Alone-Together: Shelves as Intergenerational Maps of Sense-Laden, Relational, Multimodal Pedagogies

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Instructions for reader
Take a visual walk
Walk through the words
Look for vanishing points
Mash things up

Engaging with the concept of sensory shelfies, this essay exhibits how children and adults move across and between sounds, images and objects to make meaning and to tell stories. We glance beyond boundaries and imagine the notion of the shelf as an ongoing mapping of self where layers of experience enmesh and superimpose, and where our sense of self unfolds in the in-between, liminal spaces. These twelve shelves multimodally depict the porosity and fissures that opened up as we moved fluidly between online-offline spaces alone-together. Putting into practice an experimental and speculative approach to our research (Truman et al, 2020; Springgay and Truman, 2018), we argue for these methods as pedagogies that engage with the dynamic complexity of spaces of self.

The point of departure for this research project is the second lockdown of the Covid-19 pandemic for a multi-generational group of co-researchers: Jennifer and Harriet in Bristol with two undergraduate students; Mark in Delft with a class of year 6 students. We were inside but not quite. Outside but not completely. Alone-together.

Being vulnerable to walking

We began with a walk in our different locations as a catalyst for our research-creation (Truman et al, 2020), where process-oriented, arts-informed engagements intermeshed theoretical concepts with research practices. Listening to the walk to activate thought (Springgay and Truman, 2018), we shared what stories were embedded and considered the histories laden into words to open new narratives and engage with soundscapes from the past, intermingled with apprehensions of the here and now, ground-up and in-the-moment (Manning, 2015).

Our research emerged as speculative (Springgay and Truman, 2018) multimodal encounters that made use of mapping as a generative mode of thinking (Dodge et al., 2009, Corner, 1999), where we became “entangled in a field of relations” (Powell, 2016, p. 9). Following Deleuze and Guatarri (1988), this rhizomatic understanding of thought and experience helped us put mapping to work practically and figuratively as open-ended and infinitely modifiable, constantly in process and continually productive. By marking sound, mapping spaces and catching the wonder of things (MacLure, 2013) between speculative futures and past horizons, these mappings became the mode by which sensory shelfies of self were brought into being.

Multiply, superimpose, overlay, mix, dissolve, fuse

Through layering these mappings, an ecology of vocabulary animated the interspaces of online and offline, physical and digital, more-than-human and human. We made use of layering as an operation that thickens the surface: “the resulting structure is a complex fabric, without centre, hierarchy or single organizing principle” (Corner, 1999, p. 235).

Keywords: mapping; multimodality; multisensory; shelfies; relational; pedagogy

A soundscape to accompany this essay is available here: soundcloud.com/markshillitoe/alone-together-soundscape

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entangled

Walking alone together

Look and listen for instructions. Walk, stumble, not quite outside. What stories are embedded in the walk? Make a map, inhabit spaces. Where is the porosity? Form aggregates. What are the stories of these? Sit with it. Let things come to the surface.

Clockwise from top left: plot of our research encounters / layered maps: three walks alone-together and everyday journey maps / map of Harriet’s three walks alone-together / screenshot from three walks alone-together and everyday journey maps / map of Harriet’s three walks alone-together.
Shelf 3
The frayed stuff of sound

[From top] The class in Delft
mapping / SoundCloud graph /
sharing the coming-home trees /
soundscape map / sounds map
key / soundscape map

Listen. Listen. Listen again.
Where does the sound take you?
Follow the sound to where it arrives.

Don't hesitate.
Mark marks.
Shelf 4
You are part of the story
in the map

[Background] Layered pre-pandemic spaces and lockdown spaces maps / layered favourite part of the room map with objects from lockdown / four layered lockdown spaces maps / photograph of object from lockdown
you feel calm as you walk around wondering what wonders await in the fog in front of you

to disrupt

to perform

to stumble

to limit

Shelf 5
Making and eating alone together

[Background top] projection of redacted text / [background bottom] image of plate from brunch performance / [top left] two magical story boxes
The minutiae of everyday life. A turn to Nietzsche and his writings on aesthetics in time. Notion of rhythm as it informs a science, a new field of knowledge. Rhythm wedded to time. Time falls into repetitions. Towns, cities, countryside work in rhythm. Moving through social timescales across spaces. Rhythms of our bodies and society. Things, dressage, artifice, objects, media, and politics have rhythms. Such rhythms provide privileged insight. Capitalised bodies as a push and pull. The rhythms of push and pull responses. The general and particular rhythms of life within time. Full consciousness of the abstract in order to arrive at the concrete.

Choose a page from this text. Print it out. Light a candle. Put on Tangerine Dream (optional). Tell everyone not to disturb you. Breathe.

Use a black pen. Cross out words and lines. Write the words that are left as they want to be written. Blow out candle.
A conversation between pre-lockdown and lockdown self.

--- pre-pandemic
--- during lockdown

I have to be outside. I have to see my friends. My skateboard is a tool I use to express myself and interact with other people. Deciphering actions on social to see if they are ok or not. I have people asking me if I’m ok. At the skateboard park we talk around the act of skateboarding. Outdoor life ceased to exist. Digital spaces have taken over. Digital spaces have taken over. Looking inwards can be difficult. Everyone interacts with the skatepark in their own way. Focus on something other than myself.

Communication. Expression within the locations of the city. Multiplayer game: squad, survive battle, stay alive. A way of talking to friends. Expression through talking to other individuals who are interested in the same thing. You meet characters at the skatepark that you wouldn’t normally meet. On social media, it’s up to you to make the effort. You don’t stumble into someone.

We all skateboard, it’s a prominent point of discussion at work. Companionship. Effective and precise communication. Concise.

Graffiti and art expresses a lot of meaning. Digital spaces are middle ground.

Not something I enjoy. M32, M5, M4, M32... Scrolling, scrolling, scrolling... I’m not connected to it. What do I do nowadays? Am I enjoying what I’m doing?

Reading and writing I’m not that comfortable with. I don’t feel fulfilled.

I’m not used to studying in libraries. Getting bored taking my skateboard in. Having less people there as a prompt of who I am is helpful.

The skateboard is flexible. I can move myself around different places. It is a comfort zone for me and I enjoy it.

My mum is... different ways of energy. Enthusiastic. Different sorts of motions.

**Shelf 7**

Background top layer. Photograph from three walks alone together with projection of text and our research locations map / redacted transcripts interwoven as a dialogue between 'pre-pandemic and lockdown self' / 50 sounds of me mapping layered with photograph of Delft.
to meld

The photocopier made this
detail from dialogue notes / from
top layered screenshots from
shared objects of lockdown /
manipulated redacted texts / artefacts from photocopying
event / detail of redacted text
(Rockwell Geyer, 2019)

One of the challenges of ecological research is that most of the signs
involving physics, biology, chemistry, geology, and often public
incredibly diverse, occurring in all shapes and sizes. Yet scientists and
policy makers to generalise our results from studies of one estuary
estuaries.

As scientists, one of our roles is to predict changes in the environment
induced influences. To foresee the health of estuaries in the future
under about the present and the past. How far will salt intrude if flow increase or decrease rate at which sediments shoal or the fish that spawn in fresh water?
The quivering unease of doing.

// Put your coat on
// Set an alarm on your phone for 10 minutes
// Get outside, but not completely.
// Think with your walk

// Look for meanings of a path that is no longer there.
// Record to perform movement of time—present, here and there—tinged with melancholy

// When the alarm sounds return
// Make a map of your encounters

Shelf 9
You'll never get rid of it

[Background image] The quivering unease of doing walk / Photographs from the right photographs from The quivering unease of doing walk / Basingstoke
to play

to arrive

to enclose

Shelf 10

From here to there

Background image projected
to classroom museum of
objects / children's coats / photo-walk image, Delft / children's
toys / photo-walk image, Delft
thinking-in movement.
The doing of making.

//Start now.
//Walk where you don't know.
//Stumble into something/someone/somewhere.
//Relate to disruption.
//Ask questions to find connections.
//How has it thrown itself together:
//Be quick.
//Make a map.

Shelf 11
Thinking-in-movement #2
[Clockwise from top left]
Notebook page from score for a line walk/route map/
photographs from walk, Zeewolde / The Verblist
(Serra, 1967–68)
Permit yourself the turbulence

There was a simultaneous vulnerability and productivity within the mapping encounters where we engaged with the on-flow of these assemblages that continually “acted” on semiotic flows, material flows, and social flows simultaneously” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 24). We were unwrapped by the half-hidden mysteries in our lives that were not yet solved in the “archi-textures” of our lockdown spaces (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 118) where our perception ... [was] forged ... in the passage from place to place, and in histories of movement and changing horizons along the way” (Ingold, 2007, p. 227).

Bring your text in
Don’t over-think it

To perform the mappings, we made use of the event score (Higgins, 2002) to jog us into productive spaces, opening us up to chance, experimentation and serendipity. Acting as “enabling constraints” (Miles and Springgay, 2020, p. 1010), these instructions were speculative, productive rather than limiting (Springgay and Truman, 2018). Short instructions gave co-researchers permission to mis-interpret or re-interpret, making use of the isolated freedom of lockdown spaces. We set go of structures, an unlearning that permitted us to engage with “a between-ness or liminal state that creates new zones of participation and interaction, and understanding” (Miles and Springgay, 2020, p.1011) that transverse commonly bounded subject disciplines and spaces of home and school.

Exposing, unwrapping, bringing to the surface, creating and generating, sparking new ideas that throw everything into relief

Our analytical moves engaged with the fissures of each sensory tangent and evolved into folded meanings. Redacting texts (Phillips, 2016) became a ritual of revealing rather than obscuring, focussing our gaze along the edges of speculation. Synergies within the interweaving of lines of theory and experience activated stories that we shared as intra-textual (Truman, 2016) new scores. We observed what we produced, becoming entangled in the process. We made it a moment, lighting a candle and putting music on. Standing back was an action, opening up (MacLure, 2013) to the humbling experience of listening. Feeling, not intervening. Attuned to the agency of objects: the photocopier did that.

Image, sound, word, memory, and feelings repeated, echoed and resonated through the layers of the page. This temporal remixing activated rhythms of space and time (Lefebvre, 2004). A symphony played out through the serendipity of chance encounters, opening up new understandings that permeated the surface.

Grasp that fleeting thing

Co-researchers together, we were evokers in the middle, drawing as we were talking, thinking as we were making. Oscillating between instruction and drift. Allowing oneself to be taken up by the movement of everything, and then removing oneself from being the author of it. Navigation was led by what moved and surfaced within these shelfies, which emerged as multigenerational mappings of encounters that stirred up the multi-layered, shifting and reshaping of our everyday.

Intergenerational maps of sense-laden, relational, multimodal pedagogies: you could never write anything that evokes this sort of entanglement of things. We ask the question: How do these shelfies activate our future research and learning?

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References


