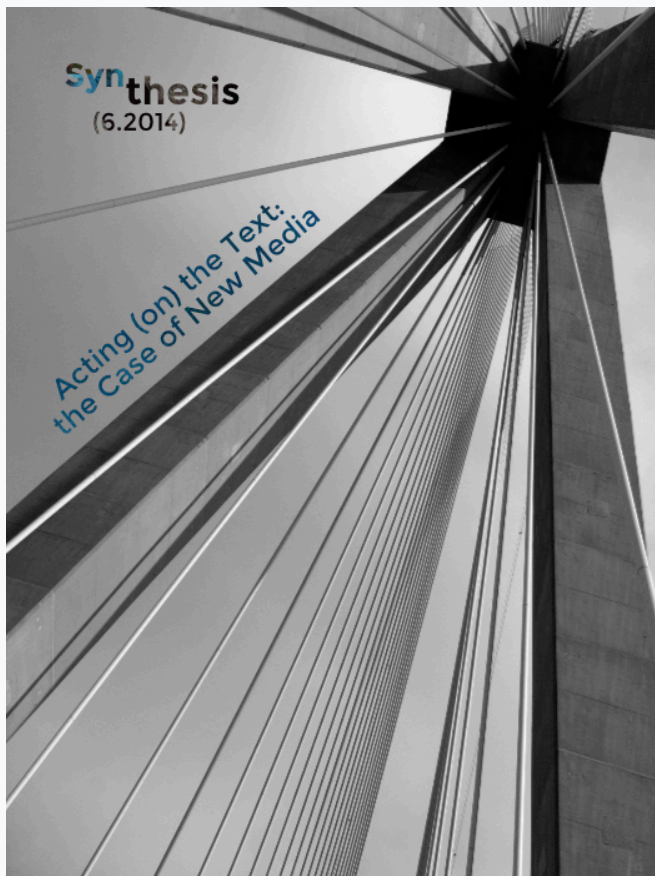


Synthesis: an Anglophone Journal of Comparative Literary Studies

No 6 (2014)

Acting (on) the Text: the Case of New Media



“All the moments in our lives occupy the same space”: Tracing the Space of Memory in Tim Wright’s In Search of Oldton

Samira Nadkarni

doi: [10.12681/syn.16173](https://doi.org/10.12681/syn.16173)

Copyright © 2014, Samira Nadkarni



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

**“All the moments in our lives occupy the same space”:
Tracing the Space of Memory in
Tim Wright’s *In Search of Oldton***

Samira Nadkarni

Abstract

Tim Wright’s 2004 creative memory project, *In Search of Oldton*, is concerned with a need to reconcile a personal and collective cultural understanding of a recent pre-digital past with the present. Its complicated and fragmented landscape is produced by the remediation of repurposed pre-digital artefacts, and traversal of its space engages with the manner in which technology is increasingly mediating interaction between the urban landscapes and their inhabitants. This paper seeks to examine the manner in which *Oldton*’s ludic-constructive play with memory engages with the psychogeographic understanding of the production of space and place through the user’s interaction with the work, and its consequent commentary on the expansion of social interactions within a contemporary social apparatus so as to include the technology that makes these interactions possible.

Introduction

Tim Wright’s 2004 creative memory project titled *In Search of Oldton* began with the scanned image of an old photograph of a garden wall. Citing it as the single piece of preserved evidence of his childhood in the fictional town of Oldton, a town that he claimed had vanished now that he was attempting to return to it as an adult, the fictional narrator of the project invited visitors of the TrAce Online Writing Centre to submit their own descriptions or memorabilia associated with this town. The repurposing (and in certain cases, remediating) of memorabilia acting as the basis by which evidence of Oldton’s once presence was established, the accounts requested from this audience were quantified by the single precondition that these

be narratives of either someone that the user had lost or descriptions of a longing for this shared lost past. Given the narrator's association of this missing town with the culture of a rural small town in 1960s' England, any visitors to the site that chose to participate in the initial stages of the project were implicitly provided with a set of social and cultural preconceptions regarding the ethos of Oldton and its missing inhabitants.

In Search of Oldton thus began with Wright constructing an online persona whose first-person narrative would form the frontispiece of the eventual work. This fictional persona had grown up in Oldton and had been made to leave it at approximately the age of six following his father's suicide, a story Wright chose by drawing on his own memories of growing up in the rural English town of Hingham, Norfolk in the 1960s and 70s, and his own father's suicide and Wright's subsequent departure. The narrative of lost things that Oldton was concerned with was therefore specifically a longing for a space within which to locate mourning—for lost innocence and people—as well as a longing for a place that was located within a specific socio-cultural timeframe and that could not, in the real world, exist as it once was. The project thus began with Wright's own repurposed memories and memorabilia at its centre, though these were attributed to the persona of his narrator and the fictional town of Oldton, in order to lay the basis for an imagined space and place proposed by his primary narrative and supplemented by the accounts and artefacts produced by his audience of collaborators.

This began a two step project where, in its first stage, submissions of evidence of a shared past were invited either online or via snail mail in January and February of 2004. This resulted in a range of personal accounts, jokes, local songs, shared commentary, or artefacts such as photographs, sound files, drawings, objects or video clips that would then be used to create and delineate the boundaries of the town and to populate it with memories of its exiled inhabitants. Selecting narratives that fit his understanding of the project as per his role as architect and primary author, Wright then began to construct a simulacra of Oldton online by plotting links to these chosen submissions onto a grid-map of the town, sketched out on the backs of a traditional pack of fifty-two playing cards. The backs of these cards lending themselves to Oldton's cartography, their fronts were used as the space in which the narrator provides his recollections—a collage of images, quotes, links and statements that are subdivided into suits. These cards outline not only the topography of Oldton, designating its fictional spatial confines, but also have hyperlinks to the site's blog where the original solicited submissions have been preserved as interlinked but distinct. Having constructed a digital place wherein a simulacra of Oldton could exist and within which these narratives could be located,

Wright began the second stage of this project by opening the site in April 2004 to those that wished to explore its bounds, and left open the blog and its call for submissions in case any of Oldton's visitors should choose to share their own anecdotes or artefacts having later 'remembered' their own link to its confines (though this was later closed to submissions in February 2008).

The premise of a shared reconstruction of a town built around the recollections of the narrator, and influenced by an audience of collaborators, divides the project into three interdependent sections: the outline of the town presented by the map (constructed on the basis of Wright's role as architect, his own understanding of the socio-economic milieu of a small town at that time, and the chosen submissions of his audience); the face of the playing cards that detail the narrator's discussion of his attempts to reclaim a sense of connection with his father while trying to forge a relationship with his son; and a final link to the blog through which submissions were invited and whose voices now form the community that memorialises Oldton. These sections are labeled "Our Oldton," "My Oldton," and "Your Oldton" respectively, and interlink to provide information to the user. They are invited to play with the text in order to engage with it. As such, they can choose to "shuffle across the map" in "Our Oldton" in order to explore the town as though traversing its space; "deal with the memories" in "My Oldton" by engaging with the faces of the Oldton pack which focus primarily on the narrator's personal recollections; or to "play with the past" in "Your Oldton" by reading the various blog posts and interactions of the online community that contributed to the creation of the town despite their exile from it.

Notably, the project is not confined to a single format. Despite the digital (re)creation of Oldton forming the core of the project, its content spans multiple media. During its early stages the remediation of pre-digital objects was necessary in order to produce them within the digital sphere, whereas later the digital project itself is made available in print and oral mediums, having been remediated once more. The user's interaction with the project in each media would be distinct, and each of these media would structure the user's relation to the content in specific ways. That is, images and objects were scanned and photographed, the contents of the blog were preserved as individual histories, and the playing cards of the Oldton pack were designed to indicate a map of the town and the user explored this town and its narratives by interacting with the online work. Users were also given the option to purchase physical copies of the Oldton pack (remediated from an original digital format to print) in order to shuffle or play with its contents in a manner less mediated by its original digital nature and Wright's limiting choice of hyperlinks, though the experience would now be restricted by the contents of the cards

themselves. The fragmented reading that produces the narrative and the space of Oldton would occur in both, the project’s digital as well as physical form, yet the manner in which this interaction would occur would change the ways in which the play on Oldton’s construction of an absent town made present occurred. The print cards would be stripped of their links to the Oldton weblog and the preserved narratives, focusing the project more firmly on the narrator’s reconstruction of events, though inevitably this recollection would be mediated by the influence of the audience community’s original submissions.

A further reworking of the narrator’s account formed the basis of a radio play for BBC radio 4 which was broadcast on 24 July, 2006. Unfortunately, this remediated oral narrative is no longer available online despite a link being available on the project homepage. And as of February 2014, the project homepage for Oldton is no longer available—a disappearance that echoes the means by which it was originally made present—although a copy of its contents has been preserved by the British Library using their UK Web Archive and allowing for continued exploration.

There are voices in this ghost town

Despite solicited content, the primary voice that guides the user through *In Search of Oldton* is that of Wright’s fictional narrator, underlining the fact that the content on the site is under Wright’s control and the manner in which the user navigates the space of Oldton will be, in large part, mediated by Wright’s choice of narrative paths. Yet the solicited content does influence both, the cartography of the town as well as the guided exploration of its recollections. That is, the contributions solicited via the project’s weblog provided Wright with the basis for his town, attributing street names as well as indicating the need for and locations of buildings such as the church, bakery, and butcher shop, yet Wright as architect and author remained the sole authority in terms of plotting Oldton onto its grid-map and representing a selection of its collage of artefacts on the faces of the playing cards. It was therefore his prerogative to resolve any disputes regarding the topography of Oldton that may have arisen in this process.

In order to allow for contributors to retain the right to attach or detach their entries to the project, Wright chose not to reposition the contributions or replicate the entries elsewhere without permission, but rather, to simply link to the original weblog entries within each fragment of Oldton. In this manner, although the entries would influence Wright’s depiction of *Oldton* and the creation and representation of the town in the narrator’s account, distinct narrative voices would

be preserved and could be removed at the collaborator's behest (Stewart). Authorship thus remained singular, yet dispersed; Wright's *Oldton* became a place to which an audience of collaborators could attach memories and memorabilia through the weblog, yet the space of *Oldton* itself remained under Wright's purview.

This use of collaborative author structures shows similarities to the eighteenth-century practice of marginalia in print narratives. Marginalia allowed for a system in which collaborative scholarship was the norm as a primary author's work formed the basis of the narrative and commentators would annotate this text. Drawing on the work of critic H. J. Jackson, Jenna Pack examines the marginalia in the works of Francis Douce, John Brand and William Oldys in order to suggest that the annotation provided by readers of the work did in fact affect changes in the content of the work itself. Pack cites the example of Oldys printing personal copies of his work on Walter Raleigh with extra folio pages on which were written amendments or additions provided to him by his readership which, due to time constraints, he had been unable to include in the manuscript itself. She notes:

Oldys actually published his friends' notes in his own text and even hoped that they would "continue their communications where they shall find anything, as well to be amended as enlargd[sic], in the foregoing Sheets; none being more willing to reform an Error, or desirous of being led by the light of truth."...While these modifications were added toward the end of the text [in the extra folio pages], Oldys's comment that they were "communicated too late to be interwoven into their proper places" indicates that he would have actually amended the body of his text based on his readers' insight if he had been given more time (Pack; Jackson 62).

Oldton's use of collaborative scholarship suggests an evolution beyond this practice of marginalia. The collaborative nature of the project exists as more than a simple set of annotations and revisions in the margins of the work, instead being indicated throughout the body of the project and continuing even after the project was first formally introduced at its home page. To clarify, the original entries in *Oldton's* weblog allowed for Wright to create the grid-map of *Oldton* and the collage narratives of its playing cards, and the delineation of this cartography allowed his audience of collaborators to further interact and contribute to these shared narratives. The section of *Oldton* labeled "Your *Oldton*" continued to allow entries in the weblog until February 2008, expanding the text without any evidence of Wright controlling the content or the number of entries. Therefore, the space of *Oldton* both is and is not strictly delineated so as to indicate the contribution of its audience and Wright's role as primary author of the piece.

It is the creation of these distinct voices—Wright and his early audience of collaborators—that concerns Michael Toolan. Despite the fact that the project is

structured around the narrator's recollections and the various accounts that give rise to the shape of the town through the user's interaction with the work, Toolan asserts that *Oldton* cannot be viewed as narrative art. Citing the multimodal bricolage of *Oldton*, the matrix architecture of its three interlinked subsections, and the nature of these shared submissions that are largely linked only through a shared sense of loss, he suggests that *Oldton* be viewed as what Michael Hooey would term a "discourse colony" instead. Drawing on Hooey's definition, Toolan indicates that a discourse colony as defined in this manner would contain multiple narratives, not always interlinked, that are present as multimodal aspects of the creative memory project (134).

While Toolan presents a valid point, perhaps it is possible to take his assertion of *Oldton*'s role as a discourse colony a step further beyond the bounds of his focus on purely the production of narrative in order to consider it as per N. Katherine Hayles' notion of technotexts. Instead of an analysis that focuses purely on the narrative as the product of an individual or collective human agency, a media specific analysis of the project would instead expand any understanding to encompass an agency that is mediated by the digital (i.e. by machines). To clarify: based on the understanding that the nature of reality is increasingly dependent upon a convergence of human and technological agency, it would appear that *Oldton*'s ontology and relations emerge from its role as an intra-agency that is the product of a socially networked system. Given that it is the assertion of *Oldton*'s absence and the need for it to be memorialised that consequently allows for *Oldton* to become present, to emerge in an ontological manner, the project is already positioned between the sense of a past (fictional as it may be) that needs to be sought and memorialised, and the present moment in which technology has begun to influence everything, from the manner in which one records evidence of their own existence to the way digital mapping is changing the interaction between humanity and their surroundings.

Hayles' suggestion that interaction between the computer and the user produces the user as part of the circuit such that "bodies of texts and bodies of subjects evolve together in complex configurations" (51) finds particular depth when introduced to the concerns that *Oldton* embodies. For example, the traversal of *Oldton*'s confines has its parallels in the use of mapping technology being increasingly used as a means by which to not only traverse cityscapes but also locate relevant information regarding one's surroundings. The availability of such technology not only affects the manner in which one interacts with the urban world in particular, but increasingly makes it possible to traverse digital simulacra of these spaces without having visited them in person, and this thereby changes the

relation of a subject to their environment. *Oldton* thus shares similarities with contemporary locative media projects like *MESH: Mapping Edinburgh's Social History* and *Urban Tapestries* that seek to interlink history, culture and community with the exploration of a city or region, although *Oldton* does so by using technology to produce its fictional place and space whereas these locative projects use place and technology to enhance the user's understanding of each.

Meredith Hoy, when speaking on the link between cyberspace and pre-existing architecture, suggests that although the architecture of the internet is invisible, digital space itself is physical, manifested by the fact that the electrical configuration of power that allows for the creation of and access to cyberspace is physical. Distinguishing between the assertion of electronic connectivity as being tied to lived space and the basis of electricity itself as material, therefore producing cyberspace as an invisible yet material construct, she states:

Cyberspace cannot be imagined apart from architecture insofar as it creates webs, networks and places out of the building materials of electrical power. Each time a digital traceroute is created, it manifests a new set of electronic signals and thus engenders a new electronic landscape. The importance of digital cartography is that it actually *creates a territory*, or leads, instead of merely following a territory that already exists (Hoy 6).

Although Hoy's assertion within her article is intended to function as a theory of locative media, it does further indicate a means by which to approach *Oldton*'s convergent multi-modal reality. Cyberspace informs both, the territory of *Oldton* and part of the social process through which it created and presents itself, i.e. a concern with the manner in which technology has changed interactions between humans and their surroundings. As such, access to technology or the location of *Oldton* within this digital cartography has repercussions for urban landscape (in the very real sense of the user's access to systems online, the change of a cityscape with antennae, wiring, and the like) echoed within the project as the loss of a pre-digital pastoral town, even while the material agency of cyberspace allows for the possibility of a memory project of this nature *to create a territory*—to allow *Oldton* to exist, in a manner of speaking.

The assumptions of concrete locations being the site of maps—playing into notions of discovery and knowledge that would culturally underlie projects associated with cartography—as well as the reclaimed 'evidence' of *Oldton*'s once inhabitants (i.e. the repurposed contributions of Wright and his audience of collaborators) is thus remediated and used as a means by which to establish the specific culture of *Oldton* at the time of its abandonment and disappearance. The means by which this occurs relies, at least in part, upon an awareness of the

changed nature of interaction between a person and her or his surroundings from the recent pre-digital past to the techno-savvy present. That is, in order to be able to explore *Oldton* in its primary digital format, the work requires that the user be familiar with its technology and have the skills necessary to navigate its landscape. Much as the project itself is concerned with a commemoration of the past, the need for this set of skills on the part of the author, his original audience of collaborators, and the user, locates it firmly in the present.

It is clear that the basis of any memory project, creative or otherwise, expresses a concern regarding the past that locates itself very specifically in the conditions of the present. The narrator's original appeal and the consequent two-stages of responses (first from Wright's audience of collaborators and secondly from the users that interacted with the digital work) evidences a shared urge to seek not only a reconciliation of past and present, but also a temporary haven from rapid technological change and its associated issues that is (rather ironically) simulated within a representation of a pre-digital past within a digital medium. That is, the need to reconcile this personal and cultural past with one's present is rooted in present concerns, and the nostalgia associated with the past is itself a product of present conditions. As Astrid Erll points out:

Memories are not objective images of past perceptions, even less of a past reality. They are subjective, highly selective reconstructions, dependent on the situation in which they are recalled. *Re-membering* is an act of assembling available data that takes place in the present. Versions of the past change with every recall, in accordance with the changed present situation. Individual and collective memories are never a mirror image of the past, but rather an expressive indication of the needs and interests of the person or group doing the remembering in the present (8).

This clearly ties in to the fact that the narrator of the project, as well as the users that choose to locate their narratives within *Oldton*, are not actually exiled from the towns that *Oldton* is being used to signify so much as displaced by the progress of time and socio-cultural changes. In the absence of an ability to return to the past, the shared search for this past becomes located in the re/mediated and multimodal space and place of *Oldton*. The use of technology allows the user to share in a deeply felt nostalgia of cultural displacement while simultaneously locating them within the present moment wherein a growing percentage of social interaction is online. As such, the nostalgic longing for a return to a supposedly Edenic pre-digital past locates this memory project within ongoing conversations regarding the nature of technology and its effect upon our world—the first being the fear of the loss of a personal and cultural pre-digital past given rapid changes in technology, the second being the manner in which access to media is fundamentally changing

the way one intuits and interacts with the world, and lastly, the fact that technology does as much to construct its surroundings as its surroundings do to construct technology, and this interdependency forms the basis for Wright’s call for commemoration of a previous set of social, cultural and technological interactions in the present.

In Search of Oldton is not the only digital project to attempt this relocation and contextualisation of a lost town; Jason Nelson’s 2010 responsive poem *Wittenoom: speculative shell and cancerous breeze* juxtaposes images of the Australian town Wittenoom that was forced to be abandoned in 1966 due to toxic clouds caused by asbestos mining in the area with fragments of interactive text. Nelson’s multimodal e-poem—consisting of nine parts, interspersed with image, text and a looping instrumental soundtrack—explores the town’s history. The poem’s fragmented mix of immersive and disrupting strategies mirrors the complex manner in which humanity and the environment are both immersed in each other and yet prone to the ecological disruption that would cause such a place to become uninhabitable. Nelson’s poem thus locates itself in the digital not simply because of the impossibility of returning to the ghost town of Wittenoom due to ongoing environmental concerns, but also because the use of digital technology to produce the space of this ghost town engages the underlying issue of the effect of machinery on the environment.

Oldton’s digital cartography attempts something similar in its pretence of investing the fictional with the real. In the mission statement that announced the project, emphasis was placed not only upon the narratives of memory, loss, and leaving that indicate the communal experience of the inhabitants of Oldton, but also on the changing nature of cities and towns and their dependency on their inhabitants (Wright, “Disappearing Towns”). The loss of Oldton provides a modern parallel to an exile from Eden, yet *Oldton* advances this metaphor to suggest that without its inhabitants, Eden and Oldton cease to exist as spaces and places, becoming mutable and devoid of any recognition of presence. The primary narrator’s evidence of a town that can no longer be located on any formal map thus points towards more than the simple erasure of Oldton; it makes a point regarding the fact that urban or rural cityscapes are reliant upon observers or inhabitants. The physical town of Wittenoom in Australia that Nelson’s project points towards echoes these concerns as the town’s lack of inhabitation and its ongoing health concerns led the Australian government to degazette it in 2007, turning it into a town that no longer exists in the promotional literature of the region. Wittenoom as place exists, yet its notion as place has become destabilised.

If we consider Wright's project in a similar manner, the ghosts that haunt *Oldton's* digital landscape are therefore not simply restricted to the narrator's deceased father or the exiled inhabitants of the town, but include Oldton itself; the absence of the town forms the basis for the project. The playing card map therefore is not positioned only as a tool or a means of access to knowledge of Oldton, but is more specifically figured as an actable, moveable and immersive means by which to traverse the space in which lost things, people, and emotions have been located, thereby locating Oldton itself via the placement of these. And in some sense, the fact that Oldton does not exist can no longer be said to be true as the town emerges in the space of a community's shared search for its presence; the ability to explore its space online and locate it as place echoes the use of satellite images or the use of mapping software to glean information regarding urban landscapes that the user themselves may never physically explore. If a relation to the environment is reliant upon its interaction with inhabitants, and if the manner in which this interaction occurs can be changed by the mediation of technology such that physical presence might no longer be the only manner by which to experience these landscapes, then the interaction between urban landscapes and its inhabitants is already in flux and determined by access to these technologies and their reception in these environments.

Bodies drifting through Oldton

As previously stated, the multimodal bricolage of image, text and hyperlinks that forms the landscape of Oldton is immersive, moveable, actable and explorable; the user's traversal of this space as an observer or temporary inhabitant is part of the process through which the digital place of Oldton is produced. As such, the user entering this landscape becomes part of its simulated reality, acting alongside the technology that makes it possible to produce the interactive encounter. This doubles the project's underlying assertion that place can no longer be viewed as a stable component—on the one hand, the town of Oldton has disappeared and the entirety of the project is structured around recovering evidence of its existence; on the other hand, the place of Oldton as designated by its cartography can only be produced by the user's choice to interact with the work. The re/creation of Oldton and its subsequent location in the digital sphere indicates an engagement with the proposition that place is simultaneously both, created by the observer on the basis of their interpretation of its elements, as well as raising new questions regarding technology's mediation of this encounter, i.e. whether this engagement would need to be physical and this reality distinctly concrete. It undercuts fundamental notions

of the manner in which place and landscapes have come to be understood as physical realities.

For example, when writing on the works of W. G. Sebald, Christopher Gregory-Guider notes that:

To endow place with the power of movement is a radical affront to its traditional status as reliably located in space-time. The substance of this challenge rests upon the assertion that, as human beings, our encounter with place is an experience largely constructed by our individual (and culturally based) desires, fears, and memories. In short, we create the places in which we live as much as we register their objective reality (423).

This assertion produces two distinct ways by which to approach any reading of Oldton as place. The first is the project's destabilisation of Oldton's location in space-time, given that it is the space of a missing town constructed by nostalgia and the need to preserve a cultural past—and therefore located in a specific socio-cultural time frame—while also being the product of the present space-time and physical reality in which Wright and the user have access to technologies that make this interactive navigation and immersion possible. And secondly, as per Gregory-Guider's statements, the user's interaction with Oldton as place is reliant upon the interaction of the user with its various interlinked fragments so as to produce the space of the place to be navigated. Space and place are therefore to be viewed as performative and reliant upon interaction. The user's understanding of Oldton as place is dependent upon the contextual historical grounding within its landscape and the construction of its space is inextricably linked to the functioning of the society that produces it—a society that is not only mediated by the digital, but one that is part of a socially networked system in which technology is produced as an agent in itself. That is, technology not only mediates the social interaction that leads to the production of Oldton's space and thereby establishes it as place; it is also (invisibly) one of the cultural voices present in the text—whether one considers the interaction of user with machine, the interaction of user with the code that underpins *Oldton*, or whether one considers the fact that Oldton is, in essence, discussing the manner in which archiving and the documentation of personal and collective realities has changed with technology.

Oldton's landscape thus allows for what one might term psychogeographic tourism of the memory of this lost town; the user becomes the medium's equivalent of a digital *flâneur*, exploring nuances of Oldton's intertwined narrative architecture and emotional landscape. The fragmented nature of the map, its use of passages (though the incorporation of its hotlinks as well as the spaces between the

individual cards), and its lack of immediate coherence on the face of the playing cards (resulting from the multilayered collages of images and text upon its surface, as well as its use of poetic language), positions Oldton as a collective site of mourning, as well as a space of concealed and revealed differences. The users are urged to explore the digital landscape as they see fit, beginning and ending their experience of its space wherever they might wish, and following the digressions that might interest them. The use of hotlinks allows for the topography of Oldton to be experienced as passages from one fragment of the landscape to another rather than as a unified experience or as the object of a totalised perception. The user is urged to playfully drift; the text that accompanies the eight of clubs urges one to simply "noodle around," arguing that the nature of online adventures is dependent upon a lack of knowing what might emerge next. The narrator continues in this vein on the nine of clubs, stating that Adam and Eve were exiled from Eden for using their "noodles" too much, therefore implying that the user is to attempt a traversal of the space of the text that is not over-intellectualised, but is instead dictated by pleasure.

The Oldton map is divided into frames of reference such that the town is presented as visible and knowable as a whole, yet individual sections are severed and cordoned off by the blank spaces between the cards themselves. The town is thus complete and present on the backs of the fifty-two cards, yet it is consequently subdivided by its representation upon the length and width of the cards, the gaps left between them as they are divided into rows and columns. The user is restricted in their reading to a single card at a time and its associated narrative and hyperlinks; they can choose to either click on one of the links, to follow the layout of the cards by going either lower or higher in the same suite, to shuffle and pick a random card, or to flip the card and view the multimodal narrative on its opposing side. As such, the user does not know what they might encounter and can only construct the sequence of events in retrospect. Wright states:

We chop and change the order in which we look at things. We dwell in some areas of the virtual environment for longer than in others. Some areas we never visit at all. I wanted to create a digital story in which I could do the same kind of thing with my own past. And by doing so, I'm hoping to reveal something about how digital narratives can unlock a different kind of 'truth' about common human experiences (TrAce Archive).

The user's choice to click on a chosen link produces it as the next fragment (revealing the work to be actable) and moving the user to a new fragment (suggesting that the work is moveable in terms of its spatial-temporal dynamics) and manipulating the work in order to produce its pieces through interaction. The

nature of this interaction, structured specifically by the materiality of its medium that insists on a single fragment at a time that may be randomly juxtaposed, along with the narrative's use of poetic language (in that the language signifies far more than it seems to and requires work to decode) constantly places the user in the space of the unknown. There results what one might term a kind of blindness as the user cannot predict what the next section will entail; the production of meaning is singular and relies upon the manner in which one traverses this landscape, compelling it to reveal a narrative that is specific to the interpretive social interaction of the user and the social and historical markers present within those particular fragments of the text. Given that the content that constitutes *Oldton* is by and large recognisable in a socio-cultural context and given the fact that its cartography is dependent upon cultural preconceptions of small town ethos, the produced sense of simultaneous familiarity and de-familiarisation that underpins this re/mediated and re/contextualised work implies that the viewer's trajectory through Oldton occurs as per Guy Debord's definition of a *dérive*. Based upon the understanding that a *dérive* is an unplanned journey through an urban landscape whereby the journey occurs purely on the basis of the feelings evoked by the interaction between the individual and their surroundings in an attempt to encounter new and 'authentic' experiences, the user as digital *flâneur* interacts with the landscape (in order to produce its space and locate it as place) and is also acted upon by this landscape (which produces them as visitor and temporary inhabitant, and that locates them in the specific socio-cultural liminality of past and present).

Interestingly, the repurposing of accounts and artefacts for the purpose of reconciliation results in their existence as liminal spaces within the text. This occurs temporally, allowing for what one might term a doubled vision that would simultaneously indicate not only its pre-digital origins and its sense of pastness, but would also firmly locate it within the digital present; it functions as the indicator of a boundary between digital and non-digital presence. In addition to this, the artefacts would also indicate liminality with regard to their purpose-existing simultaneously to provide evidence of Oldton's existence, yet also haunted by their own original purposes. For example, the scanned images that Wright repurposes in his project would signify not only their current digital presence but would remain haunted by their pre-digital origins; their use in this multimodal project would reference not only the commemoration of loss and grief but also an original function as an image with an attached narrative. The lost things that designate *Oldton* therefore disclose themselves as simply things, as well as things with specific and mutable purpose.

Conclusion

Wright's project began in 2004 with the complicated question "How does a town just disappear?" and it would seem that the presumed answer lies somewhere in the midst of socio-cultural change, rapid technological progress, the nature of interaction between inhabitants and urban landscapes, and specifically in the singular manner in which all experience is mediated and controlled by these aspects that are themselves constantly in flux. The personal cannot be made distinct from the collective and vice versa, and the question of what constitutes this collective—whether non-human agents can be considered within the construction of this notion—is already the source of debate in much of posthumanist theory. It is possible to suggest that the disappearance of the project itself from its homepage in February 2014 sees the concern with a reconciliation of a pre-digital past with the then present as growing to be a smaller concern over time, as new inhabitants of a current technological landscape emerge with different conditions of mediation and knowledge. The question is no longer one of how Oldton has disappeared, for its traces are easily accessible in digital archives, but rather a question of what it means to inhabit a technological landscape wherein access to spaces and places can be mediated digitally and the changed relationships this may entail regarding our social systems.

Works Cited

- Debord, Guy and I. Chetglov. *Theory of the Dérive*. Ed. A. Jorn. Actar/Museum of Contemporary Art, Barcelona, 1999. Print.
- Emery, Kate. "Force last residents out of Wittenoom." *The West Australian*. 17 July 2013. Web. 30 July 2014.
<<https://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/a/18026772/force-last-residents-out-of-wittenoom/>>.
- Erl, Astrid. *Memory in Culture*. Trans. Sara B. Young. UK and USA: Palgrave MacMillan Memory Studies, 2011. Print.
- Flores, Leonardo. "'Wittenoom: speculative shell and cancerous breeze' by Jason Nelson." *I love e-poetry*. 21 April 2013. Web. 22 July 2014.
<<http://iloveepoetry.com/?p=2582>>.

Samira Nadkarni, "All the moments in our lives occupy the same space"

- Gregory-Guider, Christopher C. "The "Sixth Emigrant": Travelling Places in the Works of W.G. Sebald." *Contemporary Literature* 46.3 (Autumn, 2005): 422-449. Print.
- Hayles, Katherine N. *Writing Machines*. Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2002. Print.
- Hoy, Meredith. "Digital Homelessness and L'Espce Internet." *Leonardo* 38.1 (2005): 6-7. Print.
- Jackson, H. J. *Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2001. Print.
- MESH: Mapping Edinburgh's Social History*. University of Ediburgh, 2014. Web. 28 July 2014. <<http://www.mesh.ed.ac.uk/>>.
- Nelson, Jason. *Wittencoom: speculative shell and cancerous breeze*. Springgun Press, 2010. Web. 6 July 2014. <http://www.springgunpress.com/wittencoom/>>.
- Pack, Jenna. "Pity the book. It's Dead Again.": Historicizing Interactive Reading Practices." *The Southwest Texas Popular Culture and American Culture Association Conference*, Albuquerque, NM. February 2012. Conference Paper. Email.
- Stewart, Gavin. "An nmrq interview: Tim Wright – Digital Writer." *New Media Research Group*. January – February 2008. Web. 1 October 2013. <<http://spooner.beds.ac.uk/nmrq/?p=134>>.
- Toolan, Michael. "Electronic Multimodal Narratives and Literary Form." *New Perspectives on Narrative and Multimodality*. Ed. Ruth Page. New York; London: Routledge, 2010. 127-141. Print.
- Urban Tapestries*. 2005. Web. 31 July 2014. <<http://research.urbantapestries.net/about.html>>.
- Wright, Tim. "Disappearing Towns: In Search of Oldton." Mission Statement. Web. 12 September 2013. <http://timwright.typepad.com/inresidence/oldton_mission_statement.html>.
- . *In Search of Oldton*. Web. 15 August 2013. Originally archived at <<http://www.oldton.com/>>. Now archived at UK Web Archive, British Library. 5 February 2014. Web. <http://www.webarchive.org.uk/ukwa/target/64290917/source/alpha>
- . "In Search of Oldton." *TrAce Archive*. Web. 12 September 2013. <<http://tracearchive.ntu.ac.uk/writersforthefuture/view/InSearchofOldton.htm>>.

Samira Nadkarni, "All the moments in our lives occupy the same space"

- "Sebald's Tree." *Searching for Sebald: Photography After W. G. Sebald*. Ed. Lise Patt with Christel Dillbohner. Los Angeles: Institute of Cultural Inquiry, 2007. 248-255. Print.