Unpacking Heterotopic Social Space:
An Ethnography of Urban Exploration

By

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Abstract

Urban exploration has emerged as the popular term used to describe the physical exploration of human-made structures and objects, particularly those that are abandoned or hidden from the public eye. In recent years it has received growing academic attention and has been examined in the current literature as a leisure form which produces a posture of authenticity that rejects commoditisation in its celebration of rebellion. While this work is certainly a useful and valuable start, it is evident that there is a distinct lack of critical research and many fundamental oversights as urban exploration is removed from its real contexts. This thesis takes the study of this phenomenon in a different direction by focusing its attention straight at the living and breathing individuals who call themselves urban explorers to lay bare a unique leisure world. Using as its starting point Foucault’s (1984) concept of heterotopia which is said to operate somewhere between the everyday world and the imaginary, this thesis unpacks the heterotopic social space of a group of urban explorers known as WildBoyz. At the same time, it takes into account the inescapable period of interregnum we currently find ourselves in. This is to move beyond the limits of extant studies by considering the shift into a world dominated by consumer capitalism, and the present social, cultural and political context in which urban exploration takes place. With this in mind, the thesis is an ethnographic investigation that combines the methods of hermeneutic sociology and sociological hermeneutics to enter a heterotopic social space which, including the researcher, comprised nine key individuals from North East England. By doing this, the thesis effectively delves into this heterotopia, and all of its quixotic qualities, of a group of urban explorers by unpacking how they control cognitive, aesthetic and moral social space, the life strategies they individually adopt and the significance of the 'virtual' as a further extension of their heterotopic world. In the end, what this nuanced perspective tells the reader is that a new way of understanding urban exploration has been developed, and this is one that views a particular kind of heterotopic reality as being a form of 'devotional leisure' (Blackshaw, 2017). In other words, this thesis offers instructive and comprehensive insights into the possibilities of freedom, the significance of performativity and the machinations of very particular type of 'home' that cannot help but always be temporary and on the move.
Dedications

There is more to be gained in a conversation with a man who is wise and honest than there is reading a book. This thesis is dedicated to my dad, Keith R. Bingham. He was an engineer, a grafter and a true inspiration.

It is also dedicated to Jenny, my wife-to-be.
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Chapter One

Introduction: The Aim, Objectives and Orientation

Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy ‘syntax’ in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to ‘hold together’. This is why utopias permit fables and discourse: they run with the very grain of language and are part of the fundamental fabula; heterotopias desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences (Foucault, 2002 [1970]: xix).

Introduction

This thesis is a critical investigation, and a reflection on my part, of a precarious world that may perhaps appear disturbing and confounding from the outside, but which is legitimated by its own logical dynamics. This is a heterotopia where the stench of decay and the sounds of fetid dripping water become fantastical and familiar and veritably homely for a group of like-minded individuals. Here we find a heterotopia crafted out of abandonment and secrets that are hidden in the everyday fabric of our towns and cities. The reader is invited along on a journey to watch the unpacking of this social space. As already warned, things will be uncanny and may not feel quite right, but the reader is encouraged to imagine a world and all its quixotic qualities that feels more real to us, the more we are prepared let it come to us, to let it change us. This is a world that is ontologically dependent on our preparedness to engage with its sense of discourse in which common sense notions are turned upside-down, and where risk, freedom and passion take precedence over everything else. It is a world rooted in a form of leisure known as urban exploration.

Urban exploration, which is also referred to as ‘urbex’, ‘recreational trespass’, ‘place hacking’ and ‘infiltration’, is the term used to describe the activity of exploring human-made structures and environments in the twenty-first century. It is certainly not a new phenomenon, though, for examples of human curiosity about human-made places that are secret or unknown stretch as far back as many centuries ago. What this means, nonetheless,
is that it has transformed into a form of leisure that is recognised and practiced in most Westernised countries. Evidence of this widespread transformation can be found in the general contemporaneous consensus that urban exploration is, at its most basic, all about the exploration of abandoned buildings or ruins that tend to be heavily vandalised and/or damaged by natural decay. A broader knowledge and understanding of urban exploration, however, also reveals that it does in fact entail a number of unique sub-categories. These include the loosely termed practices of, ‘derping’ (exploring general abandoned sites), ‘roof-topping’ (reaching the top of high structures), ‘draining/urban spelunking’ (walking through storm drains and sewers), infiltrating ‘live sites’ (active or in use buildings) and searching for ‘epics’ (being the first visitor to sites that are pristine and/or rarer than the average urbex). It is this all-encompassing interpretation of urban exploration, then, as it has swiftly entered popular culture, that has attracted increasing scholarly interest in recent years (Kindynis, 2016; Kindynis and Garrett, 2015; Mould, 2015; Garrett, 2013a; Garrett and Hawkins, 2013; Mott and Roberts, 2013a; Bennett, 2011; Dobraszczyk, 2010; Pinder, 2005; Edensor, 2005).

Generally speaking, the way urban exploration has been examined in the current literature is in accordance with several popular key themes. By far the most substantial of these is Bradley Garrett’s (2013a) thesis that urban exploration is best interpreted as a deviant and rebellious form of resistance that is targeted against consumer capitalism. Firmly rooted in the Situationist idea that the world has become an all-encompassing spectacle that robs us of our freedom and autonomy (Debord, 2000), Garrett argues that urban explorers form ‘tightly fractured’ communities (2013b: 2) that enable them to emancipate themselves from ideological hegemony as they redemocratise and decommodify the urban environment around them. Nevertheless, while Garrett’s (2013a; 2013b) work is an indubitably useful and valuable start, it is evident that when it comes to the accumulative body of work that exists there is a distinct lack of critical research and numerous fundamental oversights. As a result, it is arguable that most of the research that does exist operates within the limits of similar tacit assumptions about society, culture and, indeed, urban explorers themselves. These existing accounts take little account of either the culture surrounding urban exploration – its dispositions, identities, habits, forms of language and expression and morals – or the wider liquid modern landscape in which it takes place, which is being transformed by profound social, cultural, economic, technological and political change.

The central aim of this study, therefore, has been to respond to the limits of those above-
mentioned studies of urban exploration by examining it in a very different way than it has been up to now. It does this by attending to the issue that extant research tends to utilise what Ulrich Beck (2002) has termed ‘zombie concepts’, which are those ideas that are no longer very relevant in the type of modernity we find ourselves in. As the reader will discover, it is argued in this thesis that presently there is a disparity between academic perceptions of urban exploration and what actually goes on in this strange and ostensibly deviant world. With this in mind, this thesis challenges those perceptions by suggesting that developing an alternative theoretical way of understanding the phenomenon, one that takes into account the people, the ubiquitous influence of consumer capitalism and the wider social, economic and political context in which urban exploration takes place, is necessary.

As this thesis argues, today we live in a world that is no longer certain or stable as a more ‘solid’ kind of modernity would have us think and believe (Bauman, 2000). Rather, this is a rhizomatic world, ‘its trains of experience busy with unremitting new arrivals and speedy departures, and unexpected diversions, derailments and cancellations, which have replaced the secure tracks that once sustained modernity in Marx’s time’ (Blackshaw, 2016: 14). What this means is that we need a different type of sociology that can encapsulate and understand urban exploration and its so-called ‘communities’. Therefore, in embarking on this journey it was decided that the only way of achieving the aim would be to approach the task with a rigorous application and consideration of Michel Foucault’s (1984) concept of heterotopia because it directs our attention to the idea that people create spaces of compensation for themselves, where they can, for a short time, express certain deviant interests and performative identities alongside like-minded others. In other words, as I wanted to explore what urban exploration is really all about, and paint a picture of it that took into account a living and breathing world with all of its intricacies intact, it was manifest that the concept of heterotopia which operates somewhere between everyday worlds and imaginary realities had the potential of achieving such an aim.

Taking as its starting point Peter Borsay’s (2006) argument that leisure often takes place in ‘anti-structural’, liminal places, where people can form neo-tribal gatherings and do the things they generally cannot in everyday life, this thesis unpacks the ways a group of urban explorers create their own inimitable heterotopic space. In other words, it explores how urban explorers organise and control their social space, construct shared knowledgeability, develop life strategies and protect their world against ‘Others’ who threaten to destroy it. As
it is argued, urban exploration is all about people seeking spaces of compensation, rather than anything more binding, where they can each exist collectively but in their own individual ways. Essentially, this can also be viewed as a response to Garrett’s oxymoronic depiction of the ‘tightly fractured’ urban exploration community. In view of this, what is being offered is a methodology that enables me to give meaning to what escapes extant studies of urban exploration. This study, then, sought to address gaps in the knowledge by focusing on the perspectives of urban explorers themselves, and this was achieved by the researcher living and breathing a social space of heterotopia for five years.

To achieve the overarching aim, four key objectives were determined. These were to 1) explore heterotopic social space generally through a leisure studies framework and specifically through Blackshaw’s (2017) devotional leisure thesis; 2) identify and explain how urban explorers understand and attempt to control social space in urban exploration; 3) frame the central interpenetrating and intertwining life strategies that are adopted by urban explorers; and 4) address the dynamics of technology – especially photography and the internet – and how these impact on the ‘virtual’ aspects of urban exploration as a further extension of the heterotopia.

**Defining Heterotopic Social Space**

As indicated in the title of this thesis, this study is about a heterotopic social space – that of a group of urban explorers who call themselves WildBoyz. What is offered is an interpretation of their leisure world through their eyes and perspectives, but this is an interpretation that also recognises the value of my own role as the subjective researcher and that it was necessary for me to be an active participant from the beginning. This follows Anthony Giddens’s (1982) concept of the double hermeneutic which argues that when it comes to uncovering social reality we should collapse the dichotomy between what is really going on in the world, as it is perceived by ‘lay actors’, and what social sciences say is happening as they try to understand and explain social action with theories and ‘technical terminologies’. It is important that the reader reminds themselves of this from here on, and accepts that this world could not have been explored effectively in any other way. Hopefully, as my definition of heterotopia is disclosed, the reader will understand why this is so.

My definition of heterotopia is built on the concept found in the work of Foucault and,
therefore, denotes a ‘place of otherness’. Like Foucault (1984), it is argued that it is best
defined by being juxtaposed with the concept of utopia; that word that is used to describe
places or spaces that are imaginary rather than real. In contrast, heterotopia can be
described as a ‘fallen paradise’ that is ‘decentred’, ‘found in no place in particular’ and
‘associated with deviance’ (Blackshaw, 2010a: 137). Heterotopias, in other words, are the
opposite of anything utopian. They are real compensatory places or spaces ‘without
geographical markers’ and can be found in all cultures and societies (Foucault, 1984: 5). In
the first instance, then, a heterotopia is a type of ‘imaginary community’, to borrow
Blackshaw’s (2010a) way of describing it, that lies outside all other rational places in a culture
or society while also being located in culture and society. Secondly, the heterotopia is a
collective (and therefore social) space where like-minded individuals come together to
engage in forms of leisure that are perhaps less acceptable or forbidden in the everyday
world. However, as leisure is invariably both social and individual (ibid) there is not always
something absolutely collective about such spaces because people can find their own
individual sense of meaning in the heterotopia. As Foucault (1984) has suggested,
heterotopias challenge the hegemony of a single space as they can juxtapose several spaces
that are perhaps incompatible and contradictory in one single real space.

The third important element of heterotopias, as hinted above, is that they have a tendency
to be deviant, and ‘[their] inspiration tends to spring from the performativity of individual[s]’
(Blackshaw, 2017: 142). It can be added that they are spaces of intense consumption that are
so excitingly powerful and compelling, usually because of their perceived marginality,
individuals also end up being consumed by them. The fourth point is that heterotopias are
always experienced as being episodic. In other words, they do not belong to the ‘time of
necessity’; rather, they belong to the ‘time of possibilities’ (Bauman, 2007a: 33). Echoing
these ideas as he discusses Marcel Proust’s notion of de-emphasised chronology, Siegfried
Kracauer sums up the episodic nature of heterotopias well:

... history is no process at all but a hodgepodge of kaleidoscopic changes – something
like clouds that gather and disperse at random... There is no flow of time. What does
exist is a discontinuous, non-causal succession of situations, or worlds, or periods,
which, in Proust’s own case, must be thought of as projections or counterparts of the
selves into which his being successfully transforms itself... [E]ach situation is an entity
in its own right that cannot be derived from preceding ones (1994: 160-161).
A fifth point, as Blackshaw (2010a) has argued, is that heterotopias can be viewed as spaces that exclude certain ‘Others’ by restricting who can enter and who cannot. This is to isolate heterotopic social spaces from the everyday world and protect them against external influences that do not belong there. What this means is that certain individuals must have certain ‘credentials’ and be authorised to join such spaces. However, it is not enough to possess the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding; urban explorers must also believe in the heterotopia sincerely and authentically to be a genuine part of it (Blackshaw, 2017).

Nonetheless, and notwithstanding the important points above, it was understood that defining the heterotopia thoroughly also required something else. In view of this, and the fact that urban exploration is unequivocally a form of leisure, I decided to explore the idea that urban exploration is a form of ‘devotional leisure’. Following Blackshaw (2017), then, this thesis suggests that the worlds urban explorers create for themselves are still of this world, but they are situated in khôra, which, according to Jacques Derrida (1995), can be loosely translated as meaning ‘anything goes’ and a ‘home’ for all things that is ‘hardly real’ ‘but is always on the move’ (2017: 140). What this means is that urban exploration should be viewed as being heterotopic in the way it is emancipatory and a demonstration of freedom. To put it another way, it is a temporary stopping place for individuals to perform and parade certain identities that do not have a place in the real, everyday world. The heterotopia, therefore, is all about theatricality, performativity and finding alternative – even if they are only transient – ontological understandings of the world.

However, there is something more to heterotopic social space in the sense that it is at the same time a kind of home that has to be carefully crafted (Blackshaw, 2017). To elucidate, what this means is that the other side of urban exploration is about being part of something that feels warm, as though we belong somewhere and have a purpose. Therefore, it is also a collective, made up of like-minded people who have a similar vested interest in the heterotopia, that results in the formation of a space that must be shared and invented together to safeguard its authenticity and community-like qualities. Of course, what is being referred to here is not a ‘community’ in the traditional sense; it is a feeling of belonging made temporarily real by the craftsmanship contributions that have gone into creating it. In other words, in any heterotopia there is only a precarious kind of order that defies instrumental rationality and reasoning.
What all of this tells us is that heterotopic social spaces are not, as Victor Turner (1973) would argue, liminal spaces located somewhere outside or on the peripheries of the real. Instead, they are all about the art of living, and people making their own identities and homes in the world (ibid). Hence, in view of the points raised so far heterotopic social spaces can be defined simply as a temporary homes for individuals who have a greater interest in the way and flair in which they live their lives. Essentially, they are ‘a gathering of drifting performers united in a common spirit’, and all about what it feels like to be truly alive (Blackshaw, 2017: 146), nothing more. What this means, in other words, is that the heterotopia represents a different type of cognitive, aesthetic and moral space where alternative life strategies (ways of living) are employed (Bauman, 1993; 1996a), to make it inimitable and dissimilar from other established traditions. It is with this crucial observation in mind that this definition offers a starting point for understanding urban exploration and its ‘communities’. The thesis that follows, though, seeks to unpack it in far greater detail. Yet, notwithstanding this discussion, before this thesis can be developed, and the reader start to gain a taste of heterotopic social space, it is important that the concept’s limitations are addressed.

Addressing the Issues and Problems with the Concept of Heterotopia

The first issue with heterotopia, which is highlighted in most articles and books that deal with the concept, relates to the ambivalent use of the term in Foucault’s two key literary references to it (see Order of Things and Of Other Spaces). As Dehaene and De Cauter (2008) argue, when we review all of Foucault’s work the concept itself appears to lack definition and, at the same time, is not adequately contextualised. This has resulted in myriad attempts being made to clarify and improve the concept over the years, as it has been applied to numerous contexts and disciplinary fields – especially ones centred around abnormal forms of leisure that Foucault himself could not possibly have foreseen. Yet, when it comes to its application for understanding urban exploration it is, for the most part, conspicuously missing. This, of course, is most likely because the body of urban exploration literature that does exist is still relatively insubstantial. What this means, then, is that this a vital area that needs to be investigated, especially since urban exploration has been

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1 It is important to note, though, that this is the point of heterotopia – heterotopic spaces are situated outside the realm of rational discourse.
identified as being a deviant type of activity that has everything to do with spaces of otherness (Garrett, 2013a).

A further alleged problem with Foucault’s concept is highlighted in an article by Genocchio (1995), where he argues that identifying certain spaces as heterotopias is a self-refuting task because the concept depends on the closely guarded preservation of its incommensurable and undefinable character. For Genocchio, this is where the concept gains its power, but to locate and draw attention to it is to make it a space like any other. He goes on to make the point that any space that is specifically located and defined can be viewed as being Other to another space which seemingly seems to render the concept, to some extent, meaningless. In the end, what we are left with is the question, ‘what cannot be designated a heterotopia[?]’ (ibid: 39).

However, in response to Genocchio’s critique, this thesis argues that the only way of truly knowing and understanding a heterotopia is to be part of that world. This does not support the notion that this thesis and others like it are useless, it is merely being pointed out that no matter how much effort goes into inserting the reader into a particular world, they are still only gaining an insight that is partial. After all, social spaces are never stable phenomena, which means that even if they are investigated what defines them is liable to change over time, especially since we reside in what Bauman (2000) describes as a fluid and changeable world. In other words, no heterotopia can be completely and accurately defined, only the concept itself can be bestowed with a well-founded definition. What is more, Genocchio misses the point that heterotopic spaces are, more often than not, constructed around performativity and the allure of wanting to be noticed (Lyotard, 1984; Butler, 1990; Bauman, in Bauman and Lyon, 2013; Blackshaw, 2017). These are themes that will be explored in greater depth later, but for now it is important to note that trying to be distinctive and located does not automatically make heterotopic space like any other. In other words, incommensurability is not about remaining secret and hidden from the public gaze, in present modernity it can also be about showing the world precisely how we are incommensurable and inimitable (Blackshaw and Crabbe, 2004). Whether this means anything can become heterotopic does not matter, heterotopia is heterotopia all the same.

Another problem concerning the application of Foucault’s concept of heterotopia stems from the way it has been misrepresented. For instance, if the reader’s attention is directed toward
Kindynis and Garrett’s (2015) work for a moment, which focuses on urban exploration, what is manifest is that they explore heterotopia as if it were located directly in a tangible and geographical place. To be precise, in their example they use the abandoned Maze Prison in Northern Ireland to argue that it is an ‘archetypal’ heterotopic space. Nevertheless, as Foucault (1984) himself contended when he moved the concept away from the heterotopic character of language, heterotopia is about certain social spaces whose shared meaning unsettles the rationality and conventionality of sites and the everyday world. In other words, heterotopia is specifically a social phenomenon; therefore, heterotopic space is all about essential others and sets of relations, and, perhaps most importantly, their performativity that binds them together. Indeed, as Kevin Hetherington (1997) has suggested, there is far more to heterotopias than the ostensibly dark, underground places people tend to have a romantic fascination with. Although highly ambiguous, heterotopias only exist because of human beings, so they cannot help but be built around relationships and techniques of control (ibid).

One last issue with the concept of heterotopia, as highlighted by Palladino and Miller (2016), is that they are sometimes understood as being in opposition to, or beyond, the space of the everyday world. What this means is that there are some who have interpreted Foucault’s (1984) ‘ship of fools’ – that metaphor of a ship as illustrating the heterotopia – to be the vessel that takes people on a liminal journey into newfound waters, where the threshold between reason and madness (that other word for difference and strangeness) is transcended. The obvious problem with this idea, however, is that madness is invented within the parameters of the everyday world, so it cannot help but be a part of the very same world. In view of this, as Palladino and Miller suggest, heterotopias ‘remain intimately involved with the rest of the world, even as they suspend its regulations and affects’ and establish new ways of locating meaning and belonging (2016: 4).

An Outline of the Thesis

Following the preceding sections, the reader should have a better idea of what I mean when I say I aim to respond to the limits of existing studies of urban exploration, and frame this core concern with a rigorous application and consideration of Foucault’s (1984) concept of heterotopia. What is more, by attending to several issues with the concept, the reader should also have a clearer understanding of how heterotopic social space is perceived and
used in this thesis. What remains to be done now, however, is to provide an outline of the thesis by providing a brief overview of each of the chapters.

To begin the task of achieving the overarching aim of the thesis, the next chapter identifies and discusses the key literature which has attempted to understand urban exploration. As the reader will see, the body of research is still rather limited and, to date, has not been explored using a leisure studies framework. Hence, as the chapter seeks to show, it is suggested that the research that has been conducted tends to be dominated by a number of common themes and that much of it is rooted in psychogeographical thinking and Situationist theory. The central argument that is developed from this literature review chapter is that we need an improved and more suitable way of investigating urban exploration and its ‘communities’, one that takes into account the wider social, cultural and political context in which the activity takes place. Drawing on the arguments that are developed in the first part of the chapter, the latter section of Chapter Two begins the task of introducing the concept of heterotopia by critiquing how it has been used vis-à-vis urban exploration. In other words, this discussion is a preliminary insight into the world the reader is about to enter, for it offers a sense of direction as to how the problem of tackling the convoluted ontological world of urban exploration will be dealt with.

However, before a heterotopic social space could be unpacked, it is essential that the methodological dimensions of this study are laid out clearly, so the reader has a good understanding of how this research was conducted. This is the central task of Chapter Three. To begin with the methodological limits and weaknesses of the existing body of urban exploration literature are examined. This has been done to ensure they would not be repeated in this study. After that, the ontological and epistemological considerations of this thesis are provided, before the chapter moves on to discuss the research design, which is an ethnographic investigation that has made use of hermeneutic sociology and sociological hermeneutics (Bauman, 1992a; Blackshaw, 2005). In view of this, the ethnographic investigation was conducted by the researcher becoming a ‘complete participant’ (Bryman, 2016), meaning it essentially made the most out of my pre-existing ‘insider’ position. More on this will be discussed in Chapter Three, but for now it is important to add that being an insider allowed me to gather material through direct observations and participation, and by using some visual research methods. Finally, the chapter closes with the approach used for the data analysis, and some ethical issues that had to be considered.
The aim of Chapter Four is to begin attending to the first objective by providing a detailed interpretation of modernity. This is to set the scene for the rest of the thesis as this is the world urban explorers find themselves in. The discussion begins by looking at the idea of utopianism which was at the heart of the modern project. It then goes on to argue that anything seeking to be utopian cannot help but be an unachievable goal, especially now that we have entered an interregnum – that theory that designates a conjunctural change (Bordoni, 2016) – which signals that we are entering an ostensibly darker type of modernity that is unfamiliar, fragmented and uncertain. However, while utopia remains imaginary and altogether unachievable, it is suggested that there are those Other heterotopic spaces of compensation that offer something that ‘constitute liminal “counter-sites” of concrete utopia’ (Blackshaw, 2010b: 38). These are alternative versions of ‘community known as heterotopias of deviation (Foucault, 1984). As it is argued, such spaces offer something that is intense and spectacular, and they satisfy our longing for meaning and belonging. With this in mind, the chapter reinforces the idea that the darker side of modernity does not necessarily mean something is bad; rather, the darkness simply refers to something that is indistinct and imprecise.

To begin unpacking a heterotopia, and attend to the first and second objectives of this study, Chapter Five sets out to identify and explain how urban explorers control their heterotopic social space. To do this the chapter draws on Bauman’s ‘complex interaction of three interwoven, yet distinct processes – those of cognitive, moral and aesthetic spacings’ (1993: 145). However, it is subsequently argued that the heterotopia is a complex ephemeral space that is dependent on urban explorers adopting two distinct positions as they aim to control it. What this means is that one side of controlling social space involves pursuing intense moments of performativity and theatricality, while the other entails the desire to belong and create a particular kind of ‘urbex’ identity. In a nutshell, then, reflecting on the notions of proximity and distance that all three spaces deploy has enabled me to achieve the first and second objectives of this study by exploring the idea that urban explorers are true ‘artists of life’, or khôrasters-skholērs extraordinaire as it will be argued, as they carefully manipulate social space to find both a sense of personal fulfilment and a home through a form of devotional leisure (Blackshaw, 2017).

Building on the discussion developed around social spacing, Chapter Six achieves the third
objective of the study by going on to frame the strategies urban explorers adopt for living. As it is argued, these interpenetrating and intertwining ‘life strategies’, as they have been labelled by borrowing Bauman’s (1996a) apt terminology, embody and therefore build on what heterotopic social space is all about. In other words, as the discussion in this chapter unfolds the reader will begin to gain a more comprehensive understanding of what goes on in a compensatory world where rational life strategies do not work. What is more, the associated works of Deleuze and Guattari, Blackshaw, Lyotard, Foucault and Bauman provide a theoretical foundation for each of the life strategies that have been highlighted in this analysis. In sticking with the method of sociological hermeneutics, they have been used to ensure the discussion of heterotopic social space remains faithful to an accurate interpretation of contemporary society and present modernity. Finally, this chapter continues with the task of elucidating how urban explorers achieve a sense of performative meaning (as khôrasters) and feelings of belonging (as skholērs) in their heterotopic leisure world.

As for the final analysis chapter, Chapter Seven, the thesis considers one more aspect of the heterotopia that has remained conspicuously absent. The central theme in this chapter is centred around accomplishing the fourth objective which is all about addressing the dynamics of technology and the ‘virtual’, and it suggests that they create a further extension of the heterotopia. As it has been argued, as consumer capitalism has become so pervasive in the interregnum our heterotopias cannot help but be powerfully influenced by it (Bauman, 2007a). What this means, then, is that urban explorers appear to be ‘tethered’ to technology and virtuality (Turkle, 2011) as websites/blogs, digital photography and mobile technology have all become integral parts of urban exploration. Hence, the chapter begins by suggesting that the fate of heterotopic social space perhaps looks bleak as individuals seem to be more connected to an erroneous and ostensibly fictitious ‘virtual’ extension of the heterotopia that is at loggerheads with the ‘real’ one. Nonetheless, following the work and ideas of Jean Baudrillard, the chapter goes on to point out that in the interregnum any distinction between the ‘real’ and the ‘virtual’ should be abandoned and replaced with the idea of simulacrum and hyperreality. In other words, this signals that technology and the ‘virtual’ are simply part of our culture. Therefore, rather than destroying the heterotopia, this chapter argues that they provide an important extension that helps urban explorers invent and live out their performative selves and realities.
The final chapter draws the thesis to a close. It does this by focusing on what has been accomplished in the study and offering some conclusions. As the reader will also see, this chapter has been broken down into three sections to enhance its clarity. The first section discusses the methodological conclusions and highlights areas that could be targeted for future research. The second part explains how and in what ways the thesis has contributed to original knowledge and existing theory. And the last section provides an overview of heterotopic social space by arguing that the best way to unpack it and bring it to life is by situating it within a leisure studies framework, specifically Blackshaw’s (2017) devotional leisure thesis. It then closes with my own conceptualisation of heterotopia based on my own case study.
Chapter Two

Understanding Urban Exploration: A Critical Discussion of Existing Research

Introduction

The central aim of this chapter is to critically discuss the literature which attempts to understand urban exploration. In light of the contemporaneous social and cultural situation, the chapter argues that there is a need to revise current interpretations of urban exploration. The chapter then goes on to argue, expressly, how extant research is limited and how there is room for further critical investigation.

As Chris Rojek (1995) contends, in his book titled Decentring Leisure, to advance the study of forms of leisure such as urban exploration, interpretations of and about it must endeavour to remain open to different ways of viewing the world. In this sense, Rojek is warning us against research becoming dominated by any sort of governing epistemic. Drawing on this same understanding, the discussion developed below in this chapter critically reviews the key themes that have been discussed vis-à-vis urban exploration. It is the intention that the critique offered in this chapter will begin to set out my own thesis, so that the reader may anticipate the direction I have chosen to take – that interpretations of urban exploration, and indeed leisure more generally, should embrace its pluralism. As it will be proclaimed, in the twenty-first century a great diversity of individuals exist, each with their own way of understanding leisure, so it is important conceptual and empirical interpretations keep up. Failing to do this means that as scholars we will always be limited in our understanding of modernity and the forms of leisure that have been invented or developed. Before exploring the key themes, however, a brief glance at extant definitions of urban exploration, and its successive development, will follow.

Defining and Unpacking Urban Exploration

Urban exploration, ‘urbex’, ‘place hacking’ or ‘recreational trespass’, are recent terms that have entered popular discourse, and they are used to loosely describe the physical exploration of human-made structures, particularly those that are abandoned, ‘off limits’ or hidden from the public eye. It is Troy Paiva, though, who has perhaps drawn together an
uncomplicated definition that encapsulates this phenomenon in a way that has been recognised widely across much of the literature concerning urban exploration:

Urbex means different things to different people. For some, it’s about infiltrating a city’s storm drains and subway tunnels. For others, it’s climbing bridges and radio towers. Generally speaking, though, Urbex is the exploration of TOADS (Temporary, Obsolete, Abandoned and Derelict Spaces)... (Paiva, 2008: 9).

On the face of it, the above definition works well on the basis that it shows how urban exploration has gained something of a standing as an increasingly popular twenty-first century leisure pursuit. It is likely, however, that the idea originally gained traction with the release of Ninjalicious’ (2005) book, Access All Areas: A User’s Guide to the Art of Urban Exploration, and together with the rise of several blogs and websites (www.oblivionstate.com; www.28dayslater.co.uk; www.sleepycity.net; www.bradleygarrett.com) it has found suitable footing to continue growing as a form of leisure. Alongside these guides, stories and group forums, urban exploration has become more widely contextualised through a considerable number of autobiographical, photographic and monographic pieces of literature, which are often referred to as zines (see Gates, 2013 or Deyo and Leibowitz, 2003). In particular, the well-known autobiographical account of urban exploration by Bradley Garrett, titled Explore Everything: Place Hacking the City, has gained much attention and it perhaps offers the most comprehensive interpretation of this leisure activity written to date. Of course noticeable increases in media attention, which has sought to capture the interest of the general public using newspapers, magazines and television for instance, has also been especially significant since it has helped to shape many of the descriptions and characterisations that have emerged.

Notwithstanding the pronounced increase in attention, several efforts to bestow a compelling definition, and the wider public interest urban exploration has attracted, the pursuit and the discrete acts which arguably make up the practice are not all new endeavours, and they are by no means the first instances of people engaging with the urban environment in starkly different ways. For example, an older illustration of urban exploration sits with Philibert Aspairt who, in 1793, in the midst of the French Revolution, decided to enter an underground labyrinth following a rumour that monks once stored reputable wine inside its old passageways (Broadwell, 2007). By the same token, further examples could be drawn from the tales of Vladimir Gilyarovsky, an early twentieth-century journalist and urban
explorer who descended into the depths of the Neglinka² (Richter, 2016). There are also the famous Whipplesnaith’s tales of *The Night Climbers of Cambridge* which recount the daring urban adventures of a group of students in the 1930s, and The Dangerous Sports Club which was founded in the late 1970s and is celebrated for having created the bungee jump using the Clifton Suspension Bridge in Bristol (Laviolette, 2011).

In light of the above-mentioned examples, although ideas related to urban exploration may each be contested, and some even considered as being pseudo forms of exploration by certain individuals, exploring human-made environments is almost certainly something most of us have tried, perhaps inadvertently, in some shape or form. As Rudolph (1975) and Derr (2005) argue, many children, alongside using organic sites, have always turned to abandoned and human-made locations to play, as they often allow them to be creative, gain independence and play less restrictively as they transcend the borders of the traditional playing field. We are, all of us, as Heidegger (1962) proclaims, driven by a naïve curiosity rather than a ‘thirst’ or ‘hunger’, and it is this which constitutes our *being*: our knowledge and experience through feeling, pure perception and direct consciousness. Now of course, in the twenty-first century, it is simply the case that imagination and possibility in the urban environment has expanded radically, meaning there has been an upsurge in the ways people understand and interpret urban exploration. Indeed, the growing body of scholarly work which has sought to address the significance of urbanity and its emergent potential attests to this fact (Pinder, 2005; DeSilvey, 2006; Garrett, 2013a; Bennett, 2013a; Dobraszczyk, Galviz and Garrett, 2016).

Yet, it should not surprise us that people’s interest in urbanity continues to grow. Rather, we could surmise that it should be expected that urban exploration and other engagements in the urban environment have come to light and intensified, especially if we consider the Weberian idea that the city and urbanity would become all pervasive, eventually subsuming all that is natural (Weber, 1930). Today, despite the early concerns of Weber surrounding theescalation of a disenchanted world, as far as the urban environment is concerned and our attitudes towards it, opportunity and possibility has never been so great (Blackshaw, 2010b). It is for this reason that urban exploration, as a focus of study, calls for a re-examination because its rise as a form of leisure is symptomatic of the underlying forces that have been set in motion in our world, where each of us find ourselves in a phantasmagoric consumerist

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² An underground river that runs through manmade tunnels beneath the central part of Moscow.
ambit (Bauman, 2000).

Nevertheless, studies focusing on urban exploration have become largely insular, as several scholars focus only on how it is a means of escaping consumerism. Such activities, or so it is argued, combat the fear of a more monotonous and dreary quotidian existence (Garrett, 2013b; Mould, 2015). In a similar vein, others have also fallen into the trap that involves recycling *zombie* concepts (run-of-the-mill sociological concepts that have lost their explanatory and conceptual authority), to borrow Ulrich Beck’s (2002) felicitous term, despite the fact that they no longer have a compelling grasp of reality. In consequence, certain elements of the wider social, cultural and political landscape which we currently inhabit tend to be overlooked. What should be considered instead then is the wider ontological complexity of the world.

In order to overcome the above-mentioned limits of extant research that focuses on urban exploration, this chapter examines the four key areas that have been explored in the literature. It then endeavours to frame these areas, and indeed the place of urban exploration more generally, in society by unpacking what it means, socially, culturally and politically to seek leisure in the twenty-first century. To do this, the chapter makes use of the intuitive ideas of Zygmunt Bauman, particularly his notion of *liquid modernity*. The discussion, then, goes on to map out a more apposite definition of urban exploration, and a new alternative critical approach to understanding this form of leisure in contemporary society. In other words, what is being argued is that there is perhaps room for a more sociologically developed investigation of urban exploration that is recognised for its nuisance value, to move beyond one-dimensional interpretations of the phenomenon and the exhausted theories and methods that seem to overshadow existing research in this area. As a result, it will be possible to provide an understanding that is more aware of urban exploration’s social spaces and ‘communities’, as they fit in a complex ontological world, so we can avoid being limited by them. In a nutshell, then, this means that the intricate workings of social spaces, as they emerge in such an interesting and diverse world of urban exploration, can be explored with greater effect.

**The Aesthetics of Decay (Ruin Porn)**

The concept of *aesthetics of decay*, or ‘Ruin Porn’ as Joann Greco (2012) refers to it, is one of
the ways in which urban exploration has been explored to date, and, of those mentioned, it is perhaps the most prominent theme to emerge from literature discussing ruination, abandonment and dereliction. Indeed, as Garrett submits, ‘the initial catalyst for most urban explorers to go into interstitial urban spaces is to observe unimpeded material decay’ (2013b: 5).

In this vein, Tim Edensor begins by adopting the view that present modernity is one of sterility, ‘smooth surfaces and, above all, a dulling of stimuli through the obstruction of ‘chaotic elements’ (2007: 219). Industrial ruins, however, are said to offer some form of emancipation from this existence as they open out and reveal places that are relatively free of ‘intensive performative and aesthetic regulation’ (Edensor, 2005: 833; Greco, 2012). What these places offer is the chance to explore and experience something different. Accordingly, it is argued that such marginalised and hidden places are open to greater ‘sensual attractions’ and a fuller experience, with notions of memory and imagination being drawn upon to augment theories concerning aesthetics of decay (Edensor, 2005; Edensor, 2007; Greco, 2012; Fassi, 2010). In this regard, examining ‘Ruin Porn’, or aesthetics of decay, is a noteworthy pursuit, and this is revealed in the way it has gained a strong foothold in other interpretations of urban exploration which consider the relevance of nature and how it is a significant element in the materialisation of the aesthetic experience (Rowsdower, 2011; DeSilvey, 2006; Trigg, 2006). Yet, and notwithstanding the compelling nature of such arguments, it can be suggested that these conceptualisations are problematic and turn out to be especially narrow.

As regards aesthetics of decay, a significant problem exists in the sense that it is built on an essential dichotomy. For this body of theoretical understanding to work we have to assume that the world generally depicts an appearance of tidiness, indestructability and cleanliness, and this is not the case at all (Dobraszczyk, 2010). Although the utopia Edensor (2007; 2005) visualises, which is a prerequisite for this type of existence, has been supported across much discourse as being the watchword of modernity, it has arguably never existed, and nor is it ever likely to (Bauman, 1976). Rather, modernity is based on a transitory existence and everything within it is not built to last. Instead, ‘the good life’ carries a ‘use by’ date – its prearranged obsolescence – and even this is something that materiality is not guaranteed to reach (Bauman, 2000: 72). In other words, decay is not simply modernity’s other side, it is an inherent part of it. The upshot of this is that the dichotomous split is all but fictitious.
To elucidate further, as de Certeau (1984) argues, while the world may appear to be a projection of clean totalisation, the reality is that inside its grimy depths the urban canvas is inconceivably resistant to anything typifying solidity or stability. For Bauman (2000), this condition signifies the ultimate flaw with modernity and exposes the inevitability of our *liquid* condition which follows as a consequence of its incessant drive toward progress and solidity. To chase progress, and to create the order and sterility that Edensor ideates, the world and the people within it ought to be neatly categorised and labelled. Yet, the contradiction speaks for itself. As we have moved from *Deus absconditus* to *Societas abscondita* the goal Edensor identifies with is unfinishable and involves standing around long enough to witness similarity and clarity, which itself goes against the grain of modernity (Bauman and Tester, 2013). Certainly, if one is to gaze across the shifting cityscape of Sheffield in the UK for example, ever more so in its present state, it is an unclear and juxtaposed mix of constant rise and decline as much of the city lies abandoned, or engaged in the never-ending task of redevelopment (Taylor et al., 2003).

In a liquid modern world it becomes not so much about romanticising about the infrequent uncontrolled state of nature (including that which is human) because in the instability and fragility of the city, in its constant state of flux, it is everywhere (Bauman, 2000; Fassi, 2010). Certainly, there is truth in the submission that *aesthetics of decay* are capable of arresting the human imagination as we are able to bask in the superfluous meaning spawned by mystifying and barely comprehensible objects (Edensor, 2005; DeSilvey, 2006; Greco, 2012). After all, there must be something momentously intrinsic in the tangible surfaces of decay and its aesthetic exclamation that encourages DeSilvey (2006) to write so expressively. And there must also be something up close and personal in it which rouses the impulse within Miru Kim to expose her naked body to the defiled surroundings of sewers and ruined factories (Kim, 2014). However, such studies fail to consider the wider societal condition, and the realisation that nothing is fixed in the first place; except perhaps only, somewhat ironically, those infinitesimal remnants of industrial ruins which were once a part of an arguably modern and solid condition.

It is Bauman (in Bauman and Tester, 2013) who describes this as a situation inundated with ‘existential tremors’, where individuals are uncertain of who they are, or which body of people they belong to. Alongside the absence of a life plan, like the one that was provided by
solid modernity, meaning becomes ephemeral and although the search goes on, the possibility of ever being completely satisfied is thrown to the wind (Bauman, 2000). Instead, the impact transfers to us a sense of ambiguity, anxiety and fear as modernity’s bright horizon of hope fades, and all we are left with is a dark future that appears bleak, unstable and unclear – or so it would seem.

Accordingly, to delve into an approach to social enquiry that is more assiduous in its line of investigation, it is important to realise that opportunities for sensual and challenging bodily encounters as part of our leisure are not merely located in ‘industrial ruins’ or anomalous locations, they are all around us, if we open our eyes to them. Garrett comes closest to this realisation, through his treatment of the city as an environment to also be considered ‘in the here and now… not just [through] an aesthetics of decay’ (2013a: 6-10). Mott and Roberts also encapsulate this disorder well in their suggestion that ‘urbex is a slippery label encompassing a vast array of different activities and communities… for which there is no single understanding’ (2013a: 232). In other words, the crucial point is that while human negligence and incompleteness may be elements that are crucial to urban exploration, interpretations of the pursuit do not necessarily have to remain so loyal to traditional understandings of aestheticization of the ruin.

Psychogeography’s Existential ‘Escape-Attempts’

Another way urban exploration has been explored is through psychogeography. This is an approach described by Guy Debord (2000) as a mode of observation, or more comprehensively ‘the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals’ (Debord, 1981: 8). Essentially, psychogeography attempts to combine geography and psychoanalysis and, in most instances, it is walking that is used as the medium by which people’s ways of thinking about the urban environment can be transformed. Those using this approach assume that the identity of any urban landscape is not permanently fixed since it is viewed as a palimpsest which changes as people imagine and feel the city around them in different ways. As David Pinder (2005) argues, it is in the fabric of the city itself where cultural practitioners can assert new ways of exploring and experiencing the landscape and societal norms. According to psychogeographers, it is only by walking the city, ‘brick by brick, street by street’ (Blackshaw, 2013a: 87), that it becomes possible to create alternative
mental maps and impressions of the world. Only in this way can the everyday conception of the world be transcended (Debord, 2000).

In many ways, Bradley Garrett (2013a; 2013b) and Oli Mould’s (2015) arguments reverberate strongly with the ideas of Guy Debord’s situationist movement and his concept of psychogeography. Having said that, Mould denies that his book bears foundations in anything solid enough to call it a theoretical disposition. Rather, using a combined Deleuzian, de Certeauian and Debordian approach he professes to have produced something ‘without a theoretical mandate’ (2015: 7). On the face of it, however, this is a contestable claim since Mould is still convinced that people need to be creative in activities to ‘realise new functions of the city’ and escape the ‘passive consumption of the Creative City’ (2015: 185). In view of this, psychogeography and the work of situationists appears to be crucial to both authors interpretations of subversion because it looks towards developing theories and ways of being in the urban environment which envisage the city as being multi-layered. On the face of it, then, such practices merge closely with the idea of being a modern-day flâneur.

Drawing on the work of the geographer Nigel Thrift, Garrett argues that the average day-to-day city is a ‘security entertainment complex’ that manages to assert control over the masses through an astute mixture of surveillance and entertainment techniques (2013a: 14). By the same token, Mould has discussed the need to free ourselves ‘from the hegemony of the Creative City’ (2015: 111). What this means is that the reader must accept that the world, having fallen victim to capitalism and Debord’s theory of the spectacle, has succumbed to the all-pervasive commodification of society. However, as Garrett (2013a) and Mould (2015), view things, urban explorers creatively reverse such strategies by trespassing, and distributing photographs, blogs and videos of secret and locked away places back to the public. In other words, since the spectacle is, in Garrett and Mould’s scheme of things, the domination of social relationships mediated by images, rather than a collection of images as it is in a hyperreal world, society can be visualised as a palimpsest. Therefore, in marked contrast to Jean Baudrillard’s ostensibly nihilistic way of thinking, the surface of society can be peeled away to reveal new possibilities that are undistorted and unaffected by capitalism. Urban exploration is, to put it simply, an escape from the spectacle.

To deviate from the spectacle, Garrett and Mould, in an avant-gardist way, are essentially drawing on the idea that ‘situations’ can be experimented with by engaging with authentic
practices of détournement. Considered by some to be a form of ‘subversive plagiarism’ (Plant, 1992: 88), because it is believed to be a ‘hijacking of commodities’ (Stevens, 2007: 17), new and original meanings can be placed back into social situations. In effect, what both scholars are implying is that by being ‘deviant’ urban explorers can use situations to release or discover undistorted essences of commodities, to bring something that is more ‘authentic’ to life.

Nonetheless, it can be reasoned that the central problem with Garrett and Mould’s style of thinking, and indeed situationist thinking in general, is attributable to Debord, because he ‘misses the point that nothing is uncommodifiable’ against the existing form of capitalism which pervades society (Blackshaw, 2003: 117). According to Jean Baudrillard (2005), the world people now find themselves in is one where individuals barely have time to properly exist before reality starts to disappear and transform once again. This reality is, after all, one that exists without limits; it is one that involves ‘the murder of the real, [and] the loss of any imagination of the real’ (Baudrillard, 2005: 18). For Baudrillard (2005), then, and indeed at first Garrett (2013a) and Mould (2015) present an argument that seems to parallel this line of thinking, the world is rapidly moving into a stage beyond the world of illusion and simulacra: it is becoming an integral reality. In other words, anything real has been violently suffocated by its own gradual accumulation, insofar as there is no possible way for dreams to be expressions of desire because the simulated achievement of dreams already exists.

In marked contrast to the ideas of Garrett and Mould, Baudrillard (1983a) advocates that it is possible to view only a nihilistic and depthless hyperreality and a loss of distinction between the real and the signified. This does not mean people’s lives have become bogus, contrary to what critics of Baudrillard argue, it means only that any distinction between falsity and truth has disappeared inside the void of the hyperreal. As Baudrillard (1998) famously argues, in a discussion about ‘Pop’ as an art form, any picture or object that attempts to avoid being consecrated by the forces of consumerism is doomed to fail. The efforts of any author, artist or urban explorer are never enough; whatever the market wants, the market will take.

This point becomes all the more veracious if we look at Garrett’s (2013a) gradual shift into the mainstream media (see bradleygarrett.com), as the market has been greedy to swallow his subversive tales. Like the rest of us, Garrett has been consumed by consumerism, and this is revealed in his growing extensive coverage in the worldwide press and the propagation of
new books that capitalise on awe-inspiring images, the thrill of adventure and the ecstasy of deviance. Garrett’s (2013a) work also emphasises this condition in other ways. First of all, irrespective of his theoretical grounding in situationist thinking and Debord’s theory of the spectacle, much of the urban world that is being explored is viewed directly through the lens of his camera, not the human eye – a point he raises himself in a chapter discussing the use of visual methods for ethnographic research (Garrett, 2014). Second, with Garrett’s (2013a) pronounced shift from urban exploration to ‘infiltration’, or ‘place hacking’\(^3\), we begin to see the city metaphorically envisaged as something akin to the internal workings of a computer, or something to this effect, as he immerses himself within the many complex passages and the technology that surrounds us; all ‘hidden’ beneath the depths. It is in this sense that Garrett, embodied as a ‘hacker’ and a rising celebrity, has become just as much a part of the society he endeavours to transcend and understand in an alternative way, in his search to extract some sort of meaning and authenticit.

Of course, in response to Baudrillard’s schema Garrett (2013a) and Mould have attempted to uncover ‘creativity’, what we might otherwise call ‘deviance’, that searches for possibilities which encourage people, ‘however, briefly and fleetingly, to think a different city, one that encourages active participation and citizenship and resists passive consumption’ (2015: 128). Nevertheless, as Baudrillard (2005) would likely argue, this is perhaps merely a reflection of the dual drive. What this means is that integral reality breeds its own irresolvable resistance, a denial of anything definitive and complete in the form of something that is still an original illusion, what some might refer to as an imitated struggle, but this is still part and parcel of the all-encompassing integral reality (Bishop and Phillips, 2009). The practice of urban exploration, then, is very much a part of reality and the commodification that infests it, and is certainly not opposed to it; although, paradoxically, it is indubitably grounded in reality’s ‘lucid vision of an endless reversion’, in being ‘deviant’ (Baudrillard, 2005: 22).

As Baudrillard declares, no longer are there any original appearances in the world, or any compatibility with the real; hyperreality simply involves ‘deny[ing] things their truth and turn[ing] [them] into a game… thereby foil[ing] all systems of power and meaning’ (1990: 8). By this logic, it is about surviving among the remnants caused by the play of signs which never amount to real truth. It is about thriving on modernity’s necessary waste and enjoying

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\(^3\) What Garrett means is the shift from the exploration of abandoned sites and ruins (derps) to trespass on live or ‘epic’ sites (usually forbidden places such as disused London Underground stations).
the tendency to neglect; to store up the many spoils of this condition. Viewed in this way, Garrett (2013a) and his band of ‘place hackers’ are, apparently nihilistically, intricately connected to the depthlessness of society, but this is the beauty of urban exploration, it is a leisure choice born out of the infectious nature of capitalism insofar that it thrives in its ambiguity, incompleteness and changeability.

‘Bunkerologists’ and ‘Tightly Fractured’ Communities

A third core issue to be discussed – another that has been used to explore urban exploration – resonates with an orthodox understanding of community; a conception that has proven to be popular among many scholars (Blackshaw, 2010a). In other words, the literature identifies that urban exploration is not simply about engaging with just anyone, in actual fact what is important is precisely who we do it with.

First of all Luke Bennett (2013a; 2013b), whose thinking is in some ways reminiscent of Stebbins’ (2007) idea of serious leisure, likens a community of explorers who specifically seek out abandoned military bunkers to being ‘bunkerologists’ (a term coined to categorise a group of like-minded hobbyists). In linking ‘bunkerologists’ directly to our present societal condition, as a social construct, Bennett effectively – although he does not say it – employs the work of Pierre Bourdieu to argue that those gathered into his study are comprised of sets of dispositions and various forms of capital, inferring that social structures are entirely merged into social actors. Like Bourdieu, Bennett (2013a; 2013b), in essence, draws on the concept of the habitus⁴ to argue that people are structured by an embodied ‘bunkerologist’ schema which regulates peoples’ ‘practices, attitudes and dispositions’, inasmuch as it becomes their way of ‘knowing the world’ (Blackshaw, 2010b: 75) and feeling urban exploration. Garrett and Hakwins (2013) make a similar proclamation through their brief discussion of ‘identity trappings’, invoking a certain sense of concreteness in relation to everyday life, but they move on to discuss how these subsequently ‘fall away’ when the urban explorer temporarily investigates the thresholds, boundaries and edges of the urban environment.

Contra Bennett then, who, in line with Pierre Bourdieu (1984), has indirectly implied that our

⁴ What we might also refer to as the culture of a group, which is itself based on codes of intelligibility that are frequently taken to be more solid than they really are.
**habitus** is something we strive to create, in liquid modernity very few things last long enough to achieve this degree of longevity. When it comes to our ‘urbex communities’, and even the parts of the urban environment we choose to explore, their transient lives might be the only form of certainty we can hold onto tightly in an uncertain world. Although things may exist today, we cannot be certain they will tomorrow. Certainly Bennett is not completely unmindful of the fact, as Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) suggest, that the habitus does not constitute something that is pre-established and completely inflexible; a culture that remains stagnant and immobile for the entire duration of people’s lives. As Bennett points out:

> Bunkerology is a label invented by me for analytic convenience – it is not a term used by urban explorers. Indeed, the subgenre demarcations within urban exploration are weak, with many practitioners operating across a wide spectrum of place types to which they direct their attention (2011: 421).

However, notwithstanding Bennett’s important observation, it is manifest that he still views ‘urbex communities’ as being self-perpetuating and learnt through socialisation, and as having some degree of ontological stability, meaning he still ignores the actuality that urban explorer’s lives are wholly contingent, contradictory and performative. In other words, Bennett makes the mistake of attempting to uncover true behaviours and cultural dispositions that are relatively fixed, and interprets these as something that are performed in the construction of the self. In reality, as Bauman suggests, liquid modern individuals are more likely to dress according to the frenetic attire of **habitat**, which denotes ‘a space of chaos and chronic indeterminacy’ (1992a: 193), and the fact, as Judith Butler (1990) argues, that nothing exists beneath our bodily surfaces. What this means is that urban explorers temporarily acquire the impression of warmth and the security of a home, and for the most part they can convince themselves that what they have is, categorically, ‘community-like’, but it is always short-lived and never quite like the real thing.

A second important observation surrounding the idea of community arises from Garrett’s work, which has pointed towards the idea that ‘this [urban exploration] is a community first and foremost, built around embodied encounters with places and people’ (2013b: 3). Once again this links urban exploration to that of a concrete community – a community centred around appropriating and utilising the materiality of the city around them, and consuming it with leisurely intent. This suggests that Garrett too has fallen victim to the underlying assumption at play here, in the sense that ‘community’ has gained a firm place within our doxa despite having become something of an ambiguous expression apropos to our liquid
world. However, there is evidence in Garrett’s work that he notices something is not quite right with his initial assessment of ‘community’, when he refers to urban exploration, oxymoronically, as representing a ‘tightly fractured community’ (2013b: 2). In other words, Garrett is onto something, but he lacks the conceptual framework to deliver a compelling argument.

For Garrett, we can surmise that the term community is adopted and used across his writing in an appropriating sense since he wants to believe in the idea that there is a community, and some feeling of security in the belief that something tangible exists (Blackshaw, 2010a; Bauman, 2000). This point is articulated recurrently throughout his writing, but is evidenced more unambiguously when he makes the point that, ‘despite practitioners who assert that they have nothing to do with other crews, there clearly is an urban exploration community’ (Garrett, 2013a: 20). Notions of intense unity and comradeship are explored in depth in certain sections too, particularly while exploring the London Underground:

He looked me straight in the eye and said, ‘Brad, there’s only one station left on the list. I’m going, whether or not it means arrest. Someone has to do it.’ I said nothing and shook his hand, shocked into silence by the audacity of the moment. He told me later that I didn’t just shake his hand, I ‘shook the hand of someone who represented all London Tube explorers’ (2013a: 216).

What Garrett conveys, however, having deployed the term ‘fractured’, is nothing short of a contradiction because although he views the term ‘community’ as having attributed to it meanings that deal with social relations and their connections, he inadvertently rips from it the very fabric that holds a community together. Indeed, as noted above, contrary to many of the arguments made in his book this is an issue Garrett picks up on periodically by pointing out that ‘explorers are... on some level, quite tribal in their affiliations’ (2013a: 20), but it is a concern that remains unresolved as beyond these fleeting statements he fails to credit it with much attention. In this vein, as Garrett’s abrupt and confusing shift indicates, a problem transpires as regards the use of the term ‘community’, in the sense that this postulated concept is arguably an anachronism belonging to the earlier world of solid modernity (Bauman, 2000). Unlike modernity and premodern society, in a liquid society there is a certain impossibility attached to the term community since no ideal archetype can be achieved owing to their rootless weak ontologies (White, 2005). What this means is that while ‘community’ becomes more of an individual obsession – seeking an authentic existence which offers the sweet taste of freedom – people realise what importance is located in being
able to transcend one social arena, to appear as their other selves in the next.

As Scott Lash (2002) has written, across contemporary society our social structures are becoming increasingly fragmented owing to the variable nature of ‘information flows’ and the ‘identity spaces’ they enfold. In view of this, Lash draws a distinction between live and dead zones, where flows will be, temporarily at any rate, either at their most dense or their lightest. What this means is that when cities experience global flows of social, cultural and economic successes or failures, things happen and the diverse flow of cultural products, jobs and wealth – all sources of identity – appear to transfer well in various tame and wild zones. Nonetheless, there can also be what Lash describes as ‘dead’ zones. These perhaps bear more relation to urban exploration for these are the perishing or other ‘seriously wild’ (2002: 29) places which seemingly lack social, cultural and economic successes; they are places of disorganisation, deviance and the unmanageable.

As follows, then, when we look at the extant societal condition more completely it is all of a sudden possible to acknowledge how the ‘tightly fractured community’ of the urban explorer is more accurately a reflection of the constant renewal of the myriad range of entertainment and, of course, the ensuing waning of social structures as global flows move freely in modernity. By this understanding, urban exploration principally allows people to engage in the seriously wild limits of self-indulgence and fulfilment, insofar as the quotidian ‘live zones’, together with their tame and wild zones, are pushed aside almost entirely, allowing people to engage in leisure which is unequivocally performative, divided and far more extreme.

As Bauman (2000) suggests, life is episodic and becomes more about adhering to ‘networks’ of people for this is the condition of freedom, and consequently our liquid world. To be free means disassociating ourselves from the firm social ties of community and any concrete understanding of the quotidian. It would appear that capitalism has effectively dissolved the traditional idea of community since communities now begin and end with individuals. In other words, friends become, somewhat unethically, more about being for you rather than you being for them (Bauman, 1993). Contemporaneous communities reflect a consumer world in which we live to consume. In this world our ontological status has shifted, from one of durability and uniformity as supported by Bourdieu’s habitus, to an unceremonious and

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informal world of the *habitat*, a world that is essentially indeterminate and chaotic (Blackshaw, 2005). In such a world, as Butler (1990) argues, the performative body is discursively determined and so any notion of a ‘subject’ disappears. Instead, reality becomes one of ‘imaginary communities’ and is produced entirely ‘through the repetition of its own ready-made discourse’ (Blackshaw and Crabbe, 2004: 150). As Bauman argues, it is now the case that ‘cultural capital’ is no more than a ‘cultural liability’ (1996b: 25).

**Rebels without a Cause or Disguised Consumers?**

Finally, by returning to a term that was identified earlier, this discussion brings us to the fourth way urban exploration has been examined – one that views the pursuit as a form of ‘place hacking’ (Garrett, 2013a; 2013b). The idea of being a ‘hacker’, having evolved from those of the virtual variety, evidently seeks to draw out the political significance of urban exploration with people looking to transgress hegemonic regulatory norms (Mott and Roberts, 2013a). Espousing what could translate as a Foucauldian approach, several explorers have expressed that this is the essential reason for engaging with urban exploration – their *modus operandi* – to transcend local borders, rules and regulatory systems, reject the surveillant gaze of others and steer clear from becoming docile individuals or good consumers as part of the spectacle (Garrett, 2013a; Kindynis, 2016). In other words, urban exploration is often identified as being a *deviant* form of leisure (although it is not called this), where urban explorers are not unlike ‘rebels’ and ‘revolutionary heroes’ as they attempt to reclaim public space. As Mould argues (2015), such forms of ‘urban subversion’ (114) essentially undermine the ‘capitalistic functionality’ (128) of the urban environment.

As Garrett (2013a; 2013b) and Mould’s (2015) research shows, it has been argued that urban explorers are at leisure to redemocratise and decommodify urban social space. What this suggests is that Garrett and Mould are of the opinion that public forms of leisure, as opposed to commercialised forms, are morally superior. Therefore, according to this way of thinking, urban exploration as a form of leisure appears to sit alongside numerous other ‘deviant subcultures’, especially those that seem to be set on opposing ideological hegemony (Coates et al., 2010; Dylan, 2003; Beal, 1995). Over the years, however, a number of scholars and people who are involved with what they perceive to be alternative, resistant or rebellious ‘subcultural’ pursuits have begun to exhibit some concern that a wider, more eclectic,
commercial annexation of leisure is occurring (Coalter, 2000; Dylan, 2003; Coates et al., 2010; Kindynis, 2016).

As Coates et al. (2010), whose study focuses on exchanges of power and control in snowboarding, argue, the idea that rationalising transformations are altering ‘subcultures’, and indeed sports and leisure choices themselves, is becoming ever more ubiquitous and a concern for some who enjoy these activities. Nonetheless, for Garrett (2013a; 2013b) and Mould (2015), the upshot of this pervasive commercial takeover is that because people feel a growing sense of depthlessness and tension when it comes to their liberty, forms of opposition, in the form of urban trespass for example, are more likely to emerge. In other words, certain individuals are more compelled to act, and through urban exploration they have the facility to directly oppose the controlling capitalist drive for consumerism and the surveillance and streamlining it entails. In this vein, it would appear that for those who are attracted to urban environments the disillusionment caused by ‘monotonous, normative and surveyed urban spaces colonised by capitalist forces that encase and secure the city as a spectacle’ reinforces a fervent need for a decidedly political agenda (Mould, 2015; Garrett, 2013a: 4; Edensor, 2005). After all, as Coalter (2000) suggests, it is generally assumed that transcendence of this situation inevitably supports the facilitation of leisure that is more meaningful.

Nevertheless, despite the persuasive nature of arguments that call for the redemocratisation and decommodification of social space and leisure by alternative, ostensibly ‘deviant’, means, when it comes to urban exploration’s political and resistant orientation not all agree. As Bennett (2013a) argues, exploratory practices should be envisaged as being more like ‘hobbies’, without radical or political agendas. In a similar vein, Edensor et al. (2012) are equally dismissive of the idea that regulatory systems are being subverted, and they argue that ‘playful activities’ which occur in the urban environment, predominantly in industrial ruins, are attributable to a lack of surveillance and order.

Furthermore, to return to Coates et al. (2010), a prominent theme to be expounded concentrates on the idea that it is misleading to suggest snowboarders exist as antagonist individuals who can extricate or emancipate themselves from capitalist forces. Contra Garrett and Mould, it is argued that while subcultures are often individualistic and want to challenge dominant cultural values, the individuals involved are also part of the very societal
condition that has altered the perceptions and overall image of snowboarding (Coates et al., 2010). In other words, although they endeavour to renegotiate capitalist elements of their sport, they have become part of it as reflexive consumers (Bauman, 2007a; Coates et al., 2010). Therefore, while many may appear to be genuinely disgruntled at their situation, and the changes that consumerism has generated, and indeed overtly resistant, in reality they remain, beneath their performative identity, politically indifferent. In other words, as Alan Tomlinson (2001) astutely points out, leisure is embedded, often apparently clandestinely, in consumerism since it has become the main source of identity; without it people, like urban explorers, would not be able to assert or articulate themselves in the ways they do.

Vis-à-vis urban exploration, Theo Kindynis (2016) has explored the idea of consumerism in much greater depth than others have. In his article, *Urban Exploration: From Subterranea to Spectacle*, he stresses the important point that urban explorers are now almost completely cultivated by consumer culture:

One need look no further than the popular rooftopping Instagram hashtag #createyourhype—where the slang ‘hype’ denotes the marketing strategies typically employed by streetwear fashion companies to generate a buzz around their products—to see the extent to which emergent variants of UE [urban exploration] have unhesitatingly aligned themselves with a hegemonic culture of spectacular consumption (2016: 11).

Kindynis even goes so far as to question whether or not urban exploration has ever been free of capitalism and commodification. The upshot of this, of course, is that urban exploration has never been driven by a ‘subversive potential’; rather, it has been guided from the offset by the culture of consumption (Kindynis, 2016: 12).

Therefore, it can be argued that Garrett and Mould’s expositions reverberate throughout with similar findings to those drawn from subcultural studies conducted in the 1970s through to the 1990s (Hazlehurst and Hazlehurst, 1998; Hall and Jefferson, 1993; Hebdige, 1979). Following a Gramscian perspective, or something to that effect, both, in a relatively self-contained way, attempt to challenge the hegemonic order from below to encourage a ‘crisis of authority’ (Bennett et al., 1981: 199). This, however, fails to take into account wider patterns of behaviour amongst certain ‘subcultural’ groups, or those outside for that matter, as they move between social settings for instance. Moreover, as Mott and Roberts (2013a) have indicated, this way of thinking, which is very much akin to a class-based form of
symbolic resistance, forces Garrett (2013a) to focus almost entirely on the male culture of
the urban explorer, as he avoids – even plainly rejects – other interpretations, despite their
‘more multifarious range of meanings and significance’ (Bennett, 2013a: 574).

In line with the discussion above, it can be argued that Garrett and Mould attempt, and fail,
to hold onto outdated elements of some ill-defined, rebellious, subculture. It is, however, a
subculture that never really existed; it is an evanescent and imaginary construct of self-
expression and diversity. In other words, both writers are not focused on a politics of protest
that is more concentrated and forceful, or a stance which shoulders a ‘libertarian struggle…
[and a] convergence with working-class politics’ (Clarke et al., 2006: 54). If anything, their
‘counter-culture’ is analogous to former subcultures only in the respect that it represents a
‘utopian solution’. At one time such solutions existed around the outer reaches of
subcultural milieu, yet, as Clarke et al. describe them, they were ‘uncareers’ (2006: 54). In
this vein, it should be acknowledged, as Irwin Silber, once argued about the working class,
that Garrett and Mould’s ‘cultural revolution is no revolution at all’ (1970: 26). What this
indicates is that they fall into the trap which is rife in ethnography: they ignore wider
political, socio-cultural and economic issues and focus solely on the lived experience, as it
appears at face value.

In opposing the rebellious project, and following the evocations of Clarke, Hall and Jefferson,
it can be argued that Garrett and Mould have succumbed to the ‘logic of marketisation’
(2006: xxx) and fragmentation, and the possessiveness, self-interestedness, homogeneously
heterogeneous styled world of globalised leisure and the celebrity. In this vein, their work is
more useful in the respect that it might be seen to ‘inhabit, embody and express many of the
contradictions of the system itself’ (Clarke et al., 2006: 55; Kindynis, 2016). From a critical
perspective, then, it can be argued that from where Garrett and Mould position themselves
only one side of the coin is being measured, because they still view power and control as
being panoptic. As a result, this serves to render their interpretation of ‘deviance’ as being
nothing more than a desperate bid to resist control on account of the claustrophobia and
repression it incites. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding the fact that the UK is reported to
have an estimated 5.9 million CCTV cameras (Kroener, 2016), this is an over-simplified view
which assumes that spectacular demonstrations of force and power, using overt strategies
comprising CCTV cameras, sensors and police, are employed against the general public on a
daily basis (Foucault, 1991). In view of this, it is worth bringing Didier Bigo’s concept of the
Put simply, Bigo (2008) uses the ban-opticon to designate how certain profiling technologies regulate which type of people should be placed under surveillance. The ban-opticon’s dispositif – its discourses, rules, certain forms of architecture and specific practices – produce categories of people and indicate who are acceptable and welcome, and those who are not, across transnational borders (Bigo, 2008). In other words, ban-optical strategies highlight who state enemies are, to keep them at bay – those people who are somewhere outside the majority and cause feelings of insecurity (Bauman, in Bauman and Lyon, 2013).

In a nutshell, ban-optical devices and gadgets, such as CCTV cameras, do not exist to watch urban explorers and their seemingly wayward or obstreperous activities. For the most part, forms of DIY surveillance do this well enough (Bauman, in Bauman and Lyon, 2013). Moreover, urban explorers are neither confined nor excluded from society, unlike refugees, asylum-seekers and the homeless. They do not fit into such categories because the people who participate in urban exploration are not among society’s ‘flawed consumers’ (Bauman, 1998). This is not to overlook the point, as Garrett (2013a) himself has experienced, that urban explorers do occasionally feel the firm hand of the law, and various punishments are, from time to time, passed out, usually to set a precedent. But their rights are never suspended; they do not face exclusion from their own society; their lives are very rarely destroyed, and forms of surveillance will continue to ignore them once they have made suitable amends (Bauman, in Bauman and Lyon, 2013). If anything, urban exploration is perfectly suited to present modernity and fits perfectly because its participants show signs of willingness to fall into line, just as capitalism demands. In other words, the whole pursuit fits well with a society built around uniqueness and the spectacular: all things suitable for commodity production and the wider spectacle (Debord, 2000).

In light of the above discussion, and returning back to the idea of DIY surveillance strategies, it can be argued that urban explorers in actual fact submit themselves to a makeshift DIY Synopticon where the condition of being observed and realised has turned into something of a temptation, as opportunities to parade one’s performative deviant self supersede our desire for anonymity, reserve and escaping ‘the system’ (Blackshaw and Crabbe, 2004). Redmon’s (2003) study addressing playful deviance in the Mardi Gras captures the nature of this condition in detail, and explicitly informs how people develop a burning sensation to
want to release their ‘secret’ selves in full view of a very public gaze. This general condition, however, is something that is overlooked by Mott and Roberts (2013a), whose work, despite proposing to bring to light the pervasive masculinity embedded in urban exploration, fails to consider the ubiquity of performativity and the magnetism of the ‘Synopticon’ (Bauman and Lyon, 2013).

Garrett’s (2013a) exposition on the other hand indirectly exemplifies the synoptic-life better than most since he acknowledges that ‘his crew’s’6 ways of eliciting photographs and video were conspicuously transformed. Crucially, as Garrett’s ‘crew’ experimented with different means of capturing an image, the ways of posing within them became intensely exaggerated, especially in what he terms the ‘hero’ or ‘action’ shot. Garrett likens such photographs to ‘highly stylised’ shots, which are ‘uncomfortably similar to traditional photos of colonial explorers, evoking images of white men sticking flags in soil’ (2013a: 181). Indeed, in later chapters of his book, whilst discussing his experience on television, Garrett, somewhat ostentatiously, returns to this colonialist performative self, detailing how he inferred that he is the new type of investigative conqueror by proposing that ‘wherever doors are closed, we will find a way through it. Wherever history is buried, we will uncover it. Wherever architecture is exclusionary, we will liberate it’ (2013a: 223). Garrett clearly exhibits, without inhibition, that he is, in his performative world and sense of things, an emancipator for the people waging war against the Capitalist machine. In a liquid modern world, then, for the vast majority of us anyway, it might be argued that much of our focus is orientated towards wanting to be seen (Blackshaw and Crabbe, 2004). What is even more important, though, is the fact that in the present condition of modernity we can adopt virtually any identity and become whoever or whatever we want to be (ibid).

An important component in the whole creation of the urban explorer’s performative world, however, also involves the process of adiaphorization (Bauman and Lyon, 2013). This is to suggest that urban exploration becomes less about being morally in favour of seeking public accessibility to professed ‘public places’, or seeking freedom from surveillance and hegemony, and is instead about transcending and disconnecting oneself from such moral compulsions (Kindynis, 2016). In other words, adiaphora points towards attitudes of indifference to ‘others’ in the world, because we know that it is only ever ‘superstars’ and

6 Throughout his work Bradley Garrett often refers to ‘his’ group as a ‘crew’ when describing or discussing their collective participation in urban exploration.
‘celebrities’ who can expect to be noticed in liquid modernity. This, though, is not to suggest that humans are intrinsically immoral; rather, it is used here to suggest that being moral does in fact constitute part of being human; something, as Bauman suggests, that sets us apart from other things in the world (Bauman and Tester, 2013).

As Bauman advocates, unlike ethics, which are unequivocally a social construct, being moral is a struggle we face every day, and because it is something that is often onerous, even painful, ethics in the form of society and various cultures emerge as projects that accommodate and structure ‘a likelihood of order’ (2013: 45), to relieve us of vacillation and the consequences of being moral beings (Bauman and Tester, 2013). The pliable, and evidently changeable, ethics of our liquid modern world, then, like an effective ‘tranquillizer’, bear most of our burden and neutralise our moral quandaries, and to this effect sanction alternative possibilities, and even ways of orchestrating these to achieve feelings of self-satisfaction (Bauman and Tester, 2013). Under these circumstances a human being is subsequently able to establish oneself as morally indifferent – for most of the time at least – often collectively among compatible others; although they are not necessarily permanent companions, (Bauman and Lyon, 2013; Blackshaw, 2016), and we find ourselves less inhibited when it comes to consumption, because liquid modern ethics endorse it.

Accordingly, what this discussion alludes to is that research can move beyond Garrett (2013a) and Mould’s (2015) work which favours the endorsement of political statements that emphasise the ‘redemocratisation’ of space, and therefore leisure as well, and which principally explores the idea of a subterranean ‘community’ that is against panoptic forms of control and surveillance. What they ignore in making this one-sided argument is that their examination of urban exploration is once again unrepresentative of the wider societal condition, as it is arguable that regulatory panoptic-like – what we might otherwise refer to as ban-optical – practices are being shifted to the ‘unmanageable’ parts of society, to sites where people are ‘declared useless’ and so are ‘fully and truly excluded’ (Bauman and Lyon, 2013: 56). To this effect, it is important to make explicit that while Foucault (1977) endeavoured to show us that power never leaves a social void, he also argued, especially in his later work, that it always saturates social space in some form or another, and that:

society has changed and individuals have changed too; they are more diverse, different, and independent... it is clear that in the future we must separate ourselves from the society of discipline of today (cited in Hardt, 1998: 41).
Society’s ‘great project of modern discipline’, understood in its traditional context – when any aspirations of the masses to formulate individual identities were ‘criminalised’ or ‘medicalised’ by those in control – has, to an extent, become part and parcel of a bygone era (Bauman, 1996b). In other words, what Garrett (2013a) and Mould (2015) ignore is that privacy and the evasion of control are not always central interests since, in truth, people desire, and even hunger for, the private to be consumed by the public.

**Unpacking the Performativity of Urban Exploration**

As this chapter has demonstrated, extant studies about urban exploration are limited in their theoretical understanding. This is not surprising, of course, given that urban exploration is still a relatively under-researched form of leisure. We can postulate, then, that of the research that has emerged, most of it operates within the limits of similar tacit assumptions about society and culture, insofar as they fail to make sense of what lurks in the shadows of a constantly advancing liquid world. As Bauman (2014) would argue, existing studies focusing on urban exploration do not deal with sociological hermeneutics by attending to the surface phenomena that exists vis-à-vis society; instead, they limit themselves to ‘deep’ interpretations that are largely based on hermeneutic sociology (the familiar, quotidian and recognisable). Thus,

this [thesis] is an exercise in sociological hermeneutics. The meaning of social institutions and collectively pursued patterns of conduct is sought through considering them as members of such sets of strategies as are, in a sense, pre-selected and made realistic (available for choosing and possible to deploy) in given social figurations. In this instance, sociological hermeneutics demands that the continuous and changing aspects of life strategies alike be traced back to the social figurations they serve (in a dialectic process of reciprocal determination) - and forward, to the patterns of daily life in which they find expression (Bauman, 1992b: 10-11).

It is for this reason that the final section of this chapter is about attending to what is missing in the existing literature and introducing, if only briefly for now, a context that explores urban exploration and modernity in a more compelling way. In other words, what follows is an introduction to the remainder of this thesis which attempts to make sense of what lurks in the shadows of a constantly advancing liquid world: a *vorhanden* world comprised of little more than uncertainty and transformation (Bauman, 2001a). This idea, as hinted at the
beginning of the chapter, is guided by Rojek’s (1995) call to critically analyse and decentre leisure in modernity. Only by doing this can we explore forms of leisure, such as urban exploration, in a manner that remains amenable to seeing the world in a multiplicity of ways.

In a view that runs contrary to those aforementioned delineations, then, urban exploration stands for something much more significant and complex in what is arguably a liquid modern world (Bauman, 2000). In brief, liquid modernity is a term employed by Zygmunt Bauman (2000) to bring our attention to the shift from a ‘solid’ hardware kind of modernity, where size equalled power, to a more ‘fluid’ software based modernity. As Bauman (2000) argues, the world people now face is one that is starkly different to the former producer society of solid modernity, because liquid modernity is resolutely consumerist. In view of this, urban exploration represents a form of leisure which, among many others, reveals our proclivity to live ‘lemming-like’ consumer lifestyles (Blackshaw, 2010b: xi).

To be clear, urban exploration is, on the one hand, the physical exploration of human-made structures and sites, particularly those that are abandoned or remain largely unseen in our ordinary day-to-day lives. However, it can also be defined as our degree of perceived freedom relative to how far we are willing to view the self, and the things we find around us, as commodities. Therefore, urban exploration is, inexorably, an expression of performativity and a result of a contagious and societal-wide desire to consume, and it comprises such things as contingency, chance, simulation, hedonism, individualisation, desire, imitation, nostalgia and, perhaps most importantly, fantasy. In view of this, urban exploration signals that our formerly solid forms of identity and difference, and of course our social relations, have become much more porous and fluid. Indeed, this definition poses many questions, and it will be explored in greater depth throughout this thesis, but for now it will be used to help facilitate the argument that we need to understand urban exploration differently.

It is from such a position, knowing that ephemerality is unavoidable, that engagement in urban exploration can be viewed as authentic. This involves knowing that people in our current state of modernity do not strive to singularly own themselves in what Heidegger describes as ‘the cabinet of consciousness’ (1962: 89); it entails accepting that urban explorers do their utmost to ‘own up to what one is becoming’ by taking ‘responsibility for being one’s own’ (Guignon, 2004: 134). In other words, this view rejects Rowsdower’s suggestion that the impetus for the actions of the urban exploration community ‘must reflect
a collective disposition’, and that ‘that disposition must be recognised when examining both the meaning of as well as the meaning derived from that action’ (2011: 3). On this condition, urban exploration is not a cumulative means to an end. It is, rather, about extracting as much pleasure as possible.

As Chris Rojek (1985) argues when he directs our attention to Freud’s notion of the ‘death’ (Thanatos) and ‘life’ (Eros) instincts, people can, and inevitably will (most of us at least), seek ‘abnormal’ self-destructive sources of pleasure in order to live out their strangest and most disturbing and deviant fantasies. In other words, urban exploration is the rejection of classic Utilitarianism and bourgeois thought which once pursued security, order and absolute unambiguous representation, to instead support the idea of Modernism as a ‘multi-faceted phenomenon’ (Rojek, 1989: 104). In contrast to a Nietzschean genealogy, the central aim of an urban explorer is not centred on becoming a master of their overall condition; explorers do not seek esprit de corps or some notion of ‘the right direction’ (Rojek, 1989: 99). This is to suggest, therefore, alongside Rojek, that our language, ways of communicating and, above all, our leisure are comprised of meanings which are permanently equivocal and changeable.

Contra Bennett (2013a; 2013b) and others such as Garrett and Hakwins (2013) who have implied, in line with Pierre Bourdieu, that the habitus is the ultimate and desired thing people strive to create, nothing, including people’s own selves, life, the places they explore or even their interests, are fully analogous and nor do they ever last long enough to achieve longevity. When it comes to the self, and even the parts of the urban environment people choose to explore, change is wholly unpredictable and although things may exist today, none of us can be certain they will tomorrow. The phenomenon of change, therefore, is always the possibility that comes before change itself, and the only thing that remains important is our capacity to construct a habitat which enables us to constantly adapt and seize moments before they disappear (Bauman, 1992a); what we could refer to as our Being-able-to-Be, to put a Heideggerian spin on things. It is our habitat that is key to survival in liquid modernity since, as Bauman points out (in Bauman and Tester, 2001), individuals no longer reside in fixed homes. It is, rather, the case that we rest at the inn located on the way, so that our unremitting desire to move can always continue.

The work of Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984), which suggests that commercialisation and consumerism are the pervasive forces in our current state of modernity, is concomitant with
the above-mentioned way of thinking because it reinforces the point that there is nothing in our world that is not commodifiable. Yet, what Lyotard (1984) also means by this is that it is **performativity** which has emerged as the new criterion of the authenticity of truth, and it is, therefore, fantasy and a multiplicity of performances urban explorers seek to discover. Performativity, it can be argued, involves the ways people use leisure to experiment with different modes of living in a consumerist world. In also opposing Garrett (2013a) and Mould’s (2015) ‘deviant’ projects, then, and following the evocations of Baudrillard, Lyotard and, of course, Bauman, it can be argued that urban explorers have acceded to the logic of marketisation and fragmentation, and the possessiveness, self-interestedness, homogeneously heterogeneous styled world of consumerist leisure and the celebrity. In other words, this is also the aide-mémoire to remind the reader that the method of sociological hermeneutics is crucial to exposing the underlying conditions of modernity.

And yet, there is more to add if a fuller interpretation of modernity and the performativity of urban explorers is to be properly uncovered. What this means is that it is not enough to suggest that urban exploration is fuelled by performativity and equivocality, it is also important to note that any ‘authenticity’ it possesses has an irreducible social dimension. This means that humans are first and foremost tied by intricate social ties, shared understandings and historical culture before they are individuals (Guignon, 1985). However, since there is no such thing as authenticity per se in modernity (Blackshaw, 2005), urban explorers are each **collectively individual**. It is for this reason the traditional understanding of ‘community’ does not fit today’s world. The meaning of this term has been transformed.

It can be argued, therefore, that the meaning, identity and ‘authenticity’ urban explorers seek resides in their loose neo-tribal gatherings, and in the ‘rich and dense weave of undertakings and responsibilities that make up [their] lives’ (Guignon, 2004; 167; Maffesoli, 1996). As Bauman puts it, the environment we now face is one that is especially ‘hospitable and fertile’ for the intense production of difference’ (2001b: 142) and identity, and although people’s difference is better enjoyed separately, under the conditions of liquid modernity, it can only be obtained collectively (so we can share ideas, be a part of something, and stand out as being different without being castigated). Hence, while we can be certain that community has transformed, we can depend on the idea that **identity** is continuously reinvented since identity, which is no longer simply given as it was in the zuhanden world, has become ‘community’s’ posthumous predecessor (Bauman, 2001a). Essentially, what we
should recognise is that the idea of ‘community’ being discussed here is not like an ordinary community. Indeed, this idea appears to resonate with Garrett’s (2013b) notion of ‘tightly fractured communities’, but it is important to understand that what is being proposed here deals with this idea more meticulously because it challenges ontological assumptions that are part and parcel of our doxa.

In light of the above discussion, by drawing on Peter Borsay’s (2006) argument that all leisure takes place in ‘anti-structural’, liminal places, where people can live vicariously by doing the things we generally cannot do in real life, this thesis argues that to understand leisure worlds we must find ways of thinking ourselves into them. Therefore, this thesis seeks to challenge those deep-rooted ‘zombie’ concepts and ideas that have been given ‘pseudo-lives’ (Beck, 2002). This is to analyse and develop explanations of neo-tribal gatherings that make sense of the type of social, cultural and political climate urban explorers face, and to recognise their implications for realising freedom in leisure. In view of this, the sociology of Foucault (1984) becomes especially important because while it recognises the impossibility of universalistic bordered communities, it provides an opening that allows us to examine a different kind of social space. It is, therefore, his concept of the heterotopia, what we might otherwise term spaces of compensation, that allows us to not only envisage our lives as multitudinous, but also contend that there is an opportunity to understand how people, each in their own individual ways, can exist together differently. It is this concept that has the potential to make it possible to consider urban explorers more widely as people of performativity, people who perform together ‘through the repetition of [urban exploration’s] own ready-made discourse, its own code of intelligibility’ (Blackshaw and Crabbe, 2004: 150). Without it, it is unlikely we will be able to understand urban exploration in any real depth.

That being said, it is important to make the point that Foucault’s concept of the heterotopia has been used before in a number of various other applications, including urban exploration as Kindynis and Garrett (2015) have attempted to explore the idea in conjunction with the infamous abandoned Maze Prison in Northern Ireland. The point I want to reinforce, however, is that the way it has been applied in the context of urban exploration fails to explore it in an effective enough way.

First of all, Kindynis and Garrett (2015) miss the point that there is no archetypical heterotopic space or experience: it does not lie within the walls of a prison for instance.
When it comes to experiencing a heterotopia, the idea is that anything can become heterotopic as long as it becomes a critical process, but it all depends on who is creating that space. In other words, any heterotopia is arguably a social space comprising essential others and sets of relations (Foucault, 1984; Foucault, 1981; Foucault, 1980). What this means is that Kindynis and Garrett (2015) fail to take into account Foucault’s (1981; 1980) other essential work that emphasises the significance of systems of discourse or discursive practices.

Where the prison wall is described as being the boundary of the heterotopia, then, it can be argued that really the heterotopia is still in full swing as the group panic and struggle to escape after hearing the sound of barking dogs. What this means is that it is the group that creates the spectacular sense of excitement, anxiety and alarm, not any one individual or the space itself. What is more, even the hotel room that is mentioned at the beginning of the article is overlooked as being part of the same heterotopia, but really it is just as much a part of their space of compensation as the exploration of the prison because the two incompatible sites are effectively juxtaposed against one another. To use an oxymoron, the shared safety, chaos and atmosphere of the hotel and the mutual sense of excitement and optimism contrasts in a strangely compatible way with the reciprocated danger, insecurity and fear of being trapped or caught inside the prison. Normally the two sites would be viewed as being incompatible in terms of their juxtaposing effect; however, the group make each of these incompatible sites both relevant and significant as far as their heterotopia is concerned.

Secondly, the prison Kindynis and Garrett discuss is not located ‘between a dystopic... horrific past, and a utopian future’ (2015: 15), because neither of these things exist. If utopian ideals existed for example there would be no need for spaces of compensation – they would be rendered obsolete as their function would no longer be essential. What this means is that the space they occupy is Dionysian. It is, as Foucault (1984) describes, a transitional space that is both real and imperfect, but mirrors an ideal reality that is better than everyday reality. In this sense, Kindynis and Garrett are correct in making the point that ‘possibilities for encounter and discovery’ in the heterotopia are ‘too rich, too multiple to be contained on any linear spectrum’ (2015: 17). They are also correct in suggesting that the heterotopia necessitates a process of exclusion, to keep others out and strengthen the space of compensation. However, their way of thinking will always be confined if it is not recognised.
that there is only a heterotopia to be found if there are people to create a Dionysian space overflowing with sensuality, spontaneity, emotion and gratification. To reiterate, then, heterotopias are not found at all, they are created and so are inherently entangled in performativity. To put it another way, an abandoned building is no longer a heterotopia when urban explorers leave, it simply becomes derelict and empty once again when the ecstasy of the Dionysiac forces that were at play cease to be ecstatic.

Finally, and contrary to the belief that certain places are filled thickly with memories of their past, it can be argued that in reality they are not – in the way Kindynis and Garrett think anyway. The only memories that matter in a heterotopia are those created by the individual and the collective they are part of (Sartre, 2004). These are more powerful and persuasive than the memories of a place which are, in effect, illusionary. Certainly, the prison as a heterotopia would function very differently for those Irish prisoners who served time there, because they are likely to possess memories that are considerably more tangible and closer to the real than any other memory ever could be. What this means is that for Kindynis and Garrett the air is not ‘thick with dark memories’ (2015: 15) in the objects and remnants of the prison that are said to be ingrained inside the building. As Sartre (1981) argues, people do not possess the ability to restore the past as it was; objects inevitably change, along with their intended function. Put differently, the past is based on a process of assumptive reconstruction and this indicates that imagination cannot be dispensed with so easily. As Levy suggests, the act of remembering involves a past that is ‘reconstructed from the perspective of present goals and aims’ (2012: 157), so essentially they abrogate the real.

There is much more to be said about the concept of heterotopia in urban exploration, however, this chapter is not the place to explore the theory in any further depth. It will, instead, gradually be unpacked throughout the rest of the thesis. It has simply been brought to the forefront of this discussion to offer the reader a sense of direction, to reveal how the problem of tackling the complex ontological world of urban exploration will be handled and developed, and how extant interpretations that make use of the concept have been considered accordingly. In a nutshell, what is being suggested is that research concerning urban exploration should be about exploiting ‘the power of re-describing, the power of language to make new and different things possible and important – an appreciation which becomes possible only when one’s aim becomes an expanding repertoire of alternative descriptions rather than The One Right Description’ (Rorty, 1989: 39-40). In short, it is about
applying Foucault’s (1984) concept of heterotopia in a more effective way so the reader is
drawn into the very heart of social space in a manner that has not yet been achieved as far as
rural exploration is concerned.

Summary

As the reader has seen in this chapter, the research that currently exists vis-à-vis urban
exploitation is limited, leaving much room for further investigation. Generally speaking, it can
be concluded that current studies are limited in four key ways.

First, the theme of an aesthetics of decay emerges as one that has a strong influence over
research about urban exploration. While there is some truth in the fact that decay and
destruction attracts the interest and imaginations of many, a fundamental problem exists in
the sense that the concept is overstated. In other words, to raise its importance a false
dichotomy has been created, allowing writers to juxtapose the decay with the sterility and
smoothness of the contemporary city. The world, however, is much more complex than this,
and opportunities for locating sensual and challenging bodily encounters through urban
exploration are not merely located in ‘industrial ruins’ or decaying structures, they can be
found everywhere around us. This is the nature of modernity, to the extent that everything
urban and human-made that exists around us is subject to the instability and fragility that is
part and parcel of contemporary living. In other words, the smooth surfaces of a perceived
utopian world do not exist.

Second, a number of studies are limited by the domination of psychogeography and
situationist thinking, where urban exploration is viewed as being a means of escape from the
spectacle. The key idea that links this work can be found in the suggestion that the everyday
city can be peeled back, as if it were a palimpsest, allowing urban explorers to realise new
creative functions of the city that manage to evade control-by-consumerism. Nonetheless, in
contrast to this view it was argued, following the work of Baudrillard (1983a; 1990; 1998;
2005), that in a consumer society, which is inundated with signs and signifiers and the loss of
the real, there is very little that is closed off from commodification, especially when it comes
to being in the city. Any resistance is futile because people are seduced into wanting open-
ended, privatised and individualistic lives. The upshot of this condition is that urban explorers
are part of the society they attempt to transcend. Indeed, this appears to be a nihilistic
viewpoint; however, as it will be argued in the subsequent chapters, this does not mean urban explorers are incapable of being creative, or that they are unable to thrive in such a world of ambiguity, incompleteness and changeability.

Third, the chapter moved on to focus on the concept of ‘community’, in response to Bennett’s (2013a) construction of the community of the ‘bunkerologist’, but more especially Garrett’s (2013b) suggestion of a ‘tightly fractured community’. Essentially, the chapter follows the argument that the theories and concepts being used to investigate urban exploration are not foregrounded in a contemporaneous understanding of society. What this means is that extant interpretations of urban exploration have once again been produced in isolation from the type of modernity we have moved into. The upshot of this, then, is that because urban explorers are more likely to dress according to the frenetic attire of habitat, rather than that of Bourdieu’s habitus, a traditional interpretation of community no longer fits. This signifies that individuals now seek the appearance of a home, along with the warmth and security it brings, but at the same time also the freedom attached to being able to transcend it. In other words, what we call a ‘community’ in our current state of modernity has altered significantly; its meaning has shifted so it presents individuals with the opportunity to seek smaller, tribe-like, collectivities, or networks as Bauman (2000) refers to them. It can be reiterated, therefore, that Garrett (2013b) is correct in his thinking that the idea of community has changed, but, as this chapter suggests, he has been unable to develop this idea in a compelling enough way.

Finally, urban exploration has been explored in terms of its political facility, in the way it is said to be able to redemocratise and decommodify urban social spaces, as urban explorers work to subvert surveillance strategies and transcend the repressive hegemonic norms. In other words, fuelled by a rebellious mentality, urban exploration seems to be viewed as a deviant form of leisure; although it does not appear to be directly referred to as this anywhere in the literature. However, as it has been argued, when it comes to urban exploration’s resistance and politics, few agree. In view of this, what is ignored by Garrett (2013a) and Mould (2015) is the crucial point that the professed rebellion is more imaginative than it is real. For one, as Bigo (2008) has suggested, methods of surveillance in the form of heavy panoptic forces tend to be focused on certain state enemies in order to keep them at bay. What this indicates is that urban explorers are controlled by another kind of surveillance strategy – that of the synopticon. In an ironic twist, the point is that perhaps
urban explorers submit themselves to their own makeshift synopticons, where the point is to be seen by the masses. The upshot of this is that urban explorers in fact crave opportunities to parade their ‘secretive’, deviant, performative selves in front of the masses, so much so they are willing to sacrifice their anonymity and all plans to escape the system. In a liquid modern world, then, the point is to be seen, for the private to be consumed by the masses, and to live life according to the rules of an increasingly performative world.

The consequential effect of existing research in urban exploration is that it continues to influence a dearth of critique that fits the type of modernity we find ourselves in. This means, in the main, that most studies fail to apply the method of sociological hermeneutics to their work, so in the end they do not form adequate enough interpretations of modernity. As a result, studies that are centred around urban exploration are limited by the extent to which they can effectively explain the growing phenomenon. In particular, there has been little research on the subject of performativity vis-à-vis urban explorers, and how it is perhaps capitalism and consumerism that really motivates them above anything else. What this means, therefore, is that we need to move away from the preoccupation with extant arguments and theories, so that focus can be shifted to examine urban exploration in a new light. In other words, this thesis recognises that people have become increasingly fluid and consumerist, and the fact that this cannot be ignored when it comes to investigating forms of leisure in modernity. This is to suggest, then, that we need to offer a more extensive consideration to what being a consumer means in terms of being an urban explorer, by exploring important things such as individualisation, neo-tribal collectives, authenticity and the significance of the heterotopia.

However, before I can continue to develop my own contribution to research on urban exploration, one that helps to facilitate a shift in focus, a thorough methodology must first be unpacked. Therefore, the next chapter goes on to discuss how this study adopted an approach that is centred more along the lines of the feel of the experience than existing studies manage to achieve. This is the aim of the next chapter – to lucidly explain and justify my way of doing things ontologically, epistemologically and methodologically.
Chapter Three

Research Methodology: Constructing a Critical Lens

Introduction

The following chapter charts the methodology that was constructed for the research project. It is based on three years of ‘official’ research with urban explorers, and additional experiences that were gained prior to starting the research, in both the United Kingdom and New Zealand. However, before this can be unpacked it is important to elucidate how the methodological limits of extant research were overcome, and how I, the researcher, managed to enter the lived experience of a group of urban explorers. As it will be demonstrated in the next section, to date most understandings and interpretations of urban exploration have been limited not only because they lack the conceptual underpinning required to understand the phenomenon, as discussed in Chapter Two, but also because their methodologies and research approaches are pockmarked with significant flaws.

As the reader will come to see, when it comes to urban exploration its plotted maps are, somewhat ironically, unmistakably in short supply, and subsequently many lines and contours are missing due to the inadequacy of sociological and hermeneutic consideration. In this vein, it can be argued that emerging work around urban exploration runs the risk, or perhaps already shows signs, of becoming stale and stuck in its own ways. It is on this condition that a revised context for understanding urban exploration is proposed, and this approach aims to investigate urban exploration through a much wider scope – one that we might term a ‘critical lens’ to avoid the inflexibility of a rigid framework. In other words, to appeal to the imagination of the urban explorer, this research has invested in a wide-angle lens which, while being short in focal length, offers a significantly greater magnification of the world within the frame. As Gerlach and Gerlach (2007) indicate, wide-angle lenses are perhaps among the most difficult to operate well, but if used deftly and judiciously, the onlooker can rub up very closely to an unusual viewpoint as more of a scene’s elements and details are captured.

The starting point of the present study is to address the methodological limits of extant research so that urban exploration can be understood more accurately as the enchanting
and ambiguous leisure activity it is. It then moves on, in the knowledge that room has been made to understand urban exploration in a better way, to offer an in-depth consideration of the philosophical, ontological and epistemological implications of the methodology that underpin this study. In response to the limits other studies pose, I go on to consider how a better methodology can be developed by establishing one that recognises the importance of both the research participants and the implications wider society can have on them. What is more, because my methodology effectively entails deep immersion, as it is often termed, I have included some further considerations on being an insider to fully justify my position. After that, I provide the reader with details about the recruitment process and the qualitative methods that were chosen to carry out this methodology by discussing exactly what I did in the field. Following the methods section, I continue by providing an insight into how I analysed and presented my data in a way that compliments the overall design of the methodology. And finally, before offering my concluding thoughts, I have provided a section that discusses the ethical issues that had to be thought about during the research process. This was an important section to include since this thesis sought to delve into the lives of people who trespass onto land and property that is not their own.

As the reader will observe, the study was shaped by the interpretivist paradigm which, according to Alan Bryman (2016), allows researchers to take into account the interpretations and meanings individuals give to particular social situations. It was felt that such an approach would uncover meaning that is formed through the specific understandings and intentions of urban explorers, which are also embedded in certain historical and cultural conditions (Bryman, 2016). As Zygmunt Bauman suggests, it is an interpretive strategy that ‘gestates an ontology that legitimizes it in terms of the intellectual mode: an ontology within which language only is accredited with the attribute of reality’ (1992a: 22). What this means is that the world being conceived within the ontology that underlines this thesis is set on understanding how urban explorers organise and arrange their intersubjective heterotopic worlds and actions, and how they create shared commonsense knowledgeability in their social space. In this regard, it is my intention to reinforce Bauman’s (1992a) point that plurality is a crucial part of this research process, regardless of how challenging knowledge production within this ontology turns out to be, because it is an ‘irremovable feature’ of our world.

In light of the discussion in the paragraph above, it is important to make the point that this
research is reflexive. By this I mean it is characterised by the reflexivity of those individuals being examined, and by the reflexivity inherent in the research context which is part and parcel of espousing such an approach. However, it is also reflexive in the sense that it highlights the subjective position of myself and my role as the researcher throughout the research process. It is important of course to acknowledge the extent to which subjectivity can have an impact on the findings of a study, but I want to make it clear from the offset that an attempt has been made to justify subjectivity as a valuable resource. As the chapter argues, it is an important element of the research process as it challenges notions of objectivity and theoretical orthodoxy. What follows, then, in the ensuing section is a rationale for this thesis’s methodological approach. It offers a critical examination of the social sciences and the research methods that have been used by urban exploration researchers, to highlight their pivotal weaknesses.

**Rationale: The Limits of Extant Urban Exploration Studies**

As the following discussion reveals, this study follows Weber’s (1949) suggestion that the only discernible reality that exists is to be found with individuals. Therefore, the methods of the ‘social sciences’ were utilised. This was to avoid all concern with physicality and what is thought to be the natural world, to focus exclusively on human behaviour and its meaning. However, this study ensues in the knowledge that orthodox cognitive frameworks have taken precedence within ‘social sciences’, insofar as they have become part of people’s doxic relation to research (Bauman, 2014). Bauman (2014) refers to this as an ‘intellectual crisis’. As Hughes (1990) argues, it appears that researchers must abide by meticulous rules, strategies and theories, regardless of whether they are profoundly incompatible with what actually exists.

What is more, given the overlapping tendencies of rooted theoretical arenas – in their capacity to share and transfer knowledge – it is foreseeable that such an intellectual crisis threatens to intensify and permeate into other fields and areas of research (Bauman, 2014), including those focused on urban exploration. One of the major concerns to emerge from the overreliance on orthodox cognitive frameworks, for instance, surrounds Blackshaw’s (2014) suggestion that existing research is often too tightly wrapped in its own ‘isms’ and ‘ologies’ – namely the ‘Theory’ that underpins knowledge. Consequently, those under the watchful eye of the researcher are forced to remain trapped in their assigned position (Marxist and
Feminist works continue to demonstrate this. Across the small body of literature vis-à-vis urban exploration, Mott and Roberts (2013a) work exemplifies this, more so than others, through their creation of the repressed using a profoundly feminist perspective. To borrow Derrida’s way of putting it, ‘one cannot say: “here are our monsters”, without immediately turning the monsters into pets’ (1990: 80). What he means by this is that as a consequence of no longer being treated as subjects, actual people quickly become transformed into ‘objects’, regardless of the many narratives that exist outside the one neatly organised overriding depiction of the urban explorer’s world that has been considered.

Likewise, Garrett and Hawkins (2013) and Bennett (2011) are accountable for trying to impose their own constructed narrative orders upon the untidiness that is part and parcel of our world. This is especially apparent through their discussions surrounding ‘identity trappings’ and ‘bunkerologists’, which arguably share some commonality with Bourdieu’s (1984) sociology and its tendency to force its own ‘narrative order’ onto the people under observation. It is vital, therefore, that the issues raised above are attended to before they deepen any further (Blackshaw, 2014).

In response to the problem of theoretical orthodoxy, this study adopts Bauman’s (2001a) suggestion that in order to understand individuals and society we must breach rather than follow closely guarded norms and procedural code. For Blackshaw (2003; 2014), who supports this notion, it is fruitless to shield and stand up for such theories and their uniformity because, as Natoli argues, ‘there is no way to prove that what we say about the world or ourselves corresponds to what the world is or we are’ (1997: 181). Of course, it cannot be entirely dismissed that there is likely to be some ‘truth’ in orthodox cognitive frameworks, but one of the most formidable hindrances in the construction of such research lies with the human being, because we ‘are notoriously reluctant to submit [our]selves to [our] own demands’ (Bauman, 2014: 52). In other words, with the ever-widening spectrum of pursuits that continue to emerge, and the smearing of these all over the human body, it means we are first and foremost exactly that: human. To put it another way, it can be argued that certain theories embody a kind of instrumental reasoning that does not lend itself to understanding social spaces of heterotopia (Blackshaw, 2017).

As Rorty (2007) suggests, once we abandon the traditional project in social science that searches for stability, and accept that life is unduly contingent, it can be understood that we
do in fact have immeasurable purpose, especially in social networks, and in this we may take
pleasure in the ‘art of the possible’ (Blackshaw, 2010a: 47). What the above discussion serves
to indicate, then, is that it is evident across different qualitative fields that research can
easily become stagnant and ‘stuck’ in its old ways as different attempts at theoretical
uniformity are employed. However, from the offset I want to argue that this study attempts
to attend to these issues, to pave the way for the utilisation of the interpretivist paradigm
that remains true to its roots.

Having addressed the above-mentioned concern, our attention can next be directed to the
fact that the favoured methodology to have been adopted in the study of urban exploration
is grounded in ethnography, where there is a tendency to make use of an autobiographical
method of interpretation (Dobraszczyk, Galviz and Garrett, 2016; Garrett, 2013a; Gates,
– although in the context of social anthropology – the autobiographical approach is
important as regards reflexivity, and without it ethnographers run the risk of losing t
uch
with subje
activity of authors. It is, therefore, undoubtedly an integral part of interpretation
and one that is arguably part and parcel of reality and social understanding. Nonetheless,
although the autobiographical approach in ethnography can be justified in terms of its
valuable contribution to research, it does also signal the emergence of a worrying trend that
has begun to dominate the study of urban exploration, and Garrett, and several others, are
accountable for having failed to attend to its fundamental weaknesses.

For instance, although Garrett (2013a), and Deyo and Leibowitz (2003), throw in a number
comments and observations that relate to others in the field of research, much of the
research adopts a self-reflexive approach and it is questionable as to whether particular
themes have been embroidered and over-emphasised (Smith and Watson, 2010). This
becomes manifest through the continual references to a radicalised, rebellious and
subversive ‘community’, and being viewed as ‘agents’ or eccentrics, which accentuates their
disregard for the system and the ‘routine’ existence that people apparently endure. Likewise,
in Solis’s (2005) account of New York’s hidden underground, her book becomes one focused
entirely on herself and various pictures depict only her posed in various tunnels, to such an
extent that the work becomes less informative. As it has already been illustrated, rather than
being of a solid ontological status the performativity of any particular function and identity
should be understood as an ‘effect’, because as people repeat acts they coagulate, and in
due course a self-manufactured reality is established (Butler, 1990). In other words, the study of urban exploration is arguably premature in its development and there may be many more interpretations that exist. What this means is that prospective research needs to move beyond such forms of single-minded analysis to consider the voices of those urban explorers which have so far remained silent.

Further attempts to understand urban exploration can also be observed which have adopted an ‘armchair mode of cultural investigation’ (Maanen, 2011: 5). This is a method that was originally implemented by anthropologists who conducted their research based on literature and details of distant lands and dissimilar people from those who had gathered some experience in the field (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). Mott and Roberts (2013a) are an exemplar of this approach as their entire critique is largely based on assumptions formed around the work of Garrett (2013a) and Bennett (2013a; 2013b). In this they explore the professed worlds of the masculine ‘vagabond’ or ‘hobbyist’, and other additional interpretations of aggressive masculinity in the online virtual world (SleepyCity, 2007), which have apparently begun to ‘concretise’. Mott and Roberts (2013a) work does not entail any sort of ethnographic methodology, however, and it is arguable that what they propose in relation to exploring gender and the pervasiveness of masculinity in ‘urbex’ requires deep immersion within the world of urban exploration. The upshot of this is that it can be contended that without gaining a more intricate insight such research is destined to remain speculative and unrepresentative of the diverse people who involve themselves in urban exploration (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983).

In a response to their paper – Not everyone has (the) balls: Urban Exploration and the Persistence of Masculinist Geography – Garrett and Hawkins have begun to address the above-mentioned issue, and they suggest moving away from embodiment being limited to a narrow selection of ‘different forms of difference’ (2013: 16) to a much wider spectrum. Having said this, Mott and Roberts have gone on to argue that they are not so naïve to assume that there is not an ‘unavoidable presence of difference’ (2013b: 2). Instead, they reiterate, at the base of their work, Bauman’s (2000) argument that some people in society are undoubtedly more free than others when it comes to consumption. Nevertheless, as Bennett (2013b) and Garrett and Hawkins (2013) argue, it is too easy to examine urban exploration as a ‘gendered practice’, and far too soon to be making such bold suggestions given the lack of existent research.
Bennett (2011; 2013a), too, comes to the forefront as a so-called ‘armchair investigator’, despite having dipped his toes into exploring abandoned Royal Observer Corps Monitoring (ROC) posts, because his research predominantly employs the use of online forums – such as the well documented 28dayslater site. An obvious problem with this resonates with the idea that identities and bodies can remain hidden, or be altered, in the ‘virtual’ world, and people can become anyone they desire to be (Kendall, 2002). What needs to be questioned, in other words, is whether or not virtuality has any resonance with ‘real’ life. This is not to suggest ‘virtual’ realities are irrelevant of course. There may be something to be gained in developing understandings of the increased diversities of heterogeneous people in such ‘virtual’ dimensions (Kendall, 2002); it is undeniable that they are, or so it might be argued, further extensions of urban exploration’s networks. What this means is that both the ‘virtual’ and the ‘real’ sides of urban exploration need to be taken into consideration because favouring one over the other will only result in the production of limited research.

Taking into consideration what has been discussed in this section, it can be argued that there appears to be an overriding assumption that urban exploration can be understood using a one-size-fits-all approach, whether that be through an autobiographical method or so-called ‘armchair’ theorising. Interpretations of urban exploration, however, should not be limited to these two approaches, because the purposes and meanings that can be attached to urban exploration are likely to vary over time and space. In other words, studies of and about urban exploration need to make it possible to interpret, much more extensively, the lives and experiences of urban explorers, to understand how they fit with the current political, cultural and social structures that subsist in modernity (Bauman, 1992a). It was out of the question, then, to adopt the same type of methodologies and methods that have been discussed above. Instead, it was my ambition to advance the study of urban exploration by adopting a methodology capable of understanding something where everyday social norms do not apply. In this sense, the most important distinguishing feature of my own research is its regard for subjectivity and the way it allows urban explorers to speak for themselves. As the reader can see, it is in this very literal sense that the philosophy at the bottom of this research is interpretivist.

Furthermore, however, despite highlighting the limitations of extant urban exploration studies, what is clear is that the most compelling studies of urban exploration to date are still
in fact those rich, descriptive, autobiographical accounts that jump out from the page and examine the field in such a way as to make the reader feel immediately familiar with it (e.g. Garrett, 2013a; Solis, 2005). It might be argued, therefore, that ethnography is clearly still the most suitable methodology to use in an investigation of urban exploration. As Maanen (1988) has pointed out, traditionally it has been ethnography that has been the most effective methodology in revealing something about the idiosyncrasy of an increasingly fragmented world. Therefore, this thesis also employs ethnography to ensure it is grounded in the everyday world of urban explorers. Yet, before I could successfully enter this alternative reality I needed to take into account the crucial ontological and epistemological factors that would influence this research, and that a different kind of ethnography would have to be conducted. In doing this, it was my intention that I would offer something that is more in touch with the world of urban exploration than any other extant study.

**Ontological and Epistemological Considerations**

When it comes to existing interpretations of urban exploration two critical ontological problems emerge. The first lies with the ontological assumption that social reality is independent of the researcher, as revealed in the work of so-called ‘arm-chair’ theorists (Mott and Roberts, 2013a). The second lies with the likes of Garrett (2013a) who becomes too tangled in his own ontological world, meaning the ontological assumptions of his research participants become much less significant than his own. What this means is that most studies based on urban exploration are presently running the risk of trying to make sense of a single and coherent social reality, or what we might otherwise call the rational arrangement of everyday life, by overlooking other perspectives (Foucault, 2002 [1970]). The problem with this is obvious – the conceptions of the world such studies create is limited.

To remedy the aforementioned problems, this thesis accepts that ontology should be referred to as the starting point of all research, and that ontological assumptions are centred on ‘what we believe constitutes social reality’ (Blaikie, 2000: 8). This study, therefore, sought to gain an understanding of knowledge that is *existential knowledge*, which can only be uncovered by empirical investigation. It did this by employing a method of investigation recognised as ‘common-sense understanding’; a method that takes into account common-sense constructs in order to interpret human action (Schütz, 1967). In following this method, this thesis accepts that the various types of actions of individuals are important. It also
supports the idea that the everyday social world should be viewed as an object of study in and of itself, and that the social world should be made available and accessible to readers. Part of the central aim of this research, then, was to bring the everyday worlds of urban explorers to life, from the viewpoint of urban explorers. In this way, this research sought to direct its inquiry at urban exploration worlds from the inside.

It is important to point out that by drawing on this reflexive approach this thesis also reinforces the point that the world we reside in can no longer be understood as being based on a strong ontology. This is because the world has become more plural and guided by pointillist time, meaning our lives, particularly when it comes to our leisure, are experienced as episodic (Blackshaw, 2017). Instead, our being-in-the-world is guided by weak ontologies which have no rooted or permanent foundations and are always contestable (White, 2005). People’s lives, in other words, are guided by their own choices, but also a sense of contingency that often leaves individuals feeling as though they have a certain loss of control over themselves (Blackshaw, 2017). However, having acknowledged the evolving face of ontology, this research has made sure to employ Schütz and Jacobs’ (1979) notion of the insider, or ‘reality reconstructionists’ (i.e. other urban explorers), because they are essentially the only way such weak ontologies can be explored. It is only through gaining insider knowledge that different ontological ‘truths’ of and about urban exploration can be successfully revealed. In a nutshell, then, this research remains loyal to the idea that urban exploration worlds are understood exactly for what they are, through the people caught up in them, rather than imposing any sort of premeditated hypothesis from the outset.

Alongside the ontological considerations, there are further interrelated epistemological concerns to attend to, in the sense that the studies that focus on urban exploration appear to be controlled, for the most part, by a certain theoretical mind-set that views things such as time and space as being inviolable and fixed (Blackshaw, 2003). In short, epistemology is referred to as ‘the possible ways of gaining knowledge of social reality’ and how what we assume exists can be known (Blaikie, 2000: 8). In view of this, the above-mentioned perspectives are largely inattentive to the point that individuals tend to live in different kinds of realities, even though they appear to be sharing the same space as one another (Natoli, 1997). As Rojek (1995) has argued, this is modernist epistemological thinking that tries to organise people, realities, experiences and objects into neat categories and theories. However, this is a way of thinking that can only result in orthodox sociological interpretations.
being produced as the same doxic ‘zombie-categories’ are continuously recycled (Beck, 2002). These are essentially those ghost-like theories and concepts which have not quite yet died, but somehow linger on despite having lost their explanatory potential. What is being suggested here, then, is that this thesis supports a view that recognises the world as being increasingly fragmentary, insofar as new ways of forming interpretations about it, and of new forms of leisure, need to be explored and experimented with.

To clarify, an alternative epistemological position needs to be considered, one that takes into account how today’s world is unduly fragmented insofar that life can be pronounced as episodic. As Bauman (2008a) argues, this societal condition demands that people exist within various episodes of time and being, each with their own plot and characters. The episode, though, is never certain. It is always transient and characters share no promise to appear in sequential screenings (Bauman, 2008a). It is on this note, however, as Rose (2012) contends, that detecting absences and invisibility can be just as powerful as noticing the visible. It is simply the case of reconsidering our epistemological position and looking and reading for further detail with greater attentiveness.

This is where the heterotopia comes to life, because what is being suggested here is that urban explorers’ places of expression and compensation have been taken into account. Heterotopias spring to life in pointillist time and it is here that people assume the real should be something that is out of the ordinary, so very different ontological and epistemological assumptions come into play (Blackshaw, 2017). These are the spaces where people do not surrender to wider societal norms; they manage to dissolve these and replace them for desire, the ability to shapeshift and an alternative type of knowledge and awareness (Blackshaw, 2017; Foucault, 1984). There is nothing illusionary about the heterotopia either, because it offers a new, special, type of freedom that is real, where people have found their own creative way of finding a place in the world (Foucault, 1984). It is Foucault’s heterotopia that is key to understanding the intensity, performativity and richness of the worlds that urban explorers manage to create for themselves, so it is crucial that researchers find ways of accessing and experiencing them first-hand.

Research Design: Hermeneutic Sociology and Sociological Hermeneutics

In an effort to make the research approach more explicit, the ensuing section provides an
outline of the type of ethnography that was employed. As the reader will see, this research seeks to entwine ethnography, spatiality, autobiography and individual histories/stories, and the idea of the novel as an additional tool, to stimulate the sociological imagination. To reiterate, by doing so I hoped to ‘actualise’, in some measure, performativity that acts as a temporary shelter in a world where life has become a balancing act between exerting our individuality and seeking warmer, cosy, feelings of familiarity and closeness. After all, we find ourselves in an increasingly ambivalent and equivocal world where our contested forms of authenticity have to be closely guarded against those ‘Others’ who exist out there (Bauman, 2000). In other words, this research attends to the contradictory reactions that have been generated by individuals in society, termed proteophilia (freedom) and proteophobia (security) after the Greek God Proteus who was said to be capable of altering his identity and appearance entirely at will (Bauman, 1993).

As it will be argued, situated at the margins of society there are performative spaces of shared endeavour, what I refer to as heterotopias, that manifest themselves as ‘real places... without geographical markers’ (Blackshaw, 2010b: 141; Foucault, 1984). These, like Blackshaw’s (2003) ‘lads’, in his study that follows the leisure lives of a group of men in Leeds, can be thought of as being a little bit like neo-tribes, or Gemeinschaften – ‘mobile and flexible groupings’ – as Lash (2002: 27) terms them, which allow for temporary social bonding and the feeling of belonging, without the demands of any long-term commitment (Blackshaw, 2010b). This idea of incorporating the heterotopia into this research looks to build and elucidate on Garrett’s identification of the ‘tightly fractured community’ (2013b: 2). Nonetheless, and notwithstanding the importance of the argument hitherto, to avoid confusion it is important that a clear distinction is made here, between what is meant by heterotopia and ‘subculture’. As Andy Bennett (1999) argues, in an instructive piece based on youth, style and musical taste, the term ‘subculture’ is now used as a ‘catch-all’ label, in spite of the fact it imposes fixed divisions between specific groups of people. In reality, however, forms of sociation are much more likely to be fluid, arbitrary and difficult to define. The heterotopia, on the other hand, denotes a group that cannot be regarded as having permanent or stable qualities (Foucault, 1984). It is, therefore, the heterotopia that best exemplifies how we should view groups in present modernity.

To unpack the heterotopic social space of a group of urban explorers and gain insight into their feelings, motivations and actions, this research, analogous to several other authors and
academics who have written about urban exploration (Dobraszczyk, Galviz and Garrett, 2016; Garrett, 2013a; Gates, 2013; Solis, 2005; Ninjalicious, 2005; Deyo and Leibowitz, 2003), incorporates the use of autobiographical writing. However, this approach differs from Garrett’s (2013b) – and other similar attempts in urban exploration related research – autobiographical method of interpretation because it argues that the notion of subjectivity among social actors can be lost as it is the writer who becomes who he wants to be. As already noted, the consequential effect of using an autobiographical approach is that who the others are is destined to be lost. For Foucault (1986), because such accounts overemphasize the cognitive self, this type of approach dismisses the idea that it is discursive practices that influence what individuals do and how they engage with the world in various situations. Therefore, this research places emphasis on ‘unities of discourse’, based on the common signs and events that constitute ‘reality’ for the urban explorer (Blackshaw, 2003). This seeks to give voice not only to myself as the researcher, but also the other characters involved in the same story. What this means is that this research employs a different sort of structure that is much more like a novel than a conventional piece of scholarly research. This research is a story about a group of urban explorers and their heterotopia, and it is achievable only by giving the reader an insight into the many different stories of those being observed.

These latter points notwithstanding, it was not enough to suggest that urban explorer’s social spaces can be simply uncovered, or that it was even possible, without suitably focusing the critical lens and adjusting the aperture. After all, this research sought to explore heterotopic social space but also the wider societal and political reasons that are closely linked to participation within urban exploration. Therefore, in line with Bauman (2014), this study takes into consideration that two kinds of hermeneutics are available to researchers with sociological interest. That is to say, hermeneutic sociology and sociological hermeneutics can be drawn upon to facilitate in the intuitive interpretation of the shared world of social actors (Blackshaw, 2005).

As Blackshaw (2005) argues, hermeneutic sociology is useful because, as Bech describes, it is a way of ‘snuggle[ing] up to [the] quotidian and recognisable, even trivial’ (1997: 6). In other words, hermeneutic sociology is not unlike Alice tumbling down the rabbit hole into a completely different world. The crucial point, though, is that the reader, who is after a ‘mimetic representation’, is made to feel as if they are an insider as they experience the
vividness and intensity of the social world under investigation (Bauman, 1992a: 42). What is more, in addition to offering the reader a way of viewing a world which they otherwise would not be able to access, it is arguable that hermeneutic sociology ‘operates with a keen moral awareness’ (Blackshaw, 2010c: 83). This is because it accepts that the world is made up of a multiplicity of different contingent universes which often interconnect with one another to create an interminable number of possible realities (ibid). In a nutshell, then, this way of writing wallows in rich detail and theory and it uncovers the important things that are part and parcel of, and give meaning to, people’s lives. Hermeneutic sociology exposes the pure magic and intimacy of existence, and it works well to convince the reader that what they are reading is true.

However, left unaided this method of interpretation is limited to the explication of the sole heterotopia facing consideration; it is, as Blackshaw and Crabbe (2004) suggest, shaped wholly by the invention of deep immersion. What this means is that this research draws on the work of Rinehart (1998) and Rorty (1991), to argue that it is fruitless to imagine that ‘depth’ analysis alone can reveal more than ‘surface’ accounts can. Rather, what is being attended to here is the preoccupation, one that is most obvious in sociological and leisure texts, with ‘binary opposites’ or duality, to argue that a form of alternative tactics are instead required to amalgamate ‘depth’ and ‘surface’ so that neither is overlooked or underestimated (Blackshaw and Crabbe, 2004; Rinehart, 1998). As Derrida (1973) indicates, there is always prejudice invoked in antagonistic or binary opposites, and one slice of the relationship is always preferred over the other. The aim here, therefore, is to move beyond the assumption that ‘depth’ equates to truth, while ‘surface’ meaning conveys something that is misleading and insufficient.

In view of the points raised above, it is pivotal that this ethnographic account is also shaped by sociological hermeneutics, to explicitly attend to the ‘surface’ phenomena that also exists across society (Blackshaw, 2005). This approach seeks to analyse and develop explanations of heterotopia in relation to what the wider, yet equally thinner, surface of reality means to certain groups and individuals, and what implications there are for realising freedom. As Bauman puts it, ‘[sociological hermeneutics] consists, in a nutshell, in reading the observed behavioural tendencies against the conditions under which actors find themselves obliged to go about their life-tasks’ (2004a: 23). In view of this, in light of our current state of modernity, utilising the method of sociological hermeneutics also espouses Deleuze and
Guattari’s (1987) view that every undertaking in the world corresponds to a rhizomatic medium, as non-homogeneous flows of collective desires and interests and nuances and struggles. In other words, what is being suggested here is that because every single body is perpetuated and pushed by a milieu of what could be termed states of meaning (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), we need to be alert to the ever-changing nature of life and society (Bauman, 1992a).

To put it another way, what is being articulated here is the conciliation of Jean-Paul Sartre and Michel Foucault’s ideas, to suggest that at the base of things when it comes to freedom in a consumerist world humans are not entirely conditioned by structural constraints or some discursive position because the human imagination is something that cannot be completely impelled into submission or passivity (Sartre, 1984). For Sartre (1984) the inference is that consciousness capable of imagination is able to incite alternate and altogether different states of existence. This idea that consciousness is capable of imagination offers assurance that human actors will have some measure of individual freedom in the world.

A poststructuralist Foucauldian perspective, on the other hand, denies that individuality is of any importance, as it is argued that social actors are intricately tied to readily established ‘subject positions in systems of discourse’ (Blackshaw, 2003: 33; Foucault, 1981). Foucault’s (1981) position cannot be rejected, however, on the basis that it is central to the understanding that ‘subject positions’ are principally ephemeral and destined to move between the attenuated surfaces of different discourses. In other words, because they are performative, there are always points of rupture and/or forms of resistance when it comes to power-knowledge, and this allows individuals to form or join other hegemonic equivalences (Foucault, 1980). On balance, Blackshaw’s (2013b) metaphorical rendering of the world as IKEAized is useful here for showing that the idea of cultural discourse or discursive practice should not be eliminated from interpretations of society and leisure. Rather, he argues that it should be used in conjunction with the notion that the individual is still capable of exercising choice. In other words, Blackshaw (2013b; 2003) reminds us that in a fluid and flexible world of different language games, there is still room for the individual and their aspirations as a thinking and decisive body – for most of us at least.

As Natoli proclaims, ‘individuals can live in different reality frames although they seem to be
sharing the same space at the same time’ (1997: 3). This coincides with Bauman (2000) who depicts society as one of growing opportunity, but also one proliferous in human division – as opposed to co-operation and solidarity. In this vein, life is better understood as one of ‘fragmentation’, ‘disarticulation’, ‘conflict’ and sometimes the only thing that appears mutual is our incompatibility with one another and the things around us (Bauman, 2000: 90). It is on this condition that the individual cannot be repudiated in the study of urban exploration which searches for who the researcher is, just as much as it seeks to uncover who the others are, as they exist through discourse and discursive practices, or, as I have otherwise been referring to them, through heterotopias.

Moving into the Field: Some Considerations on Being an Insider

To facilitate my methodological approach it was important to envisage how I would interact with my participants. As the reader has most likely guessed by now, I opted to become a ‘complete participant’, as Raymond Gold (1958) refers to it, to effectively integrate myself fully into the life and heterotopia of an urban explorer. This involved observing other urban explorers, but also participating fully in urban exploration itself.

Nevertheless, being a complete participant is not without its problems as most conventional research argues that the researcher should, at all times, remain somewhere near the periphery of the research field, to ensure they do not become too deeply involved (Ozkul, 2016). As Bryman (2016) and Wacquant argue, ‘going native’ can have a negative impact on the scientific angle of research, especially as it can become too subjectivist and spiral from being a good social analysis into a ‘narcissistic story-telling’ exercise (2011: 87-88). Other forms of critique have also suggested that the researcher should continually reassess and resituate their insiderness throughout the research process, because at some stage the researcher will be required to stand out as a non-biased observer as they ensure the protection of the intellectual perspective (Hammett, Twyman and Graham, 2015; Davis and Davies, 2007).

A further concern when it comes to most conventional research approaches and being a complete participant is the management of ‘gatekeepers’. As Kaufmann (2002) suggests, these are other individuals who act as intermediaries, providing access into the research field. Such people are said to be especially useful for accessing marginal groups or tightly-knit
‘communities’ (ibid). In view of this, it is suggested that it is important to select a gatekeeper who has some degree of status or reputation within a group, for it is they who will have some influence over how other people react to the researcher (Hammett, Twyman and Graham, 2015).

The leading problem, then, when it comes to ethnographic research appears to be the need to establish a divide between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Bauman, 1993). What this study argues, however, is that researchers should move towards a much more inclusive ethnography, to circumvent inward-looking and theoretically grounded debates that privilege the ‘outsider’ position of the researcher. For Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) reflexivity is key, since it requires not so much differentiation between the social researcher and the researched, but the reverse: recognition that each are pieces of the same puzzle. As Natoli (1997) and Blackshaw (2003) argue, it is doubtful that there is an epistemological split between dualisms within social inquiry (i.e. mind-body, subject-object). In other words, it is illusionary to believe that researchers possess the ability to draw a conclusive boundary between being independent and detached from ‘the Others’. Such ideas of rationalism and dualism have their roots in Cartesian thinking, which is well recognised for privileging the mind over body and abandoning the idea that humans, who are arguably comprised of interrelated mind and body, are both socially constructed and capable of acquiring individual understandings and ontological beliefs (Lyons, 2001).

In challenging the concerns raised in this section, then, I decided to fully immerse myself in the world of urban exploration as a body-in-action (Wacquant, 2011), practising ethnography, empathetically, intuitively and empirically (Blackshaw, 2003). By this I mean that I, the researcher, acted as the cultural intermediary by making use of the fact that I was already an urban explorer before this research was ever even a thought. Although there is a heavy prejudice in the academic sphere that good research cannot be produced without strict rules, ethics that underline the-correct-way-of-doing-things and, more often than not, some sort of abstract positivistic foundation (Blackshaw, 2003), I wanted to produce something that really exploited the full potential of hermeneutic sociology and sociological hermeneutics. This method would entail living life as an urban explorer first and that of a researcher second, to really grasp and reveal what goes on in urban explorer’s social realities and understand the performativity that is part and parcel of it all.
Of course, I was slightly anxious about the somewhat unconventional methodology I was starting to push forward, and I did fear that other readers might view my work as being less credible and grounded too deeply in the self-styled rebellious attitude of the urban explorer which has been highlighted in literature pertaining to this topic area (see Bradley Garrett). However, following Wacquant, I decided to ‘go native armed’, not so much with theoretical tools for these would emerge later as I tried to make sense of everything I had experienced and witnessed, but with my ‘capacity for reflexivity and analysis’ (2011: 87). In other words, I tried to make sure that I was being faithful to my fellow explorers by not representing their reality as a rigorous set of empirical facts, but by giving them a voice and gradually transforming myself into a sociologist as interpretations of the heterotopia around me became clearer. This is what is known as adopting an intuitive outsider perspective (Blackshaw, 2003). In this regard, throughout my time in the field and while writing the thesis I have endeavoured to focus less on myself in the research context, and more exclusively on those who were there alongside me. This was to ensure that I produced a scrupulous analysis rather than a narcissistic story.

Indeed, some may still argue that this research is not based on anything objective, and it may be pointed out that there is no way of telling whether the research findings are based on fact or absolute fiction. Yet, by drawing on John Berger’s suggestion that ‘reality is not a given: [and that] it has to be continually sought out, held – I am tempted to say salvaged’ (2001: 461), as researchers we should begin to accept that realities and heterotopias are founded on their own forms of justification and reasoning. What this means, according to Bauman (2014), is that human experience can be felt in two ways and these can be split into the two types of phenomena that can be created when conducting social research: Erfahrungen and Erlebnisse. In short, this is where the problem lies, amid the confrontation between the steady search for objective and knowable facts and the idea of subjectivity which involves things being made real by the individual. The point being made here in this thesis is that it is only through Erlebnis that we can gain a rich insight into the lives and mind-sets of urban explorers. Therefore, as there is very little research that privileges the voices of urban explorers, this study positions itself within the realm of Erlebnis by situating the research from an insider perspective, but one which is very much aware that its findings will be ‘contingent on my own subjective explanations’ (Blackshaw, 2003: 14). In others words, what is being suggested is that it is crucial for research to be persuaded – hauled if necessary – to shift the human world away from that ‘common, unreflected-upon sense-knowledge we
think with, but hardly ever about’ (Bauman, 2014: 116), by using our sociological imagination to engage critically with the indiscernibility of ‘doxa’.

The Field of Inquiry: A Living and Breathing Method

My research grew from something I just happened to do as I grew up in the north east of England. So, if any group of people were to be the ideal candidates for this study, it was those who I grew up with as a teenager and young adult. For years we had inadvertently created our own form of leisure around a veritable playground of iconic bridges, collapsing industry, wasteland, empty mines, forgotten quarries, burnt out buildings and dilapidated modernist concrete that always seemed to be crusted in pigeon shit. Today, now all in our mid to late twenties, although our careers and interests have evolved in different ways, not a lot has changed in terms of our passion for ‘urban exploration’, as it is now referred to. Most of us still cling onto our bizarre fascination for chaos, devastation and, above all, adventure. At this juncture, then, I should point out that if I had not had the good fortune of meeting and spending time with these people I would, undoubtedly, have found it much more difficult finding my way into the world of urban exploration and understanding anything of its profundity. As Wacquant (2004) suggests, it takes a great deal of time and trust to slip into the skin of any certain type of person. Without my tangible sense of status and a role in this group, I certainly would not have achieved the sort of ‘thick description’ I was looking for – as far as I hope I have achieved in this study.

The collective I centred my study around are known as WildBoyz in the urbex world. It is an all-male group whose name was inspired by the Duran Duran song ‘Wild Boys’ sometime in 2012, after listening to the ‘beasty tune’ over the radio on several occasions while driving. Since then, it became part of the ‘craic’ and a sort of running joke, a form of self-parody as it were, and we would play the song almost every time we met up together. It was around this time ‘the Boyz’ started to invent individual names for themselves too. Most urban explorers do this, and it seems to serve as a way of making the whole endeavour feel all the more real, cool and inimitable. And so, the world of WildBoyz Urban Exploration had begun, and its central characters were born: Ford Mayhem, Meek-Kune-Do, Rizla Rider, The Hurricane, Box and Subject 47.

In terms of recruitment, I decided to keep things as natural as possible and asked if they
would all be willing to be research participants over a few pints in a pub in Ferryhill. They agreed, on the condition I bought them all a ‘bevvy’ at the end of it. After that, I decided to divide my research into two parts. The first would entail using some of the experiences I had already gained prior to the official start of my research, and the second would make use of our continuing journey and whatever we managed to explore over the next three years. I did this because I felt that the heterotopic social space of my participants could only be unpacked comprehensively if the whole story, which includes their past, present and future together, was taken into consideration. What is more, although it has been argued that research should be confined to one specific target area or place (Bryman, 2016), I opted to let my research participants lead the way. Since they already explored all over the UK, it seemed counterproductive to limit my data collection to the exploration of sites only in the north east of England. As a result, most of the ethnography took place in a multiplicity of places.

Nevertheless, and notwithstanding the above comments, this study should not be viewed as being limited to revealing only something about a small collection of close friends, because a number of other people also became involved in this story as a result of what we might call a ‘snowballing effect’ (Bryman, 2016). This form of sampling effectively makes use of known acquaintances and other significant people we happened to meet throughout the course of our journey (May, 1997). Part of the reason for this was that I had been offered a scholarship in New Zealand, and this would entail travelling out there. The other reason for doing this was that meeting other urban explorers along the way felt like a crucial, and inevitable, part of the research journey. In my eyes it was something that had to be included as any inclusion of new individuals to the heterotopic social space was still an important part of the overarching story.

Wherever new people were concerned, I always began by keeping my position as a researcher completely covert, to avoid the well-known damaging implications that come from participant’s knowing they are participants, and therefore acting along the lines of their purported role (Bryman, 2016). I decided that if I wanted to write about any particular individual or group, I had to gain a sufficient level of rapport with them before I inquired as to whether they would give me permission to write about them. Over the course of my research I did not write about anyone without first gaining their permission, other than mentioning them in publically accessible threads on various forums, such as 28dayslater, and
In terms of the time spent in the field, I did not follow a specific schedule or timescale. As it was my intention not to influence the research environment, I tried to keep things as natural as possible by allowing my research participants to decide when, how often and where they wanted to explore. Sometimes, though, to conserve the ordinariness of the environment and maintain my pre-existing (prior to the research) urbexer identity, I would involve myself in the planning stage by suggesting various sites and when we might explore them. All of this was necessary because, as it was discussed earlier, this research is reflexive and ongoing, and designed specifically to locate urban exploration within its own social context.

The research began by participating in the life world of urban explorers and, altogether, over three hundred and fifty explores were experienced as part of this study. I actively took part in everything the rest of the group did when out with them and, following what Bech has referred to as ‘sticking to the phenomena in question’ (1997: 5), I made sure that I listened to and observed everyone around me. It was my aim to continue treating all of my exploring trips with ‘the Boyz’ as exactly that: exploring trips, not research being conducted ‘in the field’. For this reason, I took no field notes in front of any participant, other than subtly documenting a number of significant quotes on my mobile phone, and taking photographs and video footage which is an integral part of urban exploration anyway.

After most explores or longer exploring trips, I would produce a set of detailed field notes on my computer that attempted to vividly describe what happened in out in the field, exactly as it occurred. A large number of ‘urbex reports’, as they are known among likeminded others, were also produced and posted on various forums and the group’s blog/website. I decided that the use of a blog/website would be something which all my participants could contribute to by offering suggestions, written reports, photographs and video, and that it would be ideal for uncovering more detail about things that had occurred in the research field. So, the reports produced by WildBoyz comprise other people’s work as well as my own, as the group worked collaboratively to provide a History of each explore, and an Our Version of Events section which details what happened. It should be added, however, that sometimes the latter section of the reports are jovial and, every so often, seek to ‘take the piss’, so their accuracy in terms of what really happened is not always entirely precise. Nevertheless, I argue that this is still a crucial part of the ‘urbex world’ and those involved in
its creation.

There is a second reason why I chose to involve my research participants in the creation of urbex reports, and this concerns Oakley’s (1981) point that there is often a sense of inequality when it comes to the researcher/research participant relationship. According to Oakley, since the researcher ultimately chooses what will be embedded in the research, participants generally end up giving away much more than they are ever going to receive back. What is more, it is often possible for the researcher to remain detached and impersonal, and they end up divulging little about themselves while participants are expected to expose personal, often intimate, details about their lives (Sandberg, 2011). With these pressing issues at the forefront of my mind, I decided that all of my participants could contribute to our blog, as opposed to it all being ‘mine’, so I was as much a part of the intimacy as everyone else. Of course there is a certain degree of bias, given that I wrote each of the narratives in this study without their input, and in doing so it was impossible to eliminate my own subjectivity, but this I argue is the nature of interpretive research that seeks to question more readily accepted ontological and epistemological positions.

The above comments aside, the obvious disadvantage to keeping the research side of things separate from the everyday context as much as possible was that I was not able to chronicle events as they happened. Nonetheless, Weber (1949) offers a method that goes some way towards justifying the veritable worth of this way of doing things through a concept he termed Verstehen. It was Weber’s belief that researchers should not just try to study a group, but that they should also try to gain an empathetic understanding of each of the individuals within the collective. To borrow a well-known idiom, we might say that this is ‘putting ourselves into someone else’s shoes’. Weber’s concept, however, can be broken down into two elements. The first, aktuelles verstehen, involves gaining knowledge of and about urban explorers in their own milieu through direct observation. The second element, erklärendes verstehen, suggests that even if a researcher directly observes someone doing something, they still cannot explain exactly why the phenomena is occurring. Hence, it is necessary for the researcher, later on, to try to account for the reasons behind particular types of actions (it goes without saying that participating in urban exploration aids this process). In other words, the point is that researchers need time to reflect on what has occurred and to develop theoretical interpretations. So, rather than regurgitating every single thing that happened, it is perhaps more beneficial to provide a rich, empathetic,
analysis of a more select number of situations. After all, trying to note down absolutely everything runs the risk of losing the richness and profundity that this research seeks.

As for chronicling certain key events, I made sure that this study would assume, first, like Geertz (1973), that things in this world are of this world, inasmuch as they do not lie outside it as occult objects or beings. Second, again following Geertz (1973), I intended that this research would produce ‘thick descriptions’ of otherwise transient and equivocal spaces of compensation. So, although it is impossible to codify findings, to make them entirely generalisable vis-à-vis a wider population, pragmatic generalisations could otherwise be made within them (Geertz, 1973). As intimated earlier, it has been my intention to embark on an inquiry that enhances the knowledge of existing studies that focus on urban exploration, because they are arguably limited. Therefore, the vocation of this study is to construct a detailed interpretive understanding of urban exploration, to record, in some greater detail, something about its heterotopic social spaces since we currently know very little about them.

Doing things in such a way meant I was able to uncover the underlying ideals, opinions, social interactions, routines, behaviours, feelings and motives that are intrinsic to urban explorers, all from their point of view. This is not to suggest that the research aimed to be fictitious or based on guesswork in its context, only that it served to exemplify that truth is not based on presupposed realist narratives (Blackshaw, 2003). As Rinehart explains, ‘the feel of the experience – verisimilitude – is what the writer is after’ (1998: 204), because the world and, most especially, our heterotopias within it are based on subjective mythology and an interpreter’s comprehension and deliverance. This is what Blackshaw refers to as ‘a ‘true’ narrative fiction’ (2003: 44). As Bauman reminds us, we should be wary of every irrevocable story that is viewed as being reliable or generalisable, on account of the fact that all stories are laden with human ambivalence (Bauman and Tester, 2001). Any account concerning the social is only ever one version of a story. Drawing inspiration from Gramsci, Bauman explains that we are not fools caught firmly in the talons of solid social structures; rather, things can be different because the world is no different to a series of independent novella (Bauman and Tester, 2001). There are, in other words, many alternatives to the ‘socially factual’, in the ungeneralizable fiction we produce for ourselves.
In addition to living among research participants, some further comments surrounding the use of still photography are required, as their implementation has become something of a growing tradition, and almost a prerequisite, for any participant seeking admission into the worlds of urban exploration (Romany, 2010). To neglect or disregard their significance would only serve as detrimental to the research. As Garrett (2014) points out, the use of photography is also a growing phenomenon, particularly in geography as a discipline, and he sees it as an important part of analytical and critiquing processes, to elicit cultural understandings. I found it necessary, therefore, to compliment my research with visual research methods.

In particular, volunteer-employed photography (VEP) was amalgamated into the study, alongside my own photographic material, because it ensured that each person involved in the study had control over what they wanted to take photographs of, and precisely when and where they wanted to take them (Garrod, 2010). As Garrod points out, VEP is useful because it can assist in uncovering human actor’s peculiarities and qualities, and as a method it is able to access aspects of their heterotopia that may otherwise remain invisible and unknown. All of the photographs and visual representations of urban explorers ‘in action’ derived from smartphones, GoPros and digital cameras, which all the explorers I spent time with owned themselves. Although Garrett (2014) advises that inexpensive disposable cameras should also be provided, on the premise that they produce images that are less staged and that they can be slipped into pockets easily, making them convenient to capture the spontaneity of human beings in different contexts, I decided not to implement this method. After suggesting it to the WildBoyz, they strongly disagreed with this method and argued that I would be ‘forcing everyone to make up bollocks, especially for those of [them] who don’t take photos in the first place’. In other words, this method would involve them doing something they would not usually do, so the photographs from disposable cameras could arguably turn out to be misleading, odd and unnatural.

And yet, to return to the point about utilising images that are less staged, it is important to point out that this research was duly concerned with the ‘staged’ production of photographs in a certain sense. While this might sound paradoxical, in relation to the argument raised above, I argue that some staged photographs are still an integral part of the urban explorer’s
world which is driven by hedonism and the desire to be the celebrity (Bauman, 2000).
However, the point is that I intended this staging to be ‘natural’, if we can call it that, or
instinctive.

As Berger (1972) contends, each and every photograph should be viewed as a way of
experimenting, authenticating and assembling an impression of reality. Each photograph is
based on something we – as the photographer – deem worthy of documentation; the thing
we have decided to capture contains within it some voluminous meaning and the feelings
and thoughts which exist spontaneously in the spectator’s own mind (Berger, 1972). In other
words, it can be argued that a photograph has no inherent native language; rather, it is
based on the unprocessed ‘language of events’, as they have been experienced in our world
(Berger, 1972: 3). A real photograph, as Berger suggests, is comprised of a wider invisible
content and represents a ‘quantum of truth’ (1972: 3), inasmuch as whilst it records what
has directly been observed, it always, according to its nature, also concerns what has not
been seen. Certainly, if the researcher is not present at the time of the photographs
manifestation the subsequent analysis can be limited, but I would argue that this is the
nature of real ethnography.

Data Analysis

The field notes I assembled contained vital pieces of information about what happened, and
also the thoughts and feelings of myself and participants throughout the entire research
journey. It was imperative, however, that I selected a method of analysis that was capable of
opening up a window into these notes which had the faculty to depict a heterotopia. This of
course had to be understood in a way that recognises that the heterotopia is wholly
embedded in ‘the Boyz’ mutual social experiences (Foucault, 1984). What this means, to put
it succinctly, is that each of ‘the Boyz’ were narrators in the construction of their world and I
had to find an appropriate way of demonstrating this. It was for this reason I decided that my
analysis would make use of narrative writing. Essentially, as it was hinted earlier, this
entailed bringing my research notes to life by turning them into episodes that aimed to
describe the cultural imaginary of ‘the Boyz’ heterotopia (Castoriadis, 1987). As Blackshaw
notes, this approach allows the culture of a particular group to ‘reveal itself’ to the reader in
such a way that we might call it a ‘true narrative fiction’ (2003: 44).
The data analysis I used involved a method of constant reflection and interpretation, in the dual sense that the ‘data’ was collected from the field in an ongoing process and I engaged with a multiplicity of theoretical writings to reflect on the episodes. To attach a label to it, this thesis made use of a thematic analysis – a procedure that is widely used in qualitative research (Bryman, 2016). What this means is that from the beginning a number of key themes were anticipated. Having been involved in urban exploration for a considerable amount of time gave me an intuitive insight into this world, and I found this knowledge invaluable as various initial observations began to reflect my themes in practice. But, I quickly discovered that the data analysis procedure was not quite as simple as it first seemed. As my time in the field increased I began to uncover new themes which challenged some of my preceding ideas. This, however, is the nature of interpretivist research and precisely what I wanted because I did not intend for my research to test only what I thought I knew by experimenting with some sort of hypothesis. I wanted my research to remain open to the possibility that new things could be uncovered along the way. In other words, this research was a non-linear process; it was continuous, reflexive and required me to constantly analyse and challenge my findings.

As noted in the previous section, photographs were also used in conjunction with field notes to augment my interpretations. A number of photographs have been inserted into this thesis and discussed, and they offer the reader a supplementary way of gaining a feel for ‘the Boyz’ heterotopia. Twinned with the rich, thick, descriptive writing, it is hoped that they encourage the reader to completely immerse themselves in this ethnographic study by following me all the way into the depths of the rabbit hole.

Furthermore, as the reader will discover in the ensuing chapters that discuss my research findings, a number of direct quotations have been incorporated into the writing. However, it is important to note that I did not conduct interviews to extract these thoughts and ideas. Instead, these findings were taken from memory, notes I made using my phone when someone said something particularly interesting, and from short video clips that happened to be recorded by ‘the Boyz’ in the field. No ‘official’ transcriptions were produced because the information collected tended to be short and contextualised, so I inserted the quotes directly into my descriptions and notes of the setting or situation they slotted into.
Ethical Issues

It is important to touch on the issue of ethics in the methodology given that this study focuses on human beings whose rights needed to be protected. Concerns about ethics really started to escalate following the infamous holocaust and other horrific Nazi experiments that took place in the 1940s, to prevent those events from ever repeating themselves (Bauman, 1989). Ethical procedures gradually became ever more procedural and stringent after a number of questionable and problematic studies continued to emerge in later years, particularly those that were conducted on human subjects and had a profound psychological effect on participants – such as research into ‘the Bystander Effect’, ‘the Milgram Experiment’ and ‘the Stanford Prison Experiment’ (Bryman, 2016; Albon, 2007; Zimbardo, 2007; Milgram, 1974). It goes without saying, then, that ethical concerns are of critical importance, and that the safety of every individual involved in a study, including the researcher, is paramount. In view of this, I have made sure to include this section which discusses the ethical issues and implications of this study, to demonstrate how this research remained ‘ethical’ as it was being carried out.

First of all, I want to argue that what seems to have gone unnoticed is that in the drive to quash unethical practices, ethics committees, boards and organisations have become too scientifically regulated and ordered, leaving virtually no room for the investigation of such things as deviant forms of leisure (Blackshaw and Crabbe, 2004; Rojek, 1995). What this means is that if strict, imbalanced and unreasonable ethics committees continue to inhibit us, we will fail to keep up with an ever-changing liquid modernity. If we do not risk entering heterotopias we will no longer merely be haunted by the great shadow of a spectre, our research will have become consumed by that spectre, and it will represent the very death of academic integrity, imagination and research involving real leisure. As Bauman (2008b) contends, ethics are dominated by a deliberate ignorance which is self-perpetuating and particularly useful when certain voices need to be stifled. However, this research argues that researchers, especially those in leisure and cultural studies, need to embrace deviance, to salvage the conditions that allow us to make our own decisions (Blackshaw and Crabbe, 2004). In turn, researchers might exercise greater freedom and autonomy when exploring alternative cultures and heterotopias. In a nutshell, then, this research embraces the contention that good research, especially when it comes to exploring deviant forms of leisure, needs to rub up against rules and regulations to challenge them in a way that is still
moral, but where such worlds can be interpreted with greater effect.

Nevertheless, and notwithstanding the points raised above, it is important to mention that I was not unmindful that some things had to be carefully considered before my research could be conducted effectively, especially where other people were implicated because the purpose of this study was to explore and understand urban exploration which often necessitates committing an act of trespass. It was important, therefore, to first of all consider the law. As far as the law goes, it should be made clear that the act of trespass in the United Kingdom and New Zealand is not illegal (Crown Prosecution Service, 2016 [1994]; Ministry of Justice, 2013 [1980]). In both countries, owners of a property, security or the police must give an individual an initial warning to leave and they may only pursue the matter if the individual concerned does not comply. To briefly summarise, in both countries laws, the act of trespass only becomes ‘criminal’ if a person returns after having been warned not to return, if they have used threatening or abusive language, if it is not clear how they entered a site, or if a person wilfully or recklessly disturbs a domestic animal. Quite understandably, trespass does become a criminal offence if an individual is caught breaking and entering, or if they are caught with tools that indicate there was an intention to break and enter.

As regards the urban explorers in my study, other than engaging in the act of trespass, none of them engaged in any type of law breaking behaviour (i.e. breaking and entering, causing criminal damage etc.) while I was present. As most of them have alternative lives outside the world of urban exploration, concern with things such as not ruining their careers tended to be at the forefront of their minds. It is undeniable that some urban explorers do break and enter and force their way into sites (see Garrett, 2013a) of course, but I want to reiterate that this study did not encompass this side of urban exploration. Only legitimate means of entry were sought, through open windows, doors, unguarded holes etc.

Before any ‘official’ research could be conducted in the field I also made sure that I had completed the university’s ethical documentation to gain ethical approval. As for the experiences that had occurred in the past, I decided to consult the work of Bauman (1993) where it is argued that there is a big difference between being ethical and moral. While ethical thought increasingly entails ‘modern legislative practice... under the banners of universality and foundation’, being moral involves being free of rules, and action that is often non-rational, unregulated and unpredictable (ibid: 1993: 8). Morality, therefore, is by no
means universalizable, not least because it is the most personal and precious of the human rights we have. Nevertheless, apparently it is vital that social research somehow remains ethical as well as moral (Ransome, 2013). As things stand, however, both ethics and morality are incompatible in today’s society because when it comes to ethics people are able to relieve themselves of all moral obligation and responsibility (Bauman, 1993).

To remain moral and faithful to my research participants, though, and to respect their human rights and trust, it mattered to me that I used crucial parts of their ongoing story that took place years before this research was ever planned. Without these key experiences, my research would not have been able to provide the rich description of their lives – the *verisimilitude* – I was looking for. There is also the fundamental point that when it comes to investigating heterotopia in full the universality of ethics are no longer relevant anyway, because different rules matter. In view of this, I also had to recognise that research ethics might even be less relevant, and even detrimental, to the research that was yet to be conducted because that too would be rooted deep inside the heterotopia. Nothing that is universal and regulated can exist in such a realm because the heterotopia demands that things work differently to the real world (Foucault, 1984). It was for this reason I followed Bauman’s (1993) advice and consulted my own conscience, by discussing the idea of incorporating past and future experiences into my research with my participants and seeking their respective permission. They all agreed that it was a good idea to discuss past experiences in my research because the past, present and future would all inevitably blur into one another anyway. Each of them also argued that there was ethical value in bringing up the issue with them, pointing out that nothing I was doing, or had done, was unethical. Finally, I had to prepare myself for the likelihood that I would have to become ‘unethical’ by conventional and procedural standards at times in the coming future for the sake of the heterotopia⁷, to remain completely moral and true to my participants and their way of viewing the world while they lived their lives as urban explorers.

In view of the points raised above, I made sure that informed consent was freely given by all of my participants. A brief outline of the research was provided verbally to give my participants an idea of my intentions behind conducting the research, and all participants were told, clearly, that if they objected to the research or wanted to withdraw at any point I

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⁷ I knew that on occasion I would have to follow my participants, even if I was not completely happy with what they were doing (i.e. climbing palisade fences, ignoring ‘Do Not Enter’ signs and security guards, and witnessing drug taking).
would ensure that nothing about them would be recorded in any shape of form. I also reiterated to my participants on several occasions that they could raise any concerns about the research with me at any point throughout the study. Additionally, I assured each and every participant that they would remain completely anonymous in my study; only their ‘urbex names’ would be used, if they agreed, and no other personal details would be utilised without their permission.

For the added protection of all those involved in this research, some names and events have been slightly altered. This is not to imply that the events discussed throughout this thesis are fictitious, only that some have been blurred. What is more, as this thesis discusses more scrupulously later on, when it comes down to being an urban explorer par excellence individuals encounter different worlds where their identities are never fixed. Their identities are, rather, always contingent upon place and time (Bauman, 2004b; Butler, 1990). It is impossible, therefore, to say with any degree of specificity who did what. What all of this means is that the reader will never truly know who did what, or when they may have done it. This, however, does not damage the integrity or richness of the research, or so I want to argue, because everything that happened in this research was still real.

Aside from the introductory part of my study that involved being open and honest with my research participants, as it was noted earlier I intended to conduct my study covertly in part. Hence, I instructed my key participants, ‘the Boyz’, not to inform any other urban explorer we met along the way about my research. This was not to deliberately deceive anyone, it merely allowed me to remain in the urbex world without compromising my position as an urban explorer too much. This meant I would only ever inform those I intended to include in the study about my role as a researcher. Of all those that were asked to join my investigation, including ‘the Boyz’, no one declined my invitation to participate or chose to opt out.

As far as health and safety was concerned, I did not want to impact upon the research by refusing to participate in explores that others around me were doing in the name of adhering to policy. It is arguable that opting myself out from engaging in what some might term ‘risky’ activity would have impacted negatively on my image as an urban explorer, and in consequence it might have affected the integrity of my research (Bryman, 2016). However, this does not mean I followed my participants into every single explore they ever did, or that
others were forced to participate in things they did not want to do. It is, after all, always more important to privilege personal wellbeing over any research activity. Depending on the situation, then, and how we each were feeling, sometimes a few individuals ‘bailed’. For example, some in the group occasionally deemed a site as being too dangerous, or ‘not worth it if the risk to reward ratio was shit’ (i.e. the chances of being caught in relation to the perceived rewards the site had to offer). At other times some of us would be physically incapable of getting into a site (if the entry was too tight, or required better climbing skill than we had), and on a few odd occasions some of my participants simply ‘couldn’t be fucked and would rather stay at home or sit in the car’. In other words, everyone in this study knew their own limits and everyone remained entirely autonomous when it came to making decisions. Finally, it is important to note that on every explore we always made sure that someone in the group had a mobile phone on them, and that someone knew roughly where we were going to be in the event of an emergency.

Summary

The methodological approach detailed in this chapter aimed to show that for this research to offer a comprehensive interpretation of a heterotopia a reciprocal and oscillating approach was required, to alter between empathetic insider and intuitive outsider perspectives (Blackshaw, 2003). This was to ensure that the spaces of expression and compensation that constitute an urban explorer’s heterotopia did not remain abstracted from a wider sociological imagination, or that they were too distanced to be of any use (Bauman, 2014). Importantly, however, the ‘outsider’ perspective is not an application of solid theory projected onto the realities of urban explorers, it is instead an integral part of interpretation, by which common knowledge and intuition are amalgamated together. This is not to imply that this research drifted into some form of instinctive feeling, though, which Geertz (1973) rejected as the foundation for a project of interpretation. The term ‘outsider’ also indicates not that I was situated outside the research, or that it is epistemologically guided or characterised by solipsism, but that my research appeals to what E. M. Forster terms ‘only connect’: to engage in interactions with other realms of human life, to reveal and trade between interconnections and the interdisciplinary (O’Neill and Seal, 2012).

The crucial point was to move away from ‘lifeless groupings imposed by sociologists’ and other academics alike (Shields, 1996: x), to risk carrying out creative and critical research that
understands, as Berger suggests, that ‘imagination is not, as it is sometimes thought, the
ability to invent; it is the ability to disclose that which exists’ (1960: 51). Bauman refers to
this as a ‘sociological sixth sense’ (2014: 52), where nothing can be assured of its exactitude
because it has to first be argued in disputes which have no discernible ending. It is the
sociological sixth sense, what we could also term intuition, that resides in the interpretation
of human choice, as a critical and empathetic way of understanding the socially produced
world and heterotopias which have been created in response to the challenges of our socially
affected situation (Bauman, 2014; Blackshaw, 2003; Bauman, 2000). As Geertz (1973) points
out, representations and indications of the unobservable and mysterious are not locked
inside our heads, they are the substance of the everyday. Time and space are not merely
‘real’ in the everyday understanding of the words, as our doxa would have us interpret them,
they can also be contingent, individually collective and represent other spaces where a
special kind of freedom is felt (Blackshaw and Crabbe, 2004; Blackshaw, 2003; Foucault,
1984).

To this end, this thesis explores the heterotopic world of urban explorers from their point of
view, but in a way that attends to the method of sociological hermeneutics. It has been
achieved, as Wacquant puts it, ‘through a methodical and meticulous work of detection and
documentation, a deciphering and writing liable to capture and to convey the taste and the
ache of action, the sound and the fury of the social world’ (2004: vii). I immersed myself deep
into the heterotopia of a group of urban explorers and from there observed, interacted with,
described and analysed likeminded people in terms of our mutual interest in urban
exploration. The aim was to explore the complexity and richness of urban exploration and I
feel I managed to achieve this on account of the methodology I employed. A large amount of
data was produced, strengthening its accuracy when I came to represent it much more
succinctly, in a way that would not have been achievable if a quantitative study had been
conducted. In other words, my methodology allowed me to enter and be a part of a
sequestered social reality in a way no other approach could.
Chapter Four
The Darker Side of Modernity: Seeking Spaces of Compensation

Introduction

Before any sort of social investigation and analysis of urban explorers can commence, it is essential that present modernity is understood in detail. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to contextualise modernity in the early twenty-first century. As it was discussed in the methodology, this is the method of sociological hermeneutics being applied to the thesis. The chapters that follow in the remainder of this thesis draw on these ideas, so in effect they represent the foundation of this study.

As is well known, Max Weber (1930) famously explored the advent of modern capitalism and the subsequent disenchantment that followed. Today, although many scholars have moved the debate to another level, and they now refer to it as a ‘post’, ‘late’ or ‘liquid’ condition (Wagner, 2012; Bauman, 2000; Giddens, 1994; Lyotard, 1984), it can be argued that Weber’s sense of disenchantment has not disappeared. Rather, the image that is often painted of modernity is bleak and pessimistic. The common theme that unites such thinkers is the view that capitalism has had serious negative implications on human freedom, because the vast majority of people these days are inclined to achieve their leisure, and indeed everything else, through consumerist means (Blackshaw, 2017).

Analogous to the above-mentioned scholars, this thesis agrees with the common decree that enchantment has faded in modernity. However, following an alternative reading of Weber’s thesis, I want to put forward the idea that enchantment has not completely disappeared from our world. As Weber argues:

The ultimate and most sublime values have faded from public life, entering either the obscure realm of mystical life or the fraternal feelings of direct relationships among individuals. It is no accident that our greatest art is intimate rather than monumental, and that today it is only within the smallest of circles of the community, from person to person and pianissimo, that there is any stirring of the
It is starkly different to most other interpretations of modernity, but as Blackshaw (2017) points out, if we are willing to take this alternative understanding of Weber into consideration then a different way of comprehending enchantment in modernity becomes possible.

The purpose of this chapter, then, is to contextualise modernity by revealing how all ideological utopian experiments do in fact remain unachievable, in the sense that they can only ever reflect *unreal places* that cannot ever be reached (Foucault, 1984). As Sigmund Freud (2002) suggests, in his book *Civilisation and its Discontents*, modernity might give the impression that it is evolving towards an improved neoteric society, but it can never completely rid itself of its past or its imperfections. In other words, no matter how utopian it appears there is always the other side to modernity that we try to hide or ignore: the side of ambivalence, dirt and decay (Freud, 2002). By contrast, if a utopia was to truly exist it would be completely flawless in every way.

Following the above line of thinking, this chapter begins by exploring a very real attempt to create a tangible utopia by taking a look at the author’s hometown of Newton Aycliffe, where this tale of urban exploration first began. At first the reader may question the relevance of this initial section vis-à-vis urban explorers, but with some patience this should become explicit as the structure of the chapter develops. The chapter then goes on to explain why the utopian vision failed by providing a detailed discussion of Bauman’s (2000) argument that we have entered a stage in modernity that might be described as being *liquid*. This means that our lives entail an uncertain ‘market-mediated mode of life’ that promotes the value of consumer choice and society, and indicates that market mechanisms have managed to percolate into every single part of human existence (Bauman, in Rojek, 2004: 304). In consequence, it has been argued that in pursuing freedom individuals have been lured into a different type of subjugation through seduction, as opposed to repression (Bauman, 2000). As a result, it can be argued that individuals have inadvertently lost their freedom, autonomy and authenticity, even if they live in ignorance of this fact. What this means is that urban explorers may think they have positioned themselves somewhere special, among the discontents and waste of a dreamt of utopia, but really they too still bear the hallmarks of what Bauman has termed the ubiquitous *consumer syndrome* (Bauman, in
Nonetheless, despite the seeming proclivity to entertain the same pessimistic outlook as Bauman, Wagner and Giddens, this thesis endeavours to outline the significance of Lyotard’s (1984) *performativity criterion* thesis which has the capacity to steer a new ontological context which can be used to understand life, today, as being charged with a new kind of theatricality. To expand on this idea, what Lyotard’s work allows us to do, if the apposite words of Beilharz are borrowed for a moment, is recognise that ‘even in consumption there is creativity of action, for culture is praxis’ (2002: xxx). In other words, what is often forgotten or dismissed is the point that some individuals are open to enhancing spaces of self-definition and artistic production, especially when it comes to leisure (Bauman, in Bauman and Raud, 2015). This, according to Blackshaw (2017), is what make us characteristically human: our appetite for enchantment and a longing to make our lives significant and meaningful in some way, shape or form. The upshot of this is that performativity becomes all about the pursuit of self-knowledge, insofar as the distinction between consumerist and authentic leisure becomes superfluous. In the end, regardless of the market-mediated mode of life, it is in forms of leisure, such as urban exploration, where individuals are genuinely resolved to open up to novel possibilities of enchantment by re-enchanting the imagination and convincing themselves they have stepped outside the options made available by consumerism.

What follows in the latter half of this chapter, therefore, is a look at Foucault’s (1984) concept of the *heterotopia*, to argue the point that while utopian dreams may be fictitious there are still spaces of compensation that urban explorers manage to create for themselves. This is the key theoretical idea that underpins the rest of this thesis as I attempt to reveal what goes on inside the *darker side of modernity*. It is also an attempt to take into account that the world urban explorers find themselves in is fluid, unpredictable and changeable, but in a way that allows me to form an interpretation that looks beyond the nihilism that pervades most contemporary renderings of society. Certainly, most heterotopic spaces are consumerist beneath the surface, but this point becomes irrelevant as far as the magic, imagination and creativity of the space is concerned. Ultimately, such spaces are different in their own unique way and this makes them far more special than the kind of leisure that is a direct product of the market. What this means, then, is that this thesis focuses on the darker side of modernity as being something that is mysterious and out of sight, rather than it
denoting something depressing and destructive.

**The Utopian Dream**

It was almost eleven o’clock on a warm August evening as four of us walked down an all too familiar footpath. It casually winds around a long corner, following the nearby road to the right. To the left, behind a carefully stained red wooden fence and alternating sections of brick wall, sits the locally known ‘Posh Estate’. It is respectable in there; the lawns are well trimmed and tended to and the gardens are immaculate. At the entrance, which we passed just moments earlier, there are four simple but elegant-looking pillars with large stone spheres positioned on top and, beyond them, each house is constructed out of an attractive farmhouse style brick. A warm green moss grows on the rooftops. Here the moss is not treated as a mould or an unwelcome nuisance; it somehow fits with the charming mellowness of the neighbourhood. Positioned on the outskirts of one of the older sides of town, and surrounded by ‘the Woods’, this area feels especially comfortable and inviting. Indeed, it should, all four of us grew up around here, so we know it far better than most places.

We continued on through a monumental arch of overgrown trees where the old woods have burst out above the path. We could hear the gentle breeze, like it often does in the summer months, pushing the trees lightly so that their branches creaked and clattered against one another. Further on, the path began to descend, down a small bank towards an underpass that would take us to the other side of the road. The sweet scent of privet, or something to that effect, was strong in our nostrils here, bringing back nostalgic memories of walking to school since this was the route we walked each morning and every weekday afternoon. The old school was just ahead from this point, and we could see its dark silhouette in the distance. But, we were not heading in that direction. Instead, we turned right and headed straight into the pale light of the underpass.

Once a key munitions site during World War II, selected for its marshy lands which blanketed the area in regular mist that provided protection against the Luftwaffe, Newton Aycliffe was to emerge as an example of a modern paradise in the aftermath of the war (Newton News, 2014). It was an experimental town ascending from William Beveridge’s 1942 report (the Beveridge Report) which aimed to demonstrate how Britain would rebuild and tackle the five
‘Giant Evils’ known as ‘Want (poverty), Disease (ill health), Ignorance (lack of education), Squalor (poor housing) and Idleness (unemployment)’ (Beveridge, 1942; Clare, 2015). These were precisely modern weaknesses in a time that still visualised an ultimate state, clinging onto the idea that immortality and the survival of the nation took precedence (Bauman, 1992b). This, of course, connects well with Norbert Elias’ concept of the ‘civilising process’, which suggests that humanity demonstrated a progressive shift towards improving standards and etiquette, and eliminating undesirable or destructive behaviours. As Elias (1994) suggests, people were pushed in a direction that caused them to feel such things as revulsion, ignominy and remorse if they witnessed or felt over-expressive emotions that had been deemed inappropriate outside of certain controlled environments. Like Bauman suggests, it was hygiene that became the central product of ‘the deconstruction of mortality’ (1992b: 155), and in an anthropoemic way this represents the national struggle for durability, precision and the ultimate objective perfection.

By the 1950s Modernism’s new brutalist architectural techniques exploded into fashion, and together with their béton brut, glass plate, brick, breezeblock and ducting, the concrete monoliths of Aylesbury, Newcastle, Sheffield, Leeds and London were brought into existence (Campkin, 2013). As Hatherley (2010) suggests, these structures were not built with aesthetics in mind, they were a ‘weapon’ and a firm ‘attitude’ against the evils of Britain, especially pre-war weaknesses and infirmities. These ‘streets in the skies’ were the dream castles of a new era and, for all intents and purposes, Newton Aycliffe was no different, it was merely a more intrepid, if not overconfident, experiment with the brutalist exposé:

Newton Aycliffe was to be a paradise for housewives, with houses grouped around greens so children could play safely away from roads. There would be nurseries (to look after children while their mothers went shopping), a sports stadium, a park and a ‘district heating system’, so dirty coal fires would not be necessary. The pubs were going to be state run, and would sell nationalised beer. The town centre was to include a luxury hotel, a college and a community centre, a people’s theatre, a dance hall and a cinema. There were even plans to use the Port Clarence railway to give townspeople a link to the seaside (Clare, 2008, cited in Alexander, 2009).

In true colonialist spirit this new settlement was understood to be profoundly utopian since it sought out better ways of living (Alexander, 2009). Much like the inner-city flats of Park Hill and Hyde Park in Sheffield, it was packed with ideas of functionality, strength and optimism, and the quasi-modernist fantasy that large fortress-like projects could help people prosper
and exist together as part of a supreme community (ibid).

In many ways, then, utopianism was at the heart of the modern project. It was an ideology that sought to change history by bringing an ideal form of society to life. The aim of this seductive life path was to establish a single collective political belief that would overthrow leading ideologies such as capitalism (Geoghegan, 2008). To this extent, the modern project was important because it brought the promise of a concrete, cooperative, community, and equality by eradicating all notions of private property and individual wealth (Manguel and Guadalupi, 1999). What this means is that utopianism would lead to the fair and even distribution of national resources and abolish the concept of superiority (ibid). What is more, as Bauman (2003a) suggests, the common starting point for any modern utopian project tended to arise by way of architectural expressions in the urban environment. Reflecting on it now, Newton Aycliffe was evidently part of this plan, and its safe, predictable but robust architecture was the first step in the direction of creating the ideal society.

The lights were flickering and streaks of intense illegible graffiti stung our eyes. A mixture of ‘GAZZA WOZ ERE 2000’ and ‘GREENY IS A FUCKIN’ GRASS’, alongside twisted pictures of cocks, fanny and spunk transformed the short tunnel into an insane, almost psychotic, scene. The heavy smell of piss and stale fag smoke pricked at our nostrils, but, crunching our way over broken glass, empty Space Raiders crisp packets, and used condoms, we walked on unfazed. The picturesque setting from earlier had disappeared altogether; not that it had actually ever fully existed all. It was, much like the rest of the narrative that makes up this study, simply part of a fabricated truth; the imaginary mixed with the idealised real – an isolated fantasy that can be released only within the magical moment of our small group.

The school mentioned above for instance, which used to be well known for propagandising religious practices and social policies, holds fewer nostalgic memories than we would perhaps like to admit, and it has changed radically in recent years on account of its various modifications and renovations, to the extent that it’s hardy the same school anymore. By the same token, my short description of our walk to the underpass failed to mention the inestimable amount of dog shit that we’d had to carefully dodge on the way, or the fact the ‘Posh Estate’ was only assigned that status on the basis that it was considered to be marginally better than its neighbouring ‘Rough Estate’, over on the opposite side of the road.
At the entrance of the ‘Posh Estate’, three of the concrete spheres are missing, and a closer inspection reveals that the crumbling mortar and cracked bricks are much cheaper than they likely once appeared. The old warmness of the street lights, those that once cast a delicate golden light, has been lost, having been replaced by harsh white LED lamps which provide high levels of scotopic lumens. During the summer months, the drains also emit a rank intoxicating stench because the original drainage system has not been adequately developed since the area has expanded. Even the woods located behind the houses, where teenagers once went for a hopeful fondle in the bushes, and where kids went to light the odd fire or ‘blow up’ deodorant cans, are almost gone nowadays, ever since the council decided to hack them down. They felled a large number of the trees for two reasons: they weren't ‘native’ to the area and so had to be forcibly removed, and because the town is fast expanding beyond its former boundaries, so there is an ever increasing demand for space for new housing.

We passed a couple of dodgy-looking smackheads at the end of the tunnel, sporting mock tartan Burberry caps titled upwards. We caught a strong inimitable scent of weed as we tried our best to avoid eye contact. Surrounded by several small splatters of yellow gozzy, they were each clutching large bottles of ‘White Lightning’ – the finest quality beverage you can consume in an underpass. One of them spoke, addressing the group as a whole: ‘Now then, fellas. Where ya’s all off to, like? Fuckin’ Paki shop’s shut, dickheads’. He sounded like ‘a propa’ fuckin’ retard’, so we ignored him. A moment later we emerged from the other side of the underpass, unscathed, through a lifeless, hazy, cloud of smoke, and each sucked in a deep breath of a fresher sort of air. Quickly glancing at Subject 47, I could read the repulsed expression daubed across his face. It was clear what he was thinking: ‘scummy fuckin’ bastards’. They were ‘pure filth’ and they belonged right there, ‘down in the waste and debris of the pissed-filled gutter’. He doesn't like chavs very much. Box laughed.

Just ahead, further down the path and behind a row of thin trees and some marginally thicker bushes, a faint silhouette slowly began to materialise into sight. It was larger than I remembered. An odd sense of excitement and anticipation made my heart beat quicker. To the immediate left of the dark outline sat another one, much smaller, but since it was closer it was a little more distinguishable. This was the former community centre and playgroup, opposite the locally known ‘Paki shop’ – one of many identical
yellow-bricked shops dotted around the town – which regularly changed hands and also often found itself boarded up from time to time. A few weathered boards clung on desperately to the community centre’s exterior, covering all the doors and several windows. The long standing rumour was that a rabies outbreak had forced it to close and, although we knew the real reason for its closure; that it was, like most other services in the area, too expensive to run, we still liked to imagine that it held within it some dark surreptitious past simply because it fulfilled our want for a better story. It was much more visible now, as we’d walked closer, but ignoring it we turned to the right, away from the rabies infected building. We had a different explore in mind: an old care home positioned just next door.

Newton Aycliffe is not a utopia, and nor has it ever been. For years, against the promise of restoration, the town centre has spiralled into a state of degeneration. Once a pristine white, in anticipation of Queen Elizabeth’s visit in 1960 (Chapman, 2006), the concrete façade now has a greyish tinge, and the early brickwork which was at one time solid and dirt-free is now stained and squalid. The dull beaten paving stones too, outside the various boarded up vacant buildings, lay cracked and broken, unpleasantly adorned with old chewing gum and the crust of many years of pigeon faeces. Of course, it would be wrong to ignore the recent attempts to transform Newton Aycliffe, because the town has been undergoing a redevelopment project for the past twenty years and a new Tesco Extra, Aldi and an Argos have been built. They are located at the end of the old town centre and are the new hub of activity, where the paving is less cracked and there are rows of the same mass produced lampposts, trees and benches. A new, larger, Job Centre Plus has opened down at this end too, and it sits alongside the empty shells of new buildings which hold the promise of a variety of new shops and more consumer freedom.

On the outskirts of Newton Aycliffe sits the industrial estate, where sounds of emergency sirens often wail over the housing estates and into the town. The pungent smell of the factories, with their tang of plastic, sweet-smelling biscuits and other chemical rich fumes, billow across much of the area. According to the Assistant Chief Executive’s Office (2012) the people living here, or in its surrounding villages, have a relatively low life expectancy compared to other towns and cities across the UK. Since the days of the ‘Aycliffe Angels’ – the wartime female industrial workforce in the area (Aycliffe Angels, no date) – the old munitions buildings have gradually been replaced by large manufacturing plants and, with new constructions such as the new Hitachi Rail plant, the estate is increasing little by little
into the surrounding fields, marshes and woods. However, while manufacturing is allegedly booming here the prevalence of high unemployment levels remain, with, like Bauman (2000) indicates vis-à-vis the wider societal condition, the prospect of any sort of long-term employment quickly shrinking amid the reign of unsteady short-term contracts.

The people of Newton Aycliffe, often dubbed the ‘Newtonians’, are left vulnerable as their jobs can be terminated tomorrow with little or no warning, and although new tidy-looking red bricked housing estates are regularly, and hastily, thrown together on the outermost fringes of town, towards the centre the number of abandoned or unoccupied sites accumulate far quicker than the new ones can ever hope to appear. The hope attached to concealing the ever-growing degeneration of the inner town is a futile challenge, in spite of the cheap flamboyant disguises that are frequently erected. Like the dog found chasing its tail, the condition here most certainly appears ineffectual and unpromising, even we might reason a little bleak. In view of this, we could quite easily reject Clare’s (2015) suggestion that the townspeople of Newton Aycliffe ‘have established a vibrant, happy community’.

The three of us were standing on the former patio of the exhausted looking residential care home, having climbed up a tree to avoid the barbed wire fence. We were waiting impatiently for Box to climb onto the roof. We’d noticed a smashed window pane earlier in the day and, once again, our curiosity had gotten the better of us. Box, as usual, had volunteered himself for the task at hand, or rather we had volunteered him since he is best recognised as the ‘crazy fucker’; usually the one to risk chancing a dance with death in potentially hazardous situations. Ford Mayhem went next, scrambling up the side of the festering brickwork and past the ‘DANGER: FRAGILE ROOF’ sign in his own squirrelly way, with his shoes slipping noisily against the green glop that coated the wall. Next, Subject 47, climbing with his typically over exaggerated technique. Pushing his leg up high he executed a heel hook by locking his heel into a smashed ventilation gap and hauling the bulk of his body using the brute strength of the muscles in his upper thigh. A few moments later I joined the others up on the roof and, seeing the near perfect circular gap in the window to our immediate left, took the opportunity to poke my head inside. I was greeted by a blast of warm fetid air as it registered unpleasantly against my face.

It was uncomfortably hot and clammy inside, and a bizarre unorthodox scene greeted us. A wild blend of green and orange mould coated the entire far wall near the door,
and the carpet wheezed under the pressure of our footsteps; irritated by the rude awakening as it coughed up years of plaster dust and a foul brown bubbling liquid. Masks on, and looking like genuine bandits, we ‘cracked on’, exiting the room onto the corridor outside. Walking past the open doors of various bedrooms we could see long forgotten dusty armchairs, and elongated moth-eaten curtains draping from the windows and across different parts of the ceiling. The light from our torches burned renewed life into the building and before long an array of objects started to appear. Various personal effects – a hand mirror, photographs of loved ones and leftover clothing – were scattered across old bedside cabinets, several shelves and the floor.

Downstairs, thick stagnant water cascaded over our trainers, but it was worth it. In the living room area evidence of the final teatime get-together remained, inviting us over and absorbing us as we became part of the scene. We were greeted by a number of scabby tables and chairs, and on each of them lay empty mugs and plates, all chipped and stained with the dark remnants of tea, or coffee. Either way, whatever their former contents was, the brown muck inside now matched the surroundings well. Elsewhere in the room, in a store cupboard to the left, stacks of VCR video tapes were piled high amongst boxes of ageing Christmas decorations and Michael Bolton CDs. There were enough books, radios, board games and scrabble counters to last an eternity: an abundance of entertainment to reinforce that this place was built with the promise of a life that was perpetual, infinite and imperishable. There was leftover food in here too, but despite the sealed packaging ‘it fuckin’ stank of shit’, as Box announced to us all.

The medical room came next, together with the dry clinical smells of antiseptic and enigmatic chemicals. But, this was more intense than your average odorous trace of medicine; this was a nauseating stench tinged with the rancid sting of dank decay. Mayhem held up a syringe coated in sooty grime, admiring the ‘sharp fuckers’ as though they resembled a sort of treasure. Next, Box pulled out a large black book that was decorated intricately with white mould spores, and, entirely uninhibited, turned the first couple of pages to uncover the records of each and every former resident of the home. Everything, all of their personal and confidential details were listed systematically, revealing much about the fragile nature of their mortality. Mayhem’s eyes lit up, and excitedly he delved into the contents of the book with Box. It wasn’t his fault ‘the incompetent bastards managing the home had left such sensitive material lying around’. It was, he commented, tremendously disturbing, identifying
other – presumably dead – people’s medicines with their names listed on bottles and packets, but strangely electrifying and sensational. In the end though, his excitement wore off as something dawned on him: ‘Jesus, this is worrying shit. The authorities can’t even be arsed to keep this physical paper stuff under wraps. Can you imagine how easy it is to access all our deets that have been uploaded to the Interweb? Fuck, dude, I don’t trust any of them to handle this shit. Did you hear about those leaks the other week’. Everyone else in the room nodded and agreed with him.

Death, that unwelcomed guest the medical room had endeavoured to battle, with its medicines and transient cures, never did actually leave. In life, every person’s name in the room had been real, but now, in this moment, only their ghostly presence and medicine remained. The only tribute to their memory was now contained in yellowing photographs and the few belongings left upstairs. No-one gave a shit about any of it anymore though, not even slightly. The home and the things inside it had all become obsolete and thus irrelevant. ‘It was a farm for milking humans of their money and sanity’, Box told the rest of us, ‘but now the people in charge have found new livestock, and even bigger enclosures to put them in’. There was some truth to his words too, since a new residential home had since been built about half a mile away from the old site and it had twice the amount of residential space.

As we set to leave, I found Subject 47 upstairs sitting alone in one of the dusty armchairs in one of the bedrooms. With his hood up covering most of his face, and the beam from my torch plunging him in an intense white light, he was engaged in a deep recital of a passage from Hamlet, whilst fiddling with a broken picture frame. He was being, as Mayhem often remarks, a ‘dramatic bell end’. This, I thought, was an important moment though, as my mind began to swim with a point made by Ernest Becker: that everything, all of our culture and the imaginative ways of living we engineer, are nothing more than a theatrical and yet fruitless protest against the true nature of reality. I wasn’t sure if I agreed with Becker, but this place was certainly a punitive reminder of the absurdity and transitory nature of the lives we live for our short time on earth. For a moment I stared at an old photograph with yellowed edges and a large crease down the centre. It was of an elderly woman in an immaculately white cardigan gazing directly at me. I thought to myself miserably. Was this it? The remnants of a life in little more than a Polaroid and a small number of dusty belongings. ‘Where be your gibes now? Your gambols? Your songs? Your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar?’ bellowed Subject 47 with his
arms held open wide and an enormous grin stretched across his face. Broken from
my trace I turned to leave the room, and shaking my head agreed with Mayhem, who
was ‘in stitches’, that he was a ‘fucking idiot’.

**The Nightmare of Disenchantment**

As Bauman (1992b) suggests, mortality cannot be overcome; only ambivalence is likely to be
sustained in the constant waste that is secreted by our current stage of modernity. This is the
key point that the episode above tries to encapsulate, as it effectively explores Zygmunt
Bauman’s (2000) concept of *liquid modernity* by examining a typical UK town and an
abandoned residential home that was part of it. To help piece together Bauman’s metaphor
for society in fewer words than his book, however, it may be useful for the reader to
consider Hieronymus Bosch’s triptych, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, briefly as it mirrors
Bauman’s thesis particularly well. Taking these ideas into consideration at this stage in this
study will, in due course, help the reader make better sense of the rest of the narratives and
how they are located in a contemporaneous understanding of society.

The triptych is precisely as Hickson (2015) describes: ‘an exercise in madness’, because it
attempts to make sense of something that is, in principle, indescribable. We might call this
society, the dawning of the history of human progress or the prodigious search for utopia.
With this in mind, any observer viewing the artwork correctly begins with the triptych in a
closed position, since the two outer panels close together. These outer panels depict a large
glasslike sphere and within sits our world.

When opened, the first panel leads the observer into an introduction with God, alongside
various animal creations and, of course, his most intrepid accomplishment – humankind.
Following Bauman (2000), we might refer to this as representing the pre-modern era. As for
the centre panel, the overall effect points to the idea that human beings have become
‘whimsical creator[s]’ and, subsequently, their ‘mad manifestations’ have produced a surreal
and exceptional landscape with magnificent architectural spectacles, hybrid creatures and a
sense of control over the environment (Hickson, 2015). However, while it is certainly strange
and eccentric, even we might add, a little out of the ordinary, no apparent evil or corruption
invades this highly imaginative world. It is, we might add, practically utopian. More crucially,
however, there is a connection with the centre panel and what Bauman (2000) has termed a
solid and heavy hardware-focused modernity, where society is production-based, maintained
through economic stratification and guided by the work ethic. A closer look at the centre panel also reveals other important clues as to what life was like in this earlier stage of modernity. The people, for instance, are required to focus their collective attention on common objectives and activities (ibid): hunting, harvesting, producing and discovering different forms of leisure. What is more, the clear reliance on technology and human resourcefulness serves to suggest that there is a dynamic sense of power and productivity to this way of life (ibid).

As for the final piece of the painting, on the right-hand side, we are immediate witnesses to a burning city, executioners and slayers, ominous and unsettling creatures and abstruse architecture. Many musical instruments also appear in this part of the illustration, to signify, we might suggest, distraction and self-indulgence. Things, creations and humans face mortality in this panel, but some of the people, and the hybrid creatures too, thrive off the same sense of chaos and sense of impermanence being portrayed. What we can decipher here is that, at the heart of this entire image, it is human consciousness which lies at the centre of everything happening; it is the deadly concoction of human consciousness and our penchant for hedonism that has dissolved the boundaries between ‘good’ and ‘evil’. Both have been distorted – obliterated even – insofar that it becomes easy to comprehend how rationality is not clear-cut, nor an even surface to act on. In a nutshell, this part of the painting can be said to depict liquid modernity, a sociality which ‘unbinds time, weakens the constraining impact of the past and effectively prevents colonisation of the future’ (Bauman, 1992a: 190).

As Giddens (1994) suggests, then, pre-modern or traditional society represents an era that was entirely focused on establishing a ritualistic type existence that was tied together by collective memory. This was a rational type of existence, it was certain and predictable. However, the idea of rationality transformed radically with the advent of modernity and as towns like Newton Aycliffe began to emerge a new way of life was becoming ever more foreseeable, driven by the idea that humankind was capable of creating and mastering everything via calculative means (ibid). This, according to Wagner (2012), was the drive towards achieving greater mastery over the world. Yet, the ideal conditions for growing what we might call tension can be realised here, because the dynamics of rational mastery and producing more freedom essentially undermine one another. It would seem that modernity, striving as it does towards rationalisation and subjectivation, can only result in the
Wittgensteinian idea that no stable state can ever be accomplished while a plurality of diverse language games blossom. As Bauman (2004a; 2000) suggests, there is no tangible state of modernity, it is merely a process that would cease to exist if it suddenly became motionless. In other words, modernity means that our rationality (together with our subjectivity) has a tendency to change, reverse or transform without warning so long as our ambivalently guided fetishism for consumption and progression prevails (Bauman, 2000).

Indeed, many great twentieth-century thinkers who initially embarked on their journeys as believers in progress, reason and science came to confront this other, seemingly darker, side of modernity. Those such as Wittgenstein (1961/1922), with his early positivist philosophy which suggested that since words are located in reality they can only directly reflect real things, Durkheim and his concern with scientism (Hirst, 2011), and even Weber with his initial orthodox quasi-Darwinian styled writings (Alexander, 2013) were some of the more prominent figures. It was the wake of the First World War, however, that symbolised a period of radical change that caused the above-mentioned scholars to move away from earlier optimistic perceptions of a promising future as emphasis was now placed on the disillusion that was felt throughout Western civilisation (Alexander, 2013). The perfectionism and sense of mastery that fuelled the Enlightenment had faded, its flame reduced to an ember, and the darker side of human hope, reason and evolution was suddenly realised. The central tenants of modernity were soon challenged and absolute faith in progress was lost.

As Wittgenstein points out:

> When we think of the world’s future, we always mean the destination it will reach if it keeps going in the direction we can see it going in now; it does not occur to us that its path is not a straight line but a curve, constantly changing direction... The earlier culture will become a heap of rubble and finally a heap of ashes (1980: 3e).

While there are those, like Tillich (1952), who draw upon such things as Sartrean existentialism to argue that greater faith will inevitably guide us, providing the courage to be in a world where modernity has produced individuals who wander alone and without direction, we cannot ignore the conflicting suggestion that absolute reason is quite simply a lie, or worse, corrupt (Alexander, 2013). As it was revealed in Box’s attitude inside the residential home, in a way that is reminiscent of Nietzsche’s famous declaration that ‘God is dead’ (1974: 343), ultimately, no one cares about the sensible or logical anymore. When things grow older they are quite easily forgotten by most: they are irrelevant when there are new hotels to be built and bigger homes to be filled, laundered and replenished. Instead,
such places become playgrounds for the likes of urban explorers – those who seek to consume new, but always short-lived, arenas of consumption. The only thing that seems to matter are people’s appetites for more, but they are never fully satisfied and before long they are driven to further consumption.

Of course, there are some other things that do matter to us in this world, such as our perceived sense of safety and security. Another useful publication to consider, therefore, in making sense of the radical changes in the customs and traditions of everyday life that have occurred, is Ulrich Beck’s *Risk Society*. What Beck (1992) suggests is that the old industrial based society of the Western world has been overshadowed by advances in technology and science, and this has paved the way for the creation of new risks and fears. The risks people face today, though, are largely manufactured and the direct result of human actions. In consequence, everyday life is uncertain and the chances of finding some kind of stability or security are slim. It is not that Beck (1992) argues that risks have necessarily increased, though, only that people have become more aware of risks and how they have changed thanks to the growth of mass media and the number of distributors that exist. It is the global awareness and the potential global consequences of today’s world that fuel a widespread sense of anxiety and panic, and the horror that we reside in a dangerous world over which we feel we have increasingly less and less control. Certainly, Mayhem’s meditations over the book with the personal details inside reflects this sense of anxiety and distrust of how our safety is organised and managed.

As the work of Bauman, Beck and Giddens reveals, pessimism for modernity and capitalism is rife among scholars in the twenty-first century as an impending sense of uncertainty and gloom wraps itself tightly around our perceived sense of freedom, safety and autonomy. This leaves us with the impression that Weber’s (1930) iron cage has grown stronger and more powerful as the market continues to accelerate, and as the world becomes increasingly privatised, and more people feel as though they are entitled to consumer-guided lifestyles, present modernity appears all but hopeless. Much like an algae bloom that starves a once-thriving lake of its oxygen, the world now choking on the spoils of a rapidly advancing modernity. The world, as ‘the Boyz’ would put it, is ‘completely fucked’, and without any hope of escape all we can do to improve our situation is join the victims of the sinking ship, holding on tight until the world finally devours itself in a deadly mix of greed, insipidness and falsity. Perhaps Antonio Gramsci captured this condition
perfectly when he suggested that ‘the old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters’ (Zizek, 2010: 95).

That we find ourselves in a nightmarish, cancerous world of decomposition and oppression is down to consumerism. But, as long as people remain distracted and oblivious to it, we can convince ourselves that we are happy. The moment our gaze falters, however, is when we begin to question our purpose, and what follows is the gut-wrenching feeling that this behaviour is self-destructive as everything quickly becomes inadequate and so is swiftly made redundant (Bauman, 2000). It is dangerous to open our eyes to the truth, because we are reminded that there is no remedy or cure that can save us from the miserable and meaningless fate we have created for ourselves.

As the reader has seen, then, this section has sought to reinforce two crucial points: that rationality is always fragmented in today’s world, and that on the other side of enchantment we are likely to always find its common affiliate – the nightmare of disenchantment. Even when we feel immersed by the unsoiled ambience of Haussmann’s Parisian boulevards on a stroll down their flawless pavements, or by the grandeur of the ‘Posh Estate’ in Newton Aycliffe, perfect worlds, as Nietzsche (1997) notes, still fall short of being perfect. Just as the reader saw earlier, the ‘Posh Estate’ has to be juxtaposed against the ‘Rough Estate’ for it to seem superior. The ‘perfect’ entity, article or being has to be imagined because, really, the essential and desirable elements that are required to keep the utopia characteristically balanced and unadulterated do not exist. In other words, the reader must bear in mind that this is the social background in which ‘the Boyz’ experiences in urban exploration are situated. Nonetheless, and notwithstanding the discussion so far, there is in fact another side to the debate that needs to be considered, but this can only be achieved if liquid modernity is thought of as being an interregnum.

**The Twenty-First Century Interregnum**

It goes without saying that the above interpretations of our current state of modernity are, in one word, depressing. But, this does not have to be the case – if we are willing to look at things in a different way. To instigate this change of thinking it is necessary, as it was noted in the previous section, to take a look at the concept of an interregnum.
According to Carlo Bordoni (2016), the interregnum is a theory that designates a conjunctural change, highlighting the point where one kind of society is reaching its end while another approaches the beginning. Essentially, the arrival of a new type of society creates a rupture in the known order of things and so throws us into an unfamiliar new world that is difficult to ‘identify, determine, recognise, or analyse’ (Blackshaw, 2017: 37). As a result, the interregnum becomes a lot like a vast desert where conflicting values and beliefs gather as ‘frightened and lonely individuals wander aimlessly’ as they try to survive (Bordoni, 2016: 35). In view of this, it is understandable why there is great reluctance among people (namely scholars) to journey into a new world, especially since it still remains invisible and therefore intimidating. However, as Agnus Heller (2005) points out, there ends up being a disproportionate tendency to romanticise and embellish the ideas discussed in the previous section. In the end, the prefixes uncertainty and fragmentation that are recurrently applied to modernity cannot help but give the word a negative connotation and this leaves little room for alternative assessments of leisure in contemporary society. In other words, as Blackshaw (2017) argues, this way of thinking is counterintuitive when it comes to exploring the enchantment of forms of leisure such as urban exploration.

To look at it in a different way, the interregnum requires us to leave our familiar and homely places, to give up perceived certainties, and commit ourselves to the journey that entails both risk and discovery (Bordoni, 2016). Of course, it may not be possible to entirely understand the shift modernity is undergoing because there is no certainty that the transition is complete. In fact, we can probably lay all our chips on the suggestion that it is not. Nevertheless, to comprehend it better than most scholars perhaps already do we have to challenge the growing fear that we might drown or get lost before we ever reach the unknown, and recognise that it is important to venture the whole way inside the interregnum to understand all of its qualities and shortcomings. In other words, we need to start viewing the transition as an opportunity to construct our own future because it has not yet been predefined (Gramsci, 2011). What this means is that there is likely to be much value in focusing on other things, such as artistic production and the power of the human imagination; rather than giving in to fatalism and pessimism – even if we do not always like the things we are seeing (Bordoni, 2016; Bauman, in Bauman and Raud, 2015). To put it another way, the physiognomy of modernity may be rife with chaos, division and consumerist values, but human beings do not live their entire lives as if they are mindless captives of this system.
As Weber (2004 [1919]) suggests in his later work, which can be interpreted as having a tone that is slightly more optimistic, only when it is recognised that rationality is constructed from an irrational base can its complex development be comprehended with greater success. By this Weber (2004 [1919]) means that the world is not imbued with meaning in any sort of guiding teleological or supernatural sense, he is instead proposing that some crucial sense of meaning could in fact exist in the constant drive for advancement and, of course, in ‘the existential effort of individual interpretation’ (Alexander, 2013: 34). It is possible, therefore, to begin to understand with much more optimism the major strategy in the construction of urban explorer’s stories: that we draw upon the features of liquid modernity which urge ravaging change, impermanence and, above all, endless openings for the construction of our own stories and truths (Bauman, 2000; Bauman, 1992a).

It stands to reason that utopian places cannot exist; they are not, as Faubion evokes, ‘utopian stricto sensu’ (2008: 31). Newton Aycliffe is, therefore, unreachable in its picture perfect form; not unlike fixtures contained within a mirror which we can imagine clearly but never fully grasp (Foucault, 1984). Places do, however, contain other ostensibly ‘darker’ and hidden spaces (especially when it comes to particular forms of leisure) which function well in their capacity to be compensatory (Spracklen, 2017). These can be recognised as heterotopias of deviation. This idea emphasises our freedom relative to our imaginative possibility and our movement through certain spaces. Most importantly, however, hence the link to Bosch, is the understanding that heterotopias have no logical path, they oscillate between ‘countervailing imagistic and rhetorical currents’ (Faubion, 2008: 32) and come into sight as a sort of impermanent asulon (a refuge, sanctuary or safe haven). What is more, our heterotopic places need not be part of the Parisian metropolis mentioned earlier, they also include the darker sites which are imbued with possibility owing to our culturally and socially conditioned imaginations (Faubion, 2008).

Today, everyday life resembles a Dionysian Pagan domain, and in spite of the efforts of countless intellectuals and the stature of science neither are ever likely to grasp the meaning of humanity’s elan vital (the ‘creative impulse or ‘living energy’) in such a porous world of change and impermanence (Maffesoli, 1996). All achievements in life are instead always temporary and they must continually be revisited and remade different or anew (de Certeau, 1984). In other words, this is a world where our lives are sliced into episodes – like the one
above in the residential home – signalling that this is a shift away from cumulative grand narratives where people, and indeed things, can quite easily be killed off ‘until further notice’ and then later be reintroduced without prior notice (Bauman, 2000; Lyotard, 1984). Our way of making history, like we did on our late-night quest into the derelict care home, is our way of becoming temporarily immortal in the face of day-to-day change, decay and transience in the interregnum. It is, therefore, crucial at this point to come to terms with the fact that our encounters with urban environments cannot be understood in any other way outside this particular interpretation of reality (i.e. being situated in the interregnum). What this means is that urban explorers have a special kind of freedom – although no more special than others with their own choices of leisure, whether it is ‘abnormal’ (Rojek, 2000), ‘dark’ (Spracklen, 2013) or ‘deviant’ (Blackshaw and Crabbe, 2004) – that allows us to follow our ‘own frames of reality’ (Blackshaw, 2003: 66): our own beautifully fragile ontological positions.

Since the irreconcilable ideas of the gardeners (those bold creators of a solid modernity) have caused their predesigned plots to decompose, we have, each and every one of us, become hunters and tourists who care far less about ‘utopian blueprints’ and ‘the overall balance of things’ (Bauman, 2007b: 100-101). It is the disenchantment of modernity that interests us more because it clings to enchantment with flea-like determination. Therefore, when we look at Bosch’s panels again we can quite easily see how our realities and achievements can slip from epitomising ‘perfection’ into the embodiment of ‘hell’, but even more astonishingly we can view things entirely in reverse: when disenchantment becomes innovative and enticing.

What follows, then, in the succeeding part of this chapter is a discussion that will help the reader begin to understand the allure and magic of alternative realities, and how urban explorers are able to create a sense of ‘community’ for themselves, through their leisure, in such a fluid and transitory world. Before that, however, the reader will be presented with another short episode to help bring ‘the Boyz’ world to life even further. As the remainder of this thesis will contend, the episodes I have incorporated divulge what the darker side of modernity really entails, but in order to recognise the true value of this work it is crucial that we all push aside that ubiquitous tendency to privilege such things as nihilism and scepticism. On this note, the reader should also be reminded that the darker side of modernity does not necessarily denote something ‘bad’; the darkness simply refers to something that is indistinct and imprecise. In this sense, perhaps it would be wise to accept it
as the absence of lucidity, but also some kind of affirmation that felicity exists beneath a cloaked disguise. The latter half of this chapter, then, will serve as a useful outline for understanding the arguments that have been formed throughout the rest of the thesis. As Blackshaw (2017) suggests, looking at things in this manner allows interpreters to reimagine leisure in the twenty-first century, so we can deal with things like performativity much more effectively.

**Hallam Tower: A ‘Garden’ of Earthly Delight?**

A few weeks later and a wall, which stood at least three metres tall, was our latest obstacle. Of course, beyond the wall we were likely to encounter other problems, but they were nothing we couldn’t overcome. We were confident. But, we were also standing in the bushes at the side of a main road, ‘freezing our tits off’ as MKD liked to remind us. Once again, we were waiting for Box. Already on the other side of the wall he was attaching the makeshift rope ladder we’d made earlier that evening to something secure. Several minutes later, having successfully tied the rope to a tree, the rest of us followed one by one. At the top, we crouched in the long grass and stared across a dingy carpark encumbered with litter and ragged weeds. Even though it was the middle of the night, the moon lit the open space well and we could clearly make out the front reception of the hotel. It was boarded up; a meticulous looking job indeed! No matter. We would have to climb on top of the enormous overhanging porch that was designed to keep guests dry in the event of rain as they unpacked or loaded up their cars. After quickly glancing from left to right, Mayhem took the lead, and the rest of us followed, ‘giving it legs’ across the deserted tarmac.

Hallam Tower, which is located in the Fulwood area of Sheffield, was constructed between 1963 and 1965, and it was one of the first luxurious hotels to emerge in the city after the Second World War (Wright, 2011). It was a distinctly ‘modern’ development, with teak panelling, sconces along the corridors and ersatz eighteenth-century Hogarth engravings. To accentuate this veneer, it appeared in a Ford Galaxie 500 television advertisement and a promotional film about Sheffield: ‘Sheffield... City on the Move’. With its new sleek futuristic look this hotel was indeed considered to be one of the finest places to stay in Sheffield at the time (Wright, 2011). However, by the early 1990s, Hallam Tower had abandoned any hope of being opulent since other hotels, which were at the time state-of-the-art, had begun to emerge throughout Sheffield, particularly in the city centre. Before permanently closing in
2004, Hallam Tower became part of the Holiday Inn brand of hotels which was originally a U.S. motel chain for a short time (Kinwardstone Conferencing, 2015). By all accounts, then, we might say that this was yet another utopian vision gone wrong.

We cared very little for the fact that this was once one of Sheffield’s finest hotels. It didn’t really matter what it was this evening because we were here for one thing in particular – the eleven-storey lift shaft. For a long time we had all talked about sneaking inside to abseil down the inside of it. Why? Because, as Mayhem affirms, we wanted to do something ‘epic’; we wanted, more than anything, to have another one of those ‘fucking good stories’ to tell other people about, and this was going to be one of them.

Clumsily, I pulled my body upwards, passing a couple of large signs that read ‘DANGER’, ‘DO NOT ENTER!', ‘ASBESTOS WARNING’ – ‘the usual bollocks’ as Rizla Rider calls it, which was plastered all over the dirty coloured boarding that covered the doors and windows of the porch. Although we may regret it in later life – then again, maybe not – we are unconcerned about such warnings: YOLO (you only live once); is that not what life is all about these days? That is what Box’s t-shirt suggested. And besides, we were on an adventure, like the ‘fuckin’ Goonies’ according to MKD, and on an adventure ‘you can do anything’, apparently.

The rope was swinging around wildly and my leg was caught awkwardly in one of the loops, yet I managed to thrust my hand forward to grab the edge of the porch. I was only a couple of metres above the ground, but, all the same, I didn't fancy falling off onto the rubble and shit below. My hand brushed against the cold surface and the shards of broken glass lying on top. Curling my fingers around the ledge to get a better grip I freed my leg and managed to haul myself up onto the porch to join the others. My breathing was heavy and I could feel the uncomfortable thump of my heart beating against my chest.

Next, we climbed through a large window which had obviously come off far worse in a chance meeting with a brick, and traversed along the inside edge which was positioned directly above the main reception foyer. A ruined reception desk, several old broken chairs and thousands of little fragments of glass lay beneath us if we fell. A grim way to go I thought. At the end of the traverse was another hole, although much smaller this time, in one of the inside windows overlooking the reception area.
This one was, as MKD announced to the rest of us as we squeezed through, ‘tight as fresh fanny’.

I fought hard to avoid the razor-sharp edges of the glass, moving my body slowly, inch by inch, like I was some sort of burglar avoiding lasers to reach the prized jewels inside a vault. This was how I felt: a master infiltrator, although I certainly wouldn’t tell the lads that. I felt the shoulder of my jacket scratch roughly against a few splinters of glass poking from the top of the window as I attempted to pull the rest of my body through the gap. Despite the chilling sound, I was fortunate, and managed to join Mayhem and MKD inside a large conference room unscathed. Like the rest of the building, it was fucked. But, a few old champagne glasses still remained, arranged on a large wooden table that was most probably immaculately polished in its day. Mayhem, laying his hand on one of the glasses looked thoughtful. He lifted it to give a mock-toast and it crumbled almost instantly. With his arm held out, he was left clutching the broken stem; a look of surprise was plastered awkwardly across his face. The rest of us roared with laughter. ‘Yer fuckin’ boob’ I heard someone yell, look at the mess yer makin”, followed by more laughter.

Upstairs, on the upper floors of the hotel, our torches burned brightly, destroying the darkness that should have surrounded us. Box, with a sense of military-like precision about him was to my right, tying various bits of rope to parts of the teak panelling and various other bits that looked ‘sturdy enough’. MKD banged his fist against a beaten doorframe which looked as though it had seen better days. Some of its wooden panels were smashed, and others hung lifelessly, but the frame itself looked ‘sound enough for an anchor’, so MKD was testing its structural integrity. Satisfied that everything seemed OK, we busied ourselves with looping a large sling around it, laughing to ourselves at the shoddy looking rope-work. It would hold, though, we all knew that. At least, we hoped it would.

Having finished setting up the abseil, Box pulled one last item out of his rucksack. A speaker. He set it away and the sound of Bob Marley’s *Three Little Birds* filled the space around us. Even if it was a little ‘cheesy’, as MKD pointed out at the time, it added to the buzzing sense of excitement we were all feeling. Now we were ready, and everything was ‘absolutely mint’, so together Rizla and Box hauled open the two lift doors. They groaned at the effort of being forced apart after their years of permanent closure. The strong, but strangely satisfying smell of oil and some sort of
industrial lubricant escaped, and we could see a couple of severed cables dangling in front of us. Above them sat the actual lift itself. Peering down the length of the shaft I could see a tangled pile of old bed frames and stained mattresses resting at the bottom, alongside a couple of broken toilets and doors. It would be a nasty drop, but despite the unsightly landing and the dodgy cable situation, we were ready.

This was it I thought, this was fucking it! I felt electrified as Rizla leaned back onto the rope. The ropes strained, creaking as they began to take the tension of his body weight. The wooden doorframe didn’t budge. We knew the system would work. All the same, the small lift foyer was buzzing with excitement as he slowly began his descent into the darkness. Suddenly, however, without any warning at all, we all heard a colossal thud and the smack of the rope against something hard. In an instant, Rizla had disappeared from the doorway of the lift. My stomach dropped: like Mayhem put it afterwards, on our way back to my place, ‘we all shit a brick’. As it turned out, though, he had simply lost his footing against the greasy surface of the lift shaft and to our relief, although he had fallen a metre or so, he was still very much alive. We all peered down the lift shaft to watch Rizla grinning wildly as he bounced against the side of the very lubricious metal wall. He offered us a quick thumbs up and next we could hear the whizz of the rope against the Black Diamond ATC as he descended into the murky darkness. From somewhere deep in the lift shaft he yelled: ‘holy shit guys, this is immense!’

Heterotopic Social Space

As it has been suggested earlier in the thesis, there is a name that Foucault gave to a certain kind of ‘community’, a ‘community’ that is too difficult to comprehend by rational means. What is more, this concept owes its existence to the failure of utopianism as it emerges as an alternative way of living that feels almost (but not quite) perfect. According to Foucault (2002 [1970]; 1984), while utopias sanction little more than ‘unreal’ places that can be likened to fables and myths, this concept pushes such fabula aside by drawing our attention to those ‘real’ places ‘without geographical markers’ that are found all throughout society and different cultures. What Foucault had in mind was what he referred to as those uncanny worlds known as heterotopias which, as the reader will see, represent sites of possibility, improvisation and, above all, performativity.
For Deaene and De Cauter (2008), it is play and forms of leisure which best characterise the heterotopia, since they create a temenos (a space cut out from the doxic fabric of the ‘commonly’ understood world). For others, like Rojek (1995), Spracklen (2013) and Blackshaw and Crabbe (2004), our heterotopias could also be places of ‘abnormal’, ‘dark’ or ‘deviant’ leisure. All the same, whatever the heterotopia is it is certain that spaces of imagination, performativity and reward are what individuals seek, to invest in the ideal, and in dreams where ‘positive and negative imaginings get mixed up with one another’ (Blackshaw, 2010b: 39; Lyotard, 1984). We might suggest, therefore, that ‘the Boyz’ are willing to experiment with the boundaries of the prevailing morality, and that they are individuals who explore what is significant about transcending the limits of normalcy – by abseiling down an abandoned lift shaft for example.

As the reader will discover in later chapters, heterotopias are very different to leisure designed and offered by the market, which fits comfortably into day-to-day reality. In many ways, it can be suggested that such forms of leisure indoctrinate individuals into thinking and acting in particular ways, and so deprive them of the fullness and richness of a life they desire (Blackshaw, 2017). However, in line with arguments Foucault (1987) has made, the heterotopias we seek in urban exploration are not limited to closely-knit collective occasions or discursive practices. What this means, as the two episodes above reveal, is that ‘the Boyz’ are able to express their own individual interests and desires while exploring together, and yet they are still part of something that feels communal. This, it can be proclaimed, elucidates on Foucault’s suggestion that ‘the heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible’ (1984: 6).

For the rest of us standing at the top of the lift shaft, we had no precise idea of what Rizla was feeling. All we knew was that he was having a ‘fuckin’ class time’ as he descended alone into the darkness. And that is all that mattered, that was the point of being in the hotel. The heterotopia did not end with Rizla descending into the depths of the lift shaft of course, there was still an impressive mutual feeling of euphoria among each and every one of us. In other words, this reinforces Bauman’s evocation that there does not always have to be something absolutely collective about our ‘places of collective consumption’, but it is important (2000: 97). The realm of the heterotopia is an extremely broad one and, like Mayhem and Subject 47 reveal in their individual moments inside the residential home, or Rizla in Hallam Tower, our performativity and imaginations allow us to find our own place in
this unique space (Lyotard, 1984). If the ‘real’ world is inadequate and lacking in creative impulses, the heterotopia provides something that is just right; it is a space of compensation rather than the illusion of something utopian (Blackshaw, 2017).

Another important element of heterotopias is their penetrability. As Foucault points out, ‘they always presuppose systems of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable’ (1984: 7). What this means is that urban explorers cannot simply enter the worlds described in the episodes above, they may only be permitted entry into a particular heterotopia if they have special knowledge and permission to do so. More on this point will be discussed in the next chapter, but for now what the reader needs to know is that temporary access into urban explorers’ shared moments depends upon being included in that ontological reality or ‘truth’, and this involves the subsequent exclusion of all ‘Others’ from the equation. It is, therefore, those moments when we are exploring the urban environment together that we have, to borrow one of Heidegger’s (1962) terms, a sense of self-certainty. This wider project of ‘self-support’ amongst ourselves reinforces, collectively, all of our other attempts to secure our sense of individual identity when we explore together. We give one another the self-assurance and confidence to be who we want to be, and do, more or less, whatever we want to do. As ‘the Boyz’ have admitted in several conversations after the lift shaft abseil, none of them would have been willing to do it if they had ‘had to have trusted a bunch of bastard fuckin’ randomers’.

In line with the above comments, the discussion can be extended further to argue that the heterotopias urban explorers’ create for themselves are also based on a unique revision of the past, through what Ricoeur (1992) refers to as ‘forgiveness’. What this means is that we do not always manage to explore the urban environment without any sort of individual wrongdoing, or transgression from our ‘collective purpose’, occurring. Nevertheless, the fact that I often feel uncomfortable, like others in our small group, when some of ‘the Boyz’ have closely examined old medical records in the care home, or when MKD has on occasion discharged a fire extinguisher, and especially when Mayhem and Box launched a set of fireworks from the rooftop of the residential home a week after our initial explore, becomes almost irrelevant. Together, we learn to block out certain things and are able to centre our attention on the main reason we became involved in urban exploration in the first place: to seek good stories and experiences. This is another point that will be re-examined in greater depth in the coming chapters, but as Ricoeur (1992) points out, ‘forgiveness’ is something
that requires enduring patience, so that our acts of forgiving may subsequently allow us to
negate and blot out events or behaviours which otherwise go beyond our pre-established
ontological basis.

It is important, of course, to realise that ‘forgiveness’ is not the same as ‘forgetting’; there
would be nothing to forgive if we simply forgot, and forgetting is not always an easy
endeavour (Ricoeur, 1992). Yet, for us to physically share memories and experiences
alongside one another this act of forgiving is of fundamental importance. Spaces of
compensation are at risk of collapsing if we do not forgive since any one of us could quite
easily be rejected if we suddenly became isolated from the weak ontological truths that are
inbuilt into the heterotopia. This, though, is the nature of a heterotopia, they can easily
become closed to us, or hidden, if we are not careful (Foucault, 1984). However, this is not to
suggest that our ontological basis or ‘group ethics’ do not evolve over time – we are aware
that certain things we disagreed with in the past can suddenly become tolerable in their own
right. In other words, given the transitory nature of our lives, the things we enjoy can adapt
and evolve, often with little difficulty.

Following the idea of adaptation and evolution, what the episodes in this chapter also signify,
as Stone (2013) has discussed elsewhere, is that the original function of a structure or a
place, such as the idea of the cemetery that Foucault (1984) uses as his own example, can
function very differently from the way it was originally intended. The failed utopian ideals of
Newton Aycliffe and Hallam Tower are now consumed in radically altered ways. They were
perceived embodiments of ‘perfection’ and an improving epoch once upon a time, but now
they are consumed by us, a group of urban explorers, who use them in the same way we
treat and ingest the rest of society – as a playground. According to Foucault (1984), every
heterotopia has its own function in society. In this sense, ours is simple, it invites us to
imagine what we might devour next as our appetites for seizing ‘epic’ moments grow.

These latter points notwithstanding, by now the reader should perhaps be able to see that
the principles of the heterotopia, as highlighted by Foucault (1984), are becoming more
conspicuous as it is a particular type of heterotopia that is being experienced by ‘the Boyz’.
Although Foucault (1984) identifies a different type of heterotopia, and refers to them as
privileged places known as *heterotopias of crisis*, these, it is argued, have been pushed to the
very margins of society. However, it is through the initial introduction of the heterotopia of
crisis that Foucault manages to direct our attention to the idea of deviant elsewhere spaces which have been transformed as society has come to view them as isolated and abnormal. These are *heterotopias of deviation* and they are what urban exploration is principally all about. ‘The Boyz’, like other urban explorers, are seeking to expose different environments and situations, where the core features of the doxa underpinning everyday society – however slippery and unpredictable – can be transcended. As Rizla explained, in a conversation after the Hallam Tower explore:

“The world is such a fucked up place, and I would rather be inside the fuckedness, instead of pretending like it doesn’t exist. It’s like pretending the world is all perfect and all that, but you can’t live like that, man. The odd ones, right, are them who own these places and leave them empty, or the people who wear, I dunno, stupid twat hats like [Subject 47]. You know what I mean? We’re just making good use of them; giving them some... Like, trying to do something different you know.”

Creating ‘a good story’ as most of ‘the Boyz’ like to put it, by using different urban environments to deviate away from the banality of mainstream existence (even if that too is underpinned by its impermanence) is the aim. It is our great struggle for something that stands out against the fictitious world of apparently legitimate trends, to delight in imagining that we are the ones who are ‘cool’ and different, with our pioneering, ‘deviant’ and sagacious zeal that drives us to consume something new and innovative with incessant vigour. For instance, as it was noted previously, a hotel with an abandoned lift shaft to abseil quickly provided us with the goods to continue with our consumptive vocation. Nonetheless, what this shows, in line with Blackshaw and Crabbe (2004), is that our involvement in urban exploration reveals how the dynamics of society call for us, somewhat paradoxically, to consume as part of the given norm, but to also move beyond any sort of ‘normal’ ambit when it comes to our consumption. In other words, our engagement with urban exploration merely captures something of ‘the phantasmagoric nature of existence’ (Blackshaw and Crabbe, 2004: 9) and the irrationality of rationality that we contend with, like everyone else (most of us at least), on a daily basis.

To this extent another key feature of heterotopias relates to their chronology, or what Foucault (1967) (see Deaene, M. and L. de Cauter) refers to as ‘heterochronism’ (slices of time). What this means, as Foucault (1984) and Stone (2013) suggest, is that people experience an absolute break with ‘traditional time’, temporarily, when they experience their heterotopia. This is also what Bauman (1995) has in mind when he describes our lives
are being contingent and episodic. If we reflect on the episodic nature of our lives then, and the deconstruction of immortality (Bauman, 1995; 1992b), it is possible to comprehend that we continually move between various episodes – where, of course, some are more unconventional and exceptional than others – of our life, especially when it comes to our leisure. In other words, heterotopias are sequestered spaces that have their own unique systems of ‘opening and closing’ (Foucault, 1984: 7), and they work well to exclude ‘Others’, effectively isolating themselves from wider society. Nevertheless, eventually everyone returns to the linear trajectory of everyday life. After the residential care home explore, the heterotopia continued for a few more hours as we sat and chatted about it over a few beers around Mayhem’s house. However, it soon ended when Subject 47 and Box ‘bailed on us’ because they had work the next day. All of a sudden, the episodic slice crumbled in on itself, and then it was over.

In developing the discussion above, attention should be drawn to the point that our engagement with urban exploration does not follow Foucault’s heterotopias which ‘accumulate indefinitely’ (see Deaene and Cauter. 2008: 20), like a museum or cemetery for example; both places which can be attributed with time that never ceases as artefacts and gravestones accumulate ad infinitum. Instead, our experiences in urban exploration bare more resemblance to heterotopias in their ‘festive mode’ (ibid: 27). As we have seen, each one of our explores are both phantasmagorical and spasmodic, regardless of what we are doing, whether we have decided to rummage through an old care home or abseil down a lift shaft of an abandoned hotel. Once they have ended, we move on, ready to face our lives outside of urban exploration. Our heterotopias are not entirely repeatable either, even if we revisit a location, but we would not want them to be; we would not be able fabricate ‘good stories’ if we relived the same ones habitually.

However, to avoid confusion it is important to realise that our explores are not liminal experiences. Contra Fraser, who argues that engagements with ruination are ‘detached from mundane life’ (2012: 148), as they represent movement out of time and into the betwixt and the between (Turner, 1973), it can be argued that such engagements are not beyond the threshold of reality. According to Blackshaw (2003), the seemingly irrational and odd does not necessarily sit outside of reality as something that is unreal and ‘other’; rather, it can be a central part of life for some people. As we already know, Foucault (1984) lays much emphasis on the point that heterotopias involve real places (which are groundless), but what
has not yet been discussed is that they have a specific function with regard to the rest of space. As it was argued above, when it comes to urban exploration the heterotopias being created offer spaces of compensation, rather than any illusion of something that is utopian or other-worldly. It follows that the role of a heterotopia is not to resist everyday reality, it is to imagine it in alternative ways, and urban explorers do this by finding their own creative spaces in the world which are in fact very real indeed (Blackshaw, 2017).

As Faubion points out, ‘it is precisely in that real space between threat and boredom’ (2008: 39) where urban explorers experience something that is more fulfilling and free than anything else the real world can offer. It is in those profound moments we are able to locate the full analytical verve of Foucault’s concept of the heterotopia (Faubion, 2008). Mayhem and Box absorbing themselves in the contents of the records book, Subject 47 giving ‘the Boyz’ a parodic recital of Hamlet, and everyone listening to Bob Marley in the remains of a lift foyer; all those events were tangible, and were so intense they seemed more real and meaningful than our normal day-to-day experiences. Operating as our places of wish fulfilment, they allow us to subvert our other daily existence, rendering it inadequate in comparison (Heynen, 2008). In other words, as Stone (2013) points out, while we experience the world as urban explorers we begin to observe the great illusion that the interregnum accentuates, which always falls short of reaching its goal, and create something of our own – our version of events – as we consume parts of the urban environment in our own unique way. In a view that challenges Kindynis and Garrett’s (2015) interpretation which views certain places as being heterotopic, Hallam Tower and the Residential Care Home are, without ‘the Boyz’ (or whoever else happens to explore them), simply abandoned buildings whose own stories are gradually dissolving as time continues to pass. They are failed illusions which have become sources of compensation as a result of the stories we are able to create inside them.

As the reader has seen, what urban explorers create is not permanent, but they show what can be accomplished when people follow a ‘heterotopic call to action’ (Blackshaw, 2017: 147). Indeed, the sense of ‘community’ offered is all about the temporary unification of individuals, and their drive to discover alterity. Another good way of comprehending this is to look at what Lyotard has termed the differend – that desperate but equally real struggle between reason and imagination that ‘is not presentable under the rules of knowledge’ (1988: 93). Essentially, the episodes in this chapter, and indeed those presented throughout
the rest of the thesis, attempt to uncover the many ways urban explorers witness the differend, and how they appeal to feelings that are more intense but also pleasurable – especially when they encounter the feeling of the sublime. The sublime is a crucial part of the ‘community’ for urban explorers; through its un-representability it exemplifies an artificially enriched collective that exceeds ‘human possibility’ (Phillips, 2006: 31).

In light of the discussion hitherto, it can be argued that by themselves places like Newton Aycliffe and Hallam Tower are dull and lifeless, featureless among the market-driven changes that invade them. What this means is that there are no procedures or clearly defined forms of protocol that are unanimously approved and renewable on demand that can locate the differend. As Lyotard (1988) argues, only our feelings are able to perceive the differend and the sublime found within it. So, it stands to reason that it will be urban explorers’ versions of the compensatory, their ‘communities’ envisaged in moments of ‘ephemeral ecstasy’ and performativity (Blackshaw, 2017: 148; Lyotard, 1984), that will emerge as being far more significant than the monotony of the real world.

Revisiting the Care Home: Living and Breathing a Heterotopia

Returning to how this chapter began, in the residential care home, the reader now knows that each of us – ‘the Boyz’ – managed to climb carefully through a broken window, and this led us into a strange world of dust, decay and dampness. In an instant, we were transported into a different sort of space, one that leaves the ordinary ontological flow of everyday life behind. The care home may certainly just have been a still, fetid old building to many, but for us it was something far more fulfilling, epitomising a different kind of ontological flow which could facilitate our search for real meaning.

All of a sudden other things became important in this world. Masks were quickly put on, partly for our safety, but mostly to look the part, and tripods, each armed with its own camera, began to appear. The old carpets wheezed and coughed as we crept from room to room, and new sounds began to replace those of the outside world. Dripping water could be heard from somewhere downstairs, there was the sound of shuffling from within the walls and ceilings, and in the room we were standing, we could detect the raspy scratches of someone’s clothing catching on the yellowed, peeling wallpaper. The entire building reeked of a heady mix of earthy decay and the sour trace of staleness. For many, this world almost
certainly sounds dirty, disease-ridden and forlorn; however, for ‘the Boyz’ it felt fantastical, exciting and beautifully familiar. And it was so incredibly powerful too, that sense of anticipation in the air, charged with such a raging feeling of excitement.

Somewhat ironically, there was also an interim sense of homeliness to be felt inside the old residential care building. This was precisely where ‘the Boyz’ feel at home, living and breathing the aesthetics alongside others who experience this world in a similar way. Indeed, ‘the Boyz’ feel a greater sense of ‘community’ in this world than they do in any other part of their lives. This is a place where they feel accepted, respected and part of a collective ‘urbex’ identity: that of WildBoyz. But, at the same time this heterotopic space comprises freedom and meaning, theatrical intensity and a sense of individuality. In other words, the under-imagined space of the care home (and any other explore), what we might also call the darker side of modernity, allows ‘the Boyz’ to explore the other sides of both the urban environment and themselves, and neither can be taken for granted. All of a sudden, then, there is something markedly hopeful and enchanting about our contemporaneous condition when it is accepted that heterotopic social spaces exist. In other words, it might be argued that the world, when viewed in this way, is perhaps a less depressing place than many scholars first assume.

Summary

To set the context for the remainder of the thesis, this chapter began by exploring the idea of modernity. Following the viewpoints of key scholars, such as Bauman, Weber and Beck, it was argued that the world, having evolved from a solid, hardware-based type of sociality, feels increasingly disenchanted on account of the market-mediated mode of life we all follow. In consequence, an overwhelming sense of meaninglessness and ambivalence can be felt, especially when it is realised that utopian dreams always fail to meet the mark. What this means is that there is nothing utopian about our world; instead, what constitutes our day-to-day lives, together with the consumer syndrome, is its other side: the sour taste of impermanence and the decay that exudes from it.

However, while it is indubitable that there is much truth in the idea of disenchantment apropos of our current stage of modernity, and that it is crucial to acknowledge in any interpretation of urban exploration, the chapter goes on to argue that we should reconsider
such nihilistic interpretations by exploring the notion that some form of enchantment may still be found. In other words, the discussion moves on to suggest that there is a way in which we can distance ourselves from such arguments, if we are willing to challenge doxa by turning the world slightly on its head. Of course, as Baudrillard and many others have pointed out, escape from the market and the interregnum is impossible – there is no denying this fact. But, all is not lost, because we can begin to appreciate the brilliance and diversity that the interregnum creates in its constant state of flux if we are willing to look past the inexorable influence of the market. In other words, what has been suggested is that there is enough room for people to employ their imaginations, insofar as they can create alternative heterotopic social spaces that are centred around magical, performative and often deviant interests as opposed to mainstream consumerism. In this vein, this chapter has pursued the idea that it is subsequently the *dark side of modernity* that should be contemplated, on the condition that *dark* does not always have to emblematise malevolence (although we should not ignore the fact that it can).

The overall aim of this chapter, then, has been to bring a sense of enchantment to the reader’s attention, through the use of Foucault’s (1984) concept of *heterotopia*. As it has been argued, what urban explorers manage to create are spaces of compensation, allowing them to experience and view space around them as being starkly different from that found in everyday life. Just as ‘the Boyz’ revealed in the two episodes provided in this chapter, urban explorers simply make use of their imaginations to make some sense of our societal condition, and in turn they are able to experience the true scope of our other deviant interests, cravings and self-determined identities. Nevertheless, it is crucial that the reader is aware of the transience of heterotopias. They can only ever exist until-further-notice – a point that will be explored in more depth later, but during the time they are alive individuals are able to transform their lives into something that is altogether intense and spectacular. To reiterate, utopian dreams are not possible. They crumble long before they can ever be accomplished. Yet, our heterotopias compensate for this and, somewhat paradoxically, produce something that is real for certain individuals, and present in the *here and now*. 
Chapter Five

Unpacking a Heterotopia: Controlling Social Space in Urban Exploration

Introduction

As it has been argued in the preceding chapters of this thesis, any connection to a tangible, or perhaps we might refer to it as felt, ‘identity’ or rational ‘community’ has been severed. That is to say, it has been reasoned that we now reside in a world where the idea that hard-wearing, like-minded or similarly-bodied, resistant ‘identities’ and ‘communities’ exist is based on an imagined fantasy, so we are less sure how the charts should be plotted when it comes to mapping our social spaces (Bauman, 1993; Blackshaw, 2010a). It appears that the only thing we can rely on to make some sense of our seemingly melancholic, and yet equally exciting and captivating condition is the idea that urban explorers manage to create for themselves temporary spaces of compensation known as heterotopias of deviation (Foucault, 1984).

In many ways, then, the heterotopia functions as a type of makeshift ‘community’ (which is another word for home) that has transformed as a result of modernity, and, as the reader will see, ‘the Boyz’ are intent on controlling it by deciding who belongs and how things work. However, while this means ‘community’ can be anything we want it to be in the interregnum, it is also always short-lived and contingent. Certainly, this sounds incredibly melancholic still, pointing out that rational communities do not work and that they are temporary; yet, the fact is that by creating and controlling our own versions of heterotopia we are able to create something performative that is much more intense and convincing while it lasts. We might even say that what is created is far more enchanting and pleasurable than traditional community (Foucault, 1984). This of course is the beauty of the heterotopia. However, in order for these claims to be substantiated it is necessary to delve right into the workings of this type of ‘community’, to unpick the social processes that bring the heterotopia to life, and of course the rules and performativity that support its temporary existence. In other words, this chapter aims to identify and explain how urban explorers understand and control heterotopic social space. In short, this is where the method of hermeneutic sociology really starts to come into play, as it is combined with the method of sociological hermeneutics to make better sense of urban exploration in the interregnum.
In order to probe the workings and rules of an urban exploration-based heterotopia, Bauman’s ‘complex interaction of three interwoven, yet distinct processes – those of cognitive, moral and aesthetic spacings’ (1993: 145) – have been explored. These processes can help us make sense of the impact the interregnum has had on social space. In other words, they can help the reader reflect on the notions of proximity and distance that all three spaces deploy in conjunction with the seductive mode of living most of us face that inspires change, adaptability and creativity (ibid). By understanding these processes and the complex nature of their arrangement, the reader will be better equipped to engage with the next chapter which deals with five life strategies of urban explorers that I have identified. This is important because any attempt to blend all five together into one tidy and cohesive lifestyle is an impossible task.

In the end, what all of this points to is that there is unlikely to be a concise or consistent account that reveals something about urban explorer’s heterotopic social spaces; they can only be disorganised, chaotic and altogether ad hoc. Like crooked pieces of wood, they cannot be straightened (Bauman, in Bauman and Raud, 2015). However, attempting to understand the evolution of modernity, and taking self-reflexivity into consideration along the way, can only provide us with an improved insight into the illusiveness, changeability and collectivity that is all part and parcel of imagined heterotopic social spaces found within the context of urban exploration. Although we may not notice it, with the advent of the interregnum a vast amount of effort and imagination goes into the creation of a heterotopia, alongside other important things like memory, nostalgia, emotion and interpretation. Therefore, this could be referred to as ‘the labour of self-composition’, what we might otherwise describe as our adaptable habitats (Bauman, 1992a). This is precisely what this chapter sets out to explore in depth, and by doing so hopes to uncover something about the heterotopia of a particular group of urban explorers who call themselves WildBoyz.

With the purpose of aiding clarity, the chapter begins with an excursus that explores the idea that urban explorers are what Blackshaw (2017) refers to as khôrastes-skholêrs extraordinaire. What this means, in brief for now, is that ‘the Boyz’ feel both a sense of ‘collective destiny’ and ‘personal fulfilment’ (2017: 161) while they are urban explorers. After that, following a new narrative piece, the chapter goes on to consider Bauman’s (1993) notion of cognitive space, to unpick specifically how ‘the Boyz’, as skholêrs, manage to form
their own heterotopic knowledge (of and about themselves and the world around them).
This section, though, is deceiving at the outset because it is likely to give the impression that ‘the Boyz’ are part of a deeply-rooted community.

Nonetheless, the chapter goes on to reveal how the idea of a rational tightly-knit community has transformed in the interregnum. In reality, while a sense of homeliness is certainly desired, what ‘the Boyz’ also seek, because they are khôrasters as well, are individual identities that make us feel inimitable and temporarily fulfilled in terms of the pleasure that is experienced. In view of this, the second section goes on to consider the interwoven process of aesthetic space. Here it is argued that ‘the Boyz’ are as much a part of Baudrillard’s world of simulation and simulacra as everyone else, but, equally, they are not mindless adherents of this condition either. What this suggests is that being a performative khôraster entails borrowing the things that exist around us, but also being in control by using the imagination and a degree of creativity to create a space of compensation that is entirely fortuitous and episodic.

The third section moves on to highlight the effort that goes into the creation of a heterotopia, by drawing once again on cognitive spacing. To begin with, a new narrative piece is provided, before the idea of the ‘Other’ is introduced. The purpose of this section is to reveal how ‘Others’ can be used to strengthen the performative space of the heterotopia. In other words, this section returns to the idea that ‘the Boyz’ are skholērs and provides a comprehensive analysis of the danger ‘Others’ can present to a heterotopia, and the subsequent strategies that go into keeping it alive.

The final section introduces another narrative and the idea of moral space which, as it is argued, is a complex process in modernity. The aim in this section is to make the reader aware of how ‘the Boyz’ create and control their own collective moral spatial arrangement by means of the heterotopia, and how all individual responsibility can be disregarded thanks to the shelter and protection it provides. The discussion goes on to argue that what is actually at work is an interplay between the illusion of socialization (collectivity) and what Bauman refers to as sociality (idiosyncrasy). To put it differently, this means the moral space of ‘the Boyz’ is ideal for demonstrating how we are khôrasters-skholērs extraordinaire. Nevertheless, there is the concern that this section could be interpreted in a way that portrays ‘the Boyz’ as being inherently immoral. Therefore, some attention has been given to
the idea of deconstructing hierarchical systems of morality. In other words, this section emphasises the point that morality is the most subjective and incontrovertible of human possessions, and that beneath the surface of the heterotopia there are always likely to be instances where moral responsibility will occur.

**Excursus: Introducing Khôrasters-Skholērs Extraordinaire**

So far, the reader has been presented with the idea that urban explorers are able to create spaces of compensation where they can locate a more fulfilling sense of meaning and purpose, and also find something that feels homely. However, before this thesis can move on to talk about this in any further depth some additional points need to be made at the offset. Hence, we begin with a necessary excursus from the main topic in this chapter.

If the concept of heterotopia is placed carefully to one side for a moment, we can divert our attention to Blackshaw’s (2017) suggestion that there are many forms of leisure that can be termed *devotional leisure*. This is important because it is my contention that urban exploration can fit into this classification. Essentially, what this means is that urban explorers are ‘artists of life who have to make themselves up… and make themselves at home’ in the world (ibid: 159). To truly understand what ‘devotional leisure’ entails, however, it is important to make an artificial distinction between ‘devotional’ and ‘performative’ leisure. By doing this, we, as interpreters, can begin to understand certain forms of leisure as being some of the homeliest places in modernity, and as exemplifying *the art of living* performatively; in other words, we uncover what it really means to engage in certain forms of leisure such as urban exploration (ibid, 2017). In view of this, the ensuing section will briefly consider the importance of *skholē* in urban exploration, before it moves on to look at what has been termed *khôra*. As the reader will see, together these fundamental concepts are an integral part of heterotopic social space.

First, in line with the hermeneutic tradition, it has been argued that there are ‘communities’ that are more enduring and these can be viewed as being ‘value-spheres’ (Heller, 1999), of which people can join only one reliably and sincerely because it is an existential choice, a vocation as it were. As the reader may agree, in light of the two episodes provided so far (see Chapter Four), ‘the Boyz’ can perhaps
be seen to embody a value-sphere. As Blackshaw points out, value-spheres are what connect individuals who are following an authentic path in ‘devotional leisure’, like a religion or art, and people believe in them absolutely, as if they are ‘death do us part affairs’ (2017: 134; Weber, 2008). Of course, they may not be so permanent, but they do well to convince us otherwise. What is more, viewed in this way ‘devotional leisure’ entails an inherent educational function, ‘a cognitive sensibility that leads to the establishment of its own educational field inhabited by myriad interpreters who might be understood variously as deeper and wider expert analysts, as skholērs’ (Blackshaw, 2017: 136). What this indicates is that value-spheres are akin to spiritual homes where each member of the collective is highly skilled in their leisure choice, but they must also be willing to teach and guide, exchange knowledge and skill, and be of genuine benefit to others in their value-sphere. Leisure value-spheres are all about keeping the vocation alive; therefore, preserving certain conditions and a sense of solidarity and companionship are key when it comes to ‘devotional leisure’.

The idea of leisure becomes much more complex, however, when we take into account that certain forms, like urban exploration, do not fit into a classification as easily identifiable as a vocation (where a stable sense of meaning is found at its centre). ‘Performative leisure’, for instance, involves meaning that might be found elsewhere, perhaps on the periphery, and it does not have a hermeneutic tradition ‘so it can only speak for itself’ (Blackshaw, 2017: 139). What this means vis-à-vis urban exploration is that it can be said to have a spellbinding allure that is created the instance we enter the game, but it is ‘situated too low on skholē’s conceptual radar to be taken credibly’ (Blackshaw, 2017: 139). In other words, it offers us an alternative stage with which we can create our own theatrical arenas for consumption.

Of course the stage has some ‘rules’ urban explorers must adhere to: it should be satisfactorily dirty and grungy – or at the very least we should feel separated from everyday reality, we need to survive the adventure, there is often a want for discovery and something remarkable should always happen – always! If these malleable criteria are not suitably fulfilled, it is certain that the true power of the performativity will not be felt. However, there are no universally accepted norms and regulations that underpin our ‘performative leisure’; anything can go since our beliefs, values, behaviours and, of course, ethics, can be twisted or reinvented at short notice. What
all of this suggests is that the world of urban exploration should be understood precisely as a contingent set of worlds and postulated episodes.

To understand the idea ‘anything can go’ in a more effective way, it is useful, as Blackshaw (2017) argues, to associate performative urbex ‘communities’ with what is known as khôra. As Wolfeys (1998) explains, Derrida suggests that khôra can refer to anything – almost anything goes – but, because of this vague definition it has often not been taken seriously by the vast majority of scholars. Nevertheless, it is very important, especially in this thesis, since ‘performative leisure’ essentially represents the openness and inexplicit nature of khôra, in the way it exists as an in-between place that manages to bring performers together, into something of a union or a community-like gathering (Blackshaw, 2017). This type of ‘community’ is precisely what Foucault (1984) called a ‘heterotopia, a ‘non-locatable non-space’ that is all about seeking some sort of transcendence outside the limits of everyday reality (Blackshaw, 2017: 139). Yet, as hinted above, khôra – that other word for heterotopia – still necessitates social relations and although they do not have to be deep they have to convince us they are. What this means, in other words, is that heterotopias are frequently practiced as skholē, despite the common assumption that performative leisure entails a different, quasi form (ibid, 2017).

To reign back in on how we might begin to interpret heterotopic social space vis-à-vis the interregnum with better effect, ‘a radical kind of understanding’ needs to be adopted, inasmuch as we need to dissolve the artificial dichotomy that exists between ‘devotional’ and ‘performative’ leisure (Blackshaw, 2017: 153). Doing this will allow us to move in a direction that acknowledges what heterotopias truly entail and how pertinent Lyotard’s (1984) concept of performativity really is in the twenty-first century.

As the reader may have noticed, the heterotopias ‘the Boyz’ create (as the two episodes in the last chapter reveal) offer something that provides their lives with meaning, especially through the compelling sense of ‘community’ that is felt, so there is certainly something ‘devotional’ about it. What is more, the ubiquitous urge to assert our belonging is satisfied as urban explorers achieve something that is interesting, intensely pleasurable and, perhaps most importantly as the reader will
discover later, watchable (Blackshaw 2017). Keeping these ideas in mind, it is important to accept, as Blackshaw argues, that ‘the twenty-first century is the age in which all devotional leisure practices dissolve into the art of living’; therefore, we need to weigh up the idea that urban explorers perhaps exemplify khôrâstes-skholērs extraordinaire (2017: 153-155). This is what it means to bring an episodic world to life; this is the point of heterotopia. After all, as Blackshaw has argued, ‘the ‘community’ found in heterotopia is not really a community, but it is really a ‘community’; it is a ‘community’ only in the loosest and most precarious sense’ (2017: 149).

Nevertheless, it is necessary to mention that certain conditions still need to be met for urban explorers to find both pleasure and belonging in heterotopia. To paraphrase Blackshaw (2017), it is not enough to suggest you are an urban explorer; you do not become one simply by adopting the name. Becoming one requires certain preconditions. What this means, to borrow John Austin’s (1975) apt way of explaining it, is that when it comes to urban exploration truth is best understood as being ‘felicitous’, meaning it requires its own felicity conditions. By borrowing Austin’s (1975) idea, which was originally conceived to comprehend the truthfulness or falsity of words and sentences, it can be argued that to properly become part of the performativity of ‘the Boyz’, an urban explorer must first be officially authorised to enter the heterotopia by those in the collective.

Second, the person seeking to become one of ‘the Boyz’ must believe, sincerely, that they are in fact an urban explorer. According to Leslie Arnowick, sincerity is the most important condition because individuals must indicate that they are an urban explorer but also genuinely believe it themselves, so there is said to be a ‘psychological state of intention’ at play (2006: 157). As John Searle (1969) points out, if an illocutionary act is to be unadulterated and ‘happy’ a promise to the performative act must be made, and this, as Blackshaw (2017) reminds us, involves being grateful for having been accepted, and being prepared, when required, to share knowledge and expertise with other urban explorers. Of course, it is possible to make insincere promises, but these lack the true sincerity that is required in the performativity of urban exploration (Searle, 1969). It follows that insincere promises never fulfil the intention; the individual concerned manages to adhere to all the relevant rules, except the one concerning the essential psychological state.
Finally, it is crucial that urban explorers become *authentic* urban explorers. As Blackshaw (2017) argues, having made the promise to be sincere an urban explorer must make a full social commitment to the collective. Following Martin Heidegger (1962), this may be referred to as a mode of *being-in-the-world*, and this is precisely when individuals are able to recognise that their existence has a particular kind of uniqueness that manages to evade straightforward description and analysis. As noted above, this is the ability of certain individuals to embrace *khôra*, and in doing so they achieve the greatest sense of the sublime that is possible in life. Elsewhere, Heller (1999) has referred to this as the type of authenticity that is virtually perfect in every way; a form of existence that feels genuine and an essential part of a person’s life. What this means, as Blackshaw (2017) suggests, is that urban explorers are enchanted by their own truth about the world and the storytelling that is at the heart of it all. In other words, for ‘the Boyz’ being an urban explorer is not about saying they are urban explorers, it is about the tales they tell of their adventures, embracing the WildBoyz identity that is inimitable and one of a kind, and being able to share the whole experience as part of the felt ‘community’. This is what being an authentic urban explorer is all about, a life that comprises real meaning and the feeling of certainty, and performativity, and risk – all of which entails the transcendence of everyday life.

In view of what has been discussed and to bring this section to some sort of close, we can turn to Slavoj Zizek who has suggested there are two ways in which human beings exist in the world. One relates to those in positions of authority, such as university professors and politicians with their regimes and firm beliefs about how the world should be viewed, and the other is located in the everyday world that comprises the masses (Zizek, 2003). There are some people, however, such as urban explorers who may argue that there is in fact an additional world that has been overlooked, and this can be found inside those heterotopias of deviation that provide individuals with a sense of idiosyncrasy and the intense feeling of a ‘community’. And yet, this third type of world is always short-lived; they are impermanent spaces, but they thrive by allowing people to embrace the concept of *becoming* as individuals find a powerful sense of meaning together with the transient ecstasy of performativity.

Not everyone can locate meaning and the performative life in urban exploration of
course, because certain felicity conditions need to be met, but urban explorers do manage it. What this means is that ‘devotional leisure’ and its double meaning (the combined dispositions of devotional and performative leisure) can be said to provide individuals with something that is significant and meaningful, and this strategy is an art form that is imaginative and compensatory, so it provides the conditions for freedom, even if they are transitory (Blackshaw, 2017). The heterotopia is precisely what urban exploration is all about in our current stage of modernity and, as the reader will observe in the ensuing chapters, it entails being a khôraster-skholēra extraordinairopv “collective destiny” and ‘personal fulfilment’ (Blackshaw, 2017: 161). Perhaps this is what Foucault had in mind when he made the point that:

In our society, art has become something that is related only to objects and not to individuals or to life. That art is something which is specialized or done by experts who are artists. But couldn’t everyone’s life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object but not our life? (1994: 261).

In view of the discussion so far, then, we must delve into ‘the Boyz’ world and understand what it really means to be a khôraster-skholēra extraordinaire. The remainder of this thesis intends to do just that, to draw the reader into a heterotopic world that is perhaps starkly different to their own; a world which would otherwise be hidden and inaccessible. In other words, reader, it is now time to push aside your own preconceptions and venture all the way into the world of ‘the Boyz’.

A Skiing Lesson in the Interregnum

It was a bright December morning and, despite Box’s protests about walking, we were heading in the direction of Sheffield Ski Village which had been abandoned earlier in the year. As MKD says time and again, Box always whines ‘like a fuckin’ fanny’ when he’s forced to walk anywhere. Nevertheless, because he was around us it was, as it is at all times, acceptable. It is possible to do and say whatever you want around ‘the Boyz’; we will listen, and probably take the piss afterwards, but that’s the way we like it – that’s the way it’s always been. I watched Box’s shoulders sink and the expression on his face drop as he stared at the hill ahead. The Hurricane laughed at him.
Ten minutes later we'd managed to reach the footpath that suddenly twisted off into an incongruous piece of green space. It was a curious mix of ‘nature reserve’ and wasteland, littered with McDonald’s wrappers and dog shit. Still, it cheered up Box. He liked a good bit of nature, especially the flat bits. At this point the excitement was mounting amongst us and the conversation really began to flow. Our talk, like it often did on these adventures, reflected on the past. Together, we were driven by nostalgia, our own sense of solidarity and friendship, and we became impelled to reconstruct memories of our past. Before we became ‘urbexers’ we’d always followed a tradition that involved travelling to the Lake District. The aim was always simple enough: ‘have a good fucking time’. Our recollections of the past usually begin here, reminiscing over times when Mayhem abseiled off a cliff ‘starkers’; when MKD managed to spill spaghetti hoops over his freshly waxed car; or the time The Hurricane ruined his best jeans while trying to push the same car out of a muddy field. They are simple moments, but they always impel us to recreate something of this former world. Now, at this point in time, we had become ‘proper’ urbexers and we were animated, ready for some ‘good craic on’ which would only be possible if we created it together. Mayhem, sensing it was the right moment, ‘got the tuneage together’: Duran Duran’s epic song, *Wild Boys*.

At the fence, the usual bickering ensued: who would go first? Each of us justified precisely, although with varying degrees of persuaision, why we shouldn’t be the first to scale the fence. Out of everyone, Box did perhaps have the most valid point; he was indeed often going first. After several minutes of bickering, it was Rizla Rider who stepped up to the mark; or rather, we – ‘the Boyz – called him forward. Rizla would be the ‘little bitch’ this time, it was ‘his own fault for being a good climber’, according to MKD. We expressed our amusement, together as one, as he began to climb the fence. A frenzy of chortling and chuckling erupted among us. Yet, in spite of this, Rizla, choosing to ignore us, pushed his long fingers through the gaps in the rusted wire and managed to lift himself upwards with a tremendous show of strength. We all watched as he scaled the fence effortlessly.

It sounds inequitable, even slightly barbarous, but this way doing of things was our way of adhering to one of our foremost ‘golden rules’. Of course, we have many of them, but in this instance we all agreed it was better that someone scouted alone, as opposed to the whole group risking detection by secca, or worse, the police. The
sacrifice of one for the good of the rest was our way of doing things and we are resolute in our struggle to preserve this arrangement.

Inside the grounds, I gazed at the scene that lay before us. What a fucking shithole I thought. From the fence, after receiving the all clear from Rizla, we’d continued on through some dead thorn bushes towards an old bobsleigh track, and past the dramatic towering remains of the old support beams for the ski lift. Although the thorns appeared lifeless, they still managed to cling desirously to our clothes and skin. Our clothes, suddenly big and cumbersome, snagged, and sticky blood trickled from our arms where the coarse barbs had pierced us. The bobsled track was heavily overgrown and mostly impassable on account of the broken rubbish that filled it – a large plastic pipe which was splintered at the edges; smashed ski boots and equipment; and of course, dog shit. Classic. Or perhaps it was human? We couldn’t tell. After all, as Mayhem reminded us, ‘the gyppos’ regularly came here ‘to burn the fuck out of the buildings’ at the bottom of the slope. They must have done it, The Hurricane’s slow repulsed nod and tightly pursed lips confirmed it. MKD also agreed with him: ‘scummy fuckin’ gyppos’.

Aside from the bobsled track, or what we assumed was a bobsled track, the rest of the slope was considerably less destroyed, in the sense that it was still fairly useable. However, the world below us was still one of apocalyptic chaos and destruction. From where we were stood we were offered a spectacular panorama, but it was one which apparently goes unnoticed by the rest of the city. Hell, it would appear, had somehow managed to boil over, and having spat its graffiti, filth and disorder over the former ski village, had promptly recoiled in horror. Incredibly, even some of the heavy dendix mesh material tiles had been uprooted in certain areas and they exposed the dull abrasive ground beneath. This, though, was a mere inconvenience, and together we agreed that we would be able to have a good run down the entire length of the slope. Despite his car crash a few weeks earlier, after having suffered ‘whiplash’, it was decided that MKD would go first. Fuck it. We wanted to see him fly up one of the old ski jumps, and we knew he’d do it.

At the top we all crowded around a nervous looking MKD. A thick trail of sweat ran down his dark stubbly cheek as he sat below us on a blue sledge, being careful to absorb our words of encouragement. Around MKD, we were one. Something whole, and nothing was more powerful. The words of the group were more important and
effective than any individual contribution could ever hope to add to our impromptu symposium. Our confidence rose fast, and it protected MKD with an imperceptible armour-plating that could not be emulated. I felt it, like a warrior. Suddenly, we all knew he would survive! And so, ensnared by the moment, Mayhem volunteered to jump on board with him, ‘like a proper fucking legend’. As he was taking his seat he whipped out his phone to start playing the tune, *Wild Boys*. As the distinct drumming began, the pair of them cheered loudly. Everyone else chanted, following the opening chorus: ‘Wild-boys! Wild-boys! Wild-boys!

After a forceful push, they were off. The Hurricane was last to let go of Mayhem’s back; he’d run with them as far as was physically possible, before they’d gained too much speed for him to keep up. He’d stuck with them for as long as possible, which seemed like a nice thing to do, but somewhere deep inside I knew it was likely that he was simply trying to force them to travel faster than they were comfortable with. The dendix mats scratched loudly beneath the sledge, and years of fine grainy dirt erupted into Mayhem and MKD’s faces. As they told us afterwards, they could taste salt and it stung their eyes badly. MKD, struggling to manoeuvre the sledge, fought to turn them away from a pile of sharp-looking wood and plastic. They managed to avoid it, with inches to spare, and the sledge sounded vociferously as it ground harshly against the matting. The first ramp was fast approaching, and apparently it appeared much larger than it had at the top of the slope. ‘FUCKKK!’, we could hear Mayhem yelling. MKD seemed to agree with him as he too bellowed raucously. According to Mayhem afterwards, they’d shot through the half-pipe at record speed, causing the graffiti on both sides to blur dazzlingly. The sledge was rattling violently as they hit the base of the ramp, but it didn’t slow them down. Nothing could stop them now…

Next, they were flying through the air. They soared over Box, who was filming with a camera beneath them to get some ‘epic footage’, and the sledge blasted him with cloud of coarse grit. Together, MKD and Mayhem cursed and swore, until they smashed back into the ground at a terrific speed. The front of the sledge exploded. It shattered completely and MKD was torn from his seat. Mayhem felt his neck being wrenched backwards with incredible force; ‘the bastard hurt’, as he told the others later, amid our tears of laughter. We continued watching as MKD, who had been ejected from the sledge, tumbled down the rest of the slope towards a pile of debris at the bottom. In an ironic turn of events it was ‘man down’ indeed, as MKD often shouted to others when they’ve found themselves in similar situations.
As for Mayhem, who was still seated on the remains of the sledge, he gradually began to slow down. The back of the sledge where he was still sitting had mostly crumbled away, but the sharp jagged edges worked particularly well now to slow him down to a complete stop. Risking a quick glance back he saw ‘the Boyz’ were applauding loudly. The Hurricane cheered, Rizla held his arm up high executing the classic fist-pump and Box was running, half sliding, towards the wreckage. Mayhem felt like a hero, but he knew this feeling wouldn’t have been possible without the others. The atmosphere was vehement. Surely we were ‘pro’ urbxsers now! Yet, if we were, we all knew – as a collective – that we owed it all to ‘the Boyz’. After all, ‘wild boys always shine’, but only together.

**Cognitive Spacing in the Heterotopia: the WildBoyz Way**

There is much to be interpreted vis-à-vis the nature of our social spacing from the above-mentioned episode, and since it is the intention of this chapter to explore this in detail, it is important to first interpret the **cognitive** space that has been created between ‘the Boyz’. According to Bauman, cognitive spacing is formed **intellectually** ‘by acquisition and distribution of knowledge’, and it is this which forms our doxic understanding of, and subsequent relation to, the heterotopia and those ‘others’ around us (1993: 146). When we are together, there is, we might suggest, an extraordinarily powerful sense of companionship, a feeling of belonging and, above all, happiness. As Garrett (2013a) has noted, from the important contributions established in his own study, a sense of ‘community’ feels ever-present, as though Tönnies (1963) *Gemeinschaft* community still exists, rooted somewhere deep within our cultures and leisure choices. In other words, the episode above appears to describe, in some detail, the construction of a world in the **zuhanden** mode, a world where we do not consciously reflect upon the objects and things we encounter (Heidegger, 1962).

Accordingly, what this reveals is a sense of what Alfred Schütz terms the ‘reciprocity of perspectives’ since every one of ‘the Boyz’ has assumed a seemingly inherent relationship: our worlds collide and, therefore, we are able to understand one another naturally and completely (Schütz and Luckmann, 1973: 4-5). Following the way we are able to force one another to submit to our tacit rules, or how our past always abruptly re-enters the present, the episode above certainly appears to support Schütz’s (ibid) suggestion that we are guided
by a basic ‘pre-packaged’ knowledge. Indeed, the suggestion that community has a firm place located within our doxa (the knowledge we think with and not about), insofar as we do not know it exists since it is a taken-for-granted knowledge which recognises our being with other humans who appear to be very much like us, seems to fit tighter than a glove. Together, in the way we laugh unanimously for instance, or the way delinquent ‘gypos’ are identified as being ‘scum’, our natural attitude is one which allows us to see what each other sees, and understand what everyone else among us understands. There is of course, as Wittgenstein (1967) famously pointed out, no way of ever uncovering whether or not this is true, it is simply the case that we appear to assume that we are able to understand each other, absolutely and unconditionally, because this is ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ (Bauman, 1993).

Nonetheless, there is a problem with the above exposition, and this lies with what Bauman refers to as misunderstanding – when we are made to ‘pause and think’, and our experiences demand some sort of clarification or explanation (1993: 147). This marks the shift, as described by Heidegger (1962), from a zuhanden world to a vorhanden one, when our process of knowledge building suddenly becomes a conscious, reflexive, task. This is when we begin to realise that the equilibrium between ourselves, and the reciprocity, becomes uncertain and unstable. Although the introductory episode to this chapter is wrought with potential examples (such as forcing one another to shoulder unwanted tasks), one that is perhaps most apparent involves a ‘pissed off MKD’, when we discovered him tangled in an old safety net, along with pieces of ‘broken crap’, at the bottom of the ski slope.

As we approached him, MKD was lent over awkwardly, clutching his back. His pain was manifest, but his frustration at us was even more pronounced as he discharged a barrage of insults towards the group: ‘fuckin’ bag-heads! What the hell. Why am I always gettin’ injured, yer fuckin’ boobs?’ What was less conspicuous, however, was that MKD at this point, to borrow the words of Ussher, seemed to realise, once again (for this is not the first time something of this nature had happened), that ‘the world as world is only revealed to [us] when things start to go wrong’ (1955: 40). What this suggests is that our social worlds open to reveal much more depth ‘when naïve expectations are frustrated’ (Bauman, 1993: 147). This, of course, is a point that requires further elucidation.

Taking the last point into consideration, it can be suggested that on this occasion we had all gone so far as to make MKD question the day’s events which had taken place, insofar as
thought-about knowledge, as opposed to naïve innocence, was suddenly brought into the situation. By all accounts, when it comes to social spacing distance between people can be ‘made’ or ‘unmade’ based on MKD’s thought-about knowledge (and the same applies to anyone else for that matter), but the propinquity and detachment is measured directly by the level of ‘richness or paucity of knowledge’. Subsequently, since ‘the Boyz’ can be located at the intimate pole in the ‘system of spatial arrangement’ (Schütz and Luckmann, 1973: 148), which gives preferentiality to familiarity over strangeness, and also means that MKD has invested a tremendous volume of rich knowledge into us, we continue to interact and acquire knowledge together. Although our own individual identity implies standing out and being different or unique, having invested knowledge in ‘the Boyz’, and feeling otherwise vulnerable without the warm feeling of security which derives from being immersed as part of a collective group (Blackshaw, 2003; Bauman, 2001b), in the end MKD ‘took it all on the chin’. In other words, our cognitive space remained, for the most part, the same. More on this point will emerge later in this chapter.

The weight of being one of ‘the Boyz’, therefore, can weigh heavily upon our shoulders, but for most of the time, especially while we are together, it is worth it. Much like a community, the heterotopia still requires patience and understanding, and although we must consciously reflect and think about it in the interregnum, a convincing feeling of homeliness and belonging seemingly triumphs over most of the problems we encounter (Blackshaw, 2003). As Bauman (1993) suggests, it is on account of our intimacy that each of us is likely to be drawn back together, because without it we feel unprotected, lonely and exposed to wilder elements without an identity.

What all of this tell us, then, if we reflect back on the idea that urban explorers are skholērs, is that part of being one of ‘the Boyz’ entails the feeling of needing to be one of the group, so that we can continue to join in with the warmthness of the heterotopia, and all of its other pleasure-giving qualities. Nevertheless, this also involves sustaining the respect and acceptance of everyone else involved (Blackshaw, 2017). This reinforces Blackshaw’s (2017) point, as noted in the excursus, that urban exploration has its own felicity conditions which must be met. That is the power that khōra, the heterotopia, has over each and every one of us; we know that it is not the depth of our social relations that counts. What really matters, at the base of everything, is our ability to continue inhabiting the heterotopia, and our skill in being able to carry on imagining and creating it (ibid).
Therefore, the reader should not be fooled into thinking that ‘the Boyz’ are hunting for any modernist-guided sense of certainty or unbreakable ontological security. ‘The Boyz’ are committed to one another only insofar as we are a *Gesellschaft* type of community, which means that our affiliation is one guided predominantly by our shared devotion to urban exploration as a leisure choice. Our sense of ‘community’ is, as Blackshaw (2010a) suggests, entirely *postulated* and performative, to the extent that we have misplaced the true innocence of community. After all, a community that is able to speak of itself is essentially ‘a contradiction in terms’ (Bauman, 2001b: 12), in the sense that in the interregnum our individual crusades are always defined by a multiplicity of discrete ‘acts of self-identification’ (Bauman, 1992a: 136). In view of this, and contrary to our apparent submissiveness to adhere to what the group demands, we are not always acquiescent beings (Blackshaw, 2003).

As the reader will witness later on, what ‘the Boyz’ also defend, possibly above all else, is their ability to exist as palimpsests, rather than always striving towards some ultimate group victory (Bauman, 2001b). Each of us keeps the heterotopia alive for as long as is necessary, but they never last forever because people’s interests and identities tend to change over time (Foucault, 1984; Bauman, in Bauman and Raud, 2015), which again reiterates the reflexive nature of our lives. It can be argued, therefore, that it is performativity and our idiosyncrasy that we value more than anything else, as opposed to the group, to the extent that perhaps the more fundamental reason we are willing to deal with heterotopias, including all the ‘bad craic’ they might entail, is to construct our desired identities. Like MKD boasted later that night in the pub, as he reinforced his chosen ultra-masculine, ‘hard-man’, identity:

“Did you see us fly? [Laughs]. I bet none of yous would have done that same ramp as me and [Mayhem], like. Ya fucking fannys, we went from the highest point. Yer man, we were pretty beast like; proper beasted it didn’t we? [Looking for us to agree]. And I did it again afterwards. None of yous did. Yous would have fucked yourselves. It’s cos I’m a beast. [Laughs].”

It is perhaps for this reason that the intimacy of ‘the Boyz’, and our engagement with urban exploration, fulfils, for the time being at least, our intersubjective need (Ricoeur, 1992) for the warmness of a home, but also our desire for flexibility, experimentation and identities which always exist until-further-notice:
Passions are, after all, notorious for their incurable volatility and the way they shift. The need for aesthetic community, notably the variety of aesthetic community which services the construction/dismantling of identity, tends for those reasons to be as much self-perpetuating as it is self-defeating. That need is never to be gratified, and neither will it ever stop prompting the search for satisfaction (Bauman, 2001b: 66).

On the face of it, we may appear to be devoted to each other, especially when it comes to our individual sacrifices for ‘the Boyz’, but this is not the central motivational driving force in our lives. The only thing we are truly committed to is ourselves, our identities and our own pleasure and happiness (Blackshaw, 2010a). In other words, what we are committed to is our performativity. Therefore, as khôrasters it is aesthetic space of the heterotopia that we are truly concerned with, and it is here where the focus of this chapter next turns its attention to.

The world, as Beck (1992) reminds us, is one where humans are torn on a daily basis between freedom and security, though neither are attainable at the same time, and nor will they ever be found in sufficient quantities so they might fully satisfy us. The beauty of this, however, as Young reminds us, is that ‘just as community collapses, identity is invented’ (1999: 164). As Bauman (2001b) suggests, identity – that manipulation of our character – has come to replace the dream of community in liquid modernity. The WildBoyz heterotopia that is built around urban exploration contains the playing fields for producing identities which can each be performed, contested and quickly rewritten. What is more, though, is that any one of ‘the Boyz’ is also free to pick out their next source of pleasure and identity without the heterotopia, because they are capable of leaving and joining heterotopias with much more ease than they would have had in the era of solid modernity.

Playing in Aesthetic Space: Understanding the Khôraster

As noted earlier, in addition to cognitive space there is what Bauman has termed aesthetic space. This is space which has been contrived affectively, as a result of our broad sense of curiosity in our search for samples of ‘experiential intensity’ (1993: 146). In terms of aesthetics then, the city becomes as Debord (2000) might describe it, a spectacle where the amusement value of everything has the capacity to override all other potential considerations. Nonetheless, contra Debord, and those others like Pinder (2005) who assume that escape can be sought against the depthlessness of hyperreality, as Baudrillard (2005)
reminds us, this is simply not possible. This is because the speed at which ‘culture’ and
history is manufactured by ‘the simulation industries’ ensures that the city abandons and
reduplicates itself as something renewed before we ever have time to experience any sense
of history (Smith, 2001: 116-117). In other words, even though urban explorers appear as
though they are creatively breaking away from hyperreality, in actual fact they are still as
much a part of it as everyone else.

Following Johan Huizinga’s (1971) suggestion, then, that we have all become homo ludens,
inasmuch as we have perhaps come to value play above all else, making it more deep-rooted
than culture itself, it would not be incorrect to gauge that play is an element which makes
any uneasiness involving our survival seem worthwhile and thinkable (Bauman, 1993).
Indeed, as Nietzsche famously proclaimed, there is little else against the certain nothingness
of our world which serves such an important purpose as play (Deleuze, 2006). Our
engagement with play also reinvents something comforting, homely and warm (Blackshaw,
2010a), something which community increasingly fails to provide in our advanced state of
modernity. The Hurricane emphasised this point as we sat on the side of the ski slope after
hours of sledging:

“You know, sneakin’ into these places really does it for me, like. It’s like our game
isn’t it. Together, where we decide what the craic is and that. I’m glad I’m doing this
shit now, while I can, so we have something to tell people about when we’re falling
to pieces and can’t do anythin’ anymore... Like, at least we’ll always have this, won’t
we? What the fuck man! [Laughs hysterically as he watches Rizla push himself off
down the slope on old broken go-kart]. It’s good craic man, and it gives us plenty of
stories to tell.”

Of course, we should also consider, if only briefly at this juncture as it is explored in greater
depth in Chapter Six, the sense of homelessness we feel in the interregnum. What The
Hurricane reveals is that an ineradicable and heavy feeling of nostalgia, or ‘homesickness’ as
we might refer to it, permeates through our lives as we feel the dull ache of loss, regret and
longing for something we never had in the first place: a tangible community (Blackshaw,
2010a). An awful lot of ‘the Boyz’ time is spent reflecting on the past, as implied in the
above episode, but, as The Hurricane suggests, by [re]creating the heterotopia – the felt
imaginary – we acquire the temporary warmth and security of a home. It could be argued,
therefore, that alongside the frenzied consumer-driven world of the pure aesthetic, which is
discussed hereafter in this section, there subsists the other truth – the fact that our homes
are in shortage and this forces us to seek them elsewhere, in our leisure for instance (Blackshaw, 2003).

However, while what is being discussed here in terms of aesthetics bears some similarity to community in the traditional sense of that word, as Bauman (1993) points out, our games themselves are not fused quite so tightly with the players because our ‘dream order’ of things will, in good time, fade away. As it was pointed out in the previous chapter, when it comes to heterotopic social spaces rules can be broken without consequence and we the players can change when we so desire, especially when we want to create or join another game. After all, there are no enduring feelings of obligation attached to playing in the interregnum (Baudrillard, 1990). Equally, there are no corollaries when our commitment to performativity dwindles. However, what heterotopic social space does provide us with, as Wittgenstein (1967) argues, is the one true ingredient to all understanding; indeed, the only one we need: the knowledge of how we might continue existing day by day. Above all, the seduction of this condition offers us no other choice than to accept the many invitations or opportunities to play which we receive throughout our lives (Baudrillard, 1990). In this vein, we might suggest that together all ‘the Boyz’ are travelling players, khôrasters who have been seduced by their fascination for more, to realise or invent newfound and neoteric experiences and performative identities.

Almost all of our other concerns seem to dissolve when it comes to our engagement with urban exploration because we are guided predominantly by the aesthetic, khôra and the magic of what the world around us could be, or, indeed, what it will become once we choose to invest ourselves in it. As Blackshaw (2010a) reminds us, there is very little left of traditional community; it has been snatched, molested and distorted so that people like ‘the Boyz’ can treat it as a commodity. This is because people are ‘consumers first, and all the rest after’ (Bauman, 2004b: 66). What ‘the Boyz’ show us, therefore, is that Pinder’s (2005) portrayal of the urban flâneur suddenly appears to be rather accurate, as they casually stroll through towns and cities in search of the true aesthetic beauty of the urban environment. The problem, however, is that the ‘urban flâneur is [now] the travelling player’, and while there were at the very beginning of this condition ‘custom-made stages’ (Bauman, 1993: 172-173), like Benjamin’s Arcades, on which flâneurs could play, we have long since transcended those playhouses where mere pleasurable views sufficed. As Bauman suggests:
The society that set off the flâneur on his perpetual voyage of discovery, which made him into the player expecting the world to be a play, had to supply him with the world fit for the play of discovery. Such a world was, originally, the street of the modern metropolis (ibid: 175).

In a nutshell, Benjamin’s Arcades no longer exist today. Instead, modernity has brought about a vast wilderness where all-powerful simulacra effectively obliterates any obstruction that might have found its way between us and our aesthetic spacing (Baudrillard, 1994). As Box often advises us, almost as if he is an advocate for the well-known brand Nike: ‘if you want to do something, just do it’. This, though, is the nature of seeking aesthetic space in the interregnum. In other words, as Baudrillard (1994) reminds us, everywhere people go scripts of how to live our lives are ready-made and flexible, and can be drawn upon instantaneously since the windows people once gazed into have been replaced for HD television screens which are far more arousing and enlivening. What this means is that when it comes to urban exploration the world becomes what we want it to be based on what we have seen and what exists around us. It was, after all, Box who was inspired by the Special Needs Crew’s (a well-known ‘urbex crew’ who post online videos and photographs) online material and suggested that we abseil the lift shaft because ‘people like watching videos of that sort of shit on YouTube’. Mayhem, too, thought to sledge down the abandoned ski slope simply because he had seen an advert for an indoor ski slope at Castleford and he fancied a go (as did the rest of us). In the end, the Sheffield slope merely presented a cheaper, and apparently much cooler, alternative.

It would be all too easy, then, to perhaps agree with the suggestion that we have moved from the society of the ‘stroller’, as Baudelaire proposed, or Benjamin’s flâneur, to Baudrillard’s performative world of fast flowing images which can be consumed without the inconvenience of having to stray too far from the comfort of our armchairs (Smith, 2001), so to speak. Indeed, this is the world ‘the Boyz’ appear to have constructed for themselves, borrowing and stealing ideas from the internet or television. And yet, contra Richard Sennett, who proclaimed that ‘the street level is dead space... space to move through, not be in’ (1977: 12-15), when it comes to urban exploration this is exactly where we want to be, among the buildings and streets where you are not supposed to pause or risk looking around. What this means is that we have to make some effort to rise above Baudrillard’s nihilism because the images we are fed as part of his simulated world are clearly not enough.
To understand ‘the Boyz’ heterotopic social space accurately, then, it might be useful to view the world through the lens of Henning Bech (1992), because it can be argued that the world around us has turned into a form of telecity⁸. Yet, while Baudrillard (2005) interprets this as the end or the disappearance of the real, since space has become regulated by the image, the interpretation being offered here intends to offer a perspective that is much less fatalistic. In other words, Bech’s concept can be extended to incorporate the urban environment and its places most people choose to avoid, to the extent that it can be argued that it is still ‘telemediated’ (Tester, 1998) but it is through the eyes and imaginations of ‘the Boyz’. What should be brought to mind, therefore, is that while we do reside in the incurable world of images and signs, ‘the Boyz’ do not unwittingly ‘abandon themselves to munching images’ (Bauman, 1992a: 155). Instead, we seek control by creating and moulding our own, and like Garrett (2013a) demonstrates in his own work, they are very real indeed – even if we have borrowed the original signs and images to construct our world. After all, as Bech reminds us, ‘television is totally non-committal’ (1992: 22). For this reason, this interpretation accepts, like Blackshaw (2003), that a sense of reality does still exist, only that it subsists through the magic and performativity of the heterotopia which, when it is present, is the only reality we need to concern ourselves with.

In other words, it is the darker side of modernity that becomes as exciting and incredible, if not more so, than the rest of the world around us. This is because this is where ‘the Boyz’ have to physically touch the filth, and rewire what we find in the urban environment to suit our desired identities and passions for excitement and happiness. Music, for instance, as the reader witnessed through Mayhem and MKD’s use of Duran Duran above, is perhaps one of the best examples of this aesthetic manipulation, where ‘the Boyz’ assume the performative role of dramatized characters (Butler, 1990), or even action heroes. The music, therefore, serves purely to intensify and exaggerate our overall performance, making us feel as though we are something special – ‘something that others out there are not’, according to Mayhem. As the reader saw in the residential home too, things had to be handled, moved or imagined and, as for Subject 47, only a dramatic performance that matched the decrepit environment could intensify his experience. Elsewhere as well, in the hotel or, as above at the ski slope, we felt the need to explore in our own unconventional (in our eyes) but intersubjective way: whether this is via abseil or sledge it does not matter. What matters is that our spaces have been satisfactorily manipulated and successfully played with.

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⁸ A screen mediated world of surfaces.
Essentially, what is being argued is that identities are groundless, performative illusions which we believe in only transitorily (Butler, 1990), brought to life on account of the images and simulacra that surround us. Crucially, though, as in the narrative above, ‘the Boyz’ enter a world that is not universal; they simply find themselves in one where the ‘real world and its other are hard to prise apart’, because they feed off one another to create an unstable ‘ground of unassailable truth on which khôra rests’ (Blackshaw, 2017: 150). The upshot of this is that the heterotopia derives its power directly from the ability of urban explorers, as khôrasters, to imagine, create and control their own aesthetic space. In other words, the darker places of the city have been manipulated and condensed so that they may be enjoyed in a way that is similar to sexual intercourse with the protection of condoms, from – as far as we allow ourselves to believe – a safe distance (away from the ordinariness of the everyday world) and ‘with no strings attached’ (Bauman, 1993: 178). This is the aesthetic space urban explorers seek, since the boundaries between what is televised and what we can manipulate and make real have become blurred, and no long-term commitment needs to be invested. In other words, performativity has become the real: the real that is borrowed and, somewhat paradoxically, fantastically unique and our own.

Life experienced as Bech’s telecty is, therefore, the quintessential aesthetic space and, just as the television is entirely ‘non-committal’, so are our lives (Tester, 1998). This is Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) world of rhizomatic surfaces, where khôrasters have become ‘bodies without organs’, inasmuch as the body’s only concern is with desire and freedom as opposed to being controlled by any form of hegemony. As we have seen, then, ‘the Boyz’ togetherness and heterotopia is entirely fortuitous, periodic and all about having the power to feel in control. It can, in other words, be changed as if were by the flick of a remote. On our way back from Sheffield Ski Slope, Box, who was still enthused by our day’s activities, reminded us of this when he set about creating his own ‘urbex plans’, in preparation for when he returned home to the north east:

**Box**: Fuck guys, that was insane.

**Rizla**: Fuck sakes! Someone else carry these stupid fuckin’ sledges? I’m gonna chuck them. Dicks.

**Mayhem**: Dude. You’re the equipment manager now, man. Unlucky.

**Everyone**: [Laughter].

**Box**: I’m gonna see if some people from work wanna check out a place in
Newcastle that I’ve seen. Feeling pretty psyched for this shit right now.

**Mayhem**: Mint.

**The Hurricane**: Just abandoning us like that? Holy shit man…

**Box**: What? It’s not like we’re a family or anythin’, is it? We can all do what we want whenever we want, we don’t need to hold each other’s hands to do stuff do we?

**Mayhem**: That’s a very interesting concept you have there, Box… [pauses]. Yeah, fuck you guys, we can all do whatever we want.

**The Hurricane**: [Imitating Mayhem, in a mock-voice]. Fuck you, guys.

**Rizla**: Right, guys. I look like a fuckin’ tit carrying these. Someone else better carry them!

In Blackshaw’s (2010a) schema any notion of community is likely to ‘self-destruct’ in the interregnum as soon as it has been satisfactorily consumed. After that it is time to abandon our imagined games and identities, indeed the very heterotopia itself, so we may continue in our search for pleasure. As Bauman (1993) reminds us, inside our contemporary homes there is no need to gather around the one TV set or stereo, mutually agreeing on one sole object of pleasure, when one is likely to exist in every other room. In the telecity our lives are utterly episodic, borrowed to a certain extent but not entirely, and there is no room for compassion or time-honoured marriage to the ones we love, or whom we could have a shared sense of comradeship with (Bauman, 2002).

Aesthetic space, therefore, is all about the heterotopia offering khôrasters a different kind of belonging that is performative, imaginative and based on pure desire and transgression, where we make certain that we have the capacity to go there ‘on a spree, on an escapade; one frolics and rollicks, one revels – one plays, one plays in playing’ (Bauman, 1993: 179). This is certainly not the type of community that shares the burden of carrying sledges, it is one with freedom at its heart, and one that allows khôrasters to ‘drift from one performative status to the next’ as they live for the moment (Blackshaw, 2017: 150).

**Traitors and Ominous Strangers: Overcoming the Arcane Other**

So far this chapter has centred its discussion on close social proximity in the heterotopia and the wonderful pleasures that can be extricated on account of it. Crucial to each of these aspects of social spacing, though, is the effort, creativity and imagination urban explorers put in, for without this labour the heterotopia could not exist. In this vein, this section of the
chapter returns to the idea of cognitive spacing to illustrate the point that heterotopic social spacing has a new level of complexity when the other side of Schütz’s ‘system of spatial arrangement’ is taken into consideration. Indeed, it may seem paradoxical to dart between social processes, but the reader should be reminded that while they may be interwoven with one another each are also distinct in their own right.

At the other side of Schütz’s ‘system of spatial arrangement’, then, there lies another extremity: the anonymity pole, where cognitive social distance does not, and indeed cannot, exist (Bauman, 1993). Objects that lie at this end of the pole do not provide the rich knowledge we are able to gather in our more intimate relationships. These are the ‘Others’ – the ‘gypos’ and ‘chavs’ we witnessed earlier – who lie far beyond our own performative cognitive social spaces. As Bauman (1993) reminds us, before we made inroads into the darker side of modernity, the world was straightforward: it was divided between fixed boundaries that allowed people to distinguish, with certainty, between fellow neighbours and the ‘faceless bodies’ of the wastelands that lay beyond their walls. Now, however, it would appear that the boundaries are reminiscent of the cities around us. The protective walls have crumbled away, exposing the festering strangeness that once lurked within. What this means, in short, is that the ‘faceless bodies’ can enter our heterotopic social spaces and, like an unwanted and incurable disease, they refuse to go away (ibid). This, therefore, calls for some sort of solution, a way of exerting power and control to ensure that the performativity of the heterotopia does not become plagued by ‘Others’. Failure to do this can result in its destruction before we have ever managed to properly enjoy it.

The Fr3e Roamers

We were entering Victoria Tunnel, a large abandoned Second World War air raid shelter that lies hidden beneath the city of Newcastle. The air was thick with an earthy dampness. An old silver-coloured handrail to the left, shimmering with droplets of condensation on its underside, guided our way. As we walked down the old pitted ramp, into the heart of the former refuge, Mayhem attempted to recall some of the tunnel’s history. The rest of us tried to list assiduously at first, but since it had remained untouched by any physical human presence for years it was extremely wet and slick, so in the end our attention was diverted to the more pressing issue of ‘not falling onto our arses’. There were five of us on this occasion: myself, Mayhem, Subject 47, Box and some random fit lass Box works with. The others hadn’t come
because we’d not given them enough notice apparently. Strictly speaking, ‘the fit lass’ wasn’t really one of us of course, but, as Box pointed out, because ‘she was hot and had a good set on her’ she’d been allowed to come along. Strictly speaking, ‘the Boyz’ were doing him a favour of course because, according to Mayhem, Box simply ‘wanted to bang her’. She was in every other way still an enemy; a contaminant to our way of doing things.

Inside the tunnel, we’d walked for almost half an hour. In that time, we’d passed the fragile remains of several wooden seats, and a number of old rusted metal frames which once supported large communal benches. The arching tunnel itself wasn’t particularly high, but it was enough that we didn’t have to stoop; although, Mayhem, Subject 47 and Box almost caught their heads on a few brown crusted light fittings and other jagged pieces of crap that were dangling from the ceiling a couple of times. The structure was beautifully crafted, but the deeper inside we ventured the more subsidence we began to witness. The air quality, too, steadily became thicker and more stale. Evidently there was a good reason why no one came down here anymore.

After another hour and a half or so, having grabbed all the photographs we wanted, and with Box satisfied that he’d managed to light up some steel wool for us, we decided to leave. The fact that we’d all developed dull headaches was concerning. Maybe burning wool hadn’t been such a good idea after all. Subject 47 led the way as we waded back through a flooded set of concrete blast doors. And it was then that we heard the sound of footsteps. Everyone froze. Against the stillness water dripped slowly somewhere from the roof, into the pool we were all standing in. Every few seconds or so thick droplets smashed against the surface of the water, shattering its smooth glasslike appearance and the surrounding silence. The heavy footsteps were edging closer, and muffled voices were reaching us now. An uncomfortable feeling of alarm set in as we expected secca or, worse, the police to be heading towards us, and there was nowhere to run this time – the tunnel ended as a fucking sewage overflow now. So, we waited, anticipating that ‘shit was definitely about to kick off’. The expressions on Subject 47 and Mayhem’s faces signalled that they were ‘shitting themselves’ – the angst had quickly engulfed them like a dark cloud.

Then we saw them, the fucking Fr3e Roamer cunts. Their presence echoed vociferously against the exquisite craftsmanship of the walls. Suited up in military-
styled camo trousers, boots, dark hoodies and skull-decorated bandanas, they greeted us taciturnly. Later that evening, and much to our amusement, ‘the fit lass’ suggested they all looked like ‘retarded, chavy, neo-Nazis’. That observation perhaps wasn’t totally erroneous either since the Roamers came from Ferryhill, not Aycliffe like the rest of us, and ‘all sorts of shit comes out of Ferryhill’. As Subject 47 often liked to remind us, they are ‘proper fucked up towns, full of graffiti and dirty fucking chavs’ (ones far worse than the Aycliffe breed). At any rate, this gained ‘the fit lass’ some credibility among ‘the Boyz’. She wasn’t so threatening to our way of doing things after all.

For several awkward moments the toothy grin of a skull smiled irksomely at us. Behind it was their ‘leader’ and ‘he was a right dickhead’. Ordinarily, he would appear alongside one particular Roamer, a mass of quivering fat, but this time ‘the gigantic retard’ hadn’t been able to squeeze his way through the entrance. ‘The Boyz’ discovered this later and found the news ‘funny as fuck’. To break the silence and put them in their place, Mayhem, regurgitated a thick glob of saliva from deep in his throat and spat towards the floor. For a moment, it floated noticeably on the surface of the water, before it drifted into the side of a jet black Fr3e Roamer boot. None of them looked too impressed.

In the beginning, Mayhem had attempted ‘to lead these young newbies into the world of urbex, like [his] own disciples, taking them into dirty derps n’ all that’. Nevertheless, the ‘stupid fuckwits’ had gone off and created their own Facebook page, trying to outshine ‘the Boyz’. Indeed, although Mayhem has confessed to the fact that he often admired their ‘spirit, drive and commitment to the game’ – all things ‘the Boyz’ sometimes lack (even though no one admits it), he’d started to dislike them and before long all sense of mutuality had dissolved into acrimony. They questioned ‘the Boyz’ ways of doing things, and ‘we couldn’t have the bellends doing that’. They disrespected the ‘fucking code, broke the rules and contaminated our territory’, so we wanted to stamp them out, permanently. The only reason the thick cunts were in the tunnel anyway, much to Mayhem’s regret, was because they’d managed to filch access details from him a few weeks earlier.

Having tolerated them for more than thirty seconds, it wasn’t long before we pointed them in the direction of the sewer where dirty sanitary towels and ‘arse soup’ lay ahead, claiming it was ‘awesome’ down there. After that, the plan was to leave them
to their own devices. Although the actual temperature was still the same, the atmosphere was certainly much colder now. As we walked past their small malodourous congregation, splashing loudly, Box quickly looked up at MKD and gave him a nod: ‘alright man, good to see you, bro! What the fuck! Fancy meeting you here dude’. Together they laughed. For a brief moment, MKD complained about the flooded passageway and his waterlogged boots, and then quickly offered a ‘see you later’. Box replied jovially: ‘yeah, dude. See you soon man’. We watched as MKD followed the Fr3e Roamers, off into the darkness.

**The Heterotopia and its ‘Otherness’**

As it has been indicated previously, despite our longing for idiosyncrasy the performative identities we attempt to construct, in our effort to manipulate our essential characters, are difficult to build and control alone. Hence, our heterotopias are assembled alongside others, such as ‘the Boyz’ (as skholērs), who are familiar on the purported social proximity scale. This works owing to what Ricoeur (1992) identifies as mutual co-authorship in the ‘exchange of memories’ which functions to produce our own shared discourse. This, according to Blackshaw (2003), and as it was demonstrated in our walk up to the abandoned ski slope, allows us to appeal to certain memories that involve key characters amongst our collective. It also inaugurates a stronger, more concentrated, sense of power and knowledge that offers some authority over our authorship of the heterotopia we have created (Foucault, 1980). At the time, any alternatives do not matter and, although ‘the Boyz’ ‘may be subjects in other people’s stories and others may be the subjects of their own and in others’ stories’ (Blackshaw, 2003: 61), it is incontrovertible that what we have created, while it exists, has more legitimacy than all the rest.

However, as Jenkins (1996) reminds us, creating any sense of identity not only entails knowing who we are, it also involves defining who we are not. This means, according to Melucci, that individual identities in the interregnum are connected by forms of collective action inasmuch as their interpretation will only ‘make sense to [us]’ (1989: 62). As Blackshaw (2017) points out, because we are skholērs any form of identity we construct is an undertaking we continually shape and craft. This method of understanding, therefore, takes as a given that a sense of identity is formed through what Ricoeur (1992) refers to as a ‘mythic stability’ which supplies each of ‘the Boyz’ with a temporal heterotopia. In other words, ‘the Boyz’ draw upon what has been termed *Einbildungskraft* – ‘the transcendental
power of the imagination’ (Taylor, 2011: 108) – to offer out other identities to those ‘Others’ and assert a presupposed sense of power over them. In turn, this creates an imaginary divide between the sameness of ‘them’ and the assumed distinctiveness of ‘the Boyz’, and this helps to reinforce our perception that a heterotopia exists between ourselves.

Turning to Jacques Derrida (1973), then, it has been argued that the stranger is now an elemental feature of ‘community’ in the interregnum, because ‘community’ which has become heterotopic is always reliant on ‘the play of difference’ between itself and the creation of inferior ‘Others’. Most of the time, of course, we try to avoid making eye contact with those ‘Others’, but this is a condition ‘without solution’ and all efforts are bound to be perpetual and inexorable (ibid: 160). Martin Buber has cogently termed this a vergegnung, to emphasise the dissimilitude between meeting and ‘mismeeting’ (Kramer and Gawlick, 2003). Nevertheless, despite having been consigned to a field of ‘civil inattention’ (Goffman, 1971: 312), where we make every effort to steal a glimpse of what is around us while convincing ourselves we are not really looking, in our episodic and telemediated world there is no assurance that we will not suffer a breach below decks. In a world where timber reaches us half-cut and is certain to be defective, the vessels we build cannot help but leak because there is no way of ever making them completely watertight. And therein lies the central problem: heterotopias and our control over them are threatened by strangeness.

One of the most disturbing traits of the stranger is that they are neither a ‘neighbour’, nor an ‘alien’; more ominously still, they have become both (Bauman, 1993: 153). Moreover, although Alexander (2013) has argued that it is the construction of difference which inaugurates the threatening sense of strangeness we feel, it is important to remind ourselves of the point Simmel (1950) has made elsewhere, that the stranger is often closer to us than we imagine, insofar that it is the would-be commonality that threatens us.

As Simmel (1950) reminds us, strangers are those we sense to be different in some way or another, but the fact they are so proximal means we can detect the ordinariness in their eyes when we look at them, and realise the close resemblance that exists between us. In this vein, there is, as Simmel (1950) observes penitently, something to be feared when it comes to those who look like us. We each run the risk of becoming that foul ‘Other’ – a unification of Fr3e Roamer cunt and former ‘epicness’ of the WildBoyz – and if that is the case our collective identity quickly loses its uniqueness and exceptionality. This is a powerful threat
since we face the consequential peril of becoming nothing, of being nonentities inside a world of nothingness. Sat in a pub one night, getting pissed on cheap beer and fireball whisky, The Hurricane made this condition very clear:

“The Fr3e Roamers? Who the fuck do these guys think they are? Are they tryin’ teh-fuck with the WildBoyz? Tryin’ to steal our identity and what we do? Well, they can fuck right off man. [General murmur of agreement]. They can pretend, but they’ll never be us. It’s bullshit, they might look like us – like the fuckin’ Boyz… In fact, fuck, no they don’t! The twats… Stealing our explores though, and taking credit for it, but they’re so different. Do you see what I mean?… [Pauses, hiccups, and looks at MKD]. They’re becomin’ us man! Stop hangin’ around with the bastards. Are you still a WildBoy?”

What we can gather here is that Simmel’s (1950) insight is accurate because the Fr3e Roamers are evident outsiders who, most unnervingly, look like us. The roots of division can easily be blurred, as The Hurricane clearly points out, but this also corresponds to the worst kind of danger because, like pollution, it can exist among us unnoticed and undetected, right up until it is too late – when irreversible damage has been accomplished.

Notwithstanding the important point above, it is crucial that Alexander’s (2013) notion of difference, as mentioned earlier, is attended to as well – in the sense that what ‘the Boyz’ also fear is the very real conviction that the ‘Other’ is entirely different from ‘Us’. What this means is that there is the risk that something absolutely dissimilar might invade our heterotopia. We notice, in other words, the putrid reek of Fr3e Roamer breath, and are forced to touch what their contaminated hands have tainted. They are a threat to our very existence and our order of things in the world, especially since they are ignorant to the rules of our heterotopic social space. All of a sudden it becomes our cognitive space that is under risk of invasion, as opposed to theirs; especially when they attempt to assimilate ‘the Boyz’, as with the example of MKD, into their own heterotopia. Mobility and limiting the rights of the ‘Other’ are the sought-after prizes for winning the battle; this is what defence comes down to: power and the primordial protection and control of our own heterotopic social spaces (Alexander, 2013). It is for this reason, the desire to preserve our sense of identity, why social space is ceaselessly under attack and always on the brink of chaos and disorder (Bauman, 1993).

According to Bauman (1993), this is where the concept of misunderstanding re-emerges once
more, because the anxiety ‘the Boyz’ feel forces us to reflect on the point that we feel lost and confused. Suddenly our assumed way of knowing how to go on, and our control of it, does not suffice. Instead, the heterotopia feels weak and feeble. Moreover, this time we cannot rely on our close social proximity with anyone where we have gained much thought-about knowledge of the other person (or people) concerned. It is for this reason another *skholēr*-guided strategy is required. This is where ‘the Boyz’ employ an *emic* tactic which polarises certain individuals and groups, and positions them as those who cannot be lived with. In the end ‘Others’ are condemned to a life outside of our game. As Mayhem reminded us whilst leaving the Victoria Tunnel, as the episode above began to reveal:

“I thought I was a leader and experienced WildBoy, set to lead these young newbies into the world of urbex, like my own disciples... So, I took them in a couple of dirty derps, acting like a boss. I knew there was so much more in store for them they would jizz in their camera bags. Turns out not. I showed them some good old relics, but they really didn’t smarten up their ways of sharing their content and stuff. They made their own page filled with mistakes and rule breaking of our urbex world, and I started to dislike them. They’re getting more likes than us now. What the fuck! Cunts. They can fuck right off now. Fucking bellends.”

Those dark strangers who refuse to go away are adorned with disapproval and disgust; they are a power-blocking evil which ought to be remedied. According to Douglas (1966), they are innately ‘dirty’ and represent a foreign contaminant or impurity that has emanated from somewhere else (like Ferryhill). In other words, they unsettle our mapping of heterotopic social space. This means, therefore, that within the *darker side of modernity* there is also a ‘darker side to community’, inasmuch as there will always be undesirables who cause great discomfort and ambivalence (Blackshaw, 2010a). These are the people who are deemed a threat and call to be eliminated since our heterotopia is at risk of being obliterated entirely. And yet, like Simmel (1950) argues, and as it was hinted in the beginning of this section, we cannot do without the presence and uncertainty of such ‘Others’. This is a paradoxical twist, but as Bauman (1993) reminds us, it is essential that ‘strangehood’ is sustained and nurtured if the heterotopic social space we recognise and understand is to exist. In other words, in the interregnum, where our heterotopias are held together loosely by some particular interest (Bauman and Tester, 2013), we need something more to help bind us; something that tackles ambivalence and provides the illusion of warmth and certainty. Strangers, then, can strengthen ‘the Boyz’ sense of authenticity, control and power.
Of course, as Beck (1992) argues, it is no easy task living life in such an insecure way. The simple fact is that strangers are everywhere and they can be anyone. There is also the issue that strangers can even reside among the ranks of ‘the Boyz’. As it was revealed with MKD, individuals never remain fixed. It is for this reason further strategies are often necessary in our effort to overcome the terror of insecurity, or at the very least ignore and pretend our fears do not exist (ibid). In other words, to reiterate the point made earlier, to feel as though we belong, and indeed exert our power, it is still necessary to reinforce and perform our identity.

First of all we need to revisit Ricoeur’s idea of forgiveness. What this means is that ‘the Boyz’ can block out certain individual wrongdoings, such as MKD’s duplicity, by lifting any burden of guilt and immobilising ‘the law of the irreversibility of time’, by modifying the past so that it means very little to us in the present (Ricoeur, 1995: 8). However, this model of forgiveness only works through the positive exchange of memories and assumes that collective memory antedates individual memories. In other words, all individual memories and concerns are pushed aside for the benefit of ‘the Boyz’ and their perceived togetherness in the present. This does not mean we condone MKD’s betrayal, only that we reconcile our differences and reaffirm our trust and performativity so that we may use each other in the creation of another adventure. This is why, as Ricoeur (1995) famously reminds us, history is always imperfect and subject to misrepresentation. There is, after all, no history which does not leave something overlooked or absent, and MKD demonstrates this point well for the reason that a well-constructed substitute history still remains faithful to the remaining evidence there is that he is one of ‘the Boyz’ and ‘a proper good craic on’. This is the true nature of history: it is, always and forever, changeable (ibid).

Second, ‘the Boyz’ make an effort to prompt what Kant refers to as Achtung, which implies, in its most basic form, the term ‘attention’ (Wheeler, 2008). In other words, from a Kantian interpretation of the world the difference between paying attention and ignoring is what sets respect apart from disrespect, so they are effectively in opposition to one another (Bauman, 2012). What this means is that respect for ‘an-Other’ is found in identifying them as ‘an equal partner in dialogue, each as subjects who have something significant to say’ (ibid: 73). This means there is something valuable to pay attention to and this may last until it grows to be negligible, or even pointless. As Blackshaw and Long (2005) indicate, this is the purpose of social capital in modernity and, like all other forms of capital, it can be exploited.
Social capital as an essential resource allows ‘Others’ to be acrimoniously precluded, so that ‘the Boyz’ exclusiveness acquires increased value and they are able to disguise a network of power under the purported guise of familiarity (Bourdieu, 1993). Needless to say, the link to Schütz’s ‘system of spatial arrangement’ and close proximity is quite evident here.

However, it is important to add that ‘the Boyz’ entering into ‘a dialogue’ together does not limit us to conversing only with specific people. As the reader witnessed, with the inclusion of ‘the fit lass’ and the positive receipt of her comment about the Fr3e Roamers, the dialogue can become a polylogue. One especially important feature of this strategy is that it takes on a phagic form, where ‘Other’ people can be assimilated into ‘the Boyz’ heterotopia (Blackshaw, 2010a). Together, everyone chooses to conform, performatively, and they are prepared to play the game by ‘the Boyz’ rules – in this case because our heterotopia, at the time, had the greatest sense of power, intensity and superiority. In terms of our individual selves, for the period of the dialogue between us, all other hierarchies and appointments of ‘superiority’ and ‘inferiority’ are temporarily adjourned (Bauman, 2012).

The above points notwithstanding, what should be manifest by now is that the ‘theme of alienation’ and its subsequent management, or perhaps we might claim its manipulation, is essential, because without being able to differentiate themselves from ‘Others’ ‘the Boyz’ would struggle to construct their heterotopia and idea of ‘communal identity’ (Blackshaw, 2010a: 154). As Bauman reminds us, the way ‘the Boyz’ enter into a dialogue together is accomplished largely through despotism, subjugation and insensitivity, which descends from the ‘pressure to keep the intended flock in the fold… the craved-for-cosiness of belonging is offered as a price of unfreedom’ (1995: 277). In the end, those ‘Others’, like the Fr3e Roamers, are at the receiving end of the opposite of Achtung, which is disrespect, because, as we like to convince ourselves, they are undeserving of our attention and consideration (Wheeler, 2008).

On the other hand, however, what this section also tells us, if we push the despotism, subjugation and insensitivity aside for a moment, is that when it comes down to it a heterotopic social space comprises a democratising spirit, where skholērs come together in was might be described as a type of value-sphere (Heller, 1999; Blackshaw, 2017). This could be what Blackshaw (2010a: 38-39) refers to as ‘heavy’ commitment to our performativity, because, as ‘the Boyz’ demonstrate, it takes a considerable amount of conscious effort, time
and skill (a strong element of craftsmanship) to remain part of the heterotopia. In other words, the heterotopia has certain felicity conditions that must be met. This is what keeps the heterotopia alive for a longer period of time, that feeling that we have created a strong sense of companionship and solidarity – an assumed sense of ‘community’ (Blackshaw, 2017). Moreover, what is certain is that without the investment of thought-about knowledge of one another, and the degree of collaboration that goes on, ‘the Boyz’ heterotopic social space would be missing something vital. Each of us would not be skholêrs, we would be little more than the ‘Others’ among strangers – pure khôrasters to put a label on it – and the degree to which we all feel freedom and meaning would almost certainly be very different.

**Morality in the Heterotopia**

There is one final aspect of heterotopic social spacing that has hitherto remained undiscussed in this chapter and that is what Bauman (1993) refers to as moral spacing. In contrast to cognitive spacing, moral space is contingent and ignores any sort of delineating rules which support our cognitive spaces; therefore, it does not follow any logical impression of reason (ibid). This is not to suggest that moral space cannot overlap with cognitive space, since morality can reach a high level of intensity when we have a rich knowledge of ‘an-Other’, but serves to highlight that such overlap does not always occur.

As Dant (2012) reminds us, prior to the Enlightenment (and now the interregnum), in what we might term the pre-modern epoch, people – with the exception of the rich and powerful – tended to participate in the same contingent moral and social spacing which was established through religion and the rules of nature. However, thanks to modernity our lives have been endowed with greater freedom. Hence, a number of different competing ethical systems and principles, which more often than not are guided by interest and performativity, have emerged (ibid). What this means, then, in terms of ‘the Boyz’ morality and control, is that there is perhaps interplay between different processes which Bauman describes as being ‘at cross-purposes and in a state of constant competition’ (1993: 119). It is precisely this struggle that this section attempts to underline, so that we may gather a more expansive understanding of what it means, in a moral sense, to be an urban explorer in the interregnum. Needless to say, if the moral spacing of ‘the Boyz’ is not attended to, the rules of the heterotopia, which the reader should be reminded functions as a place of expression and compensation, will seem much more complicated and perplexing.
What follows is a new narrative that was selected because it is ideal for unpicking the products of ‘the Boyz’ moral space. The episode took place in Leicester, a city ‘the Boyz’ decided to visit because they had never been there before. On this occasion, as with most exploring trips together, some of the usual members of the group had not been able to get time off work, or they had other commitments; therefore, to make up numbers they invited along another explorer who goes by the name of Soul. ‘The Boyz’ had met Soul through the climbing world, and since then he had gone on to explore with us on a number of different occasions. In the end, Soul became, as The Hurricane likes to refer to him, ‘an honoury member of WildBoyz’.

‘The Boyz’ Night on the Town

On our final night in Leicester, before we moved on to explore abandoned tunnels in the Peak District, we decided there was still time for a quick raid on the old Park International Hotel. Subject 47 had learned that access was especially interesting and involved a bold jump from one building to another, so it immediately caught our attention. What is more, ‘the Boyz’ had been itching to see Leicester from somewhere high. The hotel itself was a decidedly modern development, built in the early 1970s, but it finally closed in 2009 owing to its declining reputation and failing structural integrity.

Having climbed out of a window of an adjacent residential block, we followed the designated walkway across the rooftop. We were uncomfortably visible; I was instantly reminded of Foucault’s concept of the Panopticon as I could feel the eyes of the city, from their apartment blocks, offices and the street, watching us. I could certainly see them, pottering around in their kitchens or watching the television. Naïvely, and somewhat crassly, we listened to Subject 47, who insisted that no one would see us. Then again, it was thrilling as we followed the route, up steel ladders and across a small bridge, right up to the edge of the building. We knew we shouldn’t have been up there, on someone else’s rooftop, and I felt iniquitous to say the least, but Mayhem helped endorse our actions a little: ‘fuck them and fuck the police. Motherfucking capitalists, think they own the city because they apparently own land which was nobody’s in the fucking first place. Cunts’. I could feel the anger and frustration boil somewhere deep inside of him.
Stood on the edge of the residential building, we stared at the gap between us and the hotel opposite. We guessed it was over a metre, but it was almost certainly less than two. That’s what we convinced ourselves at any rate. It was raised on the other side too, by at least half a metre at its lowest point, and that was the most disconcerting part of this whole ordeal. Before doubt could set in, though, Subject 47 decided to play the role of the ‘ballsy fucker’, and jumped first without hesitation. He landed awkwardly on the other side, slipping slightly on the loose gravel surface of the hotel roof. But, he was well clear of the edge and he quickly composed himself to preserve the daring performative identity he was putting on. We all cheered.

Mayhem jumped next, more gracefully and calm than Subject 47; this sort of shit didn’t scare him, that’s what he wanted us to know. Next, MKD and The Hurricane each leapt over in turn, followed by the bags and cameras which I threw over individually – including Soul’s because we knew he was unsure about jumping. He’d taken to sitting down on the roof, far away from the edge, and continued to gnaw the dead skin on his fingers for a few minutes. Part of him was trying to build himself up to the jump, the other was thinking of an excuse to get out of doing it. I jumped next, making sure not to look down. My focus was entirely set on the opposite ledge of the hotel. Finally, it was Soul. He had to jump since his cherished camera was now on our side of this strange world. He began by telling us how much of a bad idea it was, but we ignored him, and The Hurricane told him to ‘stop being a fanny’. After that failed, Soul pleaded with us to leave, trying to convince ‘the Boyz’ there were better explores to be done. ‘The Boyz’, however, dismissed his reasoning and offered him an ultimatum: he was free to leave if he wanted, ‘if [he] want[ed] to be a pussy’, but he would have to go alone because the rest of us were doing the hotel.

Not wanting to be ‘the pussy’, Soul reluctantly decided to follow us the rest of the way. However, he made MKD and Mayhem stand next to the edge, so they were ready to catch him in the event he didn’t quite make it. We knew he would, but we stood there anyway. In the end, he jumped and cleared the gap easily. We all shook our heads at him and laughed. His cheeks flushed red for a moment, but to disguise the fact he was embarrassed he called us all ‘a bunch of dicks’ and hastily changed the topic to another conversation about the state of the roof.

The roof of the hotel was indeed, as Soul described it, ‘shit’. Looking around we could see broken air conditioning units, twisted railings and eccentric looking bushes. But,
the view was ‘pretty good’, and the roof functioned an ideal platform for taking a few
good shots. So, a moment later and Soul was absorbed by his photography, taking in
the evening views of the city below. He had bought a new camera and was excited to
get some use out of it.

Mayhem embraced the atmosphere in his own way, and after briefly fumbling around
in his pocket for a lighter, he pulled out a spliff he’d rolled earlier that evening. He
planned ‘to get baked’ with The Hurricane. As for Subject 47, the ‘crazy bastard’ was
already sat down, positioned on the very edge of the building with his legs dangling
over the world below. There was no doubt that people on the street below could
probably see him, and we all called him a ‘fuckin’ idiot’ for doing it, but it wasn’t long
before Mayhem and The Hurricane joined him. By now they were baked, so they
didn’t seem to care as much about being seen anymore. After that, since everyone
else seemed to be doing it, Soul, MKD and myself decided to join them. We all sat
there for a while, all six of us in a row with our legs dangling over the edge, shrouded
by the hazy smoke of another spliff. There was a moment of quietude and passivity,
in the knowledge that right there we didn’t have a care in the world.

Half an hour later, we were leaving in haste, debating how disappointing the inside of
the hotel had been as a kind of diversionary tactic to take our minds off the fact that
the police were hunting for us. We knew they were coming, we’d seen the trail of
blazing sirens headed in our direction from the hotel roof, and MKD had heard them
communicating on their radios inside the hotel. Back at the window, it was almost
imaginable we’d made it undetected, until they arrived while Soul was halfway
through that is. Caught in the act, Soul froze, unsure what to do next; Subject 47, ‘the
dramatic bastard’, raised his arms to signal his surrender; a wave of alarm and panic
overcame The Hurricane and MKD because of the implications this incident could
have on their jobs; Mayhem hurriedly ‘stuffed [his] remaining spliff down [his]
shreddies’ and, still outside on the roof, I ducked out of sight.

Bad Cop: What do you think you’re doing?
Soul: Oh, Jesus. Fucking hell.
MKD: Boobs.
Good Cop: Are you supposed to be doing that?
Everyone: [General murmur]. Dunno.
Bad Cop: Right, get down from the window, now!
[Brief pause, while Soul climbs back into the building].

**Bad Cop:** Is there anyone else?

[A moment of silence. I was out of sight, contemplating whether I’d make it to the ladder five or so metres away without being detected].

**Subject 47 and Soul:** He’s still outside.

**Me:** [Whispering to myself]. Fucks sake, bastards.

**Good Cop:** Come on then, come here.

**Bad Cop:** [Shouts]. Show yourself. Where are you? We know you’re out there. Get back in this building, right now.

[The police speak through the radio, confirming they’ve found us, as I emerge and climb back into the building].

**Bad Cop:** OK. Are you breaking the law here, pissing about on someone’s roof?

**Mayhem:** No, it’s trespass.

**Bad Cop:** If you’re going to start that one we’ll take you all right now and we can sort this down the station. Do you want to start again?

**Mayhem:** Yes.

**Bad Cop:** Is what you’re doing here morally and ethically justified? Who said you could climb out there? What happens if you’d fallen off? That building you were on has been condemned as being structurally unsound. Explain to me, what were you doing?

**MKD:** Just taking photographs.

**Bad Cop:** Taking photographs…

**Good Cop:** [Curiously]. Of the city?

**Soul:** Yeah man.

**Subject 47:** It wasn’t my idea like, I was just following these really. I think everyone just got a bit excited about taking photos.

**Mayhem:** [Shifting uncomfortably]. Can we go downstairs? I’m really hot up here.

**Bad Cop:** No. How do you think I feel? I’m standing here in all this clobber, all because of you.

**Mayhem:** Alright then.

**Subject 47:** I tried to say I didn’t think we should be doing it, but I don’t think anyone was listening to me.

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**The ‘Darker’ Side of Morality**

Before the reader can begin to understand the moral space of ‘the Boyz’ heterotopia, it is
important to reiterate that advent of modernity has led us into a world that is much more chaotic and unsystematic, to the extent that what we are left with is not a set of universal values or a collective sense of morality (Mumford, 1961). As Ellul reminds us, there is much more ambivalence when it comes to morality in modernity, which we could regard as the ‘plasticity of the social milieu’ (1964: 47). Our world, therefore, especially where khôra is concerned, is one pitted with mines, boreholes and the exploded remainders of our moral condition.

On the one level, then, repressed by adiaphorizing practices and moral and ethical philosophy, ‘the Boyz’ appear inherently immoral⁹ in their activities and actions. If we reconsider our moral responsibility for one another back on the ski-slope, or with Soul in Leicester, it is not difficult to agree that forcing one another to commit to certain activities which often feel uncomfortable and uncertain, and dangerous it might be added, is morally wrong. Equally, it might be suggested that ‘the Boyz’ are also immoral in the sense that they tend to use a lot of misogynist language and behaviour. As the reader has witnessed, parts of the female body are used with offensive intent in mind (e.g. the words ‘cunt’, ‘boob’, ‘pussy’ and ‘fanny’, etc.), and where ‘the fit lass’ was concerned, she was only initially invited to come along because she was viewed by Box as being idyllically ‘fuckable’.

However, what is going on here is not that ‘the Boyz’ intentionally seek out immoral activities or deeds, nor fundamentally evil pursuits. On the contrary, it is by means of our moral spatial arrangement that our heterotopic social space can neutralise any ‘natural’ moral impulses (Bauman, 1989). To put it another way, it is the heterotopia that provides ‘the Boyz’ with their own unique world and an accompanying sense of morality precisely because it is khôra and not the real world. This, as Castoriadis (1987) suggests, is the power of our self-evident performative reality, which can only be understood through the discourse that we, ‘the Boyz’, produce together. Crucially, this follows Ricoeur’s (1992) suggestion that every account or story of the world, including our moral products, is fashioned using a sense of symbolic-mythic language which forms a sort of ‘mythic stability’ and verifies, though not always logically, our discourse as being our own. To this effect, our symbolic-mythic discourse is certainly inimitable, but it also reveals the problematic juxtaposition of limitation and freedom when it comes to our moral selves (Ricoeur, 1992).

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⁹ Immoral, rather than amoral, because ‘the Boyz’ do not lack moral sensibility or awareness.
In view of the discussion above, then, ‘the Boyz’, as Bauman (1993) might suggest, have become purely adiaphoric inasmuch as anything resembling a form of ‘correct’ moral criteria has been successfully evaporated. What this suggests, following Stanley Milgram’s idea of the ‘agentic state’ (1974: 133), is that thanks to the power of khôra all conventional moral responsibility has been mitigated away so that the effects of our actions no longer concern us. In this vein, ‘the Boyz’ are guided purely by the desire to be part of the heterotopia, which as it has been suggested is very different to the real world, since this is integral to our performativity and sense of belonging whilst exploring. By this understanding then, as Lachs suggests, myself, Mayhem and the others were merely ‘intermediary men’ in the entire process which amounts to the exploration and further uncovering of the darker secrets of the urban environment. We cannot be held responsible for our actions because we each have a ‘floating responsibility’ that is directed at no particular individual (1981: 57-58). To make better sense of this argument, The Hurricane made an important observation after our evening on the rooftop, over a few beers and a dirty takeaway:

“... [Laughter]. You were really shitting yourself on that rooftop. But, you wanted to be there, right? [Soul nods in agreement while chewing on a greasy slice of grey kebab meat]. I was feeling a bit dodgy myself at first, like. Not so much the danger or owt, just at first I couldn’t help thinking we were doing something we shouldn’t. [Soul and MKD agree with him]. But, then, seeing you guys do the jump, I just thought, yeah, fuck it. This is what we do isn’t it, and if the group is doing it it’s all alright. It’s like the point of WildBoyz, exploring shit. There’s nothing wrong with that if we’re all doing it together, like. Like, a common purpose an’ that. You know what I mean?” [Mayhem and Subject 47 nod in agreement].

The condition being described in this section is essentially what Arendt (1968) has termed the ‘rule by Nobody’, or as Zimbardo terms it, ‘role-based actions’ (2007: 218). What this does is leave the rest of us in a position where we can consider our individual moral roles in activities which are aligned with urban exploration, and all potential consequences, as being too small or limited to be of any significance. This condition emphasises our compliance and submission to the performativity and professed rules of the heterotopia we are all part of, as opposed to our own moral judgements or those of the real world, through the production of ‘some sort of communistic fiction’ which is ruled by an ‘invisible hand’ (Arendt, 1998: 44). As Subject 47 demonstrated in the conversation with the police, he attempted to use this to his advantage to explain away his personal responsibility for the incident by making the group
accountable for it rather than himself.

However, what Subject 47 also reinforces in the same instance is the point that ‘the Boyz’ are not governed by a strict set of discursive rules. This is evident in the way he began to shift blame onto the rest of ‘the Boyz’, while attempting to mitigate himself away from the situation as an innocent individual who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. In other words, what has been described above is not some sort of structured ethical reformation that limits our freedom and choice, a world that is ontologically monotonous and epistemologically predictable inasmuch as our moral selves are always targeted towards tomorrow’s goal. The point is that we are not denied our moral facility in anticipation of a ‘state-to-be-achieved’ (Bauman, 1993: 129). Rather, what is at work is a process of socialization that provides the illusion of universality. Therefore, in stark contrast to what Elias (1994) termed ‘the civilizing process’, which sought to undermine localised traditions and instil fixed configurations of the morally ‘good’ and ‘bad’, the processes of socialization we form in heterotopic social space, along with our moral responsibilities are purely phantasmal: flawless and concrete from the outside, yet fallow beneath the surface.

Therefore, in addition to what has been discussed so far in this section, what is manifest is that there is perhaps also a fundamental degree of interplay between the illusion of socialization and what Bauman refers to as sociality (1993: 118-19). What this means is that alongside our collective illusionary moral sentiments of the heterotopia, our moral spaces are at the same time impossibly dispersed and displaced. For example, if the reader reflects back on the explore at the LEC International Hotel, we might argue that there was no common agenda among each of ‘the Boyz’. Mayhem and The Hurricane wanted to jump the gap and smoke a spliff, Subject 47 felt the desire to sit on the roof’s edge with his feet dangling, and Soul was in it for the photography, to try out his new camera. It is not particularly difficult, then, to agree that each of ‘the Boyz’ were capable of channelling away or sequestering any emotions that may have roused a different, perhaps more ‘moral’, sort of behaviour. If we had, we may have considered the very real potential consequences of our actions, and who might be affected as a result. However, instead there was a certain air shrouding us and, inebriated on its fumes in the ecstasy of our own individual moments, not one of us gave much of a fuck about ‘an-Other’ – or anyone else for that matter.

In other words, sociality is what we might term a ‘counter-structural structuration’ and it is a
crucial part of heterotopic social space; it is purely an aesthetic phenomenon insofar as the assessment of, and consideration for, other people’s feelings are utterly irrelevant and of no concern to us when it comes to our intoxicating desires (Bauman, 1993: 130). According to Maffesoli (1993), it is the darker underside to society where people thrive in the here and now, so there is rarely ever any unequivocal objective. The interregnum creates possibility, and this allows us to do almost anything we want, whether that is flying through the air on a sledge, taking a leap of faith or smoking a spliff – and we do all of this for no one else but ourselves. In this whole process, as Maffesoli reminds us, we are concerned only with the ‘re-enchantment of the world… by means of the image, myth, and the allegory’ (1996: xiv), and the cloak-like feeling of identity which we can take on or off, or completely adjust, with little delay or hesitation. In other words, what is being suggested here is that in the ‘shadowy realm called khôra’ anything goes (Caputo, 1997: 140). This is because ‘the Boyz’ are wary of belonging too closely to heterotopic social space as they are intent on living for the moment, so they still need to engage with the heterotopia on individual terms even though they identify with it collectively (Blackshaw, 2017).

In a nutshell, then, what this section tells us is that when it comes to moral spacing, control and the heterotopia, ‘the Boyz’ explore with one another for the sake of being in a crowd (Canetti, 1973), and they do so through the interweaving processes of sociality and the illusion of socialization. The moral aspect of the heterotopia is, in other words, another perfect example of how ‘the Boyz’ are khôrasters-skholērs extraordinaire.

As Canetti (1973) suggests, alone individuals stand frightened, but when they find themselves in khôra where different morals apply, inside the Dionysian crowd that involves ‘being with’ likeminded others, they come alive and feel more uninhibited. It is here that our concern with morality in the everyday sense can be shelved because the crowd is ultimately ‘undefined’ and ‘faceless’ (Maffesoli, 1996: 9). Together, in the cacophonous music of the moment, we are at the same time something collective; we can feel it in the sense that we move to the same chorus; we gesture and move like those around us; we do just what everyone else does, but we are responsible for no one else in the crowd (Maffesoli, 1993). Whether or not we think we should do something is irrelevant because we are blind and unable to hear in the glorious euphoric normlessness and unconstraint of the tribalistic throng. And this provides us with a sense of individual freedom like no other. This is perhaps a taste of Maffesoli’s conception of puissance (‘the will to live’) (1996: 31) that binds us
closer to the heterotopia, to khôra, where there is only room for being with others, as opposed to the moral alternative of being for them.

Rediscovering Our Moral Selves

In view of the discussion above, it would appear that ‘the Boyz’ are characteristically self-seeking and immoral. However, by using Derrida’s idea of deconstruction the final part of this chapter attempts to dismantle what are arguably hierarchical systems of thought which centre their attention on quintessential forms of morality and subsequent identity (Foucault, 1980). Like Derrida (1987a), though, what is being argued is not that deconstruction is a superior philosophical or political concept, substituting one form of moral authority for another, only that its application remains faithful to the idea that our identities and ideas should be viewed as being open, contingent and unstable. To put it differently, what we are discussing here are what Derrida has termed ‘violent hierarchies’ (1987a: 41) and whether or not their professed purity and unity should mean anything in the interregnum. In other words, it is binary structures that ensure, for as long as they can sustain their interminable struggle, discourses of domination remain dominant (ibid).

What is being argued is that we should not view morality as being some sort of pure action that can be followed up with the question, why? It should, rather, be viewed as action that can only account for itself and the power of the radical subconscious imaginary. In other words, it should be understood by what Derrida has termed differance, which ‘governs nothing, reigns over nothing, and nowhere exercises any authority’, because ‘there is no kingdom of differance’ (1982: 22). Differance is, purely and simply, a weave of non-binary differences, un-decidability and the displacement of all order (ibid). And this is the underlying purpose of deconstruction: that effort is being made to account for the unseen and stifled differences and heterogeneity, including our sense of morality, in places like heterotopias.

Mayhem, in the car as we left Leicester, perhaps elucidated on this point more lucidly:

“Being moral in urbex is situational, dude. I may do something I usually wouldn’t, but that doesn’t make me bad. I might look at the city from a roof, maybe. Or, if I saw six abandoned bulbs for a projector in an old cinema, I’d take them. Is that immoral? Really?... Maybe it’s an individual thing and it affects you, and maybe the people you are with have an influence on it too. Maybe you, maybe me or you, have an influence on them? Fuck man, I’m not even high. What am I trying to say?... [Pauses
briefly]. Don’t always do what everyone tells you to do, do what you think you should be doing and do what the boys suggest. They’re gonna be right when it comes to this sort of shit. Even if you don’t feel that way at the time, man.”

Applying Derrida’s strategy of deconstruction means it is essential we view morality as something that simply occurs, regardless of the processes of socialization, sociality and whatever else might be at work. It is, as Bauman reminds us, not something suited in ‘the stiff armour of [some] artificially constructed ethical code’ (1993: 34). In this vein, from our perspective, after being caught by the police our actions were in fact the moral ones for the simple reason that when everyone else does something it means they are permitted to do it – they abide by what we could call the ‘normalizing gaze’ (which effectively demonises us) (Blackshaw and Crabbe, 2004). What this suggests is that our attempts to resist the moulds which shape our everyday lives, especially those lionised by the media and commercial manipulators, are a signal that real moral space can still be accessed. These are the moments when we utilize neglected and forgotten space, and where different morals apply, because this is khôra. As Rizla once suggested to us all, ‘we remember the old stuff, we provide something back to other people through photographs and our stories, we feel something we can’t always explain, and we choose to share it with those closest or similar to us’. What ‘the Boyz’ do, then, is moral by our instinctual standards.

Moral responsibility, therefore, does not automatically relate to ethics or matters of value and money, nor does it concern our personal survival and that of everybody else, and it certainly does not include everyone’s happiness (Turner and Rojek, 2001). Immediate happiness is simply what we have grown to expect in a consumer society (ibid). Hence, while people such as the police may bully or cajole us into thinking and acting within certain moral limits, delineating what is deemed ‘normal’ or acceptable in society (Rojek, 1995), it seems more acceptable to agree with Pritchard (1991) that there is no unbiased ground. As Turner and Rojek (2001) point out, deviance (which does not necessarily have to be a bad thing) is hidden and lies dormant in every social relationship, because our world is compatible with different layers of ‘moral chaos’, so we should not ignore it. Hence, what we may ultimately deduce from the episodes provided throughout this chapter is that what at first appear to be immoral pursuits are in fact instances where we have the freedom, control and autonomy to judge for ourselves what is moral and how far our interests and passions can be taken. As Bauman contends:
Moral responsibility is the most personal and inalienable of human possessions, and the most precious of human rights. It cannot be taken away, shared, ceded, pawned, or deposited for safe keeping. Moral responsibility is unconditional and infinite, and it manifests itself in the constant anguish of not manifesting itself enough. Moral responsibility does not look for reassurance for its right to be or for excuses for its right not to be... (1993: 250).

As Arendt (1968) points out, every person is capable of recognising some sense of right from wrong, even when we are guided by our own sense of judgement. And, this is, arguably, exactly what we do in our heterotopic social space: we ignore the scrutiny and moral nihilism of society and replace it for our own unreliable and erratic moral impulses. We have, as Soul regularly points out, ‘the balls to try something different, and share that with other likeminded people’. So, although we knew that Soul did not want to jump the gap, we – from our point of view at least – were moral since it turned out, afterwards, that he had ‘fucking loved the whole experience’, inasmuch as he thanked us after the trip for ‘putting up with [his] whining and bitching’. In other words, the stories which emerged after an explore, irrespective of whether we coerced somebody to do something or not, are valued like a precious treasure. MKD, for instance, felt elated, proud and very much like a ‘fucking legend’, and still does, after we compelled him to go sledging first, because it gives him a wider sense of meaning and freedom in his life. It is these very memories which fuel our heterotopia, our sense of connectedness, freedom and our desire for identity, and they are always the first point of conversation between ourselves – as it was demonstrated on our walk up to the ski slope.

While what has been discussed here perhaps seems incongruous with what was argued in the previous section, it should not be viewed as being in opposition to those arguments. It is, rather, part and parcel of the darker side of modernity. What is being suggested is certainly not that ‘the Boyz’ and other urban explorers are always moral (it remains, as it always will in the interregnum, a messy, ambiguous and conflicting task), or that we are not consumers at heart. Like everyone else, we consume, and more often than not we are not always moral by ‘conventional’ ethical standards. Yet, heterotopic social space does offer an opening where we are occasionally, in some small way and sometimes unwittingly, able to be for one another because we push the boundaries and impel others around us to do the same, even if everything else is telling us not to. This is, we might argue, the correct application of freedom and morality. This may be what Maffesoli means when he discusses ‘empathetic sociality’;
where sociality becomes ‘less about rules and more about sentiments, feelings, emotions and imaginations; less about what has been or what will become than what is – the stress is on the ‘right now’ and the ‘right here’’ (Malbon, 1999: 26).

As Vetlesen (1993) points out, our responsibility for others stems precisely from having lived with them, together in the same heterotopia where different morals apply – because this is *khôra*, not the everyday world. From an ethical perspective, one the police would perhaps endorse because it fits with the nature and doxic beliefs of everyday society, *being for* one another comes before *being with*. However, as Bauman reminds us, ‘the only space where the moral act can be performed is the social space of *being with*, where it is ‘continually buffeted by the criss-crossing pressures of cognitive, aesthetic and moral spacings’ (1993: 185). There is of course, as Bauman (1993) points out, no guarantee that any of us will be moral, but there is always a chance, in what we are doing, wherever we are exploring, that instances of moral responsibility will occur. These are moments that are produced in close proximity to one another, with the people we choose; only then will instances of *being for* one another potentially emerge (Vetlesen, 1993). As follows then, in response to ‘Bad Cop’, we might say, *yes*; what we were doing was entirely justified, both morally and ethically. Then again, it is doubtful he would understand it, because in all likelihood he has not lived as an urban explorer the same way ‘the Boyz’ have.

**Summary**

It can be argued that what each of ‘the Boyz’ seek is something very different from the dissatisfactions of everyday life, so what they aim to explore and control is not only the reverse side of the urban environment but also a completely different side to themselves, through a form of ‘devotional leisure’. What this means, in other words, is that even with Bauman’s concept of *social spacing*, trying to understand ‘the Boyz’ heterotopia and making it accessible to an outsider was always going to be a knotted and complex task, but it was an essential one if the heterotopic social space was to be explored in detail. With this in mind, the methods of sociological hermeneutics and hermeneutic sociology have been used to methodically deconstruct the *cognitive, aesthetic* and *moral* spacings of ‘the Boyz’ space of compensation. It is hoped that by doing this the social processes that bring the heterotopia to life, and of course the rules that support its temporary existence, have been unpacked and explored in much greater depth. Indeed, it might be agreed that by recognising the essential
value of performativity this chapter has explored the idea of a heterotopia in such a way that allows the reader to feel the performativity of a particular group of urban explorers.

As the reader has now seen, thanks to the utilisation of Blackshaw’s (2017) theory of ‘devotional leisure’ and employing Geertz (1973) idea of ‘thick description’, what is manifest is that creating and controlling a temporary home in the interregnum entails embracing a particular performative identity, where each individual involved is required to be a skholē. This means that each one of ‘the Boyz’ is charged with the need to gain the acceptance of the group, to actively participate in the construction of the heterotopia and develop strategies that keep it alive until further-notice. In other words, there are certain felicity conditions that need to be met. Nonetheless, on the other side of it the heterotopia invites individuals to be khôraster, and therefore to be theatrical and idiosyncratic, as they search for their own personal sense of belonging and freedom. With this in mind, this chapter has, in effect, attempted to dissolve the artificial split that exists between ‘devotional’ and ‘performative’ leisure. By doing this it has been revealed that failure to get the balance just right, between forming a sense of ‘collective destiny’ and ‘personal fulfilment’ (Blackshaw, 2017: 161), can result in the breakdown of the heterotopia as the space would lack some of those crucial elements that make it so perfect. What this means, then, is that the cognitive, aesthetic and moral elements of the heterotopia are each delicate processes that require much time, effort and dedication to control them and keep them alive.

From the analysis in this chapter it becomes clear that control and power is everything when it comes to creating and living in a heterotopia. What this means is that ‘the Boyz’ have to exert their power as they are the predominant controllers of their own contingent story; they decide how things should be and who may be granted or denied entry to their special kind of world. By doing this a kind of metamorphosis takes place, which begins with each of ‘the Boyz’ stepping out of their everyday bodies into another magical performative version of themselves. And, what we find here is an opportunity to experience freedom and emancipation from the mundanities of life as we enter a Dionysian paradise – which as we now know is far from actually being paradisiacal. It might be argued, therefore, that having power and being able to control space to live as khôrasters-skholēs extraordinaire is what makes us, as urban explorers, achieve a sense of meaning and feel truly alive. What this also means, however, as the reader has seen, is that heterotopic social space cannot help but have a different sense of morality attached to it because this reality is much different from
the everyday world. After all, this is khôra, where a completely different ontological outlook applies.

As far as I am aware, to date no other attempt at understanding a heterotopia centred around urban exploration has been completed in such a meticulous way as this. Indeed, the previous chapter set out to introduce Foucault’s concept of the heterotopia vis-à-vis the interregnum and it can be argued that it was explored in some detail, so there is certainly some degree of overlap between the two chapters. This chapter, however, went much further to dissect those initial ideas by pulling apart ‘the Boyz’ heterotopia and laying out all of its bones and organs one by one. In other words, the reader has journeyed with ‘the Boyz’ in such an intimate way as to perhaps feel conversant with them, and in doing so should now have a better insight into how urban explorers understand and attempt to control heterotopic social space. The upshot of this is that with this knowledge the reader will be better equipped to move onto the next chapter where the five essential life strategies of the urban explorer, which I have identified, are revealed and unpacked in succession.
Chapter Six

The Interpenetrating and Intertwining Life Strategies of Urban Explorers

Introduction

Now that the reader has gained an insight into how urban explorers understand and control social space, it is important to frame the strategies they adopt for living. In other words, this chapter attends to the central life strategies (ways of living) that embody what heterotopic social space is all about in the interregnum. It should be noted, however, that each of the strategies are interpenetrating and intertwining so, in effect, they comprise a joint metaphor. This means that each one is an integral part of an urban explorer’s heterotopia, but what is perhaps even more crucial to note is that they never neatly merge to form a coherent life strategy. The impetus behind this chapter stems from Zygmunt Bauman’s attempt to contrive an interconnecting metaphor for understanding the task of identity-building in postmodernity, where he discusses the idea of ‘the stroller, the vagabond, the tourist and the player’ (1996a: 26). What I offer here, though, is different, in the respect that its focus lies solely with urban explorers.

As it has been argued hitherto, urban explorers are faced with the problem that their lives are episodic and overwhelmingly ambivalent, which means they are in a perpetual struggle to remain loosely tied to human relationships while also remaining open to whatever other options are within reach. Indeed, this was revealed in the way ‘the Boyz’ exist together, somewhat skilfully, as khôrasters-skholèrs. To put it another way, because any kind of rational life strategy will not work, individuals are forced to develop their own which, on the one hand, brings them closer together with people, and on the other drives them apart (Blackshaw, 2005). What this means, then, is that there is no singular clear-cut or well-defined life strategy for people to follow, so essentially individuals must somehow establish their own way of becoming and finding meaning, and the only way to do this is by embracing the impermanence we all are forced to adhere to (Dudley, 2004). However, as Bauman (1996a) reminds us, each strategy that has been adopted by urban explorers’ is not necessarily out of choice; rather, some of them, if not all, have become essential to the survival of the ‘true fiction’ of this kind of heterotopic social space. In this sense, they are perhaps much more significant than we might first have anticipated.
What this chapter focuses on, then, is the art of living as an urban explorer, so it is here that the central ‘performative’ and ‘craftsmanship contributions’ of ‘the Boyz’ are explored (Blackshaw, 2017: 155). To do this, the chapter makes use of five life strategies, because they can effectively function as ein steigrung (an intensification) of selected parts of a reality and, by doing so, serve to make them more discernible and understandable. What is more, each life strategy is underpinned by a theoretical concept, to further support and strengthen the arguments being made. In sticking with the method of hermeneutic sociology too, this chapter draws on a different central character for each of the strategies that have been identified. This is to provide the reader with an even greater intimate feel for the heterotopia.

To begin with, drawing on ideas developed vis-à-vis aesthetic space since they typify some of the essential components of the interregnum, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s concept of the schizophrenic is brought forth. The discussion aims to extend the argument that has been made so far in the preceding chapters by providing some further insight into the multifaceted lives ‘the Boyz’ lead – what we might refer to as identity fragmentation. This is to reveal more about the penetrability and volatility of heterotopias. Understanding the schizophrenic in full also sets the scene appositely, allowing other life strategies to materialise accordingly. Without the schizo it is unlikely the other life strategies would exist in the same way they do.

Second, the idea of the nostalgic is framed. This section looks at the idea of nostalgia and seeks to highlight how ‘the Boyz’ manage to stay together in spite of the individualising forces of the interregnum, and the fact that our heterotopias inevitably change and evolve. Using Tony Blackshaw’s concept of the mundane and the spectacular, this section attempts to explore what ‘the Boyz’ generally refer to as ‘the craic’. ‘The craic’ is, arguably, a temporary shelter – an unadulterated and ideal depiction of who the WildBoyz are and what they are about – which provides each of us with an imaginary antidote that opposes the change and fluidity of the interregnum and momentarily cures our sense of homesickness for old times.

Thereafter, Jean-Francois Lyotard’s work is unpacked in some depth, to explore the concept of the sublime and the idea that urban explorers are parasitical. Since the differend is
inexplicable, this section probes Lyotard’s concept of ‘Silence’ because it can provide the reader with some insight as to how urban explorers incite feelings of the sublime. Needless to say, the sublime cannot easily be explained either; therefore, this section offers what can only be viewed as a generalised overview of the processes that are at work as ‘the Boyz’ physically explore urban environments amidst the interregnum.

The fourth section applies Michel Foucault’s concepts of the panopticon and governmentality, focusing on the idea that urban explorers have a tendency to imagine the suppression created by overt surveillance systems, often more than it actually exists. In this vein, the aim is to reveal that while ‘the Boyz’ try to give the impression they are ‘rebels’ in reality perpetual uncertainty, insecurity and a dearth of feelings of safety amount to a societal condition which inhibits our ability to rebel against it. What this suggests is that a significant shift in the way we are socially controlled, which can be attributed to the very individual struggle each of us now faces, harnesses the human imagination and manages to turn it against ourselves and our perceived freedom. When discussing the theme of rebellion, then, it might perhaps be more apposite to view ‘the Boyz’ as being Rebels of Sicherheit, instead of Bradley Garrett’s colonialist-styled adventurer ideal.

The final section of this chapter seeks to address the idea that panoptic forms of control have, for the most part, been shifted to the more unstable and apparently undesirable parts of society. Therefore, using Thomas Mathiesen’s concept of the synopticon, combined with the perceptive insights of Zygmunt Bauman, the idea that ‘the Boyz’ are lured into the world of consumerism and the celebrity is explored. Modernity has transformed into a world that is built around celebrities and everywhere we turn they are there, but what urban explorers have discovered that they too can become a deviant sort of celebrity as the voracious masses will consume what they do with an insatiable appetite. In other words, as urban explorers themselves dub one another, this is the world of Media Whores, where individuality and noticeability have come to signify what it really means to exist as an idiosyncratic being.

**The Rise and Fall of a Group: The Schizo Crisis**

It was almost midnight and I found myself, with the bevvies, in Mayhem’s car with the window wound down. MKD and a lass called Deems were both in the back. We were parked down a dimly lit street somewhere in Southend-on-Sea, and judging by the rows of terraced houses with enormous towering trees positioned awkwardly in the
middle of the footpaths, we were in one of the older parts of the town. Many of the houses had since been converted into student digs; their former grandeur clearly exhausted as weeds had managed to take over most of the tiny front gardens. Most had traditional bay windows, but the old white paint on the sills and frames was withering and peeling off in great flakes. The pavement, also littered with weeds, was made up of cracked concrete paving slabs – ‘jawbreakers’ as we call them up north. In a curious way, they matched the tired-looking wrought iron gates that guarded each of these homes. It was a desiccated area to say the least. It wasn’t, but I felt as though it ought to have been raining; it felt especially gloomy. Outside the car I could hear fierce commotion. Mayhem and Subject 47 had come to blows and a big argument was underway:

Subject 47: Fuck off, dickhead.
Mayhem: Fuck off? We were supposed to be stayin’ with you. You said we could kip in the fuckin’ loft, you fucking idiot. You said there was space!
Subject 47: Yeah, well, I said two of you could stay, bud, not four.
Mayhem: You said that’s where we were sleeping, so we wouldn’t be in the way. If you’d been arsed to clear the space it wouldn’t fuckin’ matter! Where the fuck’s the others gonna’ kip?
Subject 47: Not my problem, buddy. They’re not staying here though.
Mayhem: You’re a fuckin’ wanka’.
Subject 47: Yeah, well, you’ve changed. Sneakin’ into buildings, that’s what dickheads do, mate. [Tapping the side of his head and putting on a ‘mock-retarded’ voice]. You a fuckin’ retard or somethin’? I’ve never liked ‘urban exploration’, it’s a waste of fucking time!
Mayhem: [Laughs]. We’ve changed? Fuck you! Go look in a fuckin’ mirror, you stupid cunt. And what do you mean? You’ve neva’ liked urbex? You used to do it!… What the fuck?
Subject 47: Yea, well, it’s fuckin’ stupid. I’ve never liked yours anyway; [Rizla], what a wanker! Yea, that’s right, he’s a dickhead. You’re all a waste of space in fact. Bunch of wankers. Just fuck off. Other people live here too, they don’t want dickheads like you here.
Mayhem: [Taken aback and seemingly lost for words] … This’s you all over isn’t, ditchin’ your mates, you’ve always done shit like this with people who were supposedly your mates… Now us is it? Treatin’ us like a bit of rough fanny. I’ve known you your whole life, almost. Look at you. [Using a mocking tone]. It’s all ‘hey buddy’,
fucking, ‘bud’, these days. Fuck off with your new ‘buddies’ then, I’m fuckin’ done with yer, yer fuckin’ cunt.

Half an hour later the four of us had parked up and wandered to Southend pier. The atmosphere was inauspicious and disheartening, but we’d decided we were going to try and ‘urbex’ the longest pier in the world. We spent another half an hour trying to work out how many security guards were on duty, so loitered around the visitors centre for a while. After sighting only one guard, we headed for the scaffold base. The plan was simple: the tide was out, so we’d climb one of the supporting pillars, traverse the metal under structure until we were far enough out to avoid being seen, then we would climb up and over the side of the railings. It was an ambitious plan, and I was doubtful that Deems would be able to do it. She was keen, but she was no climber. I even doubted whether we would be able to do it, considering me and MKD had sunk back a couple of beers and Mayhem was now ‘just slightly baked’.

As mentioned at the beginning of the episode, a new lass, Deems, was with us. Deems was a friend of Mayhem’s who, apparently, or so he tried to insist, he ‘didn’t want to fuck’. She was simply ‘a student, an underwear blogger and interested in urbexing, nothing else’. Unconvinced, myself and MKD had agreed to her coming along anyway, partly because the rest of ‘the Boyz’ were ‘busy’, but mainly because we’d each be paying less for petrol. At first glance, she seemed ‘sound enough’ – a bit talkative for MKD’s liking – but ‘alright’, and willing to get stuck in. Nevertheless, she was the main cause of the argument. Since the trip had been organised at the very last minute, we’d ‘not had time’ to announce how many people were coming, so Subject 47 had been under the impression that only two of us would be dropping by. As it turned out, that wasn’t the case.

With his hands firmly grasping a rusted ledge, Mayhem managed to haul himself up the first pillar. Water surrounded it, so he’d been forced to jump initially. After that it wasn’t long before he was up on the support beams. He called down to the rest of us as quietly as he could manage for fear of being heard, warning just how slippery the beams were. A little light-headed, but only slightly, and overlooking that his core and legs should be doing the work, MKD’s entire body trembled as he hauled himself up the pillar. Once he was on the beams he swayed slightly, but quickly recovered himself. Looking up, I could see that Mayhem had ‘fucked off’ across the beams, leaving everyone else behind as he attempted to find a way up to the railings. As he
was doing that, I was left with Deems, trying to offer her ‘a boost’ while, at the same time, attempting to convince her, unconvincingly, she wouldn’t fall into the sea.

At this point, perhaps because of what had happened earlier that evening when ‘shit kicked off’ with Subject 47, I began to wonder for the first time whether what we were doing was urbex anymore; whether we were still the same WildBoyz as the ones who originally explored old residential homes or abandoned hotels. Indeed, there are many urban explorers who consider ‘live sites’ to be perfectly acceptable, and that was what we were doing. In a way, then, I half justified that side of things. The other thing I wasn’t sure about, though, was the increasing use of ‘weed’ and alcohol on explores – even if, most of the time, they were consumed afterwards. Tonight they hadn’t, and it was perhaps a crucial turning point. Or not? I couldn’t decide. As for MKD, while he wasn’t particularly fond of some of ‘the Boyz’ carrying certain ‘substances’ with them, the unnerving thing for him was the increasing number of ‘fuckin’ randomers’ who were being invited along. He would often tell me how he thought everything was changing, and that it didn’t feel good.

As the only one still left on the ground, I became lost in my own thoughts, wondering whether Subject 47 was right: had WildBoyz changed? Consequently, I failed to notice the slow movement of a torch beam sweeping across the pier’s scaffold. Of course, it didn’t take long for the others to notice they were about to be seen by ‘secca’. Everyone scrambled to climb back towards the pillar. Less concerned about how slippery the beams were now, ‘the Boyz’ (including Deems) managed to get down in what felt like a matter of seconds. ‘Secca’ was still up on top of the pier, so we were confident they had no chance of catching us. I also doubted they could see us properly now since we’d all gathered at the base of the pillar where it was especially dark. Secca’s torch beam lit the ground around us somewhat erratically, as if the guards had lost sight of us. We didn’t hang around to find out though. Once everyone was ready we ‘hit legs’, to avoid any awkward questions. This explore, much to our disappointment, was ‘an epic fail’.

On Being a Schizophrenic

Every single one of ‘the Boyz’ pictured Subject 47 as a ‘dramatic bellend’. Therefore, it was perhaps of no real surprise to us that he became the first tangible casualty of the group. He was always very good at presenting himself in a ‘stagey’ way. Everything about Subject 47
screamed something theatrical, whether it came across in his overall demeanour, animated character or his intriguing ability to be able to alter the shape of his body and appearance depending on the role he was required to play. To this day he flits between various roles, from hitting the gym and protein hard, when he wants to appear indestructible while working the doors of dingy nightclubs, to being able to shed it again quickly when he goes back to his climbing or kayaking. For us, though, his most important role was being one of the original seven, part of the WildBoyz archetypus, and at one time he revelled in the image.

Playing the role of an urban explorer was something Subject 47 was good at. He was always eager for the difficult entries, often deliberately making them harder than they had to be, and willing to face the consequences if they came his way. Dressed up on every explore precisely as he imagined an explorer should look, with a bandana concealing the lower half of his face, dark hoodies, a Canon 1100D in his bag, dusty trousers and a head torch strapped across his forehead, he looked, as Box often remarked, ‘proper bad ass’. It was his own particular touch though, with his self-ridiculing humour, that really finished off the whole look: that juxtaposition between feeling untouchable and hard, combined with his bandana decorated with images of cartoon sheep. This image summed up how the urban explorer should look, in our heads at least. The image summed up what ‘the Boyz’ were all about. When it came to being on camera too, Subject 47 was never shy of a bit of attention. Like most other explorers he liked to pose, giving the world a glimpse of his concealed and, yet somewhat oxymoronically, intimidating and rebellious WildBoy superiority over ‘the rest of the pathetic world that have no balls to do this sort of shit’.

Nonetheless, times have since changed and ‘the good old days’ are no more. After securing a place at university, Subject 47 managed to escape the day-to-day drudgery of the north east and moved to be with the ‘Southern Fairies’, as ‘the Boyz’ sometimes call southerners. Away and fully emancipated from WildBoyz, he soon adopted a different sort of lifestyle as he moved in with new crowds that truly extended his choice of heterotopia. To many of ‘the Boyz’ he became ‘a bit of a fanny. A fuckin’ ponce’. Turning his nose up at certain items of clothing that were apparently ‘too cheap and tacky’, and looking down on our questionable escapades and at us in general, it was not long before Subject 47 distanced himself entirely from ‘the Boyz’. In his ‘new life’, wearing skinny jeans and flip flops, and drinking bottles of imported larger with sliced lime, he dressed to impress. Despite never liking coffee before, he was ‘in’ with a crowd of upmarket mocha drinkers now – ‘the fuckin’ pufftas with quiffs’.
'Don’t f’get yer roots’, that was one of the old well-known sayings around our parts. Yet, submerged and intoxicated in the rapture and enchantment of this new sort of heterotopia it did not take Subject 47 long at all to extend us two fingers and hightail it for good.

In view of the above discussion, when we look at Subject 47 we should detect, in its fullest sense, a real taste of Deleuze and Guattari’s schizophrenic, in a way that goes beyond the behaviour of Bauman’s (1996a) player. Just like the rest of ‘the Boyz’, this is a life strategy that Subject 47 chooses to follow, in his attempt to contend with life in the interregnum and find meaning. In view of this, clearly tired of the games contained within our heterotopic social space, Subject 47 decided it was time to move into an entirely different arena. Contra Freud, who is arguably spellbound by the idea of what Deleuze and Gauttari term the neurotic – the person trapped inside human-made, ‘artificial territorialities of our society’ – the schizo wanders, plunging deeper into ‘the realm of deterritorialization, reaching the furthest limits of the decomposition of the socius on the surface of his own body without organs’ (1983: 35). Capitalism has permeated the mind and subsequent behaviour of Subject 47, alongside the rest of ‘the Boyz’, but what he demonstrates here is the full potential of capitalism as he has become a real multiplicity created by voluminous intersecting and contradicting desires. We argue, therefore, that desiring machines come to replace the ‘ego’, as a form of ‘anti-ego’.

In many ways, it can be pointed out that Subject 47 appears to reflect Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s notion of the ‘culture industry’, otherwise known as commodity fetishism. As the pair argued, culture no longer exists as a source of dreams, promises and hopes because it has been assimilated into and consigned to capitalism and its market systems (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997). Adorno (1991) went on to expand this thesis by suggesting that people inevitably become passive consumers, where they are released from the burden of active decision-making, and so they find themselves free to engage in the repetitions and distractions that are part and parcel of a prescribed culture. There is an obvious link here between Adorno’s work and that of George Ritzer (1993), which makes use of the fast-food chain restaurant McDonalds as an analytical tool. However, unlike Ritzer, Adorno (1991) leaves room to address the point that prescribed culture is not always accepted so willingly, inasmuch as consumers are prone to creating forms of resistance and dissent. Indeed, it cannot be discounted that Adorno’s diagnosis is principally bleak and miserable, but there is evidence that his work continues in its struggle to resist the commodification of leisure. In
view of this, it should be contended that there is no escaping the fact that the world is becoming ever more consumerist, but the diversification and hybridisation of leisure that also exists requires us to reconsider how passive and incapacitated consumers really are.

If the reader’s attention is momentarily turned to Samuel Beckett’s (2009 [1947]) novel, *Molloy*, more about this condition, what we might otherwise call a chaotic arrangement, might be revealed. In Beckett’s work the leading protagonist, Molloy, having collected sixteen stones from a beach, faces a dilemma. He wishes to suck stones to battle hunger, but wants to use them equally, rather than randomly which would involve sucking some stones more than others and run the risk of not experiencing what all the others feel and taste like. Similar to Molloy, Subject 47 seeks to overcome *a-lack-of* – or laws of production as we might otherwise call them – because of an overpowering heterogeneous desire to consume. Desiring machines thus take over, ensuring that the best system for syphoning off pleasure exists. The stones Subject 47 has in his pockets are arranged in such a way that none is favoured, nor used twice, so as to eliminate continuity and the suppression of desire. For this reason, as Deleuze and Guattari (1983) argue, it is desire, active engagement and imagination that produces reality. In the interregnum reality and the *real* always flows in an enduring process of reconstruction and *becoming*. In a nutshell, then, Subject 47 is not a passive consumer as he exercises this life strategy.

Schizophrenia is like love: there is no specifically schizophrenic phenomenon or entity; schizophrenia is the universe of productive and reproductive desiring-machines, universal primary production as the essential reality of man and nature (ibid: 1983: 5).

As Deleuze and Guattari (1983) argue, *capitalist flows* and *schizophrenic flows* are not the same. Indeed, capitalism sets flows in motion, but they coagulate into our own form of fantasy. In other words, society produces the schizophrenic, just as it produces the cameras and equipment urban explorers use, but the schizo is not saleable. As it was indicated in the previous chapter, every one of ‘the Boyz’ resides in the *telicity*, meaning that schizophrenia does not come to signify or represent capitalism as such; it becomes the ‘exterior limit of capitalism’ (ibid: 246), demonstrating that individuals generally have the necessary competence to deviate from the identity of capitalism. As urban explorers we are not directly in the service of the capitalist order simply because we adopt this life strategy, and perhaps neither are groups like ‘the Quiffs’, in their own eccentric and peculiar sort of way.
Nevertheless, even though it is possible to evade being a passive consumer, as it has been argued elsewhere in this thesis, we should not assume that all forms of order and control can be made entirely redundant. In view of this, we can turn to Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) later work, where the concept of the ‘desiring machine’ – that substitute for the ‘ego’ – is replaced by *assemblages* which create a sense of regularity and normalization within a type of social order, producing the feeling that there are at least some rules to follow while pursuing this life strategy, however shallow these may be. It is here the concept of heterotopia comes into play, reinforcing the idea that inasmuch as people are individuals, we cannot do without the collective – whether this is the WildBoyz or Fr3e Roamers, for those of us as urbexers, or the new ‘mocha-drinking Quiffs’ for Subject 47. Not for one moment does the transference from ‘desiring machines’ mean that desire is in any way suppressed though, what is being suggested here simply advocates that living and expecting to find pleasure alone in a social reality comprised of absolute chaos and individualisation is very difficult.

However, as Deleuze and Guattari point out the body remains without organs and assemblages are built on unstable foundations, meaning that when it comes to the schizophrenic life strategy rules and footings can be destabilised and/or transcended partly (as MKD demonstrated in the previous chapter) or entirely. As Blackshaw (2010a) reminds us, all ‘communities’ in the interregnum begin and end with individuals; it is an obsession that exposes the consumerist nature of our lives. What this means is that urban explorers are still first and foremost *consumers* but, like Subject 47, each one of ‘the Boyz’ is a reflexive agent. In other words, as Subject 47 pointed out, ‘the Boyz’ have changed and adapted too, to the extent that even the general construction of WildBoyz – the group – transforms over time. As it was noted in the episode above, the question as to whether we were still ‘urbexers’ came to the forefront of my mind. Personally, I was not sure if we were moving away from urban exploration and becoming something else. What is certain, however, as Garrett (2013a) discovered among his own group of explorers, is that the constant consumerist need for more gradually changes the dynamics of the group – whether that comes from hitting more secure sites, finding an increased number of ‘epics’ with plenty left inside or altering the nature of urban exploration altogether.

On the pier for instance, Mayhem decided to spark up a spliff. The use of drugs and alcohol among many of ‘the Boyz’ – though certainly not all – was fast becoming a prominent characteristic of the group, ‘not the career criminal or addict shit, like’ as Mayhem was keen
to point out, ‘mostly just salvia and doobage (a short-lasting mind-altering hallucinogenic and cannabis), man, not crack or smack yer know, we’re not addicts, dude’. It was their idea of the ‘new cool’, and they called it ‘experimenting’. It ‘heightened the urbex-experience’, apparently – a point that will be revisited later in this chapter. Individual interest in drugs, alcohol, and the drug-styled gang lifestyle infiltrated ‘the Boyz’ heterotopia and in turn they produced something that amalgamated the two to form their own new and evolved type of reality.

For Freud, however, this idea of living life as a schizo is distasteful because the individuals who are of concern here lack an unconscious that is preoccupied with the *Oedipal* cycle. What this means is that they fall out of any psychoanalytical system and become weighed down by fantasy and theatrical performance (imitations/reproductions), because desire longs for that which has been repressed or is non-existent (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983). Nevertheless, as Deleuze and Guattari remind us:

... we must not delude ourselves: Freud doesn’t like schizophrenics. He doesn’t like their resistance to being oedipalized, and tends to treat them more or less like animals. They mistake words for things, he says. They are apathetic, narcissistic, cut off from reality, incapable of achieving transference; they resemble philosophers – an undesirable resemblance (ibid: 23).

In reality, then, this is what the schizophrenic life strategy is all about: attending to *lack* and *desire*. Figuratively speaking, a schizophrenic involves being neither a woman nor a man – having no sense of ‘me’ or ‘a self’ as such. Hence, the link here to Judith Butler’s genderless society is irrevocable; there is no ‘I’ that precedes gendering, ‘it involves impersonating an ideal that nobody actually inhabits’ (Butler, in Butler and Kotz, 1992). For this reason, it is *desire* that generates the *real*, as new-fangled performative realities are created (ibid). What this suggests is that the schizoid has what we could call a fecund unconsciousness, which means that individuals do not simply fantasise, they are, rather, set on producing the *real* thing. This life strategy is, as Blackshaw directs, inspired entirely by the magic of performativity. In other words, ‘the Boyz’ heterotopian leisure practice becomes ‘its own kind of detached existence’ (2017: 142), inasmuch as it becomes, if only temporarily, an event that is not only consumed but one that consumes each individual involved.

In view of the discussion hitherto, two observations about this life strategy materialise at this juncture. First, you cannot be ‘a Quiff’ and an urban explorer, unless they somehow join
together and form a new imaginary whole (a new heterotopia) – a phenomenon that is not altogether impossible either. It is one or the other, or the creation of something new – a new, exaggerated, identity and heterotopic social space. Second, you cannot be a WildBoy and not expect things to change over time – the ‘ideal’ performative existence cannot help but evolve and change. As it was argued in Chapter Four, it is inevitable that everything will decay and ultimately crumble. But, where there are ashes it is guaranteed that there will be room for something new to surface. So, whether or not heterotopic social space and identities are sought alongside ‘the Boyz’ becomes irrelevant as far as being a schizophrenic goes, because when it comes to modernity, which is defined first and foremost on the basis of freedom, there are no concrete ties supporting us, and none that will compel us to stay together always and forever.

To elucidate further by providing another example, no longer attached to or limited by her own past, Deems became a WildBoy. Seemingly unconcerned about the name, since it is purely a reality not a gender type or designation (Butler, 1990), Deems was all of a sudden living the life of an urbexer in our heterotopic social space. Nothing else mattered, in this reality she was no longer a student or an underwear blogger, she was – like a true schizophrenic and Subject 47 before her – one of ‘the Boyz’ in every way, living the real fantasy with us. As Mayhem suggested when I queried whether a female could be one of ‘the Boyz’: ‘it doesn’t matter, man. WildBoyz is about the urbex and making the experience class, fuck all else. If she gave two fucks about the name she’d go join some feminist cunts or summit. We could be the WildCuntz for all she’s arsed, she’d still want to be part of it – you know, to experience the real shit’. There seemed to be much truth in Mayhem’s words, but four days later the heterotopia had run its course for Deems, until the next time. And then she was gone.

Heterotopic social space, then, is in every way a site for schizophrenics, and being a schizo is a life strategy that allows people to express their individuality. As it was suggested in the previous chapter, aesthetic space is what ‘the Boyz’ seek in the interregnum, so we can live solipsistic lives where it is not necessary to identify with anything or anyone for too long. Indeed, urban exploration is a form of leisure that arose as a result of capitalism and it cannot exist without it, but desiring (which can only be an individual trait) and production (where other like-minded people come in handy) marks the revolutionary schizophrenic potential of urban explorers and their ability to resist despotic signs and signifiers through
the creation of heterotopias of deviation. What this means, in sum, is that each one of ‘the Boyz’ knows that in this world ‘the neurotic patient... is the petty thief’, while the ‘schizophrenic... is the daring safecracker’ (Reich, 1973: 70). In other words, we know that becoming a safecracker allows us to seek out and tackle bigger vaults, and by following this life strategy we can discover all kinds of performative magic.

The Nostalgics: Seeking ‘the Craic’

As the reader has seen, the inevitable consequences of the interregnum are perpetual contingency, anxiety and homesickness. These are the downsides to living life as a schizophrenic; since we are no longer born into identities they have become a task rather than something that was freely given (Sartre, 1984). What this means is that individuals are destined to feel as though they never quite belong, and that the threat of living alone and turning into a dejected non-being will always be present (Bauman, 2001a). What ‘the Boyz’ do, however, to combat these fears, is adopt another life strategy – that of becoming a nostalgic – which involves turning to the past and reimagining the times when things felt good, homely and normal. By doing this, ‘the Boyz’ essentially construct their own history based around certain feelings and emotions, and in turn this provides us with a temporary sense of sanctuary (Blackshaw, 2013a). Nonetheless, it is important to note that ‘the Boyz’ do not seek, or romanticise about, permanence all the time. Rather, we seek only small doses of the elixir, because living permanently in the past is not only impracticable, it would also conflict with our other life strategies that are centred around enjoying life through urban exploration. What follows, then, before this life strategy can be framed accordingly, is a brief discussion that focuses on MKD, and a new narrative.

Despite his perfidious escapades with the Fr3e Roamers, MKD is, somewhat ironically, perhaps the most loyal to the WildBoyz, with the exception of Mayhem who endeavours, maybe more than the rest of us, to keep the group together. Unlike some of the others, whose commitment to our heterotopic social space is more intermittent because of different interests and work, MKD’s life has remained much more static. Having had the same leisure interests and two jobs his entire life, MKD remains, for the most part, the same person he has always been. In view of this, he tends to have more time to engage with the heterotopia. This is not to suggest that the rest of ‘the Boyz’ are not nostalgics, of course, only that MKD is the best example for introducing this section.
At any rate, it is perhaps for the reasons above that MKD gets more homesick and nostalgic than any of the others, as the world around him seems to constantly change while he does not. This also goes some way towards explaining why he was exploring with the Fr3e Roamers even more frequently, whenever ‘the Boyz’ were not around. In a way, they were like ‘Us’, and since they were all local lads who lived near his hometown, there was some feeling of solidarity. Truthfully, however, they were never quite the real thing, and MKD is aware of this. As he pointed out, while we were driving to the small village of Butterley to ‘hit up’ an abandoned canal tunnel:

“Aye, they’re good crack on an’ that. [Fr3e Roamer’s leader], is a good laugh. Fuckin’ mental though. Some dickhead put their dirty fuckin’ hand on [name omitted] car, so he got out and nutted the fuckin’ bastard, twat. Fuckin’ bag-ead. He deserved it, like... It’s canny good. E’s a bit mental, like, and talks too much. I know yous all don’t like him, but he’s propa’ up for urbexin’ and that. They just do the shit places really though, not the propa’ stuff we do... It’s not like bein’ with yous. The craic is good, but things like [Mayhem] are what makes what we do good n’ that. [Mayhem’s] funny as fuck. Propa’ glad I met him, I don’t think my life wud av’ been the same. An’ [Rizla] and [The Hurricane], all yous, I’ve known yous all for ages, like. It’s just good when we’s are all togetha, man.”

Although he would prefer to ignore it, MKD recognises that things have changed, and that they will continue to change. Nevertheless, when all, or at least most, of ‘the Boyz’ get together once more for another adventure there is the promise of freedom and something that feels rather homely. It is for these reasons that MKD is always the first to sign up; to book it off work if necessary; to drive the rest of us to wherever we want to be; to bring the most essential item – the whisky. All of a sudden, when the WildBoyz are back, MKD feels the full intensity and power of the heterotopia, and this is all supported by him adopting the strategy of being a nostalgic.

‘Ere’ We Fuckin’ Go!’: ‘The Craic’

Having parked up down an old country lane leading to some sort of unmanned substation, which had obvious ‘DO NOT PARK’ signs displayed everywhere, everyone set about getting ready. It was nearly 11pm and we anticipated that no one would be using this road anytime soon. Everything was hauled out of the car and within
minutes it was scattered chaotically over the floor. Although we’d asked them to wait until after the explore, or at least near the end, Mayhem and Husky were busy rolling a couple of ‘dirty doobs’ while the rest of us ‘wadered up’ and carried on with the norm. We chose to turn our back on what was going on in the front seat of Rizla’s car, pretending it was business as usual as we focused on what we came here to do: urbex.

Husky was the latest addition to the group. While we had all known him since our schooldays, and he ‘couch surfed’ at Box’s house most nights, he was a new recruit to the group. We’d been desperate to fill the very discernible gap that had been created since Subject 47’s departure, so we’d drafted Husky in. It was reasoned that he was ‘an adequate enough replacement’. He fit the criteria almost perfectly, he was a WildBoy.

It was a bit of a walk to the entrance of the old canal tunnel, but everyone enjoyed it since we were able to spend the time reminiscing about the past. Even the sharp brambles that threatened to pierce the waders, and the thick mud we had to contend with, didn’t ruin our high spirits. Husky was the only one who appeared not to be enjoying himself as much, but that was probably because he’d been made the new ‘equipment manager’, and this entailed carrying everything. As for the rest of us, nothing could interfere with the banter and storytelling. Each of us spoke fervently and enthusiastically, reminding one another of the time we’d ‘rafted’ down the overflow slope of a dam, and the time we’d taken MKD into a different canal tunnel on his birthday, where we’d managed to get a large cake and cutlery down there without him knowing. Husky hadn’t been there for most of these adventures, but he too soon became immersed in the tales. Captivated by ‘the craic’, you could tell he wanted in on it as well.

Aside from the fact that Mayhem and Husky were ‘getting moderately baked’, each taking tokes on a spliff they were sharing, the heterotopia was back in full swing. Feelings of anticipation came flooding back: we knew what was going to happen, but we didn’t at the same time, and somehow it felt familiar and homely. As MKD pointed out on the way:

“Some of yous av been fuckin’ bag-eads’ recently, like. What the fuck man, yous hardly come out anymore. [Looks at Rizla]. This is fuckin’ good now though, isn’t it, like. Everyone back togetha and that”. [Holding his torch up
high he laughs merrily and, in a deep booming voice, yells “WILDBOYZ!”].
Someone get the fuckin’ tuneage sorted.” [Laughter followed].

At the tunnel entrance the heterotopia continued to play out in the usual sort of way. Mayhem, dressed as a council worker wearing overalls, high-viz and a white hardhat – in case someone came along – supervised the inflation of the dinghy, while Husky, the ‘equipment manager’, was nominated to inflate it. Both MKD and Rizla entered the water and set about ‘scouting out the entrance’. The water was deep and murky and smelt like ‘shit’, according to Husky, who was worried about getting wet since he hadn’t brought waders with him. We did our best to convince him he wouldn’t get wet, but he didn’t look convinced.

It was just after midnight as the five of us entered the tunnel. The first section had been reinforced after a road was built directly above, so black corrugated metal surrounded us. There was a lot of condensation in this part, and something green was growing on the metal work. By a stroke of luck, the boat was just small enough not to touch the sides; we had a few inches to spare either side, but it had been raining a lot recently, so the water level was quite high and we had to crouch low to avoid ‘twattin’ our ‘eads off the roof’. After a minute or so we cleared the reinforced section. Suddenly, ‘we’d done it’, we were inside the original canal tunnel dating back to the 1800s.

Ahead we could see old crumbling red brickwork. Several large cracks had formed in certain places and the walls were swelling noticeably against the pressure of the earth behind. The entire construction exuded a dank musty stench. You could practically taste it. MKD sucked in a deep noisy breath through his nostrils, and as he did he growled, ‘Mmm. Yes mannn. That’s the good shit right there’. The original wooden beams were still in situ, along with the metal reinforcement frames. They looked incredibly frail. Large splinters of rotten wood hung from the ceiling and walls and the metalwork had disintegrated, so much so that the beams mostly consisted of rusted flaky layers now. An incredible silence surrounded us, broken only by the occasional sound of dripping water.

The strong damp earthy scent teased us, willing us to drift on further into the depths. Our excitement abruptly reached its apogee and, having adjusted himself so he could kneel, with his chest puffed outward and back positioned upright, MKD shouted: ‘Ere we fuckin’ go, boys! Crazy fuckin’ bastards!’ The atmosphere was like that of a
clichéd Viking raiding party, albeit with a council worker in the back, moments before sighting land. Everyone cheered and roared with laughter. Admittedly, this wasn’t the greatest idea ever conceived, given the poor structural integrity of the tunnel, but none of us seemed to care. We made ourselves more comfortable as Husky and Rizla continued to paddle. The walls oozed with water and the old wood creaked a little, but our minds were racing with excitement. We felt ecstatic and alive. This amounted to the quintessential moment that could only be felt among ‘the Boyz’. It was one of those paradisiac times. We’d returned completely to the home we know as WildBoyz. If there was ever a utopia, this was as close as we were going to get to finding it. What was really being experienced, though, was the full force of the heterotopia; we were drifting, quite literally, deep into that magical realm of khôra.

Suddenly, and unexpectedly, a large wooden beam appeared directly ahead of us. Everyone dropped to the floor of the dinghy. More laughter resulted as we passed beneath, unscathed – ‘holy shit, fuckin’ close that, son’, someone yelled. The wood was like ‘fucking sponge! You can put your finger through it, shit!’; someone else called out. ‘Go, go, keep fuckin’ goin’ – a bit further, like! Let’s see some more.’ We drifted further into the chaos. It was only then that we could hear it. And we did indeed hear it loud and clear before we could properly see it: a large waterfall cascading from the ceiling. There was little doubt that it probably wasn’t meant to be there, it was likely to have been caused by the interminable deterioration taking place. As before, everyone scrambled to take action – cameras away; hoods and bandanas up; we braced ourselves. ‘Yeaaasss, boys, ere’ we fuckin’ go! ERE’ WE FUCKING GO!’ ‘The Boyz’ cheered and laughed excitedly. We were shouting rowdily because there was a contagious desire to do so. ‘This is fuckin’ mint!’; someone bellowed. The overwhelming enticement of our world lured us on. It was fucking spectacular!

**Drifting into Some Theory**

As Peter Fritzsche indicates, ‘nostalgia stalks modernity as an unwelcome double’ (2002: 62). It is unwelcome because nostalgia looks the opposite way to modernity, but the two tend to ignore one another and manage to coexist. Originally thought to be a form of sickness amongst Swiss mercenaries, the term served to combine two pseudo-Greek words: nostos (to return, to a native home or land) and algos (grief, pain or suffering) (Austin, 2007; Fritzsche, 2002). This interpretation of the term continues to exist to this day. Crucially, however, taking into account the context of this thesis, it is important to equate this word
with the loss of a whole socio-historical milieu and the things that accompany it, rather than
the loss of a single person, in the hope that we might re-experience a collective social past
(Broome, 2007). In this vein, we care not so much about the loss of Subject 47, our concern
lies with the fluidity and changeability of modernity, and, above all, the heterotopia – as
MKD reveals. As Blackshaw (2010a) points out, it is precisely this, the impossibility of the past
ever being resurrected that truly makes nostalgia nostalgia. Regardless of how much people
yearn for what has been lost, it will never be restored to life in the same way, even when it
feels almost real enough to touch. And yet, perhaps this is also the true source of its power.

In reality, ‘the Boyz’ are not looking to relive any particular explore. The way this life strategy
works is that we want them to be the same, but also different. The only way all our former
experiences are useful, then, is in the way our memory is able to transform it into a
‘collective task of interpretation which is... ineradicably yoked by a romantic sensibility that
evokes feelings of nostalgia’ (Blackshaw, 2013a: 75). In order for this to work, as Nora (1989)
reminds us, it is important to realise that two crucial factors must be taken into
consideration. First, there should be ‘a will to remember’ (ibid: 19) (it is worth reminding
ourselves of some of MKD’s own comments here – those spoken in the car on the way to
Butterley for example), otherwise we would run the risk of assuming that everything, or
nothing, located in our past is worthy of being remembered. And second, as Nora argues,
memories must be transient, for although they do indeed ‘stop time’ and ‘establish a state of
things’ concisely, they need to remain transformative, recyclable and random, otherwise
they, like attempts to rationalise history, run the risk of becoming familiar and thus insipid
and characterless – much like MKD’s day-to-day life where there is very little magic. In other
words, our memories have to be exceptional enough to answer our call of homesickness.

As Blackshaw (2013a) points out, any history assembled using memory is less about how
individuals really existed and more about how they have become part of a heterotopic social
space that is larger and more significant than any single person. As a life strategy, nostalgia,
which is impregnated with reassuring and supportive semblances, is a self-establishing
performance that must be continuously replicated (Butler, 1990). Adding to this argument,
Broome suggests that it ‘has only an imagined referent; the lack of any historical referent is
concealed by the repetition of a performance in and by nostalgic cultural products’ (2007:
17). Just as MKD demonstrates, then, in the above episode, it becomes more about the
stories, usually characterised by what ‘the Boyz’ refer to as ‘the craic’, we have created inside
our minds. As regards the canal explore, it did not matter that three of the original ‘Boyz’ were absent, or that Husky and drugs were present, for MKD, as the rest of us, using our memory, collective history and some imagination WildBoyz were back. This is the nature of our stories, comprising both the real and the fictional: they are always the same and also variable and interesting on account of memory, because there is no incontestable solid foundation of truth on which memories lie (Blackshaw, 2013a).

In view of the above discussion, there is an indelible link here to the idea that ‘the Boyz’ heterotopia constitutes a ‘hermeneutic community’ (Heller, 1999). As Heller argues, hermeneutics is, by default, nostalgic, because it is coupled with storytelling. What is more, though, as Sartre puts it, is that in a world where we are ‘not free to cease being free’ (Cox, 2009), hermeneutic communities, which are governed by weak ontologies, also provide us with something that allows us to feel a sense of deep commitment. The real beauty of this situation, however, is not that this type of ‘community’ provides ‘the Boyz’ with ‘a sense of passion, pleasure and purpose’, but that we are in control of how long it lasts and when we might want to leave (Blackshaw, 2017: 133). To put it another way, this way of living as a skholēr allows each of us to believe, sincerely, that our devotion to one another is a ‘death do us part’ affair, but it also comes with the freedom of being able to live together ‘until-further-notice’. This, therefore, is the attraction of adopting nostalgia as a life strategy.

Taking into account what has been discussed so far in this section, especially with regard to ‘the Boyz’ ability to drift into and between short-lived nostalgic worlds, which it can be pointed out are all part of the same heterotopia, some further consideration should be given to breaking down precisely what being a nostalgic involves. In order to do this, Blackshaw’s (2003) concept of the mundane and the spectacular has been drawn on, with the intention that it can be used to unpack what usually goes on when ‘the craic’ is being lived. First of all, then, in light of what has been discussed hitherto, being nostalgic is most certainly about reliving the mundane quotidian of ‘the Boyz’ performativity, which is itself a special sort of mundanity. ‘The Boyz’ are fully aware that it is impossible to travel back in time and relive the past as it was, but we can still produce a simulacrum of those moments, to produce the familiarity and warmth of a home (Blackshaw, 2013a). The mundane, then, is centred around our ‘great truths’ (which, paradoxically, are not always truths at all): the imagined commonplace and seemingly commonsensical.
As the heterotopia always begins, ‘the Boyz’ arrive late. This is not through intention though, it is simply a result of ‘the fucking around’ that goes on when we are due to be somewhere. For instance, someone will finish work late or forget something; somebody else, at the last minute, will need to ‘demolish someone’s toilet with a big dirty shit’; we help one another organise the gear, and share our knowledge (of such things as cameras, ropes, tripods, torches, the website etc.) with the rest of the group; we will get lost travelling to our intended location, and everyone will at some point complain about all ‘the fucking around’. However, for most of the journey our favourite ‘tuneage’ will be played too, and the standard cheery ‘fucking around’ in the back of the car will follow. Once we arrive at our chosen explore, the typically mundane situation continues further. We will often ‘scout out’ the location, sharing ideas and thoughts on how we might gain access, while pointing out dangers so everyone is aware. Usually by this time, as on the ski-slope and in the episode above, we also begin to exchange reworked versions of our collective past, if we have not already done this earlier on the journey. As with all our explores, each one is different, but when it comes to the mundane they are also all the same.

You cannot discern, measure or express it exactly, but when the mundane is relived ‘the Boyz’ begin to follow a certain form of ‘logic’ (Blackshaw, 2003). When we are together we do not always follow the same logic, we are after all individuals, but we do make sure that we exaggerate our idiosyncratic differences most of the time while in one another’s company. This serves to ‘provide us with a collective sense of belonging’ (ibid: 53). Each of ‘the Boyz’ personalities are insignificant when thought about individually, they function only together, creating and strengthening our magical heterotopic social space.

All of a sudden, Mayhem’s eccentricity and clumsiness, which exudes a sense of hilarity and absurdity, is revived. Despite this, though, he also becomes a ‘no bullshit’ sort of person who likes to get on with things. In view of this, Mayhem often serves to motivate and make our ideas come to life. Rizla and The Hurricane are both twins and quasi antagonists, so when brought together in the same heterotopia they bicker and fight, and this usually serves to entertain the rest of us. As for MKD, he becomes the hard bastard and he likes people to know it, but he is also the ‘go-along-with-the-crowd type’, the conformist of the group. Box transforms into the ‘fucking mental’ one, willing to do dangerous things because he is the guy who ‘gives no shits about anything’. Nothing stops Box from living, except his regular bouts of ‘CBAness’ (‘cannot be arsed-ness’). Originally, Subject 47 would be the one we
coerced into carrying things, and this role came with the title ‘Equipment Manager’, but he had many other identities. Dramatic and theatrical sums him up succinctly, as it was explained earlier. Husky became 47’s replacement, so he carries things too, and in many ways, when ‘the Boyz’ are together, he often tries to replicate Subject 47’s dynamism and energy, when he is not imitating Box’s ‘mental’ or lackadaisical attitudes, but he never fully succeeds with either. Instead, he has formed his own identity that blends the two in an odd sort of way. It is hard to fathom as an outsider, but all of this, every single seemingly immaterial bit, combines to form the ‘WildBoyz’ quotidian.

In addition to individual collectivity, other smaller things feed the ‘nostalgics’ mundane world. Poignant smells for instance, like powerful cataracts, stimulate former memories (Bonnett, 2016). The stench of sewage, mustiness and mould satisfies half our hunger, just like MKD demonstrated as we drifted into the canal tunnel, bringing us back to the ‘good old days’ inasmuch as it is almost erotic. We could all sense it in the tunnel, rising from the olive coloured stagnant water, the damp bricks and the rotten wooden beams.

From a Husserlian phenomenological perspective, it could be suggested that ‘the Boyz’ effectively perform, pre-reflectively, what is known as an ‘exclusive disjunction’ (Husserl, 1973: 57), meaning we notice not the smell of stagnant disease-filled rot, only the sign that there is a smell of ‘urbex’ and ‘the Boyz’ in the air. According to Husserlian doctrine, only one or the other can be perceived, never both together. Therefore, following Husserl’s treatment of reason, it could be argued that a bad smell is not necessarily bad de facto. Rather, in line with the idea of ‘transcendental subjectivity’ it can be argued that we assign every object, or in this instance smell, determinate attributes (for a time at least) which cancel out all others (Merleau-Ponty, 1989). Reason that is attached to smell seems to play an important part in the adoption of the nostalgic life strategy, and the subsequent creation of our mundane quotidian. This incredible mundanity that is part and parcel of our heterotopic social space assures us that ‘the Boyz’ are back together and it intensifies our feeling of unity. As Jacob Dlamini argues (2009), you cannot share the same sensations incited by a smell with somebody who has not experienced the moments they are connected with, this is an impossible task and serves only to make certain smells even more nostalgic.

To recapitulate, what is being framed here is what tends to happen in the initial stage of entering the heterotopia. Essentially, ‘the Boyz’ adopt the nostalgic life strategy, and in doing
so we are able to leave reality behind as we shapeshift into identities that have no place anywhere else. By excluding everyone else who lack the relevant and necessary credentials, the heterotopia is opened to ‘the Boyz’, and this works well to isolate us from the everyday world (Foucault, 1984). Chasing our appetite for freedom and escape, ‘the Boyz’ heterotopia begins with the creation of mundane space which provides a special sense of freedom that combines the make-believe with something real, and in turn supplies us with the temporary feeling of something that feels like a home.

Nevertheless, and notwithstanding the significance of the mundane, there is also what Blackshaw (2003) has termed the spectacular. This, however, is something that it is not always guaranteed to be felt on every explore. Sometimes we are forced to ‘make do’ with the mundane – when we fail to gain entry to a site for example. Further, while it originates in our ‘urbex’ activities it is each time always enormously different, exciting and extraordinary. The spectacular is what creates an intensity that is even more superior when it comes to our sense of belonging, one that is much greater than the sense of belonging derived from the mundane (ibid). As we witnessed with MKD above, all of a sudden our ‘urbex’ experience became more powerful and penetrating in terms of the sensations we were feeling. As ‘the Boyz’ paddled slowly into the mouth of the canal tunnel, the carnivalesque began. This was signalled by MKD yelling, ‘Ere we fuckin’ go boys!’. The threshold, what some might describe as a liminal moment, had been crossed. We should not be mistaken though, as it was mentioned earlier in the thesis, really, this was not a liminal moment since liminality represents a passage out of time and space (Turner, 1973). What ‘the Boyz’ experienced was in fact real, and for this reason we could argue that this was the beginning of a sublime moment. More on this point follows in the next section of this chapter.

For now, though, all the reader needs to be aware of is that it is in the spectacular where ‘the Boyz’ find it possible, more than we can in the mundane, to undermine and break social rules and universal moral principles, so that we can celebrate promiscuity and the intoxicating feelings of absolute pleasure in our heterotopic social space. As Blackshaw and Crabbe (2004) suggest, it is the obvious absurdity of the spectacular that makes our heterotopia seem even more worthwhile and warrant being pursued time and again. In many ways, as hinted above, it is analogous to Bakhtin’s (1984) notion of the carnival which produces a ‘true feast of time’, ‘renewal’ and, sure enough, ‘becoming’. This is the epitome of the heterotopia, where our performativity reaches a point that can be described as being at its
most powerful and compelling. What is more, in contrast to the mundane, the spectacular is always experienced at a swifter pace through urban exploration-related activities that are unpredictable and potentially hazardous. In other words, no longer working in a monotonous dentist, or a pub that never seems to change, MKD is liberated and he becomes someone who feels far more significant and free.

Of course, what is being described here is all part of the temptation of the nostalgic life strategy – the magnetism that will lure us back in as we hope to encounter the spectacular every time. However, as Jameson (2005) reminds us, while the spectacular element of nostalgia fulfils the ‘utopian’ (almost, but not quite) dream temporarily, it is always a dream that is placed under an immense strain. What this means is that it cannot survive forever. Instead, it disappears almost as quickly as it arrived, because it is unable to support itself for any substantial amount of time. In that case, if anything, this serves to highlight that if heterotopias are heterochronic (episodic) (Foucault, 1984), the spectacular discovered in them is even more erratic and ephemeral.

In many ways, then, what all of this would seem to suggest is that heterotopic social space, when it involves urban exploration, entails being immoral and unethical, especially when it comes to the spectacular, because WildBoyz will do almost anything to recreate their homely and exciting past. ‘The Boyz’, of course, would certainly not think of themselves as being immoral or unethical, but, in fact, if the heterotopia is to exist it must be juxtaposed against the real world which is viewed by ‘Us’ as being unfair and oppressive. The upshot of this is that what we do sometimes involves being willing to assume new untested ontological differences, and ‘reject[ing] the authority of former modes of existence’ (Blackshaw, 2013a: 175). Therefore, while eudaimonia, the term used by Aristotle to denote a form of existence that encompasses being content, healthy, prosperous and beneficial, represents the exemplar condition for every individual, as the previous chapter argued, life in the interregnum shows no sign of producing a universal ethical order that entails being for every single other human being (Bauman, 1993). In other words, modernity has not yet reached a state of balance that allows human kind to live in a way that is universally moral and free (ibid). There are only heterotopias, and even though they may be viewed by outsiders as being nightmarish, abnormal, deviant, mad and, all in all, ostensibly bad, really, these are some of the only places individuals can exercise true moral awareness and responsibility.
Notwithstanding the above, in the end it did not take long for the spectacular to fade away. As it has already been noted, this is the nature of the spectacular in heterotopic social space. We had all succeeded in paddling deep into the tunnel, but eventually we reached a section that was impassable. After ‘fucking around’ for several minutes, deciding what to do, the spectacular had disappeared. Our magnificent sense of enthusiasm had been extinguished. Spirits were still high, and ‘the craic’ remained good, but it was no longer spectacular. Noticing the change in mood, Mayhem decided it was ‘time to get baked’, so ‘sparked up’ in the back of the dinghy. A hazy cloud of smoke filled the tunnel, shrouding the raft in a dense fog. Losing his natural stutter temporarily, as he sat sprawled in the back, Rizla spoke in a low drawn out tone, ‘Yehhhh, boy. I’m fuckin’ chilled right now.’

In view of what has been discussed in this section, although there appears to be some order and structure to ‘the Boyz’ nostalgic life strategy by means of the mundane and spectacular, the heterotopia we occupy is utterly transient and the moments are always spasmodic. This is a magical world located somewhere between Nietzsche’s ‘mythical and non-rational’ and Durkheim’s rational ‘conscience collective’ (Blackshaw, 2003: 119). Through Nietzsche’s eyes, the heterotopic quotidian would have to be chaotic, lonely and tumultuous, and for Durkheim it would have to be produced in a binding ‘conscience collective’, which means that all experience must be a product of a group. In other words, this place is what Gottfried Benn has termed a Zwischenreich – an amorphous place situated between both reality and dream and the individual and collective (cited in Illbruck, 2012). In short, then, ‘the Boyz’ manage to fulfil their nostalgic craving for a sanctuary and the intense experience of performativity, and attain the feelings of safety and theatricality that come with it, simply by exploiting and making the most of the ephemeral ‘craic’. As Maffesoli (1996) reminds us:

‘pretending’ we are participating magically in a collective game... reminds us that something like the ‘community’ has existed, does exist or will exist. It is a question of aestheticism, derision, participation and reticence all at once. It is above all the mythical affirmation that the masses are a source of power. This aesthetic game or sentiment is collectively produced just as much for oneself as for the power which orchestrates it. At the same time, it allows one to remind this power that it is only a game, and that there are limits which must not be breached (Maffesoli, 1996: 49).

As the reader has seen, contra Foucault’s (1984) original suggestion that heterotopias ‘accumulate indefinitely’, it can be argued that ‘the Boyz’ space of compensation is located entirely in the festive mode of living as it morphs and is forever mercurial. In truth, what is
depicted in this section does not articulate what happens every time ‘the Boyz’ go exploring together; it is the idealised, purely nostalgic, side of heterotopia, where a fair amount of imagination has gone into creating it, and this is what we refer to as ‘the craic’. Nonetheless, the imagined familiar pattern, always beginning with the mundane and often moving into the spectacular, is special because it is WildBoyz ad perfectum: a temporary shelter that seems to offer an illusory cure against incessant change and our recurring homesickness.

What is being experienced is difficult to imagine as an outsider. It represents a point ‘in that shadowy realm called khôra’ where limits are completely dissolved, extremes are felt at their most intense and the experience of intimacy and closeness is at its strongest (Blackshaw 2017: 146). After all, ‘the Boyz’ must invest an incredible amount of trust in each other to enter a crumbling canal tunnel while the performativity of the group is in full swing. What this means, nonetheless, is that the reader has witnessed khôraster-skholêrs in action as ‘the Boyz’ adopt a life strategy that makes good use of nostalgia to help keep the heterotopia alive until-further-notice by ensuring both aforesaid cravings are satisfied.

**Parasites of the Sublime**

As it has been hinted throughout the thesis so far, there has been a recurrent theme lurking within the shadows. This theme appears as another intertwining and interpenetrating life strategy ‘the Boyz’ have adopted, as we attempt to locate some meaning in our lives and establish our own sense of becoming through our heterotopic social space. What I have in mind here is the lengths urban explorers’ go to, and the effort we put in, to detect the differend and bear witness to feelings of the sublime in heterotopia.

This life strategy, then, which has an obvious overlap with the nostalgic life strategy and the concept of the spectacular, is all about urban explorers becoming parasites. The term stems from the Greek words para (alongside) and sitos (food) and signifies something that routinely feeds on another – in this case certain situations where the feeling of the sublime can be found. The sublime is, after all, something that is highly tempting and therefore craved, because, as Edmund Burke (2008 [1729]) reminds us, it bears its foundations in any situation capable of rousing the very extremes of pain and pleasure. In other words, this life strategy goes beyond mere nostalgia. It is, rather, the prospect of inventing new possibilities, and using the body in such a way that it becomes the source of creative pleasure, especially as it
interacts with the urban environment in a multiplicity of different ways (Robinson, 2003).

There are a few theorists who have attempted to explore the idea of the sublime vis-à-vis urban exploration, such as Unt et al. (2014) and Goatcher and Brunsden (2011), but their application of the theory is, arguably, quite narrow. Therefore, the idea calls for further attention and contemplation, and a better application of Jean-François Lyotard’s work. In view of this, what follows is a much more scrupulous consideration of Lyotard’s concepts of the differend and the sublime. What is more, though, this section goes further by recognising the importance of exploring additional interwoven theories, such as Lyotard’s concept of *Silence* and Sawyer’s idea of the *traumatic sublime*, to expound upon the parasitical life strategy in greater depth.

**Myths and Beasts: Exploring Fear, Excitement and the Unexplainable**

Two cars pulled into Middlesbrough College car park, just after ten on an especially blustery November evening. The entire site was deserted and the only movement beneath the powerful lights came from crisp packets and McDonald’s wrappers as they twirled and danced erratically in the wind. Resolved to waste no time, we grabbed all the gear that was needed and climbed out of the warmth of the cars. Everyone chatted casually to one another as we walked, mostly laughing about MKD’s ‘great escape’ on an explore a few weeks earlier when security had noticed us. They’d attempted to guard all the exits to the building we were in to corner us off, and, as we’d fled through some unguarded brambles and over a barbed wire fence, MKD had managed to tear most of the ligaments in his left ankle. He still managed to escape though, and drive the ‘getaway car’, ‘like a propa’ fuckin’ boss’.

It wasn’t too long before the gigantic silhouette of an ‘oil tanker’ materialised into view. There it was, a towering filthy mass. She was beautiful. The massive flare tower looked strangely enticing, presenting us with an opportunity, potentially, to see the arresting industrial wasteland of Teesside from above. We could clearly see the worn black and red paint on the side of the vessel, the ageing letters of her name, and the build-up of grime and ‘shit’ on the bulbous bow. It was perfect though, since only proper ships have the markings of use, exploitation and exhaustion. All the blemishes, then, were the decorations that showed the North Sea Producer was something special. In fact, they lured us in, teasing us to get closer so that we could
physically touch and embrace ‘the beast’.

Box was surprisingly informative on this particular evening. Clearly he’d been on Wikipedia. Judging by what he was saying, ‘the Beast’ obviously had an impressive past. The 99,800-ton vessel had been deployed out in the MacCulloch oil field, forced to endure the harsh conditions of the North Sea, approximately 250 kilometres off the coast of Scotland. Apparently, it had withstood eighteen years out there, functioning as a Floating Production Storage and Offloading (FPSO) vessel, and in that time only experienced one major catastrophe when a gas turbine nearly exploded. Its history was impressive to say the least, but, in truth, we were less concerned about that right now. We were here because we were more interested in turning it into something else – something manipulated and distorted to meet our own selfish desires.

According to Lyotard, the differend is something that is missing and lies beyond description; it is ‘what is not presentable under the rules of knowledge’, and the frantic struggle between both imagination and reason (1988: 93). In view of this, it can be argued that since ‘the Boyz’ are reflexive, and therefore capable of overcoming traditional empiricism, doxic understandings and certain forms of everyday discourse, we manage to bring new feelings into being. These are feelings of the sublime that stimulate and support the ‘beginning of the infinity of heterogeneous finalities’ (Lyotard, 1989: 409). Every one of these finalities should be viewed as being inimitable and particular, though, and it is our task, as Lyotard (1988) suggests, to attend to them and perceive them as best as possible. This, however, can only be done by delving into ‘the Boyz’ heterotopia.

Nonetheless, it should be pointed out that as far as revealing something about the differend and the sublime goes, the differend is little more than an unsteady state that cannot be easily, nor coherently, put into language. The differend evokes only emotion and sensation and it is impossible to place our own feelings into words in any precise way, let alone those of other people (Sawyer, 2014). In other words, the reader will only be able to draw upon the interpretation of ‘the Boyz’ heterotopic social space as it is being presented here by means of a rolling episode. In view of this, this section will uncover less about what certain urban explorers feel specifically, to avoid misrepresenting them, than about the effectual forces that are at play. Since this thesis aims to combine both sociological hermeneutics and hermeneutic sociology, privileging the latter over the former would interfere with this methodological aim. What is being dealt with, then, is the heterotopia and what Lyotard
refers to as the concept of Silence; what Sawyer calls ‘the silence of Silence’ (ibid: 157).

In view of the above, it can be argued that the differend represents a ‘blind spot’ (ibid: 157). It is something inexplicable which echoes with sound. Inside the Silence we detect the elimination of what we should regard as real silence (nothingness), inasmuch as the differend becomes a form of intuition of the presence of Silence. Therefore, as Sawyer highlights, ‘Silence, the differend, and the event are entwined’ (ibid: 157) to produce intuited sensations. In a nutshell, this is the echo of us knowing that something else exists beyond the apparent silence; it is, so to speak, the impermanent and transitory end to silence (Bennington, 1988).

The usual ‘bollocks’ ensued. We’d managed to sneak onto the dockyard premises, and were crouching low in the shadows next to an old rotten wooden landing-stage that looked ready to collapse. MKD had caught sight of torch light sweeping across the dockyard – the security guard doing his routine patrol – so we’d decided to wait.

As we sat, milling around some rocks that smelt especially fishy, ‘freezing our fuckin’ tits off’, the usual procrastination began. Gazing up at ‘the Beast’, which looked almost terrifying now, caused various thoughts to swirl around our minds. I looked at the faces around me, one by one, and observed the bored-looking expressions. MKD suggested we ‘come back another night’. Box reminded us that he had to be up early for work. This excuse quickly worked for Husky too, and feigning disappointment he agreed with Box that we should ‘probably head home, smoke a cheeky spliff and get some shut eye’. Someone else pointed out that ‘all the doors n’ shit are probably locked ‘neways’. ‘The Boyz’ showed a sudden lack of interest and indifference as to whether we succeeded or not. I sensed something similar too, a raging feeling of terror or apprehension? I couldn’t quite put my finger on it. Indeed, the climb up the lines securing ‘the Beast’ to the dock would be difficult. Perhaps, it was the danger involved, or even the prospect of getting caught by secca that created this sense of unease. In truth, none of us knew what we were feeling, only that we wanted to be aboard the vessel, and we didn’t.

As we waited, Mayhem, who can sometimes be rather philosophical, gave us something to think about. He suggested that what we were feeling was us knowing that history was about to be altered. In fact, it already was. This was an ordinary vessel, ‘it looked good here, like it was supposed to be here; like it was part of the
general surroundings’, but we weren’t in that place anymore. Looking solemn, Husky played with a dead thorn branch and MKD continued to watch the guard waving his torch around in the shadows. Mayhem continued, reminding us that ‘there’s no history on the bastard thing, not before we’ve set foot on it. Who knows what could happen!’ A little inspired by Mayhem’s grand speech, I began to tell ‘the Boyz’ about Jean-François Lyotard’s idea of the sublime, and how they might well be experiencing this. They all stared at me blankly, with expressions that hinted I should probably ‘shut the fuck up’. We continued to watch the vessel in silence for a while, clouded by our disconcertment. Together, we were excited, and at the same time uncertain and ready to go home.

As far as the parasitical life strategy goes, it can be argued, in line with Lyotard, that it is the human eye that becomes more important than our words when we are located in the heterotopia, because eyes are able to gaze for longer and are not instantaneously overwhelmed by the intervening word (Elias, 1997). What this means is that our experiences in urban exploration demand that we attend to the Silence before the word simply by observing. The Silence, ‘the idiosyncrasy of art’ and repudiation of the word, brings about a spatial affirmation of that which is unfamiliar and unknown; it is a way of discussing and expressing objects and experiencing, rather than ‘reading them’, since reading, as with the ‘word’, implies fixity and structure (ibid: 267). In view of this, to enable the reader to observe and understand what ‘the Boyz’ experienced, in the only way possible in light of not having been there, an image of the North Sea Producer has been included below (see Figure 1.):
Given that the Silence – the seemingly irreconcilable and unpresentable – cannot easily be articulated, Lyotard (1988) attests that only literature has any real hope of explicating the differend once it has been detected. Admittedly, this might appear contradictory vis-à-vis what has just been argued, because we are essentially attempting to force the Silence, once it has been realised, into words. Notwithstanding this paradox, it is essentially literature’s fate to struggle to reveal something about the differend and its calling. As Lyotard suggests, detailing sensations of the sublime through literature comes closest to exploring the Silence more substantially. In view of this, the North Sea Producer was neither beautiful nor harmonious, it was a gigantic rusting beast, so it was the feeling of the sublime that incited a much more ‘violent emotion, close to unreason, which forces thought to the extremes of pleasure and displeasure’ (Lyotard, 2006: 257). The object, in this instance the oil tanker, certainly existed, but it was arguably a symbol of the unpresentable, rather than the absolute; it was the indication of a sublime ‘presence’ over a ‘presentation’ (ibid).

As it has been argued, no easily communicable interpretation of the feeling of the sublime can be readily established. Rather, as Lyotard (2006) reminds us, the very idea of something concrete is a danger to subjectivity, seeing as it repudiates individuality and our ability to critically investigate. The sublime is located at the centre of the chaos of ‘the Boyz’ heterotopia, so it is far from being a representative form of moral or aesthetic unanimity. What this means, as Trifonova reminds us, is that the task of such things as art, and in that we might include various forms of leisure such as urban exploration, is not to craft or found culture, but to look for their own ephemeral ‘conditions of possibility’ within the Silence (2007: 129). To reiterate, we can suggest that as parasites ‘the Boyz’ chase the aesthetic sublime in ‘an excess of presence’ and the avant-garde, never in the tangibility of a place. This undertaking, therefore, is not one that can belong to the aesthetic of the ‘beautiful’ as Kant would likely argue.

On board the ship, MKD, Box and Husky had decided to separate from myself and Mayhem. While they went to the bridge, we’d headed downstairs to find the engine. Having never seen one on such a scale before, we were ‘psyched to have a gander below decks’. After all, ‘who the fuck gets to stand on a bridge, or next to a fuck-off engine?’ The others were finding their own forms of aesthetic pleasure, fantasising about starting the vessel, while we were seeking something much different.

Our footsteps clanged loudly against the near-vertical staircase which took us further
and further into the bowels of the vessel. The air was pungent, thick with the satisfying aroma of oil and grease. We passed more dials, switches, alarm bulbs and levers than I’d ever seen before, all grimy and well-used. This was ‘industrial porn’ at its finest, fucking spectacular. Mayhem jumped down the last two steps, and the dull thud echoed despondently through the metallic chambers. And there she was, right in front of us – the engine. It was crudely painted, but clearly well cared-for. For a short while we stared at it in awe. What else do you do when faced with something so remarkable? This is something you imagine but never expect to see. Mayhem remarked that ‘it was fucking huge’, but, seemingly lost for words, couldn’t expand on what else he was feeling. Neither could I, so I took a photo instead. Being careful not to spare any detail we made sure to light up every inch with our torches, capturing every nook and cranny. This was something we wanted to remember well.

Alongside the obvious pleasure felt by Mayhem, there was a terrific sense of pain and anguish, because the differend evokes powerful emotions and sensations and we want them to be expressed or verbalised, but they cannot. The Silence, therefore, generally remains perfectly balanced between the positive and negative since its meaning will always be powerful, stimulating and sensational, but it will also be stifled, subject to misinterpretation and remain overwhelmingly inexpressible (Sawyer, 2014). Using his own analogy of an earthquake, Lyotard (1988) suggests that if the disaster destroyed everything, all the tools and machines used to measure the event, although it would be impossible to measure quantitatively, the scientists would still be inspired by the idea of great seismic energy. However, while analogous feelings might be felt among the scientists they would be unable to articulate this in any accurate way. Only the feeling of the sublime remains, with different sentiments and idioms that cannot capture the differend – they merely catch the conflict between them. For ‘the Boyz’, roaming around the North Sea Producer presented such an occasion that ‘suffer[ed] the wrong of not being able to be phrased’ (ibid: 22-23).

It stands to reason, then, that wandering around a ghost ship in the middle of the night is something you must experience directly, because the feelings you receive are purely those of the conflicted sublime that teeters between pain and pleasure. Yet, as Mayhem demonstrated, as he prowled below decks beside the largest engine any of us had ever seen, this was precisely the moment he had been seeking:

“Dude, I sort of felt euphoric and afraid at the same time. I’m stood on this big fuckin’ machine and it’s too big to properly comprehend. Sort of scary, like too much
to take in. How does it feel when you stand next to a beast? I dunno. That engine was fuckin’ big, dude. I can’t explain it. It was epic, but for everyone else who wasn’t there, it’s just an engine... It’s sad like, my mind was literally blown. But I’m done ‘neways. No need to go back. I’m satisfied, like proper ecsta-ic. But, it’s done n’ dusted, blood. Onto summat else that’s epic, I guess.”

As Lyotard reminds us, the sublime can only exist in the immediate present, in the ‘sensation of the instant’ (Sawyer, 2014: 172). Indeed, Mayhem clearly demonstrates this, and also provides us with a glimpse into the consequential ‘negative’ aspects of the sublime – the unnerving feeling of something so large it is incomprehensible, combined with the knowledge that he will be unable to share his incredible feelings outside our heterotopic social space (those present at the time). Even among ‘the Boyz’ he was not able to express his feeling in any real detail, but we certainly understood what he meant in some small way because we felt it too. What this means, therefore, is that ‘the Boyz’ use one another to clarify and ensure the existence of the sublime in the differend. As Bennington (1988) suggests, all of reality, including that related to urban exploration, is caught up with the differend, but what it means – its essential meaning – is based absolutely on the heterogeneous individuality of our heterotopic social spaces. Hence, as Lyotard (1988) has pointed out, all heterogeneity ensures there can be no universal definition assigned to an experience – assigning one is futile since all other definitions will ultimately betray it. All we can do in that case is follow Mayhem’s advice: feel contented and look towards the next ‘epic’ thing we might encounter.

**The Traumatic Sublime**

Notwithstanding the importance of the discussion hitherto, there is another observation to address vis-à-vis the sublime. This observation relates to the idea of the *traumatic*. As Sawyer notes, and as it was noted above, it is commonly suggested that Lyotard’s concept of the sublime typifies a sort of balance – ‘a safe distance’– between pleasure and pain (2014: 171). Nonetheless, as Sawyer points out, it is often overlooked that the enormity of the traumatic can reach a point where it is so great it becomes impossible to offer any response at all, neither excitement nor desolation, only a blank void of dread followed by the feeling of nothingness. In other words, it can be argued that Lyotard underplays, or fails to fully consider, the significance of the traumatic in the sublime. To try and understand this, we will consider the moment Mayhem climbed aboard the North Sea Producer.
His arms were trembling, pumped to the point he wasn't sure if his hands could grip any longer. He couldn't feel the rope. Gritting his teeth, Mayhem made another effort to haul himself upward. The long rope, damp from several days of constant rain, swayed gently, making it harder to grasp. It also made the whole escapade even more unnerving. Beneath him was the edge of the concrete dock and the water – it would be a nasty fall. It was impossible to go back now, though, he was too far up the rope. But he was nowhere near close enough to feel certain he would make it either. ‘Fuck’. Moreover, there was nothing ‘the Boyz’ could do to help, we could only watch and hope he didn’t let go. Helpless and alone, Mayhem began to panic. Beginning to accept defeat, his mind ‘went mental’; he expected to let go; he couldn’t think; he would feel sheer dread and hopelessness and fall. The last thing Mayhem remembered thinking was that he’d ‘done similar things to this many times before’; ‘what the fuck was going on?’ He described feeling a cruel sense of hilarity – after all, who finds themselves gazing at the lights of Teesside while clinging desperately onto a heavy rope being used to tie up an oil tanker? Suddenly the panic was overwhelming, and his mind shut down completely.

The fragment of episode provided above, much like MKD and Mayhem’s moment on the sledge, Soul on the rooftop and Rizla in the lift shaft, is an instance where ‘the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur’, insofar as we experience ‘an absolute inability to know it’ (Caruth, 1997: 208). For those theorists, like Lyng (2005) and Garrett (2013a), who employ the concept of edgework, it might be argued that the edge has been overstepped here, since a loss of control seems quite evident. There is, however, an obvious disconnection between what Mayhem experienced and the idea of overstepping the edge, because although he did in fact lose all control, he also continued to survive and experience something. For this reason, we might suggest that Mayhem perhaps experienced something like ‘the edge’, something ‘perpetually incomplete’ (Sawyer, 2014: 173), but, in reality, this was a taste of the traumatic sublime.

The more nuanced take on the concept is a different sort of sublime, a derivative product of the sublime discussed above because, owing to the unbounded suffering borne, it is absolutely unknowable at the moment it occurs. According to Sawyer, this represents the absolute obliteration of new methods of representation that ‘endeavour to evoke the unpresentable in presentation itself’ (ibid: 172). What happens instead is that what is being felt ‘force[s] notice of the unpresented in the unpresentable’ (ibid: 173). In other words, the
traumatic sublime represents a completely foreign sensation that we are generally incapable of bringing into being, so Mayhem is unable to place the event because it is utterly incommensurable. What Mayhem experiences here is a moment where there is much less that is positive about the event, to the extent that in the moment he gains mainly a negative experience. What Mayhem provides us with, then, is an instance of trauma which causes paralysis — a feeling that generally causes individuals to desperately want relief as opposed to any further stimulation.

‘The Boyz’ were peering down over the side of the vessel, searching for Mayhem in the darkness. Everyone was pushing him, telling him he could do it: ‘come on, dude, last bit! Last bit, man!’ Suddenly a single hand appeared, shaking violently in the air. Box jumped into action, grabbing hold of Mayhem’s arm in a tight, reassuring grip. MKD, greeted him with a friendly ‘alreet, like’, and grabbed the back of the rucksack he was wearing to help haul him over the railing. A variety of words escaped Mayhem’s lips: ‘motherfucking-fucker!’; ‘Jesus’, ‘cunt’; ‘holy shit, that was fucking hard!’ He hadn’t noticed while climbing, but his hands had gone from cold to hot too quickly and his fingers now throbbed intensely. It felt as though ‘some dickhead had taken a hammer to them’. He paced back and forth across the deck for a while, reflecting on what had just happened. This was the intense moment of relief which, like a cool glass of water on a hot summer’s day, was tremendously satisfying. As the adrenaline started to wear off, though, we all noticed how much he was shaking.

Again, we return to the concept of the differend. What the reader has witnessed is not simply the feeling of the sublime. Rather, it is the resonance of pure dread, a crushing sense of despair and our astounding resilience toward such trauma (Sawyer, 2014). In a way, we think we have sussed it, but the differend can always flood back in its entirety, smashing into us with tremendous force. And this is perhaps the most crucial point, the dichotomy between pain and pleasure is not something that can be tamed or understood in a succinct way. The differend will always contain surprises that cannot be known until we have located the feeling of the traumatic sublime, but this is very dangerous territory, bordering on the very limits of our ability to cling onto life.

As he stood aboard the tanker, breathing heavily and wavering slightly, the event began to shift into Mayhem’s consciousness. A wave of relief engulfed him. What he had experienced was the differend’s demand that our ways of understanding it must adapt and take risks, so
that it can be perceived in other seemingly negative and deleterious ways too. It seems, then, that for the urban explorer the parasitical life strategy is not as straightforward as it may first have appeared.

**Summarising the Events on the Producer**

What has been discussed in this section is the idea that urban explorers become *parasitical* while they are immersed in their heterotopic social space, as they seek out situations where they might encounter the differend. As Carroll explains, by considering the differend, Lyotard points us in the direction of ‘parasitical, transgressive critical aesthetics’, where individuals make use of the feelings of the sublime to inject life into ‘new strategies and forms without knowing in advance where exactly they will lead’ (1987: 167-182). Certainly, there is an inseparable overlap between the schizophrenic life strategy and that of the parasite, since both seek the aesthetic, and we, ‘the Boyz’, require constant deconstruction of the world around us to always be on the move as we search for meaning and pleasure (Derrida, 1987a). However, the idea of being constantly on the move must occasionally be halted, if only ephemerally, because the parasitical life strategy is dependent upon remaining in aesthetic space long enough to leech on objects of pleasure, especially when they communicate feelings of the sublime.

Nevertheless, in the end the parasitical life strategy cannot help but be short-lived, because it entails negotiating the fine balance between pain and pleasure, and sometimes even transcending the equilibrium when things perhaps do not quite go according to plan. In other words, the feeling of the sublime is a transitory affair. ‘The Boyz’ will eventually break with the differend – when the cause of the sublime feeling is left behind, it is decided that it has become monotonous as the romance of the sublime gradually loses its potency, or because of the danger it can beget (Slade, 2007).

**Rebels of Sicherheit**

In the previous section, the reader witnessed how ‘the Boyz’ must carefully negotiate the balance between pain and pleasure for feelings of the sublime to materialise in our heterotopic social space. This is crucial if the parasitical life strategy is to be at all fruitful. In a similar vein, then, the following section encroaches on another point of equilibrium that
must be achieved, and this springs from ‘the Boyz’ desire to have both freedom and safety as we live and find leisure in the interregnum (Beck, 1992). As the reader will see, ‘the Boyz’ find themselves in a complex situation where they aspire to be rebels, embracing Freiheit (political freedom and liberty) by opposing ‘the powers that be’ in a world they feel is homogeneous and reproducible. However, we also want some degree of certainty, security and safety (Sicherheit) in our lives. In view of this, it can be argued that another life strategy urban explorers adopt in their heterotopic social space is that of becoming a Rebel of Sicherheit. By satisfying both desires and adopting this life strategy we find we are socially controlled by everyday life, but also free to embrace a heterotopia where we can enact our rebellious performativity.

**Big Ball-sacks and Frightening Cameras**

It was late afternoon and we were hoping to get the Tees Transporter Bridge done before it got dark. We were stood in a small car park just in front of the bridge, listening to Duran Duran’s ‘Wild Boys’ tune while we tucked into MKD’s bucket of profiteroles he’d purchased on the way here. We were devising a plan to dodge the security guards who were lurking at the base of the bridge, but there were a few problems.

Normally, there was little or no security onsite at the Transporter, but since it was being repainted a temporary security hut had been erected and we could see one of the guards walking around the perimeter. Much to our dismay, as it was daytime still, he had a full view of the staircase we planned to ascend. We’d spotted a police van nosing around the area too. It had driven past us, slowly, as the officers inside carefully eyed us up. They were clearly suspicious that we were up to something. ‘The Boyz’ continued to eat, trying to look as innocuous as possible. The final problem we had involved cameras and PIR’s (passive infrared sensors). Rizla was certain he’d seen both while scouting out the bridge earlier in the day. None of us were convinced that there were any at first, and even if there were we doubted they would be constantly monitored. Several minutes later, however, the doubt set in, along with growing anxiety among ‘the Boyz’. We began to see surveillance devices where there were no surveillance devices, and suddenly we were able to imagine the security guard watching us from inside his prefabricated hut.

**Riza:** It’s fuckin’ mental this, man. We’re imaginin’ things now like, makin’ us look into
it too deep. We're all jumpy n' shit. There can't be that many cameras n' shit on there, can there?... I propa' don't wanna' get caught, like. That would be fuckin' bad craic that, like. I don't think that would help me get a job drivin' [HGV’s]. It would be mint up there, but is it worth it if there are all these cameras?

Mayhem: [In a patronising tone]. They don’t want you up there, do they? They’re tryin’ to keep people safe, so you don’t hurt yourself, [Rizla]. You might hurt yer finga’, or fall off or summat. You have to be safe, dude.

Rizla: Well, fuck them! They can’t tell me what to do, dicks.

Mayhem: Can they not?... Go show em' then, man. I didn’t see any cameras.

Rizla: No?

Mayhem: Well, I do now cos’ of you, but I didn’t before, man.

After several minutes debating whether we should risk it or not, and a second police drive-by, Mayhem and The Hurricane, fed up with talking, decided to ‘scout out’ a different way of reaching the base of the bridge. The rest of us began to follow, but Rizla suddenly stopped and demanded that MKD move the car to a space next to the security hut, so he could unknowingly mind it and ‘stop the thieving scummy Boro bastards from helpin’ themselves to our shit’. Rizla reminded us several times that ‘this area was dodgy as fuck’. We thought it was a ‘stupid fuckin’ idea’, but MKD, who loves his car decided to go along with it.

Several minutes later, we met Mayhem and The Hurricane. They were crouched by a fence that lifted at the bottom. One by one we crawled through to the other side, all except Mayhem who’d decided he wasn’t doing this one. He’d ‘done it already’, so, apparently, it wasn’t worth the risk anymore: ‘gotta’ play it safe, dude, no point in getting caught doin’ her a second time’. A little disconcerted that Mayhem was ‘bailing on us’, the rest of us decided that the ‘risk to reward ratio’ was still well worth it. MKD called him ‘a fuckin’ fanny’, but Mayhem ignored him and positioned himself on a decent sized rock so he could wait for us in reasonable comfort.

Having managed to get past the locked cage that was supposed to prevent access to the bottom levels of the staircase, we raced up the metal steps. Knowing that security was still somewhere beneath us, we tried hard to quieten our heavy footsteps. At the top, most of us were breathless, so we took a moment to look around as we caught our breath. It was evident we had free reign up top, providing security didn’t spot us. A long mental gantry allowed us to walk the entire length of the bridge and since the
entire structure was like a giant piece of playground apparatus, we were able to climb out along some of the main beams and ‘get a propa’ feel for the bridge’.

The Hurricane wandered off from the rest of us and ‘beasted out some pull ups on one of the main support beams, ‘like a fucking boss’. As for Rizla and MKD, clearly in awe that they were finally on top of the Transporter, with massive grins on their faces they repeated the same few sentences several times: ‘this is fuckin’ epic’; ‘holy fuckin’ shit, guys, I can’t believe we’re up here!’; ‘this is absolutely mint’; ‘fuckin’ mental, man’. Rizla was perhaps the most ecstatic for some reason; ‘excited at bein’ somewhere unusual; like how an astronaut would feel, just not quite as awesome’. Stood up on the railings, ‘feeling like an absolute boss’, Rizla executed the classic fist pump a couple of times, and made sure to flex his guns at the world beneath us – even if there wasn’t much there to flex. ‘I’m glad we got the ball-sacks out and did this. Fuck ‘em! Fuck ‘em all!’, he yelled.

The rich smell of chemicals lingered in the air around us. It was a rancid stench, but strangely pleasant at the same time. As we stared at the landscape surrounding us, we agreed that it was fucking awful, a squalid sight, and yet there was something strangely beautiful about the whole place as well. A large tanker was passing beneath us as we gazed, preparing to dock somewhere further down the river, but none of the crew seemed to notice us standing overhead. The feeling of excitement among us was escalating. Being stood there felt tremendous.

Several minutes later, however, and Rizla had broken the moment. Succumbing to the pressing cognizance that security might clock us at any moment, he’d decided to ‘play it safe’ and leave. After hearing sirens in the distance, his mind was suddenly alive again with thoughts of capture, incarceration and consequence. Rizla thundered across the metal gantry and back down the staircase. The vibe quickly spread to The Hurricane, so he too decided to join the hasty retreat. We watched, myself and MKD, a little stunned that they’d ‘just fucked off like bag-heads’, but decided we should leave too since their footsteps were quite audible. It felt as though we were fleeing from the police as we bolted down the metal steps, only there were no police, nor any sirens anymore. But, we could fucking hear them! The van was probably down there too! They were coming and we were still on the bridge – or most of us were at least. Looking over the handrail, I could see Rizla had reached the ground, crawling madly through the dirt to escape via the fence. In reality, though, there was no one coming.
to get us – not this time. Our imaginations had betrayed us.

**Unpacking the Revolution**

As with the rest of ‘the Boyz’, there is nothing Rizla likes more than to reject any government system that signifies despotism and repression. In a similar vein to Garrett (2013a), then, who imagines himself as an ‘epic colonialist’, we enjoy the idea that we are rebels, somehow resisting and impelling others to do the same through the photographs and stories we manage to gather as our plunder. ‘The Boyz’ revel in this image, and even make use of a ‘Jolly Roger’ with our name, ‘WildBoyz’, featured prominently at the top as our emblem (see Figure 2.), to emulate pirates, bootleggers and smugglers and their illegitimate customs. It was originally Box’s idea, to let the world know of our iconoclastic ways and our manifest refusal to conform. We all loved the idea, so ‘flying the colours’ became habitual on many of our trips. In fact, we liked the idea so much the emblem soon appeared on our website, t-shirts and the various forums we had established a presence on. ‘The Boyz’ wanted people to know who we were and to be remembered for the places we have explored.

(Figure 2.)

It should be noted, therefore, that ‘the Boyz’ are as guilty as Garrett (2013a) and Mould (2015), and those others who follow their line of thinking, for falling victim to viewing the city as one that has become homogeneous, reproducible and guarded by surveillance strategies.
In view of this and using Rizla as an example, we can argue that he falls into the same trap since he, to borrow Bronislaw Baczko’s (1989) apt term, sees ‘literary cities’ that can only ever be constructs of the imagination or, at the very most, mere sketches on paper. As with the architects of the past, Rizla manages to imagine that same orthodox, formulaic, city which is logically impersonal, mathematical, functional, orderly and controlling. In other words, ‘high-tech’ cameras, security guards or freshly painted bridges do much to convince him that ordered space, space that has been purified of all its arbitrariness and uncertainty, all serves to limit our creativity and potential for diversity. Yet, unlike those modern architects, ‘the Boyz’, as khôrasters, have a desire to escape it, precisely because we think it threatens our freedom.

Much like Foucault, then, ‘the Boyz’, particularly Rizla, are convinced that the space we endeavour to live in everyday is panoptic, although they do not knowingly call it this. In other words, we perceive the space around us to be organised in such a way it makes capitalist processes as effective and efficient as possible (Foucault, 1977). As Rizla pointed out while we were standing on the bridge:

“They always seem like they’re watchin’ us, man, with cameras n’ shit. They’re the ones who make us walk on the paths you know, so we can’t choose where we want to walk ourselves, like. Like, we have to go where ‘they’ want us to go. Bastards, trying to stop our freedom! Yeah man, like, even though the bridge was a public footpath back in the day... Well, fuck ‘em!”

Left to ‘the Boyz’ imagination, the system hems people in, trying to force us to comply with its purported smooth surfaces and brilliantly ordered way-of-living. However, ‘the Boyz’ heterotopia can be relied on to offer a different kind of space where our concerns can be temporarily transcended (Foucault, 1984). In other words, urban explorers assume a performative vagabond-styled lifestyle, because, as Gramsci famously argued, the seeds of liberation reside in the instinct for rebellion (cited in Urbinati, 2002). There is also the additional point that it is ‘cool’ to be rebellious and deviant, placing ourselves at a distance from what seen as mainstream (Brake, 1980).

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Rizla was chosen as the central character for this section because he is often viewed by ‘the Boyz’ as being the most rebellious figure in the group. Rizla is always the first to denounce unfairness when he sees it, and to make some sort of stand. As an example, he refuses to take off his motorbike helmet at petrol stations because he feels unfairly discriminated against as ‘other fuckers can wear sunglasses, ‘head-scarves’ and wigs while filling up’. 

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(Ritzer, 1993).
As Pountain and Robins (2000) point out, the ‘coolest’ have always tended to distinguish themselves as such by claiming to be pioneers of new political trends. On the other hand, it could be argued that by striving to be vagabonds ‘the Boyz’ in fact try to be viewed as being ‘uncool’, because while everyone has access to it the idea of ‘cool’ cannot help but be dead (Heath and Potter, 2006). Therefore, by reinforcing the point that we are opposed to the state and society, and all their controlling systems, urban explorers try to stand out as being radically different (Kindynis, 2016). In other words, being ‘uncool’ is the new ‘cool’. Whether or not we are, of course, is another matter, since we are certainly not the only ones who centre our performativity around rebelliousness and radicalism.

Nonetheless, and notwithstanding the discussion about being a rebellious vagabond, in a sense, Rizla is correct, some cameras and PIR’s do exist, and they tend to make ‘the Boyz’ feel edgy and aware that there are rules to follow, whether we like it or not. Yet, as the reader observed in the above episode that took place on the Tees Transporter Bridge, what has more of an effect is that ‘the Boyz’ tend to invent and imagine the presence of surveillance objects, even when none are present. As it was argued in Chapter Two, devices and gadgets such as CCTV cameras are largely ban-optical, meaning they tend to be designed to monitor and exclude certain individuals such as refugees, asylum-seekers and the homeless, rather than urban explorers (Bigo, 2008).

The form of power and control described above, then, coincides with Foucault’s (1991) suggestion that ways of controlling society have shifted in the public sphere, so rather than employing spectacular demonstrations of force and power, there has been a gradual shift toward the use of techniques which appear to make people more audible and visible. In many ways, Rizla and Garrett are correct, in that surveillance is frequently built into the structures and streets that surround us, but the important point is that ‘stones can make people docile and knowable’ regardless of performativity (Foucault, 1977: 172). What Foucault means by this is that ‘stones’ are physical and tangible, like the many controlling devices that exist, but the real target, as Rizla reveals inadvertently, is our ‘human spirit’ which they intend to crush (Selznick, 1992). In other words, by conceding to their systems of discipline, urban explorers have become ‘instruments of their own subjugation’ (ibid: 252).

As Foucault’s (1991) concept of governmentality portends, the state’s approach to gaining power and control prescribes ways of monitoring by means of self-discipline. What this
means, then, is that Rizla, and indeed the rest of us, have all fallen for the same trap. There were no cameras or PIR’s on the bridge or around its base, but there were because we were creating them. Therefore, we inaugurated exactly the sort of conduct the authorities want us to conduct. What this means is that governmentality is a managerial type of ordering, where individuals have been promoted to the role of supervisor, or at least a role that entails supervisory tasks without fair remuneration. As Bauman (in Bauman and Lyon, 2013) reminds us, every camera requires an observer and, with innumerable amounts of footage and information, monitoring has become an impossible task. In other words, the pressure to maintain the panopticon through modern technology has its limits, so the whereabouts of the managers, who cannot be everywhere at once, do not matter because individually we have become responsible for ourselves (ibid).

Therefore, regardless of how ‘cool’ ‘the Boyz’ feel, or how captivating the rebellious heterotopia seems, since we are supervisors of ourselves each of us is aware of the threat of falling into a real nightmarish life of a vagabond and the fact that we are in control of this (Bauman, 1998). What this suggests is that being a Rebel of Sicherheit also serves to remind us of the type of life we do not want in any permanent sense. In this vein, pulling together an iconoclastic ‘urbex CV’ is often less appealing than we would like to make out, given that it is likely to conflict with our real ones – Rizla point this out in the episode above. Since most of ‘the Boyz’ hold down jobs with shaky contracts, which can change with little or no prior notice, risk is always present. All of this, though, is what makes our heterotopic social space so appealing. When real life fails to deliver, it offers a performative refuge, but it never keeps us there. The heterotopia can be relied on to offer a different kind of space where concerns about certainty, security and safety can be transcended while desires are attained, but it can also be abandoned almost instantaneously when those concerns come flooding back (Foucault, 1984).

As several of the episodes in this thesis have revealed, the life strategy of being a Rebel of Sicherheit sees that self-interest always prevails before any performative rebellion or task. Our urbex-inspired rebellions are always short-lived because in an increasingly individualised society our fears are entirely our own to bear. It is risky to rely on anyone other than ourselves, so it is better to look after number one (Jacobsen and Marshman, 2008). Indeed, as Rizla demonstrated on the bridge, he was clearly embracing the Rebel of Sicherheit life strategy very closely as he had initially decided to ‘get the balls-sacks out’, but then knew
when enough was enough. As the strategy demands, he abruptly discarded all concern for his comrades and, indifferent as to whether he might alert security to our presence by stomping back down the metal staircase, chose to make a hasty exit.

The comments made about Rizla may appear callous, even bitter, but we can hardly blame him for his ignorance and disregard toward the rest of us. On different explores, and under similar circumstances, we are all guilty of having acted in this way too, especially when the police do happen to turn up. This signals that collectives have become increasingly powerless and ineffectual in the interregnum, because fear has an inescapable hold over us (Bauman, 2005a). As Mansson (2008) argues, the only way we can successfully manage our lives is to hold our own resources close to our chests, to ensure our own safety, and, where necessary, this might involve leaving some casualties behind. Adopting the strategy of becoming a Rebel of Sicherheit, then, is the perfect solution to our problem because when things go wrong in our heterotopias, the everyday world suddenly feels more certain, secure and safe than anywhere else. Whether or not it is of course is another thing, but what is certain is that at the time we, ‘the Boyz’, are convinced it is (Zimbardo, 2007). Nonetheless, perhaps this gives our heterotopic social spaces even greater strength. Knowing we cannot stay in the heterotopia forever, and not entirely wanting to either, means its appeal and attractiveness does not perish quite so easily, so it remains powerful enough to entice us back with the promise that we will still be able to embrace the dream of Freiheit (political freedom and liberty), albeit performatively.

In light of the above discussion, then, somewhat paradoxically, the locks, security and cameras ‘the Boyz’ try to avoid sometimes seem strangely reassuring (Beck, 1992). As Rizla demonstrated, the security of the car was one of his foremost feelings of disquiet, but the idea that a security guard was nearby, almost illogically, in view of the fact we were trying to avoid being detected, seemed to offer him comfort. In this vein, as Bauman (in Bauman and Lyon, 2013) shrewdly points out, surveillance companies and locksmiths are perhaps some of the few industries which need not concern themselves over change and uncertainty, because in a world that is becoming increasingly and perpetually individual, unreliable and ambiguous, both can provide us with that craved for sense of order amid the chaos.

As the reader has seen, then, Foucault’s (1991) concept of governmentality clearly plays an influential role in society, although it is less overt than we realise for the vast majority of us.
However, while urban explorers may appear to be docile beings, because we sometimes fall into the traps laid by governmentality, it should be emphasised that we are far from docile. As it has been revealed, ‘the Boyz’ often deviate from ‘the rules’ anyway, regardless of our caution, and we seem to recognise the imaginative effects surveillance has upon our lives. But, we also realise what the real implications could be if we are caught, and this causes us to show some hesitancy, a little restraint and some self-discipline. Adopting the strategy of being a Rebel of Sicherheit, therefore, gives urban explorers the best of both worlds. In view of this, what has been revealed is the success of khôrasters-skholērs as we are not prepared to suppress our desires. In this vein, each of ‘the Boyz’ is a cultural intermediary mediating between two worlds, by creatively transforming our lives into works of art through the performativity and theatricality of a heterotopia, and by being astute enough to realise when to reconcile our connection to the real everyday world.

Media Whores and the Synoptic Gaze

So far, this chapter has revealed four out of five central life strategies urban explorers adopt to establish our own way of becoming and finding meaning in the interregnum. However, there is one that is conspicuously missing and it relates to the growing influence of the celebrity and the supposed significance of reaching celebrity status. As the reader has witnessed, and contrary to what Garrett (2013a) and Mould (2015) suggest, urban explorers are in fact largely apolitical, meaning our rebellious behaviour is purely all part and parcel of the performativity of our heterotopic social spaces. In other words, although we like to imagine we represent some form of opposition to capitalism and our consumer-driven society, we do more to embrace it. In view of this, the following section explores the idea that urban explorers adopt the life strategy of being media whores – a term I did not invent; rather, it is one that happens to be widely used across the ‘urbex scene’. To do this, Thomas Mathiesen’s (1997) concept of the synopticicon, combined with some of Zygmunt Bauman’s perceptive insights, has been used.

As Bauman (2000) has pointed out, modernity has transformed into something that is built around celebrities, and no matter where we turn they are there. Most crucial of all, however, is that urban explorers have discovered they can become a ‘deviant’ sort of celebrity as the voracious masses will consume what we do with an insatiable appetite. In view of this, it can be argued that this is has become an important life strategy for ‘the Boyz’, but it needs
unpacking further to understand it in more depth than existing research manages to do.

‘Orchestrated Lunacy’ and Becoming a Celebrity

We were stood in the centre of Christchurch, myself, Mayhem who was supposed to be visiting family in Australia, and Nillskill, a Kiwi explorer I’d met up with several times since being in New Zealand, in front of the Anglican Cathedral, reflecting on the destruction everywhere around us. There was so much abandonment in one single area it was difficult to take it all in. As anyone who keeps up to date with the news will know, back in 2011 Canterbury was devastated by several earthquakes, aftershocks and then subsequent liquefaction, and ever since restoring the city has been a slow and arduous undertaking. Christchurch Cathedral was one of the casualties of the disaster and we desperately wanted have a look inside. This was an opportunity we couldn’t pass up; after all, it’s not often cathedrals find themselves being abandoned.

Quickly checking that the coast was clear, Nillskill hopped the wrought iron fence and ran into the overgrown foliage surrounding the stricken building. I went next, followed by Mayhem. We crept through the overgrown bushes, keeping as quiet as possible to avoid being heard by someone on the street, as myself and Nillskill searched for a way inside. Mayhem, meanwhile, was trying to establish a connection over FaceTime with MKD, Box and Husky back in the UK. He wanted them to join us, but since they were on the other side of the world ‘virtual exploring’ would have to do.

Inside the cathedral the scene was awe-inspiring, but overwhelmingly sad. Nillskill suggested it reminded him of a warzone. I could see why. Debris was scattered everywhere, and important objects such as the ornamental stone tombs and pulpit were cracked and smashed. There were many intact objects in the cathedral though, such as a large piano positioned near the altar and the organ. But, like everything else they were crusted in years of pigeon shit. Wherever God was, then, he certainly wasn’t here. The only active presence was that of rot and decay. Moreover, considering we were in the heart of a city, the silence was like nothing we’d ever experienced before. This was a numbing silence, broken only by the beating wings of fetid, disease-ridden pigeons and the excited conversation spilling from Mayhem’s phone as he guided ‘the Boyz’ around the nave.

Nillskill’s footsteps echoed loudly throughout the great structure as he walked towards
the back rooms. Meanwhile, however, Mayhem had decided to push one of the keys of the black forlorn piano and, although slightly out of tune, it released a deep, powerful sound. The feeling was solemn as the note hung for a moment in the stale air. ‘Nillskill shit himself’ and quickly turned to see ‘what the fuck [was] going on’. He warned us, sternly, not to do it again. ‘The Boyz’ on the phone laughed and egged us on to press another one, but we ignored them and chose instead to take them into one of the side rooms that was filled with crumbling biblical texts, dusty scrolls and an abundance of other interesting stuff. The room was practically untouched. Everyone went silent once more, unsure what to say because what we could all see was spectacular.

A few days later, with Mayhem back in Australia on his family holiday, and me back on campus, I received an unexpected call from Nillskill. The previous night, both WildBoyz and Urbex Central NZ (Nillskill’s ‘urbex’ group/crew) had decided to release some photographs of the cathedral on the internet and, much to our surprise, first thing the next morning the media were keen to speak to us. Apparently, several reporters and journalists ‘were all over the story, like flies on shit’. Looking at Nillskill over Skype, though, I could see he was jittery and unsure. From our meet-ups together, I’d come to realise that he was generally a sceptical person, and therefore tended to be very apprehensive and anxious when anything involved security or police. He was seeking my advice on what we were going to do and whether we’d get into any bother. From what he was saying, the church has already been interviewed and they were furious with us.

I didn’t know what to do, so I contacted Mayhem to see what he thought. WildBoyz had never attracted such attention before so I was feeling uneasy too. However, after speaking with Mayhem and Nillskill, we decided that we should make our side of the story known, to make the point that we’d only ventured inside to take photographs. We figured we’d throw in the ‘preserving history excuse’ too, because we were inadvertently doing that anyway and it might encourage the wider public to support us. Therefore, we decided to go ahead with the first interview, with TVNZ, over Skype. They had a camera team in the city I was in apparently, but I didn’t want to surrender my identity and location so easily, given that ‘shit seemed like it was going to kick off’.

Although the Skype interview was supposed to have been a three-way conversation,
Nillskill failed to join and I ended up doing it alone. I immediately called him afterwards to find out why the fuck he’d vanished and he gave some excuse about having had second thoughts. But, now, just as a second interview was about to begin, with a ‘current affairs programme’ dubbed Seven Sharp, he’d changed his mind and wanted to get involved. It would be ‘good publicity for Urbex Central NZ’, he said.

The second round of interviewing was much easier. This time I was really starting to get into the role of being ‘celebrity-like’, and I felt much more like my ‘urbex-self’. Somewhat unexpectedly, Nillskill fell into his performative ‘urbex character’ too, and he performed admirably; even if he did choose wear a horse’s head for the entire interview. This was very customary for him mind, since he often slipped into weird outfits while exploring. In the background, behind the interviewer, I could see a news studio filled with curious bodies, all listening intently to what we had to say. Part of me felt satisfyingly rebel-like, speaking on behalf of WildBoyz. It felt cool – and we were cool according to the interviewer, because we’d shown the public the inside of one of their beloved historic buildings. However, the other part of me felt shocked at the church’s reaction. We hadn’t anticipated that they’d denounce our actions as ‘immoral’, in those exact words, or label us ‘idiots’ for our ‘orchestrated lunacy’. Instead, they supported a full police investigation and wanted us found. Suddenly, the strategy of being a Rebel of Sicherheit was making a lot of sense to me. But my anxiety, uncertainty and insecurity wasn’t quite enough for me to end the interviews just yet. WildBoyz were famous!

**Seeking Fame and Stardom**

According to Mathiesen (1997), an important point neglected by Foucault is that at exactly the same time the modern prison was being created, the mass production newspaper press was also being developed. Essentially, this was the beginning of another ‘D.I.Y. panopticon’ (Bauman, in Bauman and Lyon, 2013: 69). Mathiesen goes on to explain that the emergence of film came next, followed by radio, television and, finally, the internet. While Mathiesen gave very little attention to the most recent development (the internet), as Aaron Doyle (2011) rightly points out, measured up against what we have today, the internet was still at a stage of relative infancy in the 1990s. Today, though, forms of media and communication have progressed even further. Indeed, what first began with millions of people viewing the few who were irradiated in the limelight, has, according to the International Telecommunication Union (2015), proliferated to over 3.2 billion potential viewers largely as
a result of the internet. What is most crucial about this development, however, is that rather than there simply being a demand to view, the growing use of media and communication can also be attributed to people’s increasing desire to be viewed.

In view of the above, it can be argued that urban explorers submit themselves to a makeshift D.I.Y synopticon, where the condition of being seen and realised has turned into something of a temptation (Bauman, 1998). As the final section of this chapter will argue, the dawn of the celebrity is upon us, and this involves engaging in an intense struggle to be seen. In other words, this is an age where urban explorer’s opportunities to parade their performative ‘deviant’ selves have superseded desire for such things as anonymity, reserve and escaping the system. Quite simply, this is all part of the magic of the fantasy of the heterotopia: it is the life strategy of being a media whore.

The above episode goes some way toward revealing Nillskill’s propensity to follow the aforementioned life strategy. To borrow some of Pyotr Chaadaev’s (1969) thoughts from his first philosophical letter, while Nillskill was initially worried about the repercussions of exploring the cathedral, in the end he chose not to look beyond the events of yesterday. This, though, is part and parcel of living in the interregnum – it is a world firmly rooted in the here and now (Blackshaw, 2017). Hence, Nillskill decided to disregard his uncertainty and reservations, as did I, to have a go at being a ‘celebrity’. We wanted to feel what it was like to suddenly be known, and recognised for being ‘epic’ explorers. In view of this, then, we might argue in line with Chaadaev, that our commitment to urban exploration and our heterotopic social spaces can result in us becoming ‘strangers to ourselves’ (1969: 136).

As Nillskill makes evident, part of being an urban explorer entails competing to get noticed, whether we fully want to or not (Watts, 2009 [1966]) – it is, we might argue, part of the performativity of ‘urbex’. In view of this, since their ‘fame and glory’, where they had apparently managed to attract over 209,000 viewers on their website thanks to the cathedral post, Urbex Central NZ went on to become more widely known across New Zealand. Whereas Nillskill and the others in the Urbex Central crew were against locations being placed in the media initially, like most urban explorers claim to be, they had sampled what being in the limelight tasted like and they liked it very much. In the weeks that followed the interviews, ‘mysteriously’, according to Nillskill, photographs of other abandoned places we had explored in Christchurch suddenly began appearing in various newspapers. And slowly,
as Nillskill and his rising co-stars felt the incredible force of a celebrity-like status, they began to mention WildBoyz less and less, to the extent that ‘the Boyz’ in the UK felt betrayed by their former allies. But, as Val Burns (2016), a journalist for The Herald, has pointed out rather perspicaciously, ‘there is only room for one ego in this selfie world, and it’s me, me and more me’.

To reiterate, to be anyone in the interregnum is to become noticed, but once we have been it is crucial we continue to work on our adaptability (Bauman, 2005b). In other words, being a schizophrenic – being open to our heterotopic social spaces transforming, or even shifting from one heterotopia to another – is imperative if we are to exist in a world of celebrity culture. In this vein, urban explorers quickly discover, as Blackshaw and Crabbe have suggested, that ‘to be deviant is to be unforgettable’ (2004: 75). Regardless of whether they were in the past, Urbex Central realised they could get more of their material and website’s content into public view by deviating from the roughly drawn universal ‘urbex code’ to an alternative ‘give-no-shits version’, as Mayhem called it. Indeed, the transforming performativity of Urbex Central spread like wildfire among their group. For instance, one of their crew who goes by the name Gunner, left New Zealand to visit abandoned places in Bulgaria for a few weeks and, as he confessed in a private forum, he was quick to ‘sell out’ when the Daily Mail contacted him about publishing some of his photographs. In the end, by the start of 2016 Gunner and Nillskill had embedded many of their ‘publications’ onto their website, providing the public with direct access to their stardom.

Nevertheless, Urbex Central are not unaccompanied in adopting the media whore life strategy, and it would be unfair to suggest that they alone embrace it. Although ‘the Boyz’ vehemently reject the idea they are ‘media whores’, as do most explorers, they too enjoy recognition and fame when it comes their way. In one example, Mayhem was contacted by the UK’s version of the Daily Mail, who wanted to publish an article based on our report of Megatron – Sheffield’s largest Victorian storm drain. A day later and WildBoyz were in the paper, and we all keenly read the article in the pub that evening. What is more, though, a further important observation to emerge from the same evening was ‘the Boyz’ decision to repudiate Urbex Central’s request to host some of our content on their website. As Rizla eloquently put it, they ‘would only claim the fame for it and shit on us afterwards’. In other words, now they had a taste for it, ‘the Boyz’ wanted their own fame and glory, so ‘the Urbex
Central fannies could go fuck themselves and be whores someplace else’.

**The Performativity of Deviance**

As Nillskill and ‘the Boyz’ have shown, Mathiesen’s synopticon has evolved quite considerably. Every one of us, according to Bauman (2000), has become proficient enough to snatch five minutes of fame, and once we have whet our palate with celestial flavours we are likely to want more of the same again. It is deviance, though, as hinted earlier, that provides urban explorers with an opening to have the many notice us. Indeed, there have been many examples throughout this thesis where urban explorers have attempted to authenticate a particular deviant style or trend, much like mods, rockers or skinheads. This, it can be argued, is an integral part of being noticed and becoming celebrity-like. In view of this, as the photographs below (see Figures 3, 4, 5 and 6) should signify, the whole synoptic affair is simply one dramatised performance (Blackshaw and Crabbe, 2004), mostly a repeatable act that results in us feeling ‘bad ass’, seditious and mutineer-like.
Essentially, what ‘the Boyz’, and ‘Others’ like the Fr3e Roamers and Urbex Central, have created are illusionary forms of deviant unity and coherence. However, lasting coherence and unity is a misconception because heterotopias are not based on the same principles as a traditional community. Instead, since we are khôrasters our lives have become creative works of art which we carefully piece together (Blackshaw, 2017). In line with Efrat Tseelon (1998), then, the photographs above provide some indication as to how we inject life into fantasy and day-dream. As above, ‘the Boyz’ and Nillskill’s identity is all about appearing criminal-like and slightly apocalyptic. What is key to this life strategy is that urban explorers can put on their deviant attire for the cameras and the masses who might be observing us, and it all feels so real we convince ourselves it is. Yet, there is nothing binding about it, it is always performative and therefore temporary (Butler, 1990). In other words, once onlookers lose interest we are keen to transform our deviant façade, in an effort to remain under the
What is clear, then, is that urban explorers can quickly shift feelings of insecurity and hesitation over being watched because the real underlying fear, somewhat ironically given that urban explorers often style themselves around being subversive, involves the thought of not being observed (Bauman, 2000). In other words, the synopticon, and indeed the media whore life strategy itself, is all about perceptiveness, and avoiding becoming undesirable (ibid). In view of this, not only does Nillskill want to sample the delights of being deviant, he also recognises that those watching us have eclectic desires that blur the distinction between what is decisively ‘good’ and ‘bad’. The synoptic gaze of the public seeks anything that is attention-grabbing: perfect bodies, disorder, sex, violence, murder, disaster, death, risk, porn, absurdity, alcohol, drugs and destruction. The world craves neoteric and interesting pursuits of a Dionysian world and difference, and so, as urban explorers have noticed, they must remain interesting and deviant enough for the public to want to watch them. Indeed, as Mayhem pointed out when I questioned the impact ‘the Boyz’ move into the Daily Mail might have in terms of other explorers’ perceptions of us: ‘it’s good to be bad, dude. Bad news is good news’.

In view of what has been argued hitherto, then, it would appear that certain practices, such as playing music to further dramatise performativity, and adopting ‘Americanised’ language (e.g. ‘dude’, ‘epic’, ‘bro’) all serve as additional approaches to remaining deviant and interesting. By incorporating such things into our heterotopic social space, ‘the Boyz’ ensure that when ‘Others’ are with us we stand out as being unique and ‘cool’. What is more, much like the ‘rockers’ considered by Peter Wicke (1990), ‘the Boyz’ find ways of transgressing music’s commercial and even original contexts, to attribute our own meanings and values to it. Given the mass proliferation of the consumption of various forms of media, though, it is no surprise that language and fashions can be extracted, adopted and customised to fulfil the imaginary demands of a heterotopia. Yet, what all of this suggests, as Karl Spracklen (2015) has pointed out, and in line with what has already been argued, is that individuals are desperate to prove their ‘coolness’. In this sense, it could be reasoned that ‘the Boyz’ follow an instrumental form of logic which makes us believe being ‘cool’ will gain us more credibility, ‘style’, ‘likes’ and ‘thumbs’ as word about us spreads across different forms of media. These further approaches, therefore, perhaps play an important role as far as the adoption of the media whore life strategy is concerned.
However, a further note should be added to point out that no matter how hard we try to give the impression we are ‘cool’ and different, ‘the Boyz’, ‘Urbex Central’ and ‘Fr3e Roamers stand for something that is no different to every other ‘subculture of petrolheads... lifestyle sports or extreme sports’ (Spracklen, 2013: 118). Urban exploration is, in other words, deeply tangled in the same commercialised world as everybody else. In sum, a synoptic society triumphs and we are oblivious – or, more accurately, we do not care.

**Summary**

Having attended to the central interpenetrating and intertwining life strategies that are adopted by urban explorers, it can be argued that there is an apposite link to Foucault’s (1967) notion of the ‘Ship of Fools’. To clarify, what is being suggested is that ‘the Boyz’ may well appear to be different, even mad, as they sail headlong into unusual spaces that perhaps once seemed familiar and part of everyday reality. However, what this chapter has aimed to show is that the reader should not necessarily view urban explorers as being mad; rather, it is an invitation to view them as voyageurs who were able and had the courage to sail into the unknown. In other words, although ‘the Boyz’ may give the impression that they are seemingly foolish, insane and, all in all, starkly different, really ‘the fool’ exemplifies an inimitable perspective which renders a certain kind of knowledge and wisdom as being unattainable to those who are outside the heterotopia (ibid). To put it simply, they are bearers of a different kind of truth, and this gives them a special position in the world.

As this chapter has attempted to reveal, on their voyage ‘the Boyz’ are freed from most everyday societal constraints, but in many ways they are also confined to the restricted conditions of the ship (ibid). What this means, then, is that ‘the Boyz’ may have found an alternative way of living in the interregnum, if only temporarily, but this entails adopting certain life strategies that are perhaps unavoidable so long as we want to be identifiable as urban explorers. Nevertheless, these strategies embody what urban exploration is all about for ‘the Boyz’. Therefore, they represent the ultimate heterotopia – in our eyes at least – and the idea that the roles of the mad and sane have been reversed, for it is the madmen who are now the guardians of truth and secrets (Turi, 2010).

To recapitulate, then, this chapter explored five different, but overlapping, life strategies to
highlight the ‘true fiction’ of ‘the Boyz’ heterotopic social space which involves them becoming: schizophrenics, nostalgics, parasites, rebels of Sicherheit and media whores. In a nutshell, it is important that all of these strategies are adopted if ‘the Boyz’ are to establish and maintain a performative sense of meaning in their lives. This is certainly an important task in a world that is becoming increasingly individualised, where human relationships are fragile, our lives remain uncertain and there is no rational life strategy to guide us. In effect, then, what the above life strategies do is make ‘the Boyz’ feel truly alive and real, and connected to others in a way that feels close-knit enough to be homely, but loose enough to remain in control of our freedom. It could be summarised, therefore, as Blackshaw (2017) has suggested, that it is only in our leisure where we can execute the ideal life strategies in order to feel both personal fulfilment, as khôrasters, and something that feels warm and homelike as skholērs. This is because it is only in our leisure where heterotopias can be relied on to provide conditions for freedom and our kind of imagined culture.
Chapter Seven

A ‘Virtual’ Extension of the Heterotopia

Introduction

Up to this point in the thesis, and indeed other associated literature, one essential element of the heterotopia has, for the most part, remained conspicuously absent. Certainly, the reader encountered the suggestion, from Chapter Four onwards, that traditional understandings of ‘community’ have transformed in the interregnum. And, in an effort to attend to this issue, and of course Garrett’s notion of urban explorers existing as part of a ‘tightly fractured community’ (2013b: 2), which is an oxymoron as such, the idea of alternative smaller heterotopic social formations was attended to. However, this revealed only part of our contemporaneous societal condition. The other part, which is perhaps less observable to anyone who is out of touch with the world of urban exploration, involves the dynamics of technology, the idea of virtuality, and the various forums, websites and blogs that have surfaced as a result.

After attending to the issue more closely, it is revealed that outside the context of urban exploration some scholars, such as Sherry Turkle (2011), have spent much time battling with the notion that many social networks – what I would still refer to as heterotopias – represent a sort of ‘second life’. These are said to exemplify lives that are technologically advanced and simulated, which are in themselves distinct but also run parallel to the real world. In a similar vein, Zygmunt Bauman turns our attention to the fact that our lives span two universes (Bauman, in Bauman and Lyon, 2013). Yet, unlike Turkle, Bauman is attentive to the point that these two lives often interpenetrate insofar as they cannot be grasped, nor fully understood, separately. It is this point that is crucial if we are to fully comprehend how heterotopic social spaces ensure a dichotomous sense of sustainability and detachment by both real and electronic means in a fast changing and fast-moving world.

In a nutshell, then, what this chapter indicates is that consumer capitalism has become so pervasive our heterotopias cannot help but be powerfully influenced by it. In this vein, this chapter explores the impact technology and virtuality have on the heterotopia, and by doing so it adds more to our knowledge of the freedom and constraints that are part and parcel of
‘the Boyz’ special kind of reality and leisure. In other words, what follows should be viewed as a further extension of the heterotopia.

To begin, the chapter considers the idea that the ‘virtual’ side of urban exploration could potentially be viewed as being a pathway to a utopian dream and the perfect alternative vision for humanity. However, this suggestion is quickly rejected in favour of the dynamics of the heterotopia which according to its imagined and short-lived nature cannot be utopian. What this means is that the preliminary section has important implications for the rest of the chapter because it invites us to begin unpicking the ‘virtual’ side of heterotopic social space which, as it is revealed, is a complex phenomenon to unravel. Taking this into account, and leading on from this initial discussion, the chapter goes on to explore the idea that urban explorers are perhaps still becoming increasingly ‘tethered’ to the ‘virtual’ extension of the heterotopia because, by all appearances, what it offers seems better (though still not utopian) than the more ‘real’ aspects of their compensatory world. First, the use of technology – in the form of mobile phones and the internet – is taken into account, before the chapter moves on to consider the more pervasive controlling effects of the digitalisation and virtualisation of photography. Essentially, these two sections examine the idea that the ‘virtual’ extension of the heterotopia could be having a detrimental impact on the ostensibly ‘real’ aspects of the heterotopia as the products of falsification and misrepresentation take over.

Thereafter, in a move to advance the discussion beyond the theme of tethering, the final section of the chapter addresses the point that urban explorers are in fact not becoming tethered to technology or the ‘virtual’. To illustrate this, what is argued is that both technology and the ‘virtual’ should be viewed as providing a vital extension to the heterotopia in the sense that they help ‘the Boyz’ live out their special kind of performative reality. What the ‘virtual’ extension of the heterotopia really does in other words is enhance our watchableness, which, in turn, satisfies our craving for recognition. In the end, what is suggested is that it is only performativity that matters when it comes to urban exploration in the interregnum, and knowing that being open to both ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ aspects of the heterotopia can only enrich our ephemeral performative identities and experiences.
Loose bits of gravel from the poorly tarmacked road crunched loudly beneath MKD’s car tyres as it slowly came to a halt outside Box’s house. Survivor’s legendary song, *Eye of the Tiger*, was playing at full volume. Fucking classic. Originally, our plan had been to sit and wait in the car, but since we were running late (as usual) we decided it would be better to fetch the others because they were ‘worse for fannying around than us’. Not bothering to knock, we strode through the front door and headed straight into the living room. From somewhere behind me MKD announced our presence, addressing ‘the Boyz’ who were scattered in various places around the room as one: ‘WILDBOYZ! ’

Half an hour later, however, and it was obvious our plan to hurry ‘the Boyz’ along had been ineffective. Box, who had been sat in front of one of several computer monitors that were positioned against the wall closest to the door, had summoned our attention almost immediately upon entering the room. Up on the screen that was directly facing Box was an internet page displaying the WildBoyzz Facebook page. It was up for an important reason; we had recently reached seven hundred ‘likes’. Mayhem, who was sat on one of the sofas trying to brush fleas off his cat, was ecstatic at this news:

*Mayhem*: Seven hundred likes, fucking badass, man.
*Me*: Yer, man.
*MKD*: [Laughs].
*Box*: Dude, I can’t believe how many people are likin’ our shit right now. We’re doin’ well, boyyyyyyyy!
*Mayhem*: It’s good, man, I feel like we’re popular, dude. Like, people want to know us. It feels like we’re bringing a community together, sort of. You get me, fam?
*Me*: Yer man, good craic.
*Mayhem*: Have you seen how many people are messaging us wanting to meet, Kev? And holy shit, we’re fucking liked to fuck on 28days, dude. Rank fucking six overall now. Good craic like, it’s like having tons of fans or friends following us around, wanting to get to know us n’ stuff.
*Rizla*: Ranked six, really?
*Mayhem*: Yer, boy.
*MKD*: Any of them fanny, like?
*Mayhem*: [Enthusiastically]. Yes dude! There are!
MKD: Yes, man. Fuckin’ get-in!
Rizla: It’s crazy, it’s like bein’ a WildBoy is better on the net than in real life. Like, in terms of recognition and that. Also, not havin’ to meet thousands of other fuckin’ people is awesome.
MKD: What about the ladies, man?
Rizla: Nah man, not that. I mean, we don’t av’ to do anythin’, there’s no propa’ commitment or ‘owt. We just post up what we’ve been doin’, or a quick snap of ourselves, n’ people seem to like us for it.
Husky: Yer dude, when you think about it, actually knowin’ thousands of people would be pretty shit. For a start, how would we even remember all their names?
MKD: Dude, females? [Laughter].
Rizla: Shut up, man! I mean we can be whoever we choose, right, and then there are way more people to see us. You don’t get that inside abandoned buildings, like, lots more traffic sort of thing.

Having finished rolling the last of several massive spliffs at the table behind us, Husky joined us at the computer screens. Rizla had joined us all too, to come and look, but a phone call from his girlfriend had momentarily averted his attention. This was the third phone call he’d had off her in twenty minutes; she was ‘bein’ a fanny’ about him heading off on a trip with ‘the Boyz’ because she didn’t like it when he was away for any more than a few hours.

Two more screens had now been switched on, and across the array of monitors we were eying up different pages of our website with a sense of pride and delight. As if we were at some sort of board meeting, Box and Husky proceeded to tell the rest of us about their plans for the introduction of a location map to the website. Most of us agreed with them, and thought it was a good idea, but MKD questioned why they would want to reveal all the locations publicly, since ‘any chavvy bastard could find these places then’. Narrowing their eyes at MKD, both Box and Husky looked confused. The integration of a map onto the site wasn’t meant to help anyone they explained, it served purely to show ‘everyone what we’ve done; all our achievements n’ that’. Everyone in the room seemed to agree. ‘What was the point in havin’ the site if people weren’t seein’ how much we’ve done’. Suddenly realising what they were on about, MKD nodded his head in agreement. ‘It was a propa’ good idea’. Interrupting us, a small notification box popped up on one of the monitors. It signalled that the photos Box had been editing had finished being exported to his hard-drive. Excitedly,
Box opened the folder and double clicked on the first image in the set. A photograph of the Angel of the North filled the screen. There was a tiny figure (The Hurricane) sat on one of the wings, holding his arms out wide. It looked ‘fucking badass!’

Back with us now, Rizla nodded approvingly and decided that the photo was ‘mint’. Compared to the old image of the Angel, which had looked ‘pretty ordinary’ and ‘a bit shit’, this one had a perfect red sky behind it, which grew darker around the edges of the photo. As for the Angel itself, Box had darkened the colour of it, so much so it looked like a smoky silhouette in the night. Against the background, the imposing structure looked absolutely incredible. This was going ‘straight on the Facebook page’. As he was uploading it, Box made sure to add a quick caption beneath it: ‘Fuck you Gateshead council’. He laughed, and made the point that this whole process was a bit like gaming, that ‘there’s a bit of something real, but way more fantasy and imagination in it’.

After staring at the screen for a further ten minutes, admiring our virtual presence, we took note of the time and decided ‘we should probably hit the road’. It still took some considerable effort for Mayhem and Box to pull themselves away from the web pages we’d been looking at though. Both were deeply engrossed and couldn’t resist having one last click on the 28dayslater page, just in case there were any last minute ‘likes’ or ‘followers’ to attend to. Nevertheless, they did manage it eventually.

At this point, though, Box suddenly remembered that he couldn’t actually come with us since he had to be in work later on for staff training. However, amid offering us a quick apology, he told us he would join us, along with The Hurricane, in a few days time in Wales for the Newport Bridge explore. The disappointment on the faces of the rest of ‘the Boyz’ was very noticeable. He was ‘being a fuckin’ boob’, according to MKD. Elsewhere in the room, someone joked that ‘it was a good job people on the internet could be arsed with us’ and that ‘they show an interest’. Mayhem laughed, and left the room to put his ‘shit in the car’. The rest of us followed, shouting our goodbyes to Box who had returned to the PC and was gazing at the comments on a WildBoyz YouTube video he’d recently posted.

**Virtuality: An Impossible Utopian Dream**

As Pierre Levy, suggests, the mass expansion of information and communications technology,
what he has aptly termed the ‘information highway’, has led us down an ever-expanding road in the direction of mass digitalisation which supports interconnectivity and ‘global cyberspace’ (1997: xix-xx). The exponential growth in the number of internet users provides sufficient proof of this societal trend, for while there were fewer than 20 million users in 1994, in 2017 there are now estimated to be approximately 3.6 billion connected individuals (Internet Live Stats, 2017). In view of this, we can be certain that due to growing digitalisation urban explorers are now able to take advantage of the abilities of computers, access a plethora of information and build ‘virtual’ worlds, relationships, collective projects and collaborative efforts.

From Levy’s standpoint, the advances in technology, specifically the internet, signify that we are moving from one version of humanity into a more hopeful alternative. Urban explorers, then, thanks to the shared knowledge of our forums and websites, seem to be at the forefront of this societal movement, and they represent the beginning of a judicious virtual mechanism capable of building a foundation for collective intelligence\textsuperscript{11}. The way ‘the Boyz’ communicate to hundreds of similar-minded explorers, and thousands of other individuals whose interest has been momentarily captured, represents the deterritorialisation space and the redistribution of wealth (Jenkins, 2006). Wealth in this context, however, corresponds to shared knowledge, rather than economic gain.

What is more, according to Levy (1997), is that the rise of technology and our efficiency, in terms of the ways we are able to communicate and share, brings urban explorers closer together as skills, abilities and living knowledge are evenly and more willingly distributed. The widespread sharing of photographs, feedback provided on ‘urbex reports’, arranged meet-ups and revealing of locations all point to the advent of this condition. We might suggest, therefore, that we are witnesses to the inauguration of the enrichment of individual urban explorers under one form of collective intelligence by means of ‘virtual’ space (ibid). There are, however, three crucial drivers involved in this new human condition. First, the presumption that speed is essential to everyday life and the acceleration and evolution of communication, space and our bodies (ibid). Second, the growing impossibility when it comes to limiting the control and movement of knowledge by certain ruling populations or experts; although it seems urban explorers are beginning to, it is the whole of humankind, by

\textsuperscript{11} Pierre Levy defines collective intelligence as ‘a form of universally distributed intelligence’ (9). It is improved perpetually and brings about the efficient organisation, and even distribution, of skills and abilities. A mutual appreciation of the enrichment of all people, rather than the few, is anticipated.
using the ‘virtual’ world, that must ‘adapt, learn, and invent if it is to improve its lot’ (ibid: 9). And lastly, we require the tools to sieve out relevant and significant knowledge. This involves creating a ‘knowledge space’, reminiscent of the online urbex forums that already exist, to make knowledge more navigable so as to view others in terms of their ‘mutual interests, abilities, projects, means, and identities within this new space’ (ibid: 9; Jenkins, 2006).

There is, however, a decisive problem with the work of Levy, and Jenkins too. Both writers, we might argue, can be labelled as exponents for a traditional utopian world (Ross and Nightingale, 2003). As it has been argued elsewhere in this thesis, in reality – and this includes virtuality since they overlap – there is no such thing as a utopia. In this vein, if we examine Levy’s ideas, although he supports the demise of theological speculation, he views a mass ‘virtual’ world as a new, more humanist, version that transcends the former axiom. Hence, Levy’s world of cyberspace reflects far too much brightness and quixoticity. This is a new kind of angelic world that draws on the finest qualities of human imagination and our proficiency to cooperate as a global collective. It is important to emphasise at this juncture, though, as Jenkins points out, that this is not something analogous to any sort of dystopian ‘hive mind’ (2006: 140) as portrayed in George Orwell’s novel 1984 where individuality is repressed, it is based on an idyllic egalitarian type of society. Put simply, then, the world Levy paints can be said to encompass far too many angels and too few demons, especially if we consider Rojek’s (2000) suggestion that leisure is often more deviant and abnormal than some would like to admit.

In line with Rojek, and taking into account the episode provided above, the ‘virtual’ aspects of urban exploration, like the real, do not fit into such an idyllic world. For a start, adhering to such a utopian vision conflicts with the imagined Dionysiac heterotopia (space that breaks down the great panoptic walls to reveal the irresistible fruits of madness and, of course, the ontological possibilities contained in those darker imaginings). ‘The Boyz’, therefore, do not seek a universal utopian ideal, which could not ever be real anyway even if they wanted it to be. Rather, we survive through and through by creating ephemeral spaces of compensation that entail both the good and the bad, and, indeed, both risk and reward. In other words, what we seek is what we might call a celebrated enactment of something that feels almost utopian at the time, but really it is not (Nikolchina, 2013). This comprises some sort of intermittent venture into that ‘shadowy realm called khôra’ – that strange in-between, ‘non-locatable’, ‘non-space’ that provides a sense of homeliness and freedom that is ‘hardly real’
and ‘always on the move’ (Derrida, 1995; Blackshaw, 2017: 139-140). What ‘the Boyz’ seek, then, is a temporary performative union that is destined never to be perfect but at the time convinces us otherwise, an imagined space where we can embrace our roguish persona and feel close to satisfied that we are ‘badass’.

Therefore, as far as ‘the Boyz’ view things, engaging in the ‘virtual’ world by means of various forums and websites according to Levy’s framework would conflict with what being a khôraster-skholēr extraordinaire is all about. Instead, much like every other consumer in the interregnum, ‘the Boyz’ are guided by temporariness and heterogeneous self-interest and desire (Bauman, 2007a). In view of this, Box and Husky do not consider their proposal that the WildBoyz website should have a ‘locations map’ to be an act of benevolence for the common benefit of fellow urban explorers. As they admitted towards the end of the discussion, their suggestion was made to put WildBoyz achievements on show, to make us more publicly viewable and make an exhibition out of how ‘fuckin’ epic’ our deviance really is. In other words, this reinforces the point that in the interregnum making use of the internet and technology is not a pathway towards collective intelligence.

In view of the paragraph above, Ross and Nightingale (2003) make it very clear that cyberspace is a site of contestation, where culture and markets frequently clash and struggle against one another. Hence, while collective intelligence necessitates the end to rivalries and struggles for dominance, and the safeguarding of mutual co-existence (Levy, 1997), really ‘the Boyz’ require the ‘Other’ and a perceived sense of superiority because, as Chapter Five revealed, without these things the heterotopia would become less meaningful.

In effect, then, ‘the Boyz’ use the ‘virtual’ extension of the heterotopia to compete against rival groups and individuals who also seek likes, thumbs and followers. Moreover, in forms of deviant leisure, such as urban exploration, groups tend to establish their own imagined and fragmented kind of ethics which cannot be regarded as acceptable by ‘orthodox’ standards, and these extend into the ‘virtual’ aspects of the heterotopia. By contrast, if ‘the Boyz’ followed a universal set of ethics it would most certainly have a significant impact on their idea of individuality and performativity – those very things that make our heterotopia truly heterotopic. What this indicates in other words, as Bauman (1988) argues, is that in our present stage of modernity our newly found sense of freedom means individuals now face the pressure of symbolic rivalry as they search, unremittingly, for new ways of asserting their
idiosyncrasy in order to gain the recognition they crave. This represents a crucial shift from rivalry being based purely on power and wealth to a new kind of rivalry that is centred around the temporary display of symbols (ibid).

Considering what has been discussed so far, then, it should be more clear why the ‘virtual’ realm WildBoyz inhabit should not be viewed as a utopia but instead as an extension of the heterotopia which is something entirely different. What this means is that the ‘virtual’ extension of heterotopia supports urban explorers in the pursuit of a focus of interest, and it increases the excitement, pleasure and sense of homeliness we can extricate from our performative statuses (Bauman, in Bauman and Lyon, 2013). Beyond these things, however, it does nothing more. After all, in urban exploration, and especially its ‘virtual’ side, superficiality and shallowness are precisely what we look for; they offer us an illusion of being in a relationship and, simultaneously, protect us from the constrictions of one. Therefore, as Turkle (2011) points out, by creating an online avatar individuals can assume any identity they want, but, most importantly, we are not imprisoned by them because they are not fixed and permanent. Indeed, as Bauman (2003b) reminds us, thanks to the increasing presence and influence of the ‘virtual’ identities can be deleted at the press of a single key, or changed by another, to suit our illimitable fantasies.

This theme pertaining to fluidity and the pliable use of identity in the ‘virtual’ world, or avatars as we might otherwise call them, is one this chapter seeks to explore in greater depth. There are, however, different sides to this critical discussion and each must be visited and explored in turn. As follows then, the first central argument in the ensuing section indicates that urban explorers are, increasingly, becoming ‘tethered’ – to borrow Turkle’s (2011) apt term – by virtuality and certain forms of technology that provide access to the internet. Subsequently, it could be argued that urban explorers are losing sight of the ‘real’, in exchange for something that feels better, and perhaps more heterotopic, as individuals become transfixed with and part of the ‘virtual’ world. In view of this, as a re-emerging link to surveillance strategies suddenly seems evident, it might appear as though we are encroaching once again upon a world that resembles an Orwellian type of dystopia: a worldwide nightmare that threatens to limit individual freedom by harnessing the mind-sets of the masses using technology. The focus of the next section, therefore, takes us in this direction.
Phones, Photos and ‘The Bitch’

After a long drive, we arrived outside the Harpur Hill Research Facility. It had been more difficult to find than we’d expected, and in the end it was thanks to Mayhem’s phone that we’d found it. Without it, after discovering our paper map had a gaping hole in it, right on the area we needed to be, ‘we’d have been pretty fucked’. Nevertheless, now we were hiding the phones and doing our best to look like seasoned ‘hikers’ (despite our obvious inability to fold up an ordinance survey map) since there were a couple of other ramblers around and they were glancing at us suspiciously. To get out of sight quickly, we climbed over a nearby sty to join a public footpath. It continued across a field which seemed to lead into the valley below us, where the facility was situated.

Once out of sight of the ramblers, we diverted from the main trail by climbing over a barbed wire fence. We walked through the next field as a group, reminiscing about some of our old adventures; all except Rizla who was a couple of paces behind. He was on his phone again. We could tell the discussion he was having was becoming heated too, so we ignored him and pretended he wasn’t there. What is more, however, although he was walking with the rest of us, Mayhem’s attention was also centred on his phone, causing him to stumble occasionally as he walked. Approaching his personal record, he was busy playing an intense game of Tetris.

A large metal tube with a small railway line running through soon became visible, so we proceeded towards it. Several minutes later and we were stood before a wire mesh perimeter fence. On the other side, a London Underground train was sitting at the end of the tracks. Except for some graffiti here and there it had been completely stripped of paint, leaving its grey body bare and very reflective under the afternoon sun. Husky climbed over first, followed by MKD, and then the rest of us; all except Rizla who was still engaged in the phone call with his girlfriend. So, halfway over the fence, MKD laughed and called him a ‘fuckin’ fanny’.

Inside the train it looked as though a bomb had gone off. Several of the seats had been torn apart, most of the windows were broken and there was wooden debris in the walkway. As we discovered later, a bomb had in fact been detonated inside the train. Following the 2005 London bombings, the facility now used the old carriages to test explosives and improve safety on the Underground, so our initial depiction had in
fact been accurate. Glass crunched beneath our shoes as we proceeded through the carriage, and the occasional piece of wood groaned loudly. The carriage looked as though it had been sat here for a while, untouched, as moss and mould had begun to grow on the seats. Their dark brown and orange covers were damp and tinged green. To our left hung a ‘Central London Journey Planner’ sticker, but it was beginning to peel from the side of the train and its edges were blackened with decay. The familiar smell of rot filled our nostrils; it was strangely satisfying!

As the site wasn’t particularly big it didn’t take very long to explore, so MKD suggested we stage some ‘cool shots’. But, somewhere further down the train, Rizla was still arguing, and Mayhem was busy snapchatting Box to update him on the ‘craic’. Waiting for the others, MKD decided to join in and checked his messages. He’d been texting ‘some fit lass with huge tits’, so was keen to resume his conversation with her. Husky sat on one of the mouldy seats, fiddling with his own phone for a moment before he launched a series of protests. They were ‘bein’ dicks’. As he’d run out of data and couldn’t afford to purchase any more, he was feeling dissatisfied with the lack of company, so continued to moan: ‘Come on guys, we’re supposed to be exploring, not fannying around on our phones. Can’t your conversations wait? You’s always do this.’ No one replied. Instead, they continued to ignore him for another few minutes.

Husky looked relieved when Mayhem and MKD finally put their phones away and began planning how they would stage themselves for some shots. MKD wanted us to make an apocalyptic scene, where we looked as though we were riding the train normally. Everyone set about arranging themselves: Mayhem stood by the door, Husky found himself a seat and MKD grabbed one of the straphangers like a standing traveller. Rizla continued his phone call. We spent the next half an hour taking stylised shots: Mayhem climbing out of a window to look like a masked bandit climbing onto the roof; MKD behind the driver’s control panel; and Husky ‘cracking out’ some pull ups on the straphangers. We did ‘a spot of chimping’ afterwards (looking back through the images on the cameras) and all agreed, they looked ‘epic’. Of course, they would have to be tweaked to properly finish them off and bring out the apocalyptic atmosphere we were after, but for now we were satisfied with them and excited about properly viewing and uploading them at the end of our trip.

Half an hour later we were starting to pack up the gear when Rizla re-emerged.
Judging by the expression on his face he wasn't happy. In truth, we'd almost forgotten that he was there, so we were slightly startled when he appeared. He slumped into one of the mouldy seats next to us and began to explain that he had to go back home. We gave him some harsh verbal abuse and disputed his decision, telling him what we really thought of his girlfriend; all except Mayhem who was sharing a photo he'd taken using his phone on the Facebook page. This wasn't the first exploring trip Rizla had bailed on us. It wasn't as simple as that, though, and he had to go back, apparently, because she was having a 'break-down'. He didn't have a choice in the matter. Although we objected to him heading home for a while longer, we understood that he was having problems with the 'psycho-bitch lass' he was with. She was a 'propa' fuckin' nut-job'. Whenever his phone was on, she would call him. Whenever it was off, there would be a message or a missed call waiting for him. There was no escape, in the end she would always be able to get in touch. Other than going to work, he wasn't allowed out of her sight. Poor bastard.

With that, we left the train and started walking towards the perimeter fence. Mayhem was the last to follow, and after misjudging the distance between the ground and the train door 'he pretty much nosedived out of it'. Somehow, though, his gaze never fully shifted from his phone the entire time. He was waiting for someone to comment on his photograph. Everyone laughed at what had just happened, but Mayhem didn't seem to notice that either, his focus was on the new 'like' he'd just received.

Back at the cars most of us watched as MKD and Rizla hauled everything out of Rizla's car and into MKD's. He apologised profusely, but several irritating ‘dings’ coming from his phone interrupted once again. ‘The bitch was relentless’. Out of earshot, both MKD and Husky suggested we ‘abduct’ Rizla, ‘for his own good’, and force him to come with us. Despite their best efforts, however, Rizla insisted he had to leave; his mind was elsewhere and he needed to ‘sort out shit at home’. The rest of us climbed into MKD's car and waved at Rizla, except for Husky who raised his middle finger, as he drove past. Various comments circulated around the car: ‘fucking psycho bitch, I feel sorry for him’; ‘if he just turned off his fuckin’ phone’; ‘she's always doin' this, getting in touch n' that when he's away, neva' leaves him alone’. Mayhem, however, quickly became fed up with the ‘shitty mood’ and requested music. Several moments later, with the sound of W.A.S.P, I Wanna Be Somebody blasting out of the speakers, the atmosphere gradually grew calmer.
‘Right boys, where to next?’ someone yelled. ‘Fucking Wales, boys! Let’s fuckin’ go’. After flicking the key in the ignition, the car roared to life. MKD cheered and asked which way he was supposed to drive. Sarcastically, someone suggested we should get the map out of the boot. Everyone laughed. Our excitement was rising and the atmosphere was starting to return to normal once again. Mayhem got his phone out and quickly found the directions to Newport in Wales. It took a few moments to load the map, then we were off. The car sped down the road and Mayhem yelled, ‘GO, GO! Let’s doooo this! Fuck that bastard map, this is the fucking techno age!’

**Tethered to Technology: The Void of the Hyperreal**

At this stage in the thesis it would be naive to believe, unsuspectingly, that urban exploration exists purely because of the growing and changeable urban infrastructure that is part of our ever-expanding world. For most urban explorers, it is not enough to fill their leisure time with actual exploratory activities in a reality that is wholly offline; rather, it necessitates the inclusion of the seemingly paradoxical online technological reality. Alongside actual hidden and crumbling structures, urban exploration involves being connected. This should not come to us as a surprise, though, since virtually every other aspect of our lives is caught in the interpenetrating dynamics of these two universes.

Taking the above comments into account, it is manifest that several scholars have begun to acknowledge the impact ‘virtual’ realities are having upon contemporary leisure choices, particularly as they are becoming more integrated to offer a means by which new identities and ‘friendships’ can be formed (Crawford, 2013). What is significant, as noted earlier, is that such ‘virtual’ arenas fulfil our desire for something like a ‘community’, without the need for shared history, marked physical propinquity or similar demographic behaviour. For Manuel Castells, this is part of a globally occurring shift where we see individuals moving away from family and close relationships to tertiary relationships, which have steered us towards a condition preoccupied with ‘the privatization of sociability’ (2001: 128). As Granovetter (1973) points out, weak ties are valuable given that they raise peoples’ freedom of movement, assuming we do not encounter a lack of observers, opportunities or information which, conversely, more tightly-knit ties could beget. A clear link to the concept of heterotopia, and of course the khôraster, is therefore discernible, and it would appear that the ‘virtual’ is an important avenue to explore.
As Turkle (1995) has pointed out in some of her earlier and more optimistic work, ‘virtual’ worlds allow individuals to experiment, customise and try out new identities in a way that is perhaps not possible in the ‘real’ world. In other words, in this extension of their heterotopia ‘the Boyz’ can experiment with very different identities that would be more difficult, or even impossible, to construct without ‘virtual’ or technological aid, and they are also able to invest more time assembling who they want to be inside a ‘virtual’ domain (ibid). Needless to say, the cut-and-paste tool – a device which is never as effective in the ‘real’ world – is very handy here (Giannachi, 2004). This resonates well, then, with the idea that ‘the Boyz’ should be characterised by their reflexivity (Lash, 1994). In view of this, it is manifest that ‘the Boyz’ have devoted a large amount of time to creating and adapting their collective identity on the internet, to elevate their noticeability and prominence. A quick glance over the website’s homepage, which currently features a Jolly Roger displayed prominently at the head of the page, signifying that ‘the Boyz’ have tried to create some sort of contemporaneous adaptation of the pirate, is evidence of this (see www.wildboyz-ue.com).

Hence, while it was perhaps not so obvious to an outsider in the beginning, now, owing to the technology and the internet, ‘the Boyz’ have managed to augment their image that they are nonconformist individuals who trespass without seeking prior permission. More to the point, though, they have been able to test, reflexively, different behaviours and styles of deviance over the years, as the ‘virtual’ extension of the heterotopia has allowed them to play with bringing new practices and orthodoxies into their performative reality.

There is an obvious dilemma, though, when it comes to the ‘virtual’ aspects of heterotopia and our reflexivity, and Jean-Claude Kaufmann (2012) sums this up well by pointing out that in spite of our growing freedom a certain degree of stability, constancy and reassurance is still desirable. As it has been argued hitherto, and as the episode above hinted, urban explorers appear insecure in their relationships, and troubled about intimacy which involves such things as connectedness and emotional closeness. Nevertheless, it is evident that social networking websites do perhaps fulfil these desires to some extent, and therefore come to be alluring and desirable. Reaching seven hundred ‘likes’ on Facebook, for instance, and gaining more still on 28dayslater which pushed WildBoyz into the top sixth most liked profile on the forum, were landmark moments for ‘the Boyz’ because they made them feel as though people are fond of them. Hence, for every person that gives a thumb, a share, a comment, or, ultimately, likes the WildBoyz Facebook page, they feel more valued and
closely connected to ‘Others’ (Bauman and Lyon, 2013). What is significant too, in terms of the ‘virtual’ side of the heterotopia, is that in the interregnum our sociability is not limited to finding others who are similar to us; rather, it can be extended to comprise ‘Others’ we know nothing about (Castells, 2000). As Bauman has pointed out:

We chat and have ‘buddies’ to chat with. Buddies, as every chat addict knows, come and go, switch in and out – but there are always a few of them on the line itching to drown silence in ‘messages’. In the ‘buddy-buddy’ sort of relationship, not messages as such, but the coming and going of messages, the circulation of messages, are the message – don’t mind the content. We belong – to the even flow of words and unfinished sentences (abbreviated, to be sure, truncated to speed up the circulation). We belong to talking, not to what is talked about (2003b: 34).

Indeed, Bauman’s assertion, which itself has already fallen victim to the fluidity of the interregnum, should perhaps be remoulded, to replace messages with symbols, emojis and fragments – or even just singular words: ‘fantastic’, ‘amazing’, ‘epic’, ‘superb’. After all, these are all ‘the Boyz’ require in their relationships with ‘Others’. Nonetheless, and notwithstanding the last point, regardless of the type of ‘message’, it appears each one of these things serves no other purpose than to make ‘the Boyz’ feel good since they detect a sense of warmness and thus suddenly feel wanted (Turkle, 1995). Therefore, in line with Turkle, it could be argued that urban explorers are becoming increasingly ‘tethered to technology’ (2011: 11), and the ‘virtual’ aspects of heterotopia, as more seems possible. In other words, it is certainly not utopian but the ‘virtual’ side of the heterotopia seems even better in what it offers than the ‘real’. After all, ‘virtual’ networks offer a means by which we can both transform our identities into anything we desire and feel closer to ‘friends’ and ‘followers’ (or at least those who seem to like us).

Much like Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs), then, where characters and teams are changeable, or Facebook where people are encouraged to constantly modify and update their lives, interests and opinions (Blackshaw, 2010a), being a WildBoy in the ‘virtual’ sense, as Rizla suggests, seems to be better than being a WildBoy in the ‘real’ world. There are, he argues, so many potential possibilities in cyberspace, and far more people to acknowledge them than the few we occasionally stumble across inside dusty buildings. Thought-about performative identities are, after all, the ones ‘the Boyz’ take out and test in the ‘real’ world, supported the whole time by the ‘virtual’ impression of a ‘community’ that is, or so it feels, the secure, seemingly dependable and stable collective *ad*
definitum finem. What is also important, as Rizla also points out, is the fact that ‘not havin’ to meet thousands of other fuckin’ people is awesome... we don’t have to do anythin’, there’s no propa’ commitment or ‘owt. We just post up what we’ve been doing, or a quick snap of ourselves, and people seem to like us for it’. For ‘the Boyz’, this represents a more desirable condition, as Husky suggested, because ‘actually knowin’ thousands of people would be pretty shit; for a start, how would we even remember all their names?’

Yet, there is a consequential concern to attend to. As Turkle (2011) points out, it would appear that the nostalgic longing for direct contact may be gradually shifting, as ‘the Boyz’ ever-increasing use of cyberspace and mobile technology provides the temporary heterotopic sense of belonging we are searching for. What this indicates, in response to fears surrounding the fragmentation of the group, as discussed elsewhere, mobile phones, computers and other electronic devices help us ignore the possibility that we might face an impending void of loneliness and social isolation. Subsequently, for some, such as Neil Postman (1993), it is conceivable that this condition could signal the end to physical relationships – and therefore, we should add, skholērs too. When a Facebook message comes through, a ‘like’ on the WildBoyz page appears, or a Snapchat is received, ‘the Boyz’ are obliged to attend to it. No matter where they are, they have to look; they are willing, it would appear, to disconnect themselves from the ‘real’ world and substitute it for everything that exists inside their small handheld screens. Traditionally, it may have been the norm to embrace the intimacy and exclusivity of an immediate setting and the people around them; now, of course, as Mayhem demonstrates, it is more important to share an image or comment publicly, and wait anxiously for someone to respond (Turkle, 2011).

In many ways the foregoing discussion resonates well with the work of Postman, a well-known cynic when it comes to cogitating over the negative effects of our new technological era. In his critique, Postman (1993) argues that our world has become a ‘Technopoly’. This signals that our heterotopias are now being controlled by technology, insofar as any alternative ‘thought-worlds’ are being eliminated by rendering them irrelevant and therefore invisible (ibid: 48). Reflecting on the previous narrative episode, it seems evident that ‘the Boyz’ have fallen blindly into this trap, and rather than resist as they like to imagine they do, they have merely augmented their dependence on technological devices. ‘Technopoly’, in other words, has become the ruling part of our culture and identity in the interregnum. Culture, and in turn our heterotopias, now work according to technology and the ‘virtual’,
and they uncover a multiplicity of satisfactions which contribute to the freedom we feel we find in an increasingly individualised world, all while offering a sense of ‘community’ that seems to bring us closer together.

In sticking with Postman’s cynicism, there are further adverse traits associated with the technological annexation of culture and the heterotopia that need to be considered. For example, as the previous episode showed, Husky revealed that his economic circumstance, and perhaps even his cultural background, limited his access to the internet that month because he could not afford data. Consequently, this contributed, in a significant way, to his feeling of being partially excluded from the ‘virtual’ extension of the heterotopia. Indeed, Husky could perhaps have done something else to occupy his time in the train carriage, but he was too preoccupied with his exclusion that it essentially became unbearable. Rizla’s quandary too, while on one level quite different, resonates with Husky’s dilemma. Since Rizla was still contactable, his girlfriend – who was well aware of this – was still able to carry on an argument they had been having earlier that morning. Knowing there was no way he could escape, as his new partner was indefatigable in her efforts to ‘get her own way’, and because the temptation to avoid looking at his phone would never go away, Rizla ‘bailed’ on us.

Nonetheless, it would be erroneous to believe that there has been a complete annexation of the ‘real’. In other words, technology and the internet should not be treated as some sort of ‘isolated phenomenon’ that is seizing control (Wellman and Gulia, 1999: 169). As Chapter Five revealed, ‘the Boyz’ ‘real’ cognitive, aesthetic and moral spacings still exist in the interregnum, as do their life strategies. Therefore, although individuals may be less sociable than they perhaps would be without internet and mobile phone access, it is clear they have not been completely absorbed into a world comprising of nothing other than an infobahn (something analogous to ‘The Matrix’ portrayed by ‘The Wachowskis’). Certainly, rational communities are no longer a realistic option in the interregnum, but this is not to suggest that being connected virtually completely undermines corporeal social contact (Blackshaw, 2010a). Hence, while it does occasionally spark a certain degree of tension, when someone’s internet data limit unexpectedly runs out for example, which leaves them feeling, if only temporarily, more isolated and alone, in general being connected via technology only serves as an appendage to our ongoing physical relationships, not something that is better (Wellman and Gulia, 1999).
As Wellman and Gulia (1999) argue, our lives and relationships can still function well in an era of new technology. As the reader will see, ‘the Boyz’ continue to bring ‘baggage’ (essential parts of their lives and problems) with them into their heterotopic social space, regardless of whether they are online or not. More to the point, though, as skholērs urban explorers can continue – most of the time – to preserve their ‘real’ and more intimate relationships, alongside the many more shallower ‘virtual’ affiliations that were discussed earlier (ibid). By taking the following photograph (see Figure 7.) into consideration we can begin to understand this condition more widely.

If we focus exclusively on Mayhem (on the far right-hand side), it is apparent he appears disengaged from the group as an attempt to take a stylised shot was in progress. Really, however, Mayhem was ‘updating [Box] on the craic’ by exchanging texts and Snapchats. As Bauman (2000) suggests, in our current stage of modernity any close bonds we might have are becoming increasingly difficult to hold together in one locale, as our increasingly fluid lifestyles demand we continually move. Yet, as far as we were concerned, at this particular moment Box was still with us, and we could feel his presence in the room – even if it was ‘virtual’ – as Mayhem was acting as a mediator to form a connection between our two divided worlds. And this was important to ‘the Boyz’, given that Box bears a much thicker, more intimate, bond with the group than any ‘Other’ (Wellman and Gulia, 1999). It is axiomatic, therefore, that Box is, by Wellman and Gulia’s (1999) definition, ‘baggage’ –
someone significant enough to warrant being brought into ‘the Boyz’ heterotopia.

Reflecting on the discussion hitherto, then, if corporeal and ‘virtual’ realities can no longer be viewed as being separated it is time to think about their connection in a different way. In view of this, Baudrillard’s ideas should be consulted because they are especially suited to the task of explicating the real and the virtual. Thus, in marked contrast to Turkle’s (2011) suggestion that the ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ are two discrete worlds, Baudrillard (1983b) argues that there is no longer any distinction between the ‘real’ and the signified because both have entered the void of the hyperreal. In other words, their boundaries have become blurred, inasmuch as it is simulacrum that is the measure of the ‘real’ in the interregnum. Castells refers to this in his own way as ‘a culture of real virtuality’, which represents a world of signs and symbols where corporeal existence is fully immersed in appearances that have become our way of existing (1996: 11). To put it another way, what is being suggested here is that any distinction between the ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ should be abandoned because at this stage in modernity neither can exist without the other. There is no separation. As Blackshaw has argued, there is only that ‘shadowy realm called khôra’, where ‘performative unions’ manage to gather in the hope that they might find some way of transcending the limits of the everyday world (2017: 140).

On the face of it, then, if everything that has been discussed hitherto is taken into account what is manifest is that urban explorers’ are ‘tethered’ to virtuality and technology, but this certainly does not eradicate other and arguably more ‘real’ aspects of our lives. Both exist simultaneously and are unlikely to disappear. Therefore, there is no coherent answer to the question of whether being tethered to hyperreality is good or bad; rather, it just is. In this vein, though, we can rest assured that an impending dystopia is not becoming a reality. Like the utopia, the dystopian counterpart is also unreal and exists only as a result of a prevailing human tendency to romanticise disaster and destruction (Milojevic, 2005). Instead, what is more important, regardless of contradictory opinions, is to recognise that technology has become a crucial part of urban exploration, and whether it brings us closer together, or we are over-reliant on its discernible benefits, one thing is certain, as Rizla has shrewdly argued, in response to my own adversity against the constant use of smartphones:

“Until the oil runs out, or summat shit like that, it’s neva’ gonna matter if yer pretend yer don’t use technology. It’s neva’ gonna’ go away. You know, it’s part of life now, man. Surely avin’ technology outweighs fightin’ it n’ that. Even though you say it’s
good not bringin’ your problems explorin’, they neva’ really go away, do they? The difference is, we can sort our shit out right away, while you just pretend it’s not happenin’, dude.”

To put it simply, the ‘baggage’ ‘the Boyz’ bring with them into their ‘virtual’ realms is purely symptomatic of the fact that beneath the neatly polished surfaces of our devices they are human, and this entails shaping our own lives and contemporary forms of leisure. It is true, of course, that being ‘tethered’ to a hyperreal world has, as Levy (1997) argues, led to a decline in the influence and authority of ‘organised’ and ‘organic’ social groups, such as religious or family assemblages. And likewise, as Turkle contends, we perhaps risk losing sight of our ‘downtime’, meaning we have less time for self-reflection and face-to-face interactions (2011: 172). However, since our lives are guided by simulacrum we are not so much ‘tethered’ to our devices as Turkle (2011) argues; rather, we are simply chained to human culture in an interregnum that is driven by consumer capitalism. In short, whether we are advocates for hyperreality or not, it is an irreversible part of our culture in every part of our lives including our choices of leisure (Baudrillard, 1983b) and, whether we like to admit it or not, it offers us a very real sense of freedom that humanity has never experienced before.

Photographic Chicanery: An Alternative Way of Seeing

So far it has been argued that we should abandon the distinction between the ‘real’ and the ‘virtual’, in favour of a global shift into a hyperreal world where both have been replaced by simulacrum. However, what has not been taken into consideration is urban exploration’s close affiliation with photography, despite it being an integral part of this form of leisure. In other words, another way virtuality has a significant impact on urban explorers, in tandem with the correlating ideas that they are becoming increasingly tethered to technology and that identity is becoming increasingly pliable and virtualised, pertains to the growing use of cameras and video recording equipment. This is an important area to take into consideration because we can begin to question whether hyperreality (specifically the hyperreal image) results in the ‘virtual’ extension of the heterotopia being little more than a product of falsification and misrepresentation.

As follows, since the indexical image has become less important in the interregnum, we need to examine whether urban explorers’ close relationship with photographic technology has resulted in them losing touch with performative ‘truths’ and other ‘authentic’ aspects of
their heterotopias. What this means is that the photographic side of heterotopic social space seems to be gradually becoming less about exploring in a bodily and worldly sense and more about using digital technology to produce the performative experience. Moreover, the ease with which urban explorers can easily modify, manipulate and distribute images means there is a risk of certain elements of the heterotopia being completely superseded by photography, digitalisation and virtualisation. What follows in this section, then, attends to these points, to extend the discussion and explore in some greater depth the relationship between heterotopic social space and photography, digitalisation and virtualisation, and whether urban explorers are becoming increasingly controlled by these things.

‘The Age of Mechanical Reproduction’

In a similar vein to Walter Benjamin who, in his 1936 essay, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, argued that photography was having a significant impact on the handmade image, several scholars have indicated that there are echoes of a similar shift in what many have termed a ‘post-photographic era’ (Holland, 2015; Shore, 2014; Batchen, 2002; Mitchell, 1992). Of course, this is not to suggest that the world has gone beyond an epoch that uses photographic devices, it merely underlines the point that Benjamin’s (1936) original evocations have a certain degree of relevance today as we have moved into an electronic and digital age. As Benjamin noted, new forms of image technology meant that a multiplicity of copies (which are themselves not fake or imperfect) could replace the idea of the original image. This initial technical process allowed images to be seen synchronously by a range of new audiences across a variety of different settings; therefore, images became less secured by their context and more open to interpretation (ibid). Now, as Martin Lister (2004) has pointed out, the photographic image is undergoing an analogous transformation since images can be created digitally and reproduced using electronic technology, where they can be more widely distributed via ‘virtual’ networks. Certainly, the episode set in Box’s house captured this phenomenon, as ‘the Boyz’ revealed in the way they swiftly edited an image of the Angel of the North, and then promptly uploaded it to their Facebook page.

A further significant point Benjamin (1936) made involved the camera’s moment suspending capabilities, meaning complicated and perplexing environments could be temporarily encapsulated and then examined. Reminiscent of Bauman’s (2000) contemporaneous interpretation of modernity, the world Benjamin investigated was becoming increasingly
fragmented. Everyday life was becoming typified by speed, changeability, increased production and new forms of communication systems and transport networks, meaning the new urban milieu could easily overwhelm onlookers with the unprecedented level of surprise and amazement it created (Benjamin, 1936). In view of this, Benjamin pointed to the fact that photographs could extract everyday details that might habitually go unnoticed, revealing what he aptly termed the ‘optical unconscious’. In turn, more about the industrial milieu could be discovered. Arguably, the same can be said to apply in the interregnum, as Rizla revealed when he once pointed out that he ‘always notice[s] way fuckin’ more when lookin’ back at the snaps’. It is, according to Rizla, ‘easy to miss fucking all sorts of things when you’re actually there, but you find all the interestin’ or unusual stuff when you have a look after’.

What Benjamin’s (1936) work also suggests is that amidst the rise of mechanical imaging technology, and the increasing likelihood people would be able to view images more frequently and ordinarily, discovering things about the wider world was no longer exclusively limited to the elite classes. Rather, the everyday masses could begin to interpret, and identify with, the rapidly changing world around them. ‘The Boyz’ reveal that this same trend, which has remained perpetual since the modern era, exists in the interregnum, in the way they too are able to enter into the world of images. Despite their manifest lack of elite or privileged status, ‘the Boyz’ have reached a point in time and space where they find themselves more in control of photographs and the technology used to produce them. In view of this, by showing they are simply part of the everyday masses in a consumerist ambit, ‘the Boyz’ depict a world that has changed dramatically, but this perhaps also signifies, most of all, that the age of electronic imaging has become an age of freedom, heterogeneity and autonomy.

In other words, and contrary to this section’s opening proclamation, the rise of technology, in the form of the camera and the photograph, offer an unprecedented sense of freedom that has never existed before.

However, there are some critics who might disagree. By returning to Garrett's (2014) suggestion, as mentioned in Chapter Two, it could be argued that like the mobile phone people can easily end up viewing most of an explore through the viewfinder or screen of a digital camera as they are becoming increasingly tethered to, and controlled by, their devices. While John Berger has argued that ‘seeing comes before words’ (1972: 7), regardless of the medium, there is the crucial point that humans are becoming too intimate with easily
transportable or wearable technology such as DSLR and GoPro cameras, and even drone equipment, to the extent that we are at risk of becoming ‘trans’ or ‘post’ human (Rothblatt, 2014). As Mayhem pointed out, as if he had snapped out of a sort of trance, as we talked to one another while leaving Harpur Hill testing facility:

“Fucking ball-sacks. We just spent the whole time looking at that place through our cameras, dude. That makes me pretty sad... It’s like we can’t enjoy ‘sploring without our cameras n’ shit anymore. Like, we have to look at everything through them. What the fuck is happening to us, dude?... I think I want to, man, to see what it’s like again, and actually experience it... Like, did we even experience or look at that place just then? Or do we just think we did, but really we’ve only seen it, like, how the camera has been makin’ us want to see it, you know, as we try to get the perfect snapolla?... You get me, fam? Next explore, I’m leavin’ the fuckin’ camera behind. Fuck this shit...”

Viewing and experiencing the world electronically changes the human condition enormously and, as Woodrow Barfield (2015) points out, this may disturb, or even completely alter, the continuum currently holding human evolution together. In a recent article that mentions the ‘biohacker’ Rich Lee, Arthur House (2014) discusses the prospective concept of ‘cyborg sex’ and the ‘MMO Orgy’; this involves individuals being linked, over the internet, via webcams and spinal implants which allow people to stimulate their genital nerves together. Although the idea strays slightly from photography and the type of cameras urban explorers use, the crucial point here is to suggest that as a consequence of digital technology we are at risk of becoming ‘digital people’ who have lost sight of other aspects of our world and what they look and feel like through our own eyes and bodies (Barfield, 2015). Like Lee, who argues that ‘once you have cyborg sex, you will never want to return to normal sex’, in his comment above Mayhem reveals a similar dilemma, in that he no longer knows whether he is looking at the environment around him for its own sake, using his own imagination, or whether the camera and the desired result – a perfect digital photograph – have seized control.

Essentially, after the explore Mayhem felt as though he had not experienced it properly; something about it almost felt fictitious, as though it was a less significant experience.

Yet, the very fact Mayhem was uncomfortable about resigning himself completely to digital technology indicates that it is perhaps not quite as oppressing or manipulating as we often assume. In this respect, we are not ‘docile’ bodies that can be contained and controlled (Foucault, 1977). As a result of the interregnum we have become more tumultuous and
resourceful in the ways we strive to experience and understand the world (Blackshaw, 2003). Indeed, on the next few explores we did after the testing facility, Mayhem ‘ditched’ the camera and chose to leave it in the car – ‘[it was] up to someone else to take shots for the website’. As James Hughes (2004) has argued, adopting the view that our bodies and minds are our own property, to be utilised or exploited exactly as each person desires, when it comes to control of ourselves nothing is definitive. In the interregnum, where humans have never experienced such liberalism and individual technological control, it is axiomatic that we will be more proficient in shaping and experimenting with our lifestyles to fit with how we want our bodies to look; this is what Hughes has termed morphological freedom (2004).

What this means is that, for the most part, Mayhem has individual sovereignty over his ontologically confusing cyborg-like body, indicating he is not entirely oppressed by the technologies and electronic devices he has chosen to attach to himself; like the camera, things can be removed and discarded without consequence. This is a point that will be picked up again later, in the next section of this chapter.

The foregoing critique clearly suggests that photographic technology is perhaps less controlling than we imagine, but it does overlook the crucial point that while digital recording devices may not always control us diametrically, when they are in our hands, but more especially after they have been, the desire to exhibit perfect or specific images still slithers back into our consciousness. On the face of it, this condition does not appear to be too harmful to our heterotopia – we know urban explorers are capable of putting the camera aside. However, what has not yet been mentioned is the powerful impulse, brought about by the internet and computer programs such as Adobe Photoshop or Lightroom, which cause people to want to manipulate or modify digital images. Traditionally, photographs were taken to be an index of the object or scene the image was based on, but in the interregnum indexicality is rapidly becoming one small part of the photograph taking process (Lister, 2004). As Fred Ritchin warned, just as image editing systems were being developed and distributed more widely, in an age of computers the new plasticity of the image may lead to a ‘profound undermining of photography’s status as an inherently truthful pictorial form’ (1990: 28).

In view of the episode above, it is clear ‘the Boyz’ have adapted their behaviour and indeed the dynamics of the ‘virtual’ extension of their heterotopia in three fundamental ways: they stage stylised shots, modify photographs electronically for online use and add verbal
captions to images which are posted on websites such as Facebook. Certainly, the way MKD organised the group around the train carriage, to create an image depicting us as journeying, as naturally as possible, inside some sort of paradigmatic apocalyptic spectacle, supports this idea. After the staged photograph was taken, it was modified accordingly to accentuate the colours, especially the dirtier black elements of the image which contrast nicely against the background outside the carriage – which was also altered to make it slightly whiter and more desolate-looking than it really was. Adapting the photograph in this way worked to exaggerate the extent of its dramatic quality. Finally, once the image was uploaded to the WildBoyz Urban Exploration Facebook page, a caption was purposefully added: ‘Life, when Russia finally fucks us over…’ (see Figure 8.).

As Ritchin points out, digital image technologies quickly become seductive because the editor can ‘reach into the guts of a photograph and manipulate any aspect of it’ (1990: 29). For ‘the Boyz’, when it comes to the ‘virtual’ extension of heterotopic social space, photography manipulation techniques become something that breeds an element of dependency within them; although, this is something that is very rarely consciously noticed. As the episode at the beginning of this chapter revealed (in the living room), ‘the Boyz’ no longer seem capable of feeling content with images that are optically ‘real’, or as close as they can be to being real at any rate. On the contrary, ‘the Boyz’ reside in a world where images have become, somewhat un glamorously, data that can be easily transported across
communication networks. As Box pointed out while he was editing: ‘it’s no different to
gaming, there’s a bit of something real, but way more fantasy and imagination in it’. In other
words, ‘the Boyz’ know images are interminably changeable and, simply because they are,
and because we know the image can easily become almost anything we want it to be, there
is a compulsive need to ‘tweak’, even if improvements are not strictly necessary; any image
can be enhanced thanks to digitalisation, imagination and virtualisation.

It would appear that there is a sure sense of hopelessness when it comes to living and
seeking leisure in the interregnum – after all it is excruciatingly difficult to see beyond the
seductive, and we might even add manipulative, nature of ‘virtual’ and digital technologies.
And yet, despite this observation a number of important points can be elicited at this
juncture. First, it is crucial to attend to the work of Berger (1984), whose concern with
photography extends to the relationship between the seer and what is being seen. According
to Berger, whether we are tethered or not, rather than getting caught in a scientific teleology
of the image, which views photographs and the world as things that are rational and
objective, digital photography allows us to explore the superfluity of meaning that exists in
our heterotopias, which are part of a hyperreal world. In other words, Berger accentuates
the relation between both sight and imagination, advocating that photography should
involve the ‘sensuous, the particular and the ephemeral’ (ibid: 61). Even if urban explorers
are attached to their cameras, as Mayhem argues, digital images have the capacity to go
beyond and ‘insinuate further than the discrete phenomena’ around us (Berger and Mohr,
1982: 118). Therefore, even though they may be disputable, it is, as Box suggests, our
creativity and imagination that irradiates and stimulates our encapsulation of the world.

Contrary to those ideas surrounding tethering, authenticity, manipulation and falsity, then,
what is being overlooked in Ritchin’s (1990) argument is that there are important meanings
attached to images, even if they are produced and used in ways that signify we are chained
to technology. As Martha Rosler (1991) has made a point of illustrating, the ‘modern’ idea of
photographic truth cannot exist, and any attempt to reminisce about a time when it did is
fruitless. In a similar vein to Baudrillard, Rosler argues that there is no such thing as a
photographic tradition, where images are not shaped by the photographer or the result of
intention. Images became severed from rational ‘truth’ a long time ago, and this has simply
escalated with the advent of mass production, entertainment, propaganda, visual arts and,
most crucial of all, global commodification (Lister, 2004). In other words, although
photographs may no longer represent ‘truth’ in the conventional sense of the word they do
tell the truth about the world in which we live and find our leisure in because they expose
part of the performativity of our heterotopias. In a nutshell, this encroaches upon the idea,
one more, that urban explorers are not so much tied to technology; rather, they are simply
part of a reality where all appearances are illusionary in a culture of simulacrum.

Based on the foregoing discussion, a crucial overlap with the work of Jacques Derrida can
also be drawn vis-à-vis the open-ended nature of photography and the digital image. In his
ideas pertaining to language and meaning, Derrida (1987b) places much emphasis on the
polysemic nature of signs and how they are constantly being nuanced and altered as they are
produced and articulated under different contexts or circumstances. This means they never
reach a point of fixed meaning. Therefore, according to Derrida, images always precede
words. Images are considered superior because they do not reduce complex things into
simple terms (ibid). Limiting something, such as a photograph, to its bare indexical form only
reveals that we do not really understand it (ibid). Much like Derrida’s own writing, which has
been criticised for having a vexatious style, the true effect of any image or sign should make
us pause and reflect on the unnoticed meanings it elicits. Indeed, Derrida (1987b) recognises
that we should be cautious about charging into what has already been declared lucid and
precise. When it comes to photography, virtuality and digital technology, then, signs are
produced, but their meaning is wholly unstable, volatile and dependent upon the
interrelational play between them and other signs. As Baudrillard (1983b) would likely have
argued, urban explorers and their photographs are not fictitious or fake; rather, the
hyperreality of modernity renders any falseness or misinterpretation entirely invalid. This is a
reality whose appearance is an illusion, where signs are signs of signs, so the urban explorers
bond with photography and staged images is reality.

It is, therefore, the ‘shadowy realm of khôra’ that is captured by the image – where anything
goes – meaning, simply, that we are forced to locate our own sense of belonging which tends
to be malleable (Blackshaw, 2017). As Butler (1990) argues, and indeed as it has been
explored in depth elsewhere in this thesis, ‘the Boyz’ make it very clear that the self and
what is ‘real’ is constantly defined by, and in, performativity and our interminable need to
achieve watchableness. What this indicates is that there is nothing deeply rooted in a
photograph; all images and their contents should be viewed as surface phenomena that is
fluid, aesthetic and part of our desire to be noticed and celebrity-like (Bauman, 1998;
Baudrillard, 1998). In view of this, the photographs the reader observed in this chapter simply reveal the ‘performative status of the natural itself’, and the point that, actually, nothing else matters in the sort of world we now live and find our leisure in (Butler, 1990: 186). In other words, the apocalyptic train shots may well be interpreted as being denaturalised and dissonant, but as far as urban exploration, our heterotopic social space and photography all go this is what reality is all about in the interregnum. It is about entering a whole different kind of existence, away from the mundanity of the everyday, and convincing everyone outside, through our performance, that we are ‘cool’, inimitable and worth watching.

**Imitation and Differentiation: A Performative Struggle for Recognition**

At this stage in the chapter it should be clear that ‘the Boyz’, who are after all *khôrasters-skholêrs extraordinaire*, mostly seek one predominant thing and that is performativity which is the most essential part of their imagined heterotopia. However, performativity is just as much about being seen as it is about consumption and finding a temporary home (Blackshaw and Crabbe, 2004). What this means, then, is that what ‘the Boyz’ really crave is not technology at all or some sort of ‘virtual’ substitute for reality but *recognition*¹², something every individual is said to desire (Honneth, 1995, 2007). In view of this, any distinction between the ‘real’ and the ‘virtual’ does not matter because urban explorers are fully tethered to neither. It is only the phenomenon of performativity that is significant (Lyotard, 1984), and those certain conditions that are necessary to produce an ideal state (which itself is only ever until-further-notice), because it can lead to gaining the recognition we desire and help us maintain a positive emotional state (Honneth, 1995). What this means is that all ontological truth claims in urban exploration are measured by how well they perform and create some kind of interim image, and they are simply made more efficient if they are facilitated by technology and the ‘virtual’ side of heterotopic social space.

In a nutshell, then, this section sets out to reinforce the idea, as far as urban exploration goes, that there has not been an annexation of the ‘real’ by the ‘virtual’ in the interregnum. Rather, what is supported in what follows is the argument that living and seeking leisure in

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¹² Axel Honneth (1995, 2007) argues that recognition involves three spheres – ‘love’, ‘rights’ and ‘solidarity’ – that are crucial to developing self-confidence, a mutual mode of recognition (i.e. moral relations with others) and the identification and reinforcement of our abilities, traits and self-esteem. According to Honneth, recognition is crucial to self-realisation and the development of a positive self-attitude.
the interregnum simply entails exploiting all aspects of the simulacrum that has become our world, as we work to enhance our imagined and yet very real performative heterotopias and identities. After all, this is the type of world we live in now, one that is dominated by consumer capitalism which causes individuals to want to be fashionable, celebrity-like and above all watchable (Bauman, 1998).

A Couple of Trend-Setters Take the Bus

It was late afternoon, and myself and Mayhem were on the 393 bus to Malabar, a small coastal suburb in south-eastern Sydney, Australia. For the first half of the journey the bus was crowded, so we were unable to talk to one another. Instead, we gazed at the other passengers, wondering whether the people around us were ‘typical’ Australians. After taking note that a security guard was on the bus to protect the driver, realising the woman opposite us had been mumbling incomprehensibly to herself the entire journey because she was ‘shit-faced’, and noticing that the couple of blokes with skin heads to our left had electronic tags on their legs, we decided they probably weren’t.

After thirty minutes of holding on as tight as possible as the driver raced to finish his shift, the bus emptied enough so we could talk. Our conversation picked up and we resumed a discussion we’d been having earlier on. We’d been comparing Christchurch to Sydney and noting how much better the former was in terms of exploring opportunities. We both knew the place was a veritable ‘gold mine’ when it came to exploring. However, although we treasured the ‘Garden City’ as a trove of ‘abandonedness’, we couldn’t help but agree that it was becoming far too ‘touristy’ for our liking. As Mayhem pointed out, ‘since we got on the news with the cathedrals, and because those Urbex Central cunts sold pretty much everything out to the media, it’s too fuckin’ busy now’. He wasn’t wrong either; over the years the number of people trying to get inside ‘earthquaked buildings’ in Christchurch has risen spectacularly.

A few months before we decided to visit Australia, Mayhem and myself had talked about meeting up somewhere in New Zealand, and we’d chatted about visiting Christchurch again, to take advantage of all its damage. In the end, though, we decided to abandon that plan and head somewhere less touristy, like Australia, where few Europeans seem to go for urbex. Our aim was to ‘hit up new stuff that people in the UK hadn’t seen’, mostly so we could post it up online and attract interest. As for
the explore we were heading for, although it had been done before by several
Australian explorers and graffiti artists, there were no up-to-date reports and, as far
as we could see, there was nothing done by any Europeans. What is more, we knew
we’d get more recognition for researching sites ourselves, using newspapers and
heritage databases, without local help, a guide or following the so-called ‘tourist trail’.

The bus turned sharply, causing Mayhem to lose his balance and almost fall into one
of the ankle tag-wearing blokes. The ‘big baldy fuck’ twirled the carrier bag he was
holding (which contained a pack of Victoria Bitters) tightly around his hand. He stared
at us for a while, until his mate grabbed his attention as some ‘hot chick with big tits’
walked past the bus. With his attention clearly averted from us, as we heard one of
them yell ‘strewth, I bet she’s a right dirty goer’, we decided it was safe to resume our
conversation. It turned out that another thing discouraging Mayhem from visiting New
Zealand again concerned the fact that it felt like WildBoyz were following in Urbex
Central’s shadow, as many of the initial explores I’d done with them were things
they’d already attempted or had fully explored. It was only after I began to find my
own footing in New Zealand that we began to ‘hit’ new things that neither party had
explored. What is more, Urbex Central always seemed to get ‘more of the fuckin’
glory wi the stuff in New Zealand’, because they were fuckin’ media whores’.

Before we could go on, I noticed, out of the corner of my eye, that the landscape
outside looked very familiar. Suddenly realising we could see our explore out of the
window, over on the other side of the bay, Mayhem quickly pushed the bell. Much
sooner than we’d anticipated, the bus screeched as it came to a halt, and the pair of
us were propelled forwards into the ‘DO NOT STAND’ zone. We exited the vehicle,
and seconds after setting foot on the pavement the bus thundered past us, leaving us
standing alone in a quiet, pleasant-looking, residential area. Turning back the way we
had already come to walk to the other side of the bay, we picked up our conversation
where we’d left off: ‘fuckin’ whores, man’, Mayhem continued…

It took almost an hour to walk to the other side. Reaching the bunker had taken much
longer than we’d anticipated. Now, though, we were stood before a metal grill that
had been fixed to prevent access to the underground section of the site, weighing up
whether we’d be able to squeeze through a gap someone had made between the
bars. At this point, however, the reality of where we were started to sink it. Earlier on
the rocks we’d noticed some rather large spiders, with hair, teeth and other sinister
features, and in the bushes enormous colonies of ants were roaming around in the sand. And now, in between the metal grill sat a relatively small spider but, according to Mayhem, they were the ‘propa’ deadly cunts’. Not wanting to chance it, we encouraged it to ‘fuck off’ with a long stick and quickly scrambled through the gap while it looked clear. Even with the spider removed, though, we could still feel pieces of web sticking to our hair and faces. In three short words, it was ‘bad fuckin’ craic’.

The inside of the bunker didn’t look as though it had been visited in a long time. Gazing down the long passage in front of us, which resembled a classic scene in an Indiana Jones film, we could see great big webs stretching from the ceiling to floor. The pair of us were more hesitant than we’d been in a long time, but we decided to press on anyway. After all, it had taken us well over two hours to reach the bunker. However, before we continued to edge our way forward, Mayhem made sure we had the big stick ready at hand.

The floor was sandy, but the old rails that were originally used to transport ammunition down the passageways were still visible. We followed them into the darkness where, thankfully, the spider webs started to clear as we ventured deeper inside. It was only at this point we began to notice how heavily graffitied the concrete tunnel walls were; most of it looked similar to the Newton Aycliffe pedestrian underpass scrawl, but a couple of bits looked decent enough. What we found much more interesting, however, was our discovery of some of the old fittings that still remained down here, such as the badly rusted metal ventilation shaft running across the ceiling, and very faint stencilled military markings on the walls.

As we walked further into the tunnel, an eerie silence shrouded us. This feeling was perhaps intensified because we knew it was growing dark outside; the prospect of getting lost in the bushes didn’t appeal to either of us, and neither did sleeping in the bunker with dangerous critters lurking everywhere. Nevertheless, despite our initial concerns, we still ended up leaving after the sun had set. To get better quality photographs the pair of us had spent well over an hour trying to ‘light paint’ all of the bunkers ‘nooks and crannies’. We each knew that good photographs attract more viewers, and more viewers are what are desirable. As Mayhem reminded me, after I asked him to look at a photograph we’d spent several minutes trying to take using small LEDs:
Mayhem: Nah, dude. It’s shit. We can’t post that. Nobody likes a shit potato.
Me: A shit potato?
Both: [Laughter].
Me: You high, man?
Mayhem: Fuck sake. Nah, I mean photo. Must be jet lag, I feel fucked. Or the spiders, man, they’re mentally draining.
Both: [Laughter].
Mayhem: No-one will like it, man. We want good quality, not like the Fr3e Roamers and their shit standards. Bellends.
Me: Aye.

**Performativity and Fashionability**

In view of the episode above, urban explorers expose a fundamental juxtaposition when it comes to seeking recognition amid a culture of hyperreality, simulacrum and performativity. On one level, the use of technology means we have increased the noticeability and accessibility of locations for other urban explorers, via forums, blogs and social networking sites. In turn, this has resulted in there being a higher chance we will simply exploit one another’s knowledge and experience, particularly when we are first-time visitors to a new region or another country. This signals that staying in touch with the game is crucial, and that advantage can be taken of ‘Others’; their locations, situated on ‘their turf’, can be appropriated and turned into new reports and content for our own virtual webpages. On the other hand, urban explorers’ face a second predicament. As suggested previously, being performative entails wanting recognition. Therefore, it becomes necessary, given that we reside in a consumerist world, to involve ourselves in what we might call ‘fashion’ which stirs a desire to become a ‘trend-setter’. That is to say, as Honneth (1995, 2007) would suggest, urban explorers find satisfaction and, more crucially, a positive relation-to-self in being the ones to bring new, ‘unseen’, exploits to the table. In view of this, although it was published at the beginning of the twentieth century, these contradictory tendencies resonate with Georg’s Simmel’s (1957) construction of a general theory vis-à-vis ‘fashion’ which still has some degree of contemporary relevance.

According to Simmel, driven by instinct every human actor is predisposed to ‘imitate’, yet they also aspire to ‘distinguish’ themselves from other human beings. These are said to be the ‘great antagonistic forces’ that symbolise the base on which our individualities rest (ibid:
Understandably, then, in view of the fact that sustaining a degree of equilibrium between socialising and desocialising forces is nigh on impossible (Bauman, 2011), urban explorers’ social lives end up being unstable and conditional. Remaining in ‘fashion’ is crucial in urban exploration, but, as Simmel (1957) reminds us, it is essential that neither of the two poles prevail, or become more stable than the other. Somewhat incongruously, the self-destructive nature of fashion must survive, to guarantee that it will continue in its cycle of disseminating and expiring. The fate of fashion is preordained, it cannot escape its own doom if it is to rise once again up from the ashes. The place of technology and virtuality in the fashion phenomenon should be obvious then – it helps accelerate and improve the vital conditions that are demanded by our performative selves and our cravings for recognition.

**The Imitation Game**

Taking into account the tendency towards ‘imitation’, it might be argued that it stems from the fear of being left behind (Simmel, 1957; Honneth, 1995). As it was argued earlier, this world is one subjugated to the logic of consumerism and performativity, therefore, the demands of fashion should be fairly logical. So long as we want to be an urban explorer, and in due course gain recognition, it is every urban explorer’s desire to avoid falling from the path, meaning they must steer well away from any risk of failure (Bauman, 2011). Failure, after all, signifies our inability to consume and our subsequent expulsion from the race.

In this vein, if we take into consideration the episode above, we can turn our attention towards WildBoyz arrival in New Zealand and, to borrow one of Bourdieu’s (1984) terms, the fact that we had little serviceable cultural capital. Bauman might argue that aside from some level of intuition, myself and Mayhem possessed nothing substantial in our habitats that might allow us to behave with a bit of savoir-faire in New Zealand. As far as Simmel is concerned, then, it becomes necessary to imitate others who are in some way or another deemed superior to our own selves. Some might argue this adheres, in a way, to the Simmelian principle that ‘fashion is a product of class distinction’ (1957: 544). However, as Bauman (2011) has noted, the concept of class is problematic in itself since class society is a product of solid modernity and therefore its rigid distinctions have been blurred as society has become more differentiated, complex and widespread. Nevertheless, a form of division still exists in the interregnum, because the survival of fashion is based on some members of society being more worthy of being imitated (Simmel, 1957).
Making contact with Urbex Central was straightforward enough thanks to our use of technology and the ‘virtual’ side of urban exploration. After an initial exchange of messages over the internet, and Mayhem conducting a thorough examination of their content (on their website and Facebook), to weigh up the expediency of forming a connection, we felt as though we were ‘in business’. After all, as Simmel (1957) argues, ‘Others’ have to be admired before they can be emulated. Suddenly, then, thanks to Urbex Central’s ‘virtual’ presence, WildBoyz quickly became more internationally recognised on various online forums and websites, and among other explorers in the ‘real’ world.

Revisiting a number of Urbex Central’s previously explored locations was the first step in the process of imitation, to ‘get a foot in the door’ as some might say. It was very important to follow in their footsteps and accomplishments; this led to us – especially me in a more physical sense – being able to join them more closely, and before long they began to reveal the locations of new places they themselves had not yet visited. Of course, this came with some conditions enforced by Urbex Central – WildBoyz were, at that time, the ‘imitators’ after all. Some of their terms involved such things as tolerating their decision to wear high-vis on most explores, not posting certain locations in the public domain, overlooking their growing desire to be in the news and not conversing with their rival group in Auckland, Urbex New Zealand & Australia. Adhering to their way of doing things was the next step in our process of imitation and seeking recognition.

Meanwhile, back in the UK WildBoyz were gaining a growing sense of distinction. By imitating ‘Others’, we had successfully begun to distinguish ourselves as being noticeably different from most ‘Other’ UK explorers (Simmel, 1957). Viewed in terms of our ‘virtual’ notability, WildBoyz were gaining a phenomenal number of likes for our new increasingly ‘fashionable’ ‘Kiwi reports’, across Facebook, different urbex forums and our own website, and people were beginning to recognise the name. In a group chat on Facebook, for example, which a few of ‘the Boyz’ use to communicate with climbers to arrange meet-ups, one evening the discussion oscillated towards urban exploration. As the conversation progressed, one of the climbers who also ‘dabbles in a bit of urbex’, unaware he was in a conversation with some of ‘the Boyz’, made the point that he had heard of WildBoyz and ‘love[d] the photos those guys take, especially the class cathedral shots’. What this indicates, is that our seemingly discrete ‘imitation’ tactics were working well to form ‘a chain of self-
propagating change’ (Bauman, 2011: 18) as ‘the Boyz’ found themselves procuring greater ‘self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem’ (Honneth, 1995: xi). Consistent with Turkle’s (2011) findings, we were quickly discovering that it feels good to be noticed, and therefore fashionable, across the internet. In other words, ‘the Boyz’ were leading themselves into a process of gaining recognition as our fashionability was gaining momentum.

Essentially, what the reader is witnessing is how urban explorers rely on the presence of the ‘Other’ to augment their own heterotopic existence. However, what is missing pertains to how we can continue taking responsibility for our own actions – how we replace our ‘imitation’ of Urbex Central with something more distinguished and inimitable – to be in control of our performativity and a heterotopia that is entirely our own (Rorty, 2007). In this vein, as Peter Bramham and John Spink (2016) have suggested, with the collapse of the cultural ‘elite’ there are no ruling hierarchies anymore, dictating who can participate in certain forms of leisure and who cannot. Instead, what we see now is the emergence of an ‘anarchic diversity of fashions and styles’ (ibid: 16). As pleasure-seeking pursuers of identity and performativity, then, it is not enough to imitate. As noted earlier, bound by our proclivity for consumption and recognition, the idea of ‘fashion’ also rouses our desire to become the ‘trend-setter’. What this means is that it is not sufficient enough to have achieved something notable in our performative heterotopias; rather, it is imperative we do so in such a way that is significant enough to attract the gaze of millions (Blackshaw, 2017). This, as David Foster Wallace argues, is ‘the unconscious reinforcement of the deep thesis that the most significant quality of truly alive persons is watchableness, and that genuine human worth is not just identical with but rooted in the phenomenon of watching’ (1993: 155).

Once again the link between the search for freedom and urban explorers’ ‘media whore’ life strategy has resurfaced. To remind the reader, this pertains to the argument that the ‘synopticon’ influences and controls us in the interregnum by urging us to become celebrity-like. In this vein, if we take into consideration Rojek’s (2001) suggestion that one of the most important qualities of the celebrity, one that will assist in capturing the eye of ‘the crowd’ to attain recognition, is their prestige, it becomes more obvious that the pressure to project the self in a way that seems unique is a constant challenge.
An Insatiable Appetite for Recognition

Consistent with what has been discussed so far, it is technology and the ‘virtual’ world that offers an additional platform that helps urban explorers cope with the task of gaining recognition with greater ease and simplicity (Crawford, 2013). Indeed, the very nature of the ‘virtual’ world takes the Latin roots of the term *celebrity* very literally: the combination of the words *celebrem*, meaning fame or recognised in public, and the term *celere* that was used to refer to something done in a short period of time (Rojek, 2001). This reinforces Butler’s (1990) point well, that guided by performativity urban explorers have decentred, and therefore oppose, any notion of a fixed subject behind the performance. In a nutshell, then, it is crucial that performativity is always counterbalanced by nuance, and this should be directed precisely at the ‘Other’ (ibid). Once again this encroaches on Bauman’s (1988) idea of *symbolic rivalry* and how it is crucial if we want to be distinguished.

In line with the idea of competing against ‘the Other’, it is necessary to consider two of Harvey Leibenstein’s (1950) concepts: the ‘snob’ and ‘bandwagon’ effects. According to Leibenstein, the ‘snob effect’ deals with the idea that our preference for something increases when its supply to the masses is limited. With regard to urban exploration, it can be argued that explores which have not yet entered the multiplicity of social networking sites are deemed more desirable than those which have ‘been hit’ countless times before. In turn, it is almost guaranteed that the ‘new epic’ will attract the attention of ‘the crowd’. For a time, our ‘virtual’ stardom and recognition reaches an astounding new height as the fresh content receives the ‘likes’ and interest we desire.

Vis-à-vis Urbex Central, as I, and Mayhem to some extent, gradually became more familiar with the ‘urbex scene’ in New Zealand, it became less necessary to ‘imitate’ them. What this means, as hinted in the Malabar episode above, is that WildBoyz began to reinforce their own heterogeneity by establishing a sense of symbolic rivalry against Urbex Central. In view of this, we decided, unanimously, to start placing reports, which Urbex Central had demanded not to publish, into the public domain on 28dayslater and our website. Further, it was becoming something of a contest between the two groups to be the first to post up reports of new and more daring locations in and around Australasia, despite the fact that we had quite often explored them together. What is more, even editing our photographs to make them look more impressive than Urbex Central’s images became paramount in our
desire to enhance our watchableness. Therefore, although we did not know it at the time, adhering to Leibenstein’s ‘snob effect’ was paramount in our move to ‘become even more epic’. Whoever posted their ‘high-quality’ report up first would instantly be acknowledged as the first, original, contributor, and ‘fame’ and recognition would be received accordingly.

Essentially, what is being suggested here is that WildBoyz had begun by imitating an idealised ‘Other’ in order to become discernible from the online ‘crowd’, but to carry on gaining distinction and more fame – to be fashionable and recognised – it was necessary to change our imitative allegiance. To remind ourselves, as Simmel (1957) has argued, the very nature of fashion means that ‘imitation’ is partnered with a more powerful and persuasive force, and this makes us go wild for further distinction and differentiation. As Mayhem pointed out, after exploring the Malabar bunkers, while we were on our way to meet some new explorers elsewhere in Australia:

“Fuck those fucking Urbex Central cunts, it’s important to look at propa’ crews who go all over now, like. Like The_Raw and those boys, or those Behind Closed Doors guys, we should be following those motherfuckers. They’ve got some good shit under their belts. They’re postin’ good shit on the internet all the fucking time, dude... New shit, man, that’s what it’s all about. We need more stuff as good, or stuff that’s even better than the North Sea Producer, then people n’ all our WildFanz will think we’re fuckin’ cool. Yer get me, fam? Brisbane, ‘ere we come!”

In line with Foucault’s (1987) later work, and to return to the notion of docility highlighted earlier, the above argument resonates with the principle of Enkrateia\textsuperscript{13} and techniques or technologies of the self. Drawing on classical practices of self-formation, Foucault claims that Ancient Greek ethics of existence should be valued above Roman or Christian ethics, even though a certain degree of importance is attached to self-limitation, as they place greater emphasis on the point that there should be a voluntary element to them. In other words, what is being rejected here is any form of rationality that limits the extent to which we can be autonomous individuals, forcing people into various regulated or imitated homogeneous identities that are generally permitted, or appear analogous, throughout society. In line with this idea, which conceives of individuals less as ‘docile bodies’ than counter-hegemonic, reflexive and autonomous agents, ‘the Boyz’ demonstrate that we are individuals who

\textsuperscript{13} Enkrateia refers to ‘self-mastery’, with regard to pleasures and appetites. While Foucault’s original use of the term applied largely to pre-modern and modern contexts, it is used here vis-à-vis liquid modernity.
attempt to invent ourselves (ibid). In many ways, then, as Bauman (in Bauman and Lyon, 2013) has argued, this shift is not so much about domination and power. Instead, the shift pertains to an aesthetic that is linked to the synopticon, eclectic cultural dynamism and performativity.

It can be argued, then, that urban exploration which is located inside a world where individuals are controlled, in part, by subjected knowledge and local discursivities, and in these we might add synoptic surveillance strategies, is a source of fetishism, voyeurism, glamour, deviance and Enkrateia (Blackshaw and Crabbe, 2004). What this means, as ‘the Boyz’ demonstrate, is that urban explorers are individuals who can shape their own existence, as they endeavour to sample the delights of those aforementioned enthralments. Nevertheless, in our ubiquitous consumerist society – which Foucault himself was never able to fully envisage – this necessitates the use of technology and cyberspace, which create a ‘virtual’ extension of the heterotopia and acts as a platform or a medium for performativity, self-fashioning and gaining recognition. As the episode above aims to demonstrate, cultivating and caring for oneself, or one’s own collective, is achieved by reinventing ourselves through an ‘aesthetics of existence’ (McNay, 1994: 146). Through a process involving originality, creativity and stylisation (conforming to the evanescent and fast-paced world of the interregnum and its ever-expanding technologies and ‘virtual’ elements), and a sense of protest against normalisation, urban explorers exploit aesthetics of existence to produce something that feels, momentarily, idiosyncratic and inimitable.

As regards the rift between Urbex Central and WildBoyz, contrary to Foucault’s (1977) earlier work where the ‘Other’ was visualised as an indistinct or nebulous contestatory power situated on the peripheries of society, both sides are a result of symbolic power relations that have entered the same social sphere or a similar discursive position (McNay, 1994; Bauman, 1988). That is to say, we can interpret power as being something that no longer operates in a unidirectional manner, directed by those like Urbex Central who might have been viewed as superior to WildBoyz. The relationship between the former and the latter should be conceptualised instead as an agonistic scuffle between individuals who are free, where the separation from the ‘Others’ and prioritisation of the self is necessary if self-mastery is to be achieved (Foucault, 1987). To put it another way, the role of the ‘Other’ and our interest in them must not precede the care for, or cultivation of, one’s own self or group if WildBoyz are to seize their moment in the limelight.
However, as Simmel (1957) reminds us, despite the struggle for inimitability when something fashionable spreads its cursoriness will bring about its inevitable demise. Like the legendary tale of Faust the scholar and Mephistopheles, where we witness Faust trades his soul to the devil in exchange for prominence, unrestricted knowledge and other worldly pleasures, ‘virtual’ stardom and recognition does not last forever. There can be no perfect state of recognition (Kompridis, 2007; Honneth, 1995). The tendency for something to move in the direction of universal recognition comes with its own conditions and its eventual unavoidable decay. In other words, what is fashionable today will soon become yet another ‘fragment of the past’ (Simmel, 1957: 547). In this vein, it is first important to consider what Leibenstein (1950) has termed the ‘bandwagon’ effect – otherwise known as the ‘tour bus’ spectacle among urban explorers.

As Leibenstein argues, the ‘bandwagon’ effect signifies the increasing desirability of a product, resulting in the recurrent likelihood that it will be imitated. In point of fact, only a week after ‘the Boyz’ explored the health and safety testing facility there was a swift proliferation of reports from the same place, as several explorers had flocked down there the following weekend. As Husky judiciously pointed out, ‘the cunt hadn’t been done in years, it had interesting shit everywhere and we’d shown everyone there was access, so it was ripe for the picking really, wasn’t it’. The same could be said about the Malabar bunker explore, which we had selected specifically because it had not been done in years. As expected, posting new photographs of it across UK and Australian forums seemed to liven things up a bit, especially in Australia, and more people decided to have a look themselves, and post photographs of the place, over the next few weeks following our own visit.

However, the second and arguably more important point that should be taken into consideration here can be found if we return to the argument that ‘the Boyz’ often seek to make themselves more distinguishable and differentiated from ‘Others’. Extending Leibenstein’s original work, Mason (1981) reversed the bandwagon theory to expound on the phenomenon that when too many ‘Others’ purchase or take interest in a product the original ‘trend setter’ ceases to consume it themselves. Pierre Bourdieu (1984) made similar claims along these lines, arguing that any direct display of fashion quickly becomes less stylish for certain consumers’ – principally those who regard themselves as having higher and more intellectual tastes. Yet, contrary to such ideas that point to the status-enhancing
implications of commodities, as it has been reiterated throughout this chapter, Baudrillard (1978) explored the view that class-based meanings attributed to things and products, under a contemporary consumer based society, have been eroded. What this condition really implies, then, is that the former antiquated and barbaric traits of the upper-class have become intrinsic to all consumers in the interregnum (ibid).

As regards the last episode, the moment ‘Other’ incipient urban explorers began to ‘hit’ Christchurch, after our initial success there, and, as Mayhem once remarked, since Urbex Central began to ‘steal all the glory by runnin’ to the media like little bitches’, WildBoyz interest in Christchurch quickly wilted. In the process of planning our trip to Australia, we discussed the possibility of visiting Christchurch again because of the abundance of abandoned locations available there. In the end, though, we agreed that we should only ‘hit’ Australia because it was ‘far less touristy’, and it would accommodate our expanding repertoire of urbex accomplishments which would be exceptional enough to gain us further publicity and recognition on 28dayslater and our website. Fashion is, after all, as Simmel (1957) points out astutely, a process which allows a [liquid] society to consolidate itself, by returning back to everything, and indeed anything, that disturbs it. Even after our success at Malabar, however, and the attention WildBoyz received for posting the location, interest quickly dwindled as more and more posts began to appear across the internet. In the end, it was time for us to find something ‘new’ and interesting all over again.

In bringing this section to a close, it can be argued that Simmel’s original work pertaining to fashion still retains its usefulness today through showing how urban explorers are not naively susceptible to imitation. On the contrary, Simmel’s analysis reveals a dialectic between imitation and distinction, which is crucial when it comes to understanding performativity because being performative involves much more than facilely imitating an ‘Other’. On the face of it, then, this section signals that urban exploration is both irrational and superficial, but, above all, it also reveals that few individuals are immune when it comes to fashion, because change is a pivotal factor so long as we wish to remain fashionable. And it is certain that urban explorers will want to remain fashionable and inimitable in the type of society we find ourselves in, otherwise we risk becoming conspicuously unfashionable and superfluous and this is one of the greatest sources of fear for individuals living in the interregnum (Bauman, 2000). In view of this, although Simmel could not have foreseen it himself, it is clear that fashion depends on the ‘virtual’, inasmuch as we could say a ‘virtual’ extension of
the heterotopia has been created.

As this chapter set to determine, in the interregnum the ‘virtual’ extension of the heterotopia is necessary so long as we desire to build a performative heterotopia where we can satisfy our craving for recognition by fostering a positive relation-to-self (Honneth, 1995). Like urban explorers themselves, this extension of our compensatory space emphasises the point that things work with much greater effect when they are enhanced by something else. Whether that is the collective (‘the Boyz’) or technology does not matter because, in the end, both enhance our performative world and satisfy our cravings for freedom, homeliness and the desire to be noticed.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to address the dynamics of technology and the ‘virtual’ aspects of urban exploration, to explore how they serve as a further extension of heterotopic social space. For some scholars, however, such as Pierre Levy (1997), the ‘virtual’ signals the beginning of an alternative form of humanity that allows individuals such as urban explorers to build a perfect world where they can share knowledge, create extensive relationships and work towards accomplishing collective projects. As it has been argued, though, in the interregnum this idea amounts to nothing more than a naive utopian illusion. Of Levy’s three crucial drivers speed is the only part of the dream that is fulfilling its role sufficiently. As for the others, ‘the Boyz’ relationships with Urbex Central and Fr3e Roamers clearly demonstrate that limiting the control and movement of ruling populations seems unachievable as each group strives to outdo ‘Others’. In view of this, it seems unlikely that any formation of a shared ‘knowledge space’ – the third essential driver – among explorers will arise. In the end, only Foucault’s (1984) idea of the ephemeral heterotopia seems possible, where each ‘virtual’ network gives rise to its own idiosyncratic ethics and unsettled identities.

Contra Levy, then, while it is clear the ‘virtual’ side of urban exploration cannot steer us into utopia, some, such as Sherry Turkle (2011), have argued that the ‘real’ is still gradually becoming less significant. What this means is that there is the belief that the ‘virtual’ extension of the heterotopia offers us something better, if only temporarily, than the more ‘real’ aspects of our compensatory spaces, inasmuch as urban explorers are becoming
increasingly tethered to electronic devices and the internet. In this light, the fate of heterotopic social space seems bleak as individuals are becoming more connected to an erroneous and by all appearances fictitious ‘virtual’ extension of the heterotopia that is at loggerheads with the ‘real’ one.

Nevertheless, as it has been argued, even though urban explorers seem as though they are tethered to technology and virtuality what is ignored by Turkle and other critics is the fact that human culture has transformed. What this means, according to Jean Baudrillard (1983b), is that we should abandon the distinction between the ‘real’ and the ‘virtual’ and replace it with the idea of simulacrum or hyperreality. For it is this that has become the measure of the ‘real’, signalling that we should view individuals as being tethered to our culture which is driven by consumer capitalism and performativity instead. In short, then, this chapter suggested that our heterotopias cannot help but have both ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ aspects because in the interregnum neither can be separated. As Blackshaw (2017) reminds us, there is only that ‘shadowy realm called khôra, where ‘performative unions’ gather in the hope they might find some way of transcending the limits of the more mundane everyday world.

To support the overall argument being made, and attend to another essential aspect of urban exploration, further attention was given to the digitalisation and virtualisation of photography. It was argued that out of all technologies this appears to cause a more powerful form of tethering to electronic devices and the ‘virtual’. Nonetheless, and contrary to those ideas surrounding tethering, authenticity, image manipulation and falsity, it was suggested that photographic truth does not, and in fact never has, existed. What this means is that it has always involved a certain degree of staging, adaptation and mechanical production techniques. In other words, photographic truth does not represent truth in the conventional sense of the word, but images certainly do tell the ‘truth’ about our heterotopias because photography and its techniques of manipulation capture urban explorers’ creativity, imagination and the essential polysemic nature of signs. In a nutshell, then, the idea that urban explorers are tethered to hyperreality and the magnetism and allure of performativity, rather than the ‘virtual’, was reinforced.

The final section of this chapter went on to advance the discussion beyond the general theme of ‘tethering’ and ‘virtual’ appropriation. What is suggested instead is that both
technology and the ‘virtual’ provide an important extension to the heterotopia, one that helps ‘the Boyz’ live out their performative selves and reality. On balance, then, if urban explorers are tethered to anything it is being performative because this is how we all live and survive in a hyperreal world. In this vein, following Simmel’s (1957) idea of fashion and Axel Honneth’s (1995) notion of recognition (which involves three spheres that are essential to developing self-confidence, moral relations with others and reinforcing our awareness of our abilities, traits and self-esteem) what ‘the Boyz’ crave, like everyone else in society, is a positive emotional state – what we might otherwise refer to as a positive relation-to-self. What this means is that the ‘virtual’ extension of the heterotopia essentially increases ‘the Boyz’ watchableness and fashionability and therefore our recognition as our ontological truth claims are reinforced. After all, ontological truth claims are measured by how well they perform (Blackshaw, 2017).

To help further elucidate this phenomenon, the chapter went on to explain how ‘the Boyz’ are not docile bodies who are willing to surrender themselves to technology, the ‘virtual’ or even ‘Others’. Rather, we are individuals who follow the principle of Enkrateia, which means urban explorers are people who invent and shape themselves. In this vein, when it comes to the ‘virtual’ extension of the heterotopia becoming fashionable and gaining recognition begins with imitation and this leads to becoming distinguished. Nevertheless, it should be understood that once we have distinguished ourselves from ‘Others’ our inimitability can never last for long. As Simmel (1957) suggests, it is a continuous process that never really ends, so long as our desire to remain fashionable endures.
Chapter Eight

Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of this final chapter is to draw the thesis to a close by focusing on what has been accomplished in this study and how it contributes to original knowledge. The overarching aim of the thesis was to respond to the limits of existing studies of urban exploration, and frame this core concern with a rigorous application and consideration of Foucault’s (1984) concept of heterotopia. In this regard, the key objectives were to: explore heterotopic social space generally through a leisure studies framework and specifically through Blackshaw’s (2017) devotional leisure thesis; identify and explain how urban explorers understand and attempt to control social space in urban exploration; frame the central interpenetrating and intertwining life strategies that are adopted by urban explorers; and address the dynamics of technology – especially photography and the internet – and how these impact on the ‘virtual’ aspects of urban exploration as a further extension of the heterotopia.

As it was indicated in Chapter Two, the phenomenon of urban exploration is an under-researched area. To date, only one comprehensive study has been conducted by Bradley Garrett (2013a) and this work is accompanied by only a small number of academic research papers and chapters which tend to be limited in their methodological and theoretical scope. For instance, most of the research that has been conducted does not attempt to understand urban explorers in any comprehensive way. Rather, it is focused on the aestheticism of decay, urban exploration as a means of psychogeographical enquiry and the notion that urban explorers represent a type of rebellious community. What is more, with the exception of Kindynis (2016), Garrett and those others who have set out to examine urban exploration do not take into account the wider social, economic and political context in which urban exploration takes place.

Nonetheless, this thesis is much different in its approach because it provides the first detailed investigation of heterotopic social space vis-à-vis urban exploration. This is the thesis’s major original contribution to knowledge. The concept of heterotopia was employed
because it allows us to explore the idea that in the interregnum urban explorers create their own versions of community which have their own rules, allow people to be collectively individual and are more intense than rational understandings of community. Unpacking this concept was essential because, as it has been argued, traditional community cannot help but be missing in our current stage of modernity. It also serves as a sensitising concept in the way its meaning is developed in an open, less structured and empirical way, in order to sensitise the reader and invite them to come on a special kind of journey, which in this case is ‘the Boyz’. In other words, the concept of heterotopia has been used to analyse and develop an understanding of: the type of social, cultural and political climate urban explorers face; the resultant compensatory spaces that are starkly different to everyday space; and the degree of freedom that is felt as a result of discrete forms of leisure such as urban exploration. What this means, then, is that this study could be considered unique, within the context of urban exploration, as it has concentrated on thoroughly unpacking the performative world, and indeed ‘its own code of intelligibility’ (Blackshaw and Crabbe, 2004: 150), of a group of urban explorers.

What follows in the remainder of this chapter is a summary of the main findings and their theoretical implications. However, before the main findings and contributions to knowledge can be discussed, it is perhaps a good idea to first consider the methodological implications of this study. In view of this, this conclusion begins with a discussion centred around the methodology that was employed, to sum up what advantage there was to using it and explain its potential for further research in the future. After that I summarise my key contributions to extant knowledge from the four findings chapters. And finally, I draw this thesis to a close by outlining my own approach to understanding urban exploration and its inherent performativity.

**Methodological Conclusions and Implications for Future Research**

As suggested above, my aim over the course of this thesis has been to offer a thorough investigation of heterotopic social space and, of course, the group of individuals who intermittently bring it to being and inhabit it. It was for this reason that a rigorous examination of urban exploration, the urban exploration literature and current societal changes was conducted initially. Thereafter, I was able to design a methodology that would be able to attend to the central problems and gaps in extant research.
Throughout this thesis, then, I have employed a qualitative research process that was shaped by the interpretivist paradigm, and this entailed producing ‘thick descriptions’ (Geertz, 1973) by immersing myself in the heterotopia of a specific group of urban explorers who call themselves WildBoyz. However, it is important to add that I was resolute and careful to find a suitable balance between the empirical evidence and theoretical insights that were applied and developed in the thesis. This is because the intention was to bring the heterotopia to life, first by transporting the reader into the heterotopia itself, allowing them to journey alongside ‘the Boyz’ and gain a palpable feel for what it means to be and seek leisure as an urban explorer, but also by generating accurate conclusions that took into consideration our current stage of modernity. In other words, it was my intention, as indicated in Chapter Three, that the reader would follow in the footsteps of Alice by leaping headfirst into the rabbit hole that leads into a completely different world within our world. And through the intimate descriptions, dialogue and imagery this thesis provides, this is a world that becomes ever more vivid and intense the longer the reader remains. In the end this was crucial because, as Alice so rightly points out, ‘what use is a story without pictures or conversation?’

As it has been demonstrated, to achieve the balance noted in the paragraph above this study became an ethnographic investigation that employed the methods of hermeneutic sociology and sociological hermeneutics. Essentially, this methodology entailed living life as an urban explorer and a cultural intermediary, to comprehend a world from an insider perspective and provide the reader access to it. However, since I recognised that my participants do not reside inside an impenetrable vacuum because there is a certain ambivalence about heterotopia as it does not rest on foundations of incontrovertible truth, and that each of ‘the Boyz’ and their heterotopia are intricately linked to the wider fabric of society and culture, meaning they are subject to its influences, an intuitive outsider perspective was also adopted. Doing things this way allowed me to enter ‘the Boyz’ heterotopia in such a way that has allowed this study to be instrumental in revealing the doxa of its world.

Essentially, the evidence gathered through this methodology enabled me to explore how urban explorers understand and attempt to control social space and the strategies they adopt for living. In other words, the methods that were employed allowed me to delve into Blackshaw’s (2017) concept of ‘devotional leisure’ and reveal the duality involved in being an urban explorer, so we can now view ‘the Boyz’ as being khôrasters-skholērs extraordinaire.
will detail what can be concluded from this evidence in greater depth later in the chapter, but for now it stands that this methodology allowed me to be part of the heterotopia in such a way as to reveal the conditions of performativity in urban exploration, which involves emancipation and being able to locate something that feels almost like a ‘community’.

In terms of further investigation, the methodology I have employed in this thesis, and some of the insights gained from it, could be applied to other areas of research based on urban exploration. Perhaps the most obvious use it could serve would be to explore a different heterotopic social space, to identify, in a comparison study, whether it is anything like the one ‘the Boyz’ have created for themselves. Indeed, I acknowledge that I have focused narrowly on a small network of urban explorers, which of course was necessary to achieve the aim and objectives of this study. Therefore, increasing the pool of urban explorers – both individuals and groups – would certainly be useful for developing the concept of heterotopia even further. What is more, this methodology could be applied in a slightly different way, but one that is, nonetheless, still a comparative study. What I have in mind here is a comparison between experienced and more dedicated urban explorers against the rise of the quick-fix ‘Instagram kids’ who, to borrow Robert Stebbins (2007) notion of ‘casual leisure’, might be described as being less skilled, as having an ephemeral interest in urban exploration and after nothing more than quick intrinsic rewards. In other words, this would be a study disclosing the differences between *khôrasters*-skholērs and those individuals who are perhaps pure *khôrasters* – those whose interest does not extend to desiring a sense of belonging and something that feels like a home in urban exploration.

It might also be useful to explore more seriously the issues of gender and ethnicity in urban exploration research. As Mott and Roberts (2013a) have argued, there is especially a lack of research when it comes to female urban explorers, and indeed any other explorers for that matter who are not predominantly white males. One particular gap in the research that has arisen in this study and also Garrett’s (2013a) concerns the misogynistic behaviour of urban explorers and the tendency for the opposite sex to be subject to sexual objectification. Unfortunately, these issues could not be attended to in the present study due to restrictions on space and the simple fact that only a few women and ethnic minorities were ever part of ‘the Boyz’ heterotopia.

One final area that could be the focus of further investigation centres around the increasing
use of drone technology (see Kohlstedt, 2015). In effect, what this indicates is that ways of exploring are changing radically, to the extent that for some urban explorers the human body is rapidly becoming something of a redundant entity. Clearly this invites a whole new area of discussion to emerge as boundaries are transcended and issues of identity, ethics, virtuality, and even the concept of heterotopia reach a completely new level. Indeed, it also brings into question whether the point of exploring inaccessible or generally unseen places has any less meaning for extant urban explorers since the toxic, precarious and generally forbidden underbelly of modernity is suddenly becoming more, if not too, accessible to all.

**Theoretical Contributions**

Through the methodical examination of the experiences of urban explorers, the exploration and application of a range of theoretical perspectives and by forming its own contributions to knowledge, this thesis has achieved the aim and objectives that were repeated at the beginning of this chapter. What follows are the conclusions based on what has been analysed in the literature review and findings chapters, and what I have managed to accomplish with this thesis.

My research has shown that urban exploration has emerged as a form of leisure that is becoming increasingly fashionable on account of the interregnum, which signals an ongoing shift from a solid producer-based modernity to something that is fluid, arbitrary and consumerist. In view of this, as Bauman (2000) has argued, since they are no longer tied to anything tangible such as a community, individuals are now forced to find their own meaning in the world, and find creative ways of surviving against the loneliness, uncertainly and insecurity that is everywhere around us. What they also find, however, is a form of freedom that cannot be found anywhere else – freedom that makes individuals feel truly alive. It is with this in mind that this thesis offers its first contribution to knowledge, as it was noted earlier, which is the idea that urban explorers seek spaces of compensation, what Foucault (1984) has termed heterotopias of deviation, to satisfy their need for theatrical and intense moments of experience and an interim sense of belonging alongside likeminded others.

What is more, though, as Chapter Seven revealed, is that the shift to a different type of modernity has also led to important technological transformations in terms of our communicative abilities, and the way individuals engage with urban exploration. In other words, this thesis has identified and unpacked a further ‘virtual’ aspect of urban exploration.
– which is essentially an extension of the heterotopia – in a way no other study has.

The second major contribution to knowledge this thesis provides is what its adds to Foucault’s (1984) concept of heterotopia. As it is well documented, Foucault defined heterotopias as other, real, spaces of alternative possibilities. He referred to them on three occasions, but never went on to completely develop the idea (Dehaene and De Cauter, 2008; Palladino and Miller, 2016). As a result, his enticing words have motivated many interpretations and applications of the concept across many disciplines, including Kindynis and Garrett’s (2015) attempt vis-à-vis urban exploration. Nonetheless, the way the concept has been applied in the context of urban exploration is ineffective and arguably weak, inasmuch as its ability to build on Foucault’s original concept has been negligible. In response, this thesis has provided a rigorous application and consideration of the concept of heterotopia by building on the original idea which was essentially Foucault’s way of expanding on Freud’s ‘pleasure’ and ‘reality’ principles. Additionally, it has drawn heavily on Derrida’s (1995) idea of khôra, which is very similar to heterotopia in the way it represents the ‘non-locatable, non-space’ that is found in the heterotopia, to help us understand it even more expansively.

The last point notwithstanding, to return to the point about Freud (2015 [1920]) for a moment, the ‘pleasure principle’ is said to be an innate tendency that resides in the unconscious of every individual, but as Foucault saw things Panoptic strategies, what we might refer to as the ‘reality principle’, suppress our desires in everyday life and this causes the temporary suspension of the ‘pleasure principle’. Heterotopia’s of deviation, then, were highlighted as a way of subtly disturbing spaces so that they might become contradictory and intense, and so satisfy people’s desires and cravings. What Foucault could have not predicted, however, is how important heterotopias would become in the twenty-first century, as the interregnum has dissolved old boundaries of the past where some things had to remain hidden.

Today, everything is much more visible and all individuals are busy seeking out heterotopias that might temporarily satisfy their needs in more inimitable but generally observable ways. It is this conception of the heterotopia that has been explored. By doing so it has allowed me to bring the idea of performativity and its watchableness into Foucault’s original concept, which is crucial when trying to understand urban exploration because, as Lyotard (1984)
argues, this has become the new criterion of the authenticity of truth in the interregnum. What this tells us, then, is that heterotopic social space is filled with performativity and shaped by the imaginations of those who are part of it.

Finally, the third contribution to knowledge is the way this thesis has advanced the study of urban exploration by attending to several fundamental problems with extant research. At the beginning of the study (in Chapter Two) it was argued that a significant number of urban exploration studies are dominated by psychogeography and situationist ideas. My foremost criticism of this work has been that this way of thinking draws on a reified method of viewing urban exploration as a means of escape from society. The main consequences of this are that the astute work of Baudrillard (1983a; 1990; 1998; 2005), which points to the idea that we are part of an inescapable consumer society, is ignored, and that an ideal, but equally impossible, way of being in the world is revered. As this thesis has demonstrated, without an open understanding of the type of transformed modernity we find ourselves in it would not have been possible to develop an accurate interpretation of urban explorers. In other words, it was by acknowledging the influences and effects our consumer society have had on individuals that this study managed to explore the creativity and imagination that goes into the construction of heterotopic social space.

Another problem with extant urban exploration research that this thesis attended to, as indicated above, was the penchant for applying the concept of ‘community’. This was to respond to Bennett’s (2011) creation of the ‘bunkerologist’, but more especially Garrett’s (2013b) suggestion of a ‘tightly fractured community’. As it was argued in Chapter Two, the idea of community has transformed in the interregnum as it has become what Beck (2002) has termed a ‘zombie’ concept, which is deceiving because when we detect its presence it tends to appear like community as sociology has traditionally understood it. Nonetheless, comprehending community in the context of urban exploration demands an alternative understanding. Hence, as the reader knows, this study espouses Bauman’s (2000) notion of communities that are more fluid and neo-tribal. This is why the concept of heterotopia was employed, because it can be juxtaposed against the utopian dream of community to reveal urban explorers’ arenas of Dionysian performativity. After all, when we view the concept of ‘community’ from a heterotopian context it is an entirely different sort of beast, where irrationality takes the place of rationality.
The last way this thesis has advanced existing studies of urban exploration is by attending to the suggestion, as it has been argued by Garrett (2013a) and Mould (2015), that urban explorers are ‘rebels’ seeking to redemocratise and decommodify urban space. By unpacking this idea, this study revealed that the professed rebellion is more imaginative than real. Hence, following the ideas of Bigo (2008) and Mathiesen (1997), it was argued that as methods of surveillance have changed urban explorers find themselves controlled, almost unwittingly, by makeshift synoptic strategies where the point is to see and be seen by the masses. The upshot of this, as it has been pointed out, is that urban explorers in fact crave chances where they are able to display their ‘secretive’, ‘deviant’, performative selves, to the extent that any plans to escape the system have simply become part of their performative identity. In this vein, it can be argued, in something of an ironic twist, that urban explorers are effectively actors in the surveillance of themselves.

Towards an Understanding of Urban Exploration: Performativity and the Heterotopia

As the findings chapters have signified, when framed through a leisure studies framework, specifically Blackshaw’s (2017) devotional leisure thesis, heterotopic social space can be seen to pivot around the theatricality typically found in performativity and the need to be part of a collective. In view of this, I determined that the best way to unpack the underlying workings of a heterotopia was by applying Bauman’s ‘complex interaction of three interwoven, yet distinct processes – those of cognitive, moral and aesthetic spacings’ (1993: 145). By unpicking each of these processes I was subsequently able to emphasise that the heterotopia is all about the need to control social space. I was then able go on to argue that this allows ‘the Boyz’ to occupy two different but distinct positions as they succeed in gaining control of their social space. In short, it was explained how they are khôrasters-skholêrs extraordinaires. Further, what also emerged from this critical discussion was that neither position can be privileged over the other, so long as the true magic of the heterotopia is desired. In a nutshell, then, reflecting on the notions of proximity and distance that all three spaces deploy allowed me to expose urban explorers as being true ‘artists of life’, to borrow Blackshaw (2017) apt term, as they carefully manipulate social space to find both a sense of personal fulfilment and a home through their form of devotional leisure.

Nonetheless, to provide a comprehensive interpretation of a heterotopia it was not enough to simply identify and explain how ‘the Boyz’ control social space. What this means is that I
found it important to also frame the interpenetrating and intertwining strategies they adopt for living – by borrowing what Bauman (1996a) has termed ‘life strategies’ – that embody what their heterotopia is all about. To put it another way, I coined five new life strategies to frame how ‘the Boyz’ find meaning and establish their own way of becoming in the interregnum. However, as the reader may have noticed, most of them, if not all, may be deemed repellent and even offensive. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this was intentional, and even instrumental, to remain faithful to the image urban explorers try to create for themselves. In other words, in sticking with the performativity of urban explorers, they are meant to be provocative and shocking, to lay bare an accurate interpretation of an inimitable heterotopia that would prefer to be seen as something that is a little bit bad and ever so slightly mad.

Hence, as I have concluded, the ‘schizophrenic’ has been used to highlight the way urban explorers experience a sense of identity fragmentation, emphasising the penetrability and volatility of the heterotopia. Thereafter, drawing attention to the ‘nostalgic’ allowed the reader to understand how ‘the Boyz’ desperately search for ‘the craic’, particularly through the mundane and spectacular elements of their past, to recreate, time after time, a temporary sense of home. Following this, the idea that ‘the Boyz’ are ‘parasites’ was brought forth, to reveal how it is the feeling of the sublime they seek to extract, which can only be found in situations where the differend is present. And there are certainly plenty of those in urban exploration. Next, the notion that urban explorers are ‘rebels of Sicherheit’ was presented, to explore the idea that ‘the Boyz’ are rebellious only performatively, because what they also seek alongside freedom is safety, security and some degree of certainty. And finally, by building on the concept of performativity, the idea of the ‘media whore’ was introduced, to signify that it is idiosyncrasy and people’s appetites to be celebrity-like that have a powerful hold over us in a society that is decidedly consumerist. In the end, being a ‘media whore’ is all about bodies being exploited and individuals forming and announcing themselves to the rest of the world through their performativity.

Taking into consideration the last point, what is manifest is that the effects of the shift into a world based on consumer capitalism have been analysed and illustrated by this study. However, while my research allowed me to explore the basic connections between our consumer culture and urban exploration, it also directed me towards some wider implications of consumerism. What I have in mind is the way this study has encapsulated not
only the surface fluidity of consumer culture and the way performativity has become key to the experience of urban exploration, but also how opportunities opened up by the continuous development of technology and the internet have had a significant impact on the heterotopia. What this means is that heterotopic social space may have begun in the urban environment but, as I have shown, it has been dramatically enhanced by the blurring of the boundaries between the ‘real’ and the ‘virtual’. What we are left with, as Baudrillard (1994) has suggested, is something without an origin – only a simulacrum which has become the measure of the real, or what we might call ‘the shadowy realm of khôra’ where anything goes (Blackshaw, 2017). Yet, to question whether the heterotopia is real or not is beside the point since it is only the performativity of it that is important.

In view of the points above, another way I have unpacked heterotopic social space is by addressing a ‘virtual’ extension of it. As it has been argued, this is part and parcel of the performativity, and it comprises forms of social media, photography, cyberspace and mobile phones. This is something which has hitherto remained conspicuously absent from the literature.

Taken as a whole, then, as it was argued in Chapter Two, this thesis concludes first with the suggestion that the best way to understand urban exploration, and indeed the people who do it, is to apply Foucault’s (1984) concept of the heterotopia. However, since this idea was underdeveloped, especially in the context of urban exploration, it was necessary to find a way of refining it, and this was done by bringing it to life. To do this, though, it was suggested that a heterotopia, that inimitable and complex hybrid world that is both real and imaginary, can only be explored by attending to the three areas I have identified. In other words, it was imperative to understand how urban explorers control social space, what life strategies they adopt for living and to address the significance and impact that technology and the ‘virtual’ has on the heterotopia. Together, this is what lies at the heart of ‘the Boyz’ heterotopic social space in modernity.

My thesis also concludes by suggesting that we are now in a position to offer a more accurate definition of a particular kind of heterotopic social space. First of all, at its most basic, it is the physical exploration of human-made structures and sites, particularly those that are abandoned or remain largely unseen in our ordinary day-to-day lives. However, on a second and much more profound level, it is much more than this. Although urban
exploration would ostensibly appear to be a rebellious form of deviant leisure, the research demonstrates that it is in fact an expression of performativity and theatricality. What this means is that ‘the Boyz’ heterotopia has everything to do with emancipation, freedom and feelings of dissatisfaction with the everyday world; yet, much like everything else in the interregnum it is fundamentally consumerist in orientation. At the same time, though, heterotopic social space is something that feels homely and is charged with feelings of meaning and belonging. In other words, it can be defined as being a gateway into the darker side of modernity that allows ‘the Boyz’ to enter an ephemeral, yet magical space of compensation where there is room to fulfil both vocations. For this reason, we can define heterotopic social space as being the home of khôrasters-skholërs extraordinaire.

Epilogue

The best part of the literature that focuses on urban exploration depicts the world and the activity itself as if they are both relatively stable things, and it tends to do this by relying on outdated theoretical concepts and ideas that are no longer dependable in our current stage of modernity – the interregnum. What this study shows, however, is that urban exploration is all about metamorphosis and becoming part of the ever-changing consumer world that is everywhere around us. Yet, the final significant conclusion that can be drawn from this thesis vis-à-vis the above-mentioned point is that it does not matter if ‘the Boyz’ are part and parcel of twenty-first century consumer culture. Looking beyond this, it is important to acknowledge that the heterotopia is still its own unique event, a fantasy that is nothing more and nothing less than the performativity that injects life into it. In a nutshell, then, the reader must understand that urban exploration is not limited by consumerism; rather, it is simply fashioned by it. Therefore, it is time to put an end to casually demonising consumer capitalism and denouncing it as something that is inherently evil – an evil that should be circumvented at all costs. On balance, it is beneath the surface of these unrefined assessments, especially where performativity is concerned, where we find that there is much more to explore. These are our heterotopias, what we might also refer to as the reverse side of consumer capitalism.

As my research shows, heterotopic social space represents a bizarre world, a space that is both real and imaginary, but far superior than anything located in the everyday. It is something wrought with fierce paroxysms of nostalgia and excitement; however, it is never
likely to be the same as urban explorers assemble sporadically whenever the opportunity to explore happens to arise. Freed from the sticky tribulations of commitment, each occasion presents itself as a chance to socialise in the interim and immerse the body in a task of performativity that is at a distance from the mundanity and sameness of the everyday world. And it is here, in khôra, where absolutely anything feels possible if the imagination permits it.

‘The Boyz’ story is essentially an ongoing myth with no real end in sight, and while every episodic chapter of our heterotopia has certain predictable qualities, observing them is rather like watching a television series unfold. What I mean by this is that there will always be unexpected twists in the tale that take us by surprise as the quest for freedom, authenticity and belonging continues. And yet, every memory, image, emotion and fantasy created by ‘the Boyz’ serves to become progressively more meaningful as time goes on. It is for this reason our passion and love for the heterotopia becomes more powerful and spellbinding every time we bring the world of WildBoyz back to life. In the end, what we create is not really fantasy at all; it becomes, at its apex, both a cozy and exciting place that feels more real than anything else we have ever experienced. As Mayhem once put it while trying to explain the heterotopia in his own way, ‘it’s like getting into bed with four dirty sluts and fuckin’ them all at once’. In other words, it’s warm and inviting but also never seems to lose its potency and intoxicating allure. Nonetheless, the heterotopia remains a discursive event and so it is inevitable that outside their leisure the lives of khôrasters-skholérs extraordinaire must return to the task of living in the interregnum. Until the next time that is.

So, and notwithstanding the foregoing remarks, to reign back in on ‘the Boyz’ one last time it was eleven o’clock and we were arriving one by one to meet on the top level of a rundown car park. Aside from the odd Tesco carrier bag, a randomly discarded pair of knickers and ourselves, it was completely deserted. As they appeared everyone squeezed into Box’s car where we were sharing a big dirty chicken tikka pizza and listening to Jarvis Cocker’s ‘cunts are still running the world’ tune. It had been a few months since we had all had a gathering like this so an intensifying sense of excitement was building. We talked and laughed, but all the while kept glancing eagerly out of the windscreen at Newton Aycliffe’s ‘legendary’ clock tower. Our plan was to get inside it and stand among the five bells at the top.

As part of the town’s ongoing redevelopment process the beige-coloured brick tower was being refurbished and preserved. It is after all one of the last remaining tokens of Lord
Beveridge’s vision for the area, so it cannot help but be iconic. For ‘the Boyz’, though, there was, and still is, actually something rather special about it since we had all grown up with it constantly lurking distinctively on the horizon, and being able to hear its chimes resound far and wide across the utopian ‘shithole’ we still like to call home. Therefore, we were being enticed by a raging sense of nostalgia and our resolve to experience ‘the good old days’ once again, and the excitement and adventure it would no doubt tender.

With everyone present and accounted for – Mayhem, MKD, Box, Husky and Soul – we ditched the cars and headed in the direction of the cracked concrete ramp that would take us into the town centre. Looking at us here, though, it is obvious, not unlike the town, that things have changed among ‘the Boyz’. Time, along with new jobs, interests and relationships have each taken their toll on our heterotopia. Now, Subject 47’s absence is no longer noticeable, The Hurricane has a ‘proper job’ so he is less willing to take risks for fear of jeopardising his career, Rizla Rider has almost completely slipped away from us into the arms of a ‘crazy bitch’, and new characters such as Husky and Soul have assumed their places in the group. Yet, the performative fiction still carries on to this day as I write these final concluding passages. Indeed, the next few hours would still take each of us back, answering an even greater call of nostalgia, by restoring our heterotopia and the craic once again.

I close, then, not with an ending but an interminable new beginning, with the heterotopia and our performativity reigniting itself. This explore was going to be a fucking good one, perhaps even better than the last. We could feel the magic of our special world unfurling as it permeated our bodies and minds, and we joked, upon reaching the base of the tower, that this venture might even result in us receiving the prize of making another appearance in the news. Not that this truly mattered in the end though; what really mattered was that ‘the Boyz’ were back together and the craic was ‘absolutely mint’. After all, what use is fame and freedom if you are alone?
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