobby practice.
2. The article thus utilised the dissertation's findings to argue that, contrary to the assertions of some academic commentators (like Garrett 2011), urban exploration practices are not free of normative constraints, and do not represent an atomised, individualistic, entirely open and unbounded reading of the built environment. Subsequently Article 5 provoked debate both upon *www.28dayslater* and in cultural geography, leading to an on-line dialogue with Garrett regarding my broad (and his narrower) framings of what urban exploration is.
3. The article theorised urban exploration within the intellectual context of psychogeography – but in doing so pointed to the existence of two variant forms of psychogeography: an ambulant aesthetic recreational practice that has emerged in the UK in the last decade which generates and circulates lay accounts of urban wanderings, and the radical political programme declared by Guy Debord and the Situationists in France in the 1960s. In this evaluation a challenge was thrown down to interpreters who would characterise all urban exploration as political (and having resistance as its essential *raison d'être*). The examination of the logics of contemporary psychogeography is picked up again in Articles 7 and 8.

4. The study oddly finds a strong 'survey' mentality within the logics of practice – a taxonomic urge to order and categorise knowledge of the bunker seemingly at odds with the more rebellious ethos assumed by prevailing theorisation of urban exploration. And within this we find a field of knowledge and practice (in the sense conceptualised by Bourdieu (1984)) in which cultural capital is clearly earned in the act of generating and circulating accounts that conform to the community's established norms. Adopting (and adapting) de Certeau's idea of an "erotics of knowledge" (1984: 92), I show how the bunker-hunting community appears primarily motivated by the ritualised and purposeful 'performative' (Nash 2000) value of accumulating and circulating compliant accounts of bunker site visits.

## **2.7 Article 6 – gender and identity work within bunker-hunting**

Article 6 also revisited the study of bunker-hunters reported in Article 5, and did so by examining (and extensively theorising) issues of identity formation through participation in bunker-hunting. The lens chosen for this re-examination was gender, in order to explore the question "why is it that most bunker-hunters are male?" The core propositions and findings of Article 6 are:

1. The analysis draws upon the relationship between socialisation, community affiliation and masculinity as performance. The Article finds within the original study (and supplemental work on other publicly available sources) evidence of the particular suitability of bunker-hunting to a 'ritual-tinkering' version of contemporary masculinity, and also to masculine reaffirmation in the face of the emasculation of traditional male occupations and pastimes through which identity could have been made by actual physical production of artefacts, places or structures.
2. The article also – consistent with the methodological conventions of feminist geography – reveals my identity, experiences and motivations embedded within my bunker-hunting study. Thus it positions me – as researcher – as reflexively embedded within the study, as an active part of the meaning-making processes that are being studied (as was intimated in Article 2 concerning my embeddedness within the arboriculturalists). As such it points to autoethnographic aspects of my programme, noting – for example – the impact of this prolonged attentiveness to an obscure hobby practice upon my own family and worldview.



3. Article 6 seeks to make sense of bunker-hunting through a number of theoretical frameworks, but most notably develops (and critiques) Smith's notion of an escapist masculine "sheddism" (Smith 2002) and its counter- (or alter-) domesticity, thus linking the materialities (and physical arrangements) of place with the performativities of identity work.

## **2.8 Article 7 – genre and interpretive performance in bunker-hunting**

Article 7 was a further reflection upon the original bunker-hunters study and its reception by its academic audience, and specifically as a reply to Garrett's criticism that Article 5 had suggested that only one representational practice existed for urban exploration (the 'taxonomic'). This follow-on study sought to explore the communal shaping of meaning-making through an examination of the non-internet origins of bunker-hunting's representational practices, and how these subsist (but also evolve) within 'off-line' media (primarily books and visual culture). The core propositions and findings of Article 7 are:

1. The key argument in Article 7 is that whilst clearly identifiable, the codes of representation provided by these off-line media are repertoires, starting points which tolerate a degree of 'mix and match'. Thus meaning-making is actively practiced by particular bunker-hunters, with tropes being blended (to a degree) to soften the bluntness that might otherwise arise from rigid adherence to one mode of representation. Thus in Article 7 the focus becomes increasingly one of the wilful *practice* of representation by active agents.
2. But the article sustains the 'there is order at work here' theme first introduced in Article 5 by taking to task Beck's (2011) assertion that bunkers lie (somehow) beyond representation, their anomalous nature preventing stable contemplation of the bunker as object. Article 7 mobilises its assessment of regularity in off-line media portrayals to show genre effects at work in channelling accounts of bunkers towards various – stable – types of representational conformity.

3. Article 7 builds upon Article 6's argument that bunker-hunters valorise the bunker in order to achieve something for themselves, by emphasising the performative dimension of adherence to the available (multiple) forms of representation: the political, the taxonomic, the nostalgic and the reverential. The conformity of bunker representation to these modes of representation is then explored via case studies that show both concordance and a degree of innovation (creative reception) in their interpretation. So, for example the evolution of a book cover for the bunker-hunters' bible, *Cold War Secret Nuclear Bunkers* (McCamley 2007) is shown to change over the first 10 years of its publication, as urban exploration attains a clearer identity, one that is separate from the related sphere of (amateur) conflict archaeology.

## 2.9 Article 8 – *Scree*: aesthetic meaning-making for an industrial hillside

Article 8 builds upon Article 5's spotlighting of the psychogeographical sensibility that dominates contemporary theorisation of urban exploration and Article 7's explication of the influence of a family of psychogeographically inclined tropes within the 'experiential' variant of bunker-hunting discussed in that article. It does so by following Article 6 and 7's focus upon the practice of representation as a means of identity work, and pursues this by setting out to present a written psychogeographical account of a derelict industrial hillside in northern Sheffield. As such this work is an experiment aimed at eliciting – through competent performance – contemporary psychogeography's logics of seeing and doing. The core propositions and findings of Article 8 are:

1. After the bunker study I became associated with communities (online and virtual) of psychogeographers, who as a hobby practice seek to enchant (re-valorise) derelict, abandoned or otherwise mundane places via a combination of artistic engagement (photography, creative writing, fine arts) and playful rambling. Through that association the opportunity to collaborate with a landscape photographer, Dr Katja Hock (Nottingham Trent University) was offered to me in the form of a commission to produce a collaborative work, with the brief that neither of the two elements (text or words) should be subordinate to the other in the resulting work. Through this commission I was able to show an understanding of psychogeography's ways of doing (and the bounds of *that* interpretive community) by producing a text that conformed to that genre, and by so doing I directly explored the shaping effect of that framework upon my interpretation – and subsequent representation of – that hillside. Thus in Article 8 I directly – *by doing* – explore both the constraints

(interpretive bounds) and the facilitation (representational codes as a *resource*) set within an interpretive community.

2. Article 8 also investigates – via community internet forums – the ways in which local residents have now (or in the past) made sense of this seemingly wasteland place. That investigation finds surprisingly fond and rich recollection about playful engagements with that hillside and its matter. Clearly the hillside – as a focal point for those memories – is a cherished place. In the tales of tips, slopes, old tyres, broken bricks and dens speak warmly of an active engagement with matter found in this place and of the intersection of that human/matter relations with community, friendships and rivalries. Lives were written onto (and with) the detritus of this hillside – and the manner of arranging that matter, in those lay practices, was both conforming (to classic-sounding forms of play behaviour) and within those bounds creative and improvisational. The effect is something similar to the interpretation of ‘reasonable safety’ requirements and bunker-hunting ways, in that practices of engagement and recursive performance can be identified.
3. Finally, the dialogue between me and Katja Hock towards the end of the Article 8, gives candid insight into the gap between us (and our interpretive communities) as we walked the hillside – our ways of seeing the same place having been formed via modes of representation oriented around different registers (image vs text), different locus of meaning (in the archive or the mind of the spectator) and different formative employment and national landscape experiences (artist vs environmental lawyer; English vs German). This humbled me to the presence of parallel interpretive schema, each logically coherent in their own terms, but not always able to understand the ‘other’. It also forced me to reflect upon the extent to which my own biography was present in my own meaning-making upon the hillside, how much my training as an environmental lawyer who had specialised in purposive techno-legal interpretation of landfill and land contamination sites such as this place, was still shaping how I interrogated the hillside.

### 3. SYNTHESIS OF THE WORK AS A COHERENT STUDY AND ITS ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

#### 3.1 Introduction: situating the programme and its contribution

Each article's individual peer-assessed contribution to knowledge has been addressed in chapter 2. This chapter is a defence of the cohesiveness of the programme itself, and of its *aggregate* contribution to the cross-disciplinary themes of meaning-making, affect and materiality as they relate to human interaction with the built environment.

#### 3.2 My research journey

My research journey saw a shift from initial policy, doctrinal and socio-legal studies of the Occupiers' Liability Acts impacts upon land managers (Articles 1-3) to later studies exploring the motives and methods of 'urban explorers' (Articles 4-8). This journey entailed a move away from a conspicuously 'legal' framing of my investigation, towards a more 'cultural-ethnographic' focus as I explored other forms of normative ordering that shape urban explorers' engagements with built environment structures. This journey entailed significant shifts in register, matters of concern and my positioning as researcher, towards a more 'participant' methodology. However, this diversity of scales, foci and disciplinary audiences was an intentional strategy, at all times addressed to the programme's aim of teasing out the cultural logics of how both *access-managers* and *access-takers* engage with the built environment's structures.

The coherence of my programme must be defended based upon the work presented in the programme itself. However it is still perhaps helpful to mention that my research trajectory does not mark an irrevocable break with legal scholarship. Subsequent to the eight publications presented here, my follow-on work has taken a productive middle-ground position (i.e. successfully straddling both law *and* geography) and I am now an active promoter (Bennett & Layard 2015 & Forthcoming) of 'legal geography' in the UK. This, traditionally North American inter-disciplinary hybrid (Braverman et al 2014) encourages legal scholars to include the spatial and material features of the world in their work, and urges geographers to have regard to law's discursive formative effects within the physical realm. This was a synthesis born of the programme, but not itself brought fully to fruition within the instalments presented here.



### 3.3 Disciplinary conversations

Throughout its course the programme has orbited a number of disciplines and themes. In doing so it aspired to be interdisciplinary in the sense of challenging disciplinary closure, and believing that multiple-perspectives, working across traditional academic demarcations are more likely to deliver innovation and insight than confinement within the disciplinary canons and concern of a single field (Moran, 2010). I will therefore defend the coherence of my programme by showing its connection to three core disciplines (cultural studies, law and cultural geography).

#### *Cultural Studies*

Cultural studies is a hybrid of literary studies and interpretive sociology, with origins lying variously in Hoggart (2009) and Williams (2014), the Frankfurt School (Arato & Gebhardt 1997) and the sociology of knowledge (e.g. Berger & Luckmann 1971; Weber 1985; Foucault 2001). Whilst much of cultural studies became focussed upon studies of mass media, in the work of Bourdieu (1984), de Certeau (1984) and Fiske (1989) it also became attentive in the 1980s to 'bottom-up' – user-led, cultural formations.

Initially such formations were regarded as evidence of popular resistance to dominant hegemonic cultural forces, but increasingly these formations came to be seen as a major engine of 'mainstream' culture itself. This reappraisal emerged in the work of 'audience reception' studies (Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998), Fish's (1980, 1989) and Wenger's (1998) work on the normative stabilisation achieved through specific practitioner communities' interpretive cultural frameworks, and in a renewed interest in studying the pragmatics of everyday life (Highmore 2010; Delaney 2010).

My programme contributes to debates in cultural studies by its empirical investigation of the formation and circulation of interpretations of normative codes (law in the case of managers; representational modes in the case of bunker-hunters and psychogeographers). The programme's case studies show that a simplistic casual model cannot be applied to the operation of such codes, instead pointing to the strong influence of meso-level communal interpretive practices that shape individual action, but which can resist (or at least confound) 'instructions' received from 'above'.

Thus the 'culture' of how managers and enthusiasts interact with built environment structures is a product of iterative engagements with place by communities of users, which in turn reinforce 'localised' normativities, taking received code-texts as starting points, rather than as determinative instruction sets.

## *Law*

Fish's writings on interpretive communities provide a helpful bridge from cultural studies into legal studies – but Fish's cross-over is the exception, rather than the rule. There has been little work (either theoretically or empirically) in legal studies to examine how lay 'audiences' receive and interpret aspects of the law that have been 'broadcast' to them. Thus the programme's contribution to legal scholarship is that it (specifically in Articles 1-3) empirically applies cultural studies' 'audience-reception theory' beyond its usual concern with "fan cultures" (Hills 2003) and into to the receipt of the 'messages' intended by legislators in enacting the Occupiers' Liability Acts 1957 and 1984.

Through empirical investigation of three case studies the programme considers how the 'audience' (the cemetery managers, arboriculturalists and judges) 'hear' and interpret those legislative pronouncements, and shows how through their interpretive actions within their communities the abstract generalities of this legislation are translated (and approximated) into practical, place-governing and decision-taking action. In focussing upon the 'translational' interpretive actions of professional intermediaries within the built environment this programme presents a unique insight into the pragmatics of place management.

Legal scholarship has paid little attention to the 'translation' of the law by 'lay' professionals, as studies have tended to focus either upon law's operationalisation by the judiciary and lawyers (e.g. Griffiths, 1985; Twining & Miers 1999), or – as studies of "legal consciousness" (Ewick & Silbey 1998; Silbey 2005) - upon the experience of being 'subjected to' the law. The case studies in Article 1-3 thus helpfully supplement the limited existing empirical scholarship on law's translation by managers, e.g. Hutter's (1988) study of how environmental health officers interpret the legal duties and discretions that they administer, Beale & Dugdale's (1975) investigation of how engineers choose to utilise contract law in their business dealings and Ericson's (1993) study of how detectives interpret criminal procedural rules. Such studies – rare as they are – offer us a view towards what Hart (1994) called a "sociological jurisprudence", a mode of inquiry that seeks insight into the perception and engagement with law by individuals, as viewed from an "internal" (i.e. phenomenological) perspective, and (importantly) connecting that affective aspect (how law makes them feel) to their pragmatic managerial actions.

## *Geography*

Straddling both the physical- and the social-sciences, geography has a unique ability to acknowledge the physicality of the world, and thereby to make a strong contribution to the study of human

interaction with non-human 'things' (i.e. materiality) and the formation of emotional and/or normative cultural attachments to, or orderings of, places and physical artefacts found there (Whatmore 2006; Bennett 2010). My programme originated in my own experiences as an environmental lawyer, having seen how different communities see the same environments (and the same laws) quite differently. Accordingly, as my programme progressed I developed an increasing affinity with *cultural* geography, the branch of human geography that focusses "upon the patterns and interactions of human culture, both material and non-material, in relation to the natural environment" (Cosgrove in Johnston et al 1994: 111), and my programme regards regarding both law and landscape aesthetics (Cosgrove 1998) as key normative codes framing human/environment interaction.

Across the programme's trajectory there is a shift of emphasis from a focus on the discursive framing power of these codes, towards a greater acknowledgment of their 'playfulness' and entanglement with the effects of the built environment itself. Thus by Article 7, I was affiliating to the "more-than-representation" (Lorimer 2005: 83) emergent position within cultural geography, a stance (originally declared as "Non Representational Theory" by Thrift 2008) that seeks to move beyond a fixation upon identity politics and determinative symbolism (that position being characteristic of the 'linguistic turn' of the 1970s and 1980s in the social sciences) and instead views human-environment relations as dynamic – the co-production of constant processes that entangle discursive elements, affective rhythms, local pragmatics and the resistances and affordances of matter (Hodder 2012). My programme's case studies all speak to this entanglement of humans and their built environment structures (cemetery memorials, trees, industrial machinery, abandoned military bunkers and derelict land).

However across the programme, I also echo Nash's (2000) critique of this 'new' cultural geography, by showing (in an echo of Bailey's work (1993) on 'spatial imaginaries') that practices of 'representation' remain a significant part of how places are made and interacted with. Thus I make an important contribution to the empirical (and theoretical) exploration of this 'new' cultural geography, by defending a role for textual and discursive elements within it, and showing in the case studies how interpretive codes have normative effects upon places, objects and projects. But I also importantly show – drawing upon recent scholarship in the 'new' geographies of affect (Pile 2010), enthusiasm (Craggs et al 2013), enchantment (Geoghegan & Woodyer 2014), play (Woodyer 2012) and spectrality (Wylie 2007) – how these discursive effects, their deployment and their intensities, are entangled with (and mediated by) habits and emotional attachments to place (e.g. the bereaved in Article 1 or the anxious landowners in Article 2).

This concern with examining how ideas about places influence how they are managed and used, connects with cultural geography's resurgent interest in 'place' as a scale of investigation (Creswell 2004), supplementing its tendency to focus upon place as the product either of capital (Mitchell 2002) or of the subjectivities of each perceiver (Tuan 1977). Article 3 thus shows how judges' assumptions about the ordering of the built environment and its patterns of use have the power to act back upon the built environment, reinforce the spatial differentiation effects that the judges have assumed to be pre-existing in the demarcation between spaces of play and work. This concern with the inter-relation between imaginaries and material manifestations is echoed in Article 4 (in relation to the genealogy of 'bunker mentality').

Having identified my programme's disciplinary connections, I will now outline its contribution to the cross-disciplinary themes of meaning-making, materiality and affect. This will also identify the conceptual evolution embodied in my programme's journey.

### **3.4 *From interpretation to practice* – understanding meaning-making in the built environment**

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The programme was prompted by the findings of an earlier study on landowner liability anxieties about recreational access to their land (Bennett & Crowe 2008). The issue of how to transmit effective reassurance messages in order to overcome these fears, was a key point flagged for further study. Therefore Articles 1-3 comprised investigations, influenced by audience-reception theory, into how liability anxieties are received by communities and then adjusted (and/or reinforced) via iterative practice.

From the outset my programme was theoretically oriented around Fish's work upon the active production of meaning by readers in response to presented texts – and how the original writer has limited control over how his text is received and used by any reader (Fish 1980, 1989). Fish argued that the reader makes local sense of the text, both based upon his own subjective life experience and the culture in which he finds himself. But importantly Fish went on to argue that the range of possible interpretations of any text are not equally valid, it is not a case of an interpretive 'free-for-all'. Instead, certain dominant interpretations become established within particular interpretive communities, and it will be these dominant interpretations (and the codes they set out for engaging with the text – both what it means and what (and how) to 'do things' with it) that shape how the text will be interpreted and used.

Fish's work on interpretive communities can itself be situated within a range of theoretical and empirical developments between the 1960s and 1980s across a wide range of fields, from



deconstruction (Derrida 1998) to studies of how viewers respond to television programmes (Ang 1985), from science and technology studies (Latour 2007) through to studies of legal consciousness (Ewick & Silbey 1998). The overarching milieu was that of the rise of epistemological doubt – the uncertainties of knowing, the difficulties of accessing reality – that crystallised in social constructionism and the linguistic turn in social science.

This concern with epistemology placed studies of meaning-making (via hermeneutics, semiotics, discourse analysis and phenomenology) at the forefront of that scholarship. Fish's work on interpretive communities was contemporary to (and chimes with) Berger's work on "ways of seeing" (1972), Foucault's work (1995) on "gazes" attributable to particular dominant discursive formations, Kuhn (1996) on "paradigms" in the evolution of scientific orthodoxies, Goffman's work (1974) on "frame analysis" (the parsing of reality into meaningful fragments and contexts by the meaning-maker) and also with the emergence of feminist epistemologies, focussed upon "situated knowledges" (Haraway 1988) and their construction of *local* truths.

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All of these theorists underpinned my adoption of Fish's theoretical position. Fish – however – appeared particularly apposite as he was one of the few theorists who had applied literary and cultural theory to legal texts and also because his position additionally featured a focus on pragmatism (that the act of interpretation is an action carried out for some reason – it is purposive – and the goal sought will inform the act of interpretation).

I also took from Fish a desire to reveal the plurality of interpretive communities, moving away from social constructionism's focus upon ideology and the tracing of political power and 'top-down' oppression within the formation and circulation of bodies of knowledge (Mitchell 2002).

As the individual article summaries have already shown, the studies within the programme all – each in their own way – share a concern to elicit the presence of interpretive communities within the management and/or cherishing of some of the built environment's places and physical structures. However, increasingly I came to see the need to look beyond a sole focus upon the translation of code-embodying texts into 'on the ground' local interpretations and practices (and their link to place- and thing-affiliations). The importance of interpretive communities in shaping (and constraining) meaning-making was never abandoned, but in order to acknowledge a greater role for actor agency, I was increasingly influenced by Wenger's work on "communities of practice" (Wenger 1998).

Wenger sees the forming and circulation of dominant interpretive codes within particular communities as important, but widens the focus to also show how the accumulation of knowledge

helps to create and sustain the community itself. Interpretation is thus part – but not all – of the operations of particular purpose-related communities. Wenger’s anthropological (and empirical) expansion of Fish, thus gives more room to a processual account of how these communities work, as it allows for change over time, for multiple community membership and for actor innovation within events of meaning-making. Thus here we can find scope to bring in Bourdieu’s (1984) notion of competence as knowing the rules of the game – with the game metaphor revealing both the normative structural adherence aspect (*conformity*), and the importance for the actor to maximise his outcomes by creatively adopting and/or innovating (*tactical utilisation*).

Thus throughout my programme there is an attentiveness to both delineating the structures (and strictures) of a variety of interpretive community derived “practices of representation” (Hall 1997), and also showing the innovation potential within them. Indeed these two aspects are entangled, for new communities can form, stabilise and circulate *alternative* interpretations – and whether of occupiers’ liability legislation (Articles 1 and 2) or abandoned concrete bunkers (Article 7) – thus simultaneously both narrowing *and* expanding meaning-making.

In the articles, the concern then is to show both the robustness and multiplicity of the particular ways of engaging with the built environment’s mundane structures and places by certain professional and recreational communities – and within this to reveal some of the structural similarities of their meaning-making. Thus in the articles we strangely find seemingly counter-cultural ‘urban explorers’ performing building surveying as a hobby, managers projecting wild ‘learned’ anxieties onto nondescript (and perfectly safe) assets, and local communities excavating rich meaning – in play and reminiscence – in the detritus of a landfill site.

This is all testimony to *meso*-level meaning-making, for the programme shows the interpretive limits of both top-down (*macro*-level) and atomistic (individual, or *micro*-level) meaning-making. For example, the weaknesses of the Ministry of Justice’s attempts to nationally impose ‘definitive’ interpretations of ‘reasonable safety’ for cemeteries (Article 1) or the effectiveness of [www.28dayslater.co.uk](http://www.28dayslater.co.uk) forum moderators in neutralising idiosyncratic ROC Post visit accounts by consigning them to a forum folder called “Where bad posts go to die” (Article 5). Thus it is at the *meso*-level of the spatially or otherwise situationally ‘local’ interpretive communities that the resilient meaning-making examined in this programme has been found.

The programme’s studies have not found much evidence at the *meso*-level that representational practices are hegemonic, in that they act to prevent thought beyond that expressly permitted by their dominant meaning-making schema. Instead, the codes laid down are performative

opportunities, or incentives – they set genre frameworks that *facilitate* performance. Actors can choose whether or not to accord their meaning-making to these resources or not, and there may be tactical advantage in ‘softening’ adherence in certain circumstances (see Article 7), and creativity (innovation or poetics) may emerge from playful rule-breaking provided a general alignment to the context and concerns of the community still remains in place. Alternatively, compliance may be ‘allusional’ – based upon ironic nods to dominant tropes, in situations where they don’t quite fit, for example that found in ‘tongue in cheek’ accounts of danger in the face of ‘guard ducks’ encountered whilst exploring otherwise deserted (and unguarded) ROC Posts, or a petulant, slavish adherence to every minutiae of a risk assessment pro-forma in a palpably low-risk setting.

Thus, orientation to the community’s interpretation will often be a pragmatic decision by the actor – because of the benefits that flow from doing so. So, for example, bunker-hunters might well choose to utilize dominant representational codes in their bunker-hunting accounts in order to maximise the cultural capital to be gained. Likewise, in the case of occupiers, aligning their land management decisions (e.g. whether to fence off a body of water) with a trade association’s, professional body’s or peer group’s interpretation of occupiers’ liability liabilities (e.g. as in the case of the National Tree Safety Group – Article 2). This is understandably attractive, because doing so places them in the reassuring comfort of ‘the pack’ and its collective framing of ‘reasonable safety’. In each case, it would require extra effort or risk not to adhere to the path of least resistance – the community’s established interpretation or way of doing.

The case studies show how powerful discursive-interpretive formations arise within purpose-focussed communities, and the effects that they can then project translocally onto places and built environment structures. In so doing, these effects are helping to make places (local, normatively ordered spaces) but they are not omnipotent. There is a pluralism at work – both multiplicities of interpretive schema, and a multitude of other confounding factors – emotional intensities, differential temporalities, material limits and pragmatic project priorities. For example, Article 1 shows that the ‘ratchet effect’ is not an inevitable function of the presence of health & safety anxieties, meanwhile Article 7 shows that an individual can ‘code-switch’ between different representational formations, and be ‘truthful’ to each, in separate accounts of the same place.

This non-determinative pluralistic picture is more characteristic of Wenger’s work on communities of practice than it is of Fish’s work on interpretive communities, because it ascribes a greater agency to iterative practice, entails a wider range of contributing factors and is grounded empirically in Wenger’s fieldwork in insurance claims handling departments. Wenger (a cultural anthropologist) studied the group formation of competency, and in addition to showing the importance of the



receipt and translation of codes 'from above', he showed how competency was an ongoing performance in which an area of material and immaterial props were enlisted. Thus interpretive concordance was an important feature of group formation and identity, but was not determinative, and such competency-formations were always evolving through a mixture in internal and external perturbation and renegotiation.

Notably, Wenger points to the ways in which objects take on important roles within group processes. He writes of about a tactical reification, whereby physical objects are imbued with higher levels of importance than might be the case in other communities, and emphasises how that reification is often purposive – i.e. it serves a purpose that is meaningful to the group. Thus in Article 1 we see the reification of cemetery memorials in the aftermath of a tragedy and its ensuing regulatory investigation; meanwhile in bunker-hunting (and other collecting' hobbies) we see an attentiveness to micro-level differentiation between seemingly identical objects. This object focus is human-induced, related to social identity practices (Miller 2009) and about making matter matter (Barad 2007).

Interpreting the programme's case studies through Wenger's work foregrounds interpretation as an iterative practice, and one which must be viewed in its full context, a context in which we see the entanglement of ideas, materiality and affect all set amidst shifting identity formations of the communities, their members and their projects.

### **3.5 *From ideas to embodiment* – the entanglement of texts, affect and materiality in the built environment**

The programme started-out with a focus upon eliciting the discursive logics of the interpretive practices by which particular communities bring themselves into knowing relations with certain built environment structures. But as the case studies progressed the focus widened to view interpretation as part of wider group- and project-sustaining formations, and as the explicit focus upon relations with place increased, I became more attentive to the role of non-human factors. This 'thingly' concern was already present in Articles 1-3, but not fully appreciated. From Article 4 I started to engage with literature concerning "social materiality" (Dale 2005) and became more attentive to both the physical significance of the built environmental structures, and of their affective resonance. In undertaking this journey, I was responding to the 'material-affective turn', led by (Jane) Bennett (2010). Bennett (a US political philosopher) writing in a materialist-feminist mode, calls for the social science and humanities to embrace the "vibrant" thingly nature of the world. Her call is an ecologically inspired one, but also has resonance with actor-network-theory (Latour 2007) and the

work of speculative realist philosophers (Gratton 2014), particularly those working within object oriented ontologies (like Harman (2011) and Morton (2013)). Suffice it to say that this broad camp of theorist have, over the last 10 years, rejuvenated the field of *material* culture studies (a hybrid of anthropology and archaeology) and thus triggered a new perspective from which to study culture and its relationship to place (a perspective that challenges cultural studies' semiotic fixation on meaning-making), the cross-over point being works in the humanities on 'thing theory' (Brown 2004; Bogost 2012).

That Bennett has influentially conjoined matter and affect is no mean feat. Conventionally, physical objects and human feelings would (at best) be regarded as incidental in conventional social science analysis, where the study is of how people arrange their relationships, not how they arrange or relate to their chairs. But Bennett has shown how physical things emotionally matter, and this argument has resonated powerfully within cultural geography.

My programme has sought to empirically explore the material-affect relationship across a range of 'professional' and 'enthusiast' realms: thus, building on Article 1 (the power of the bereaved) and Article 2 (the power of fears of liability) and Article 8 (the power of community reminiscence about playing upon derelict land). The programme shows both legal and built environment scholarship how to open up space and methods for exploring material-affect within *these* sober and conservative disciplines.

Ontologically, my programme takes the built environment to be real, but at the same time awash with the shifting intensities of ideas, meaning-making and interpretations that affect the pragmatically experienced day to day physicality of (in the case of my programme's concern) gravestones, trees, buildings and hillsides. This then, is an entanglement (Hodder 2012) of ideas and matter. As Barad (2007) has argued matter and meaning-making are inseparable – meaning-makes matter matter (by giving it significance). Thus in 2000 old gravestones passed from being forgotten – backgrounded – lumps of stone in cemeteries, and became things of attention and concern because of the change in the way that they were framed by key communities of practice; and that change in perception was triggered by a material incident: the fatal crushing of a child in a Harrogate cemetery, a sudden conjunction of gravity, stone, flesh and law that called out for sense-making (and both discursive and physical reaction) its aftermath.

A cemetery memorial is neither 'good' nor 'bad' in its own terms. It simply 'is'. A memorial becomes an object of liability anxiety or desire, when communities of like-minded practitioners develop and sustain stable ways of framing and knowing how to regard these objects in the light of a particular

human projects or priorities. My programme shows how we live, work and play amongst images, texts, trees, physical structures, buildings and wasteland. We find ways to make sense of those objects, to manage, use and enjoy them, and we form communities within which to share and develop those pragmatic, action-orientated interpretations. As Miller (2009) and Hodder (2012) each argues, our entanglement with both matter and communities make *us*.

My programme's original contribution to knowledge is that it presents rich, analytical case studies that show how the discursive and the material are woven together through iterative local practice. It does so in ways which, and concerns itself with types of places and structures that, have not been considered in this way before.

### **3.6 Who are the urban explorers?**

Alongside presenting a provocative assertion of the discursive-material relations of the every-day, every-where, this programme has also sought – at all times – to remain connected to *human* projects. Materiality means human/matter relations. I have stopped short of following some now writing in Bennett's wake who seek to write of 'things without us' (e.g. Bogost 2012), in some post-human way. My programme was instigated in the wake of my (humanistic) shock that a land manager could be so dismissive of the logics of urban exploration, but was sustained by an equivalent shock at the hegemony of a 'rebel romanticism' view of urban exploration prevalent within cultural geography. My concern was to break down this polarisation for in a fundamental sense both anxious land managers and adventurous recreational trespassers are 'urban explorers', each applying and developing interpretative codes in an effort to meaningfully access or manage built environment structures.

My programme has opened a new more holistic, and socially inclusive perspective upon the study of urban exploration, a positioning subsequently endorsed by Craggs, Geoghegan & Neate (2013). Meanwhile Mott & Roberts (2014) have praised Article 6's questioning of gender assumptions within urban exploration and its scholarship. The programme has also foregrounded other dimensions that also have received no direct attention within existing scholarship, including urban exploration's relationship to child trespass (Article 3) and to 'middle-aged' recreational practices (Article 6). My opening out of these angles has innovatively drawn upon and repurposed contemporary scholarship in the geographies of childhood (Valentine 2004) and in gender studies of emasculation (McDowell 2002), the latter having been augmented in Article 6 by my investigation of the nostalgic and purposeful lure of bunkers for male ex-workers of a certain type and age.

More broadly, the opening up of these aspects of urban exploration – and the questioning of prevailing assumptions about the ‘type’ of people who ‘do’ urban exploration – speaks to recent work in ludic geographies (Woodyer 2012), the geographies of enthusiasm (Geoghegan 2009) and studies of how tourists ‘use’ places (Strain 2003).

### **3.7 Reflections on the programme’s research methodology**

In this section I reflect upon the experience, and contribution, of my experiments in methodology across the programme.

#### *My use of case studies*

The programme adopted a case study methodology throughout, framing a phenomenon for investigation (e.g. management of tree safety) and then investigating that topic, and stakeholders’ interpretive strategies towards it, across a defined period of time. In each case the concern was to account for the rich detail of the ways in which local interpretive codes, attendant practices and orientations towards particular built environment structures where formed and circulated, and of the context in which the phenomenon stood. In this regard for actuality, the case studies all aspired to an ethnographic verisimilitude – a depictive truth: the “thick description” that Geertz (2010: 6) writes of as a hallmark of a successful account of an *in situ* cultural formation. In pursuit of their holistic analytical account, the case studies are notable for the diversity of research materials drawn upon to build their picture of the phenomenon and context (Yin 2003) under investigation in each case, combining ‘texts’ – online, offline, policy documents, legal materials, books, films – alongside local, day-to-day observations, cultural and historical specificities, and the materiality of the built environment itself.

#### *My turn to auto-ethnography*

Any research project is a journey – a structured and enquiry-led movement towards some hoped-for insight. Each case study saw me attempting to ‘make sense’ of the sense-making activities of specific interpretive communities. The general trajectory across the sequence of studies was towards me becoming increasingly embedded within the concerns and activities of the particular community – this started with direct engagement with arboriculturalists in Article 2 and culminated in me creating a work ‘as’ a psychogeographer in Article 8. Above and beyond this increasingly “interpretive autoethnographic” (Denzin 2014) stance, was the ancillary opportunity to experience (and analyse) the operation of interpretive communities within academia, professional circles and the urban exploration fraternity as my various articles became prepared, published and discussed.



The programme's increasingly autoethnographic element was not originally intended – but by Article 6 was an explicit feature, the realisation having set in by that time that the case studies were tracking my own journey of adjustment into academia – in the sense of being a vehicle by which I developed confidence to move progressively away from directly 'applied' investigations, towards a research stance that was less concerned about showing clear links back to professional land management. I found (e.g. in Articles 2, 6 and 8) that I could extract considerable analytic benefit from considering my own presence and experience within the case studies. This also coincided with a sense felt in Article 1 that I had failed to fully engage with the communities under examination in that study (cemetery managers) and that my attempts to address this in Articles 2 and 5 via on-line observation, whilst giving some fresh insights had still left much of the analysis to be that of me reflecting upon my own 'learning about' the phenomenon under investigation. I therefore increasingly embraced this subjectivity and embeddedness, coming to view it as a 'revelatory' research resource, rather than as a weakness or something to be screened-out of my analysis.

### *On living dangerously*

Hammersley (1990) defines ethnographic research as entailing a transformative risk-taking, a straddling of worlds in order to derive scholarly insight through a measure of jeopardy and cross-cultural travel. I will now explain how my programme sought to harness the ethnographic power of its own disciplinary transgressions.

This programme's approach to analysis holds a healthy disrespect for synoptic closure, preferring to chase out and show how professional and lay communities overlap, and co-produce legal and representational codes. This becomes particularly apparent in the later publications (Article 6 onwards), where earlier articles' confident summation of the phenomenon under review is either revisited (Articles 6 and 7) or overtaken by an embrace of a playful (and performative), localised, insider-based reading of both representational code and place (Article 8) in order to experience competence: thus maximising verisimilitude, but in doing so reducing explicit analysis.

Throughout the programme (and even in Article 8) lawyerly skills of attention to detail and elicitation of process, were combined with an ethnographic openness – through listening to how sense-making was actually operating, rather than just taking at face value that a representational code or legal measure (for example) was having certain 'on the ground' effects, simply via a top-down promulgation (what communications theorists Katz & Lazarsfeld (1955) dismissed as the naive 'hypodermic needle' model of meaning transmission implicit in both mass media and public policy). Accordingly, across the Articles there is a concern to draw out the lingering tension between



subjectivity and rationality, between competing 'official' and 'unofficial' accounts, and to foreground the perspectives of underrepresented identities – specifically children, middle-aged men and adults-at-play (urban explorers and psychogeographers).

The programme's methodological contribution towards knowledge then, is its use of a range of qualitative techniques across a series of case studies, and in particular its foregrounding my own presence and sense-making within the published accounts of the journey. Whilst this is not particularly a new or extreme position to adopt in cultural studies or cultural geography research, it was such in the more cautious, conservative and positivist realm of scholarship about management of the built environment. This was exemplified by feedback I received upon an article submitted to a built environment journal in 2012 which characterised me as 'clearly someone who likes to live dangerously' and warned me that the manner (but not object) of my research work was straying beyond the acceptable bounds of that "academic tribe and territory" (Becher & Trowler 2001).

Thus, my programme's contribution to scholarship about the built environment and its management and use, was one that – at least in part – had to take place outside the constraints of that field's own view of research practice. My programme thus may be viewed as an attempt to engage occasional calls from within that field's own ranks for a greater embrace of methodological pluralism (Dainty 2008), and attendant warnings of the danger of built environment researchers failing to keep up with methodological and theoretical developments in the social science disciplines from which they borrow their methods and concepts (Hughes 2008).

## 4. CONCLUSION: CONTRIBUTION, IMPLICATIONS AND FOLLOW-ON

The programme shows how disparate parts of the academy and their matters of concern can be woven together. In innovatively bridging legal, geographic and cultural studies the programme has been able to find (and develop) tools in order to elicit logics of interpretation, practice and object-relations at work (and play) within the built environment.

The programme provides both a practical and a theoretical contribution towards understanding how places and structures become feared (as liabilities) or loved (as treasures) and of the logics and processes by which this occurs. The programme has accordingly contributed to the geographies of enthusiasm, exploration and heritage and to the sociologies of lay knowledge, organisation and also to material culture studies.

In recognition of this the bunker-hunter studies (Articles 5-7) have been published in high ranking human geography journals. Meanwhile the 'occupiers' liability perception' studies (Articles 1-3), in addition to helping to build a legal geography canon in the UK, have contributed to developing debate and liability evaluation in a number of areas of built environment management, leading on to invitations to engage with key stakeholders such as the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, the Mineral Products Association and the British Mountaineering Council.

The programme thus – in itself – represents an experiment in talking across (and between) different communities and it has been heartening that the programme has attracted both interest from 'pure' scholarship and 'applied' (e.g. land management) audiences. The success of this multi-purpose and multi-vocal objective is significant in and of itself.

The programme has also prompted the formation of new, interdisciplinary collaborations. Following publication of Articles 4-7, I was contacted by academics from the UK, Switzerland, Italy, the US, the Netherlands and Germany about their work on the use and management of abandoned bunkers. This led in turn to me convening and chairing a day-long bunker symposium at the 2014 Royal Geographical Society's Annual Conference, and I am now editing a collection of 12 academic papers arising from this event.

But most importantly of all – returning to the programme's earlier mentioned origins in a site manager's contemptible dismissal of urban exploration – the programme has, by explicating the logics inherent in both land managers' and urban explorers' interpretive practices about built

environment structures, given both communities a means by which to find a better understanding of both themselves and each other.

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