

Introduction

'Every individual navigates a sensory universe tied to a personal history... Walking in the same forest, different individuals are sensitive to different stimuli... There is the forest of the mushroom picker, the rambler, the fugitive, or Aboriginal, the forest of the hunter, gamekeeper or poacher; the forest of lovers, vagabondsa thousand forests in one.' (Breton, 2017:2)

Spaces bear witness to often-silenced, everyday histories of, for example, civic resistance and societal cohesion, before or after war and violence. 'Composed of intersections of mobile elements...in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it' (De Certeau, 1987), space has the potential to embody layered contested voices. By focusing upon space and place and the attached social and cultural meanings, this article examines animation practice as a means to interrogate concepts relating to history and grand narrative; identity; and personal and shared memory. Drawing from research conducted with young people in Rwanda, Kosovo and the UK, it illustrates how using creative processes in animation is able to elicit dialogue, critical awareness and agency brought about through a reimagining of space. Over the course of two years, the AHRC research project *ReSpace* set out to critically engage youth in Rwanda, Kosovo, and the UK through a series of art-based workshops, to research and reimagine specific sites using a combination of methods from animation, architecture and anthropology. Similarities of experience, of history, memory, and perhaps above all the over-signification of these post-conflict spaces (Rwanda, Kosovo), challenge standard assumptions about pre-war and post-war social realities.

The *ReSpace* project, discussed here, set out to discover new epistemic grounds, exploring methodologies, and empathetic learning by considering different positionalities of insider/outsider to contested spaces. A reimagining of place through participatory and experimental methods enabled a reconstitution of memory, stories and voice - 'a vital human strategy for sustaining a sense of agency in the face of disempowering circumstances.' (Jackson, 2002:14). Young people studying anthropology (Prishtina, Kosovo), architecture and animation (Kigali, Rwanda) shared their methods with each other as they reflected upon how to come to understand a place/ space as a post-memory generation (Hirsh, 2008) in a post-conflict context. A reinvention of these spaces was explored through animation methods using the virtual reality tools such as Quill VR, interactive platforms (Unreal), stop-motion, direct and under-the-camera animation. In this article we revisit the animations created with and by young people on this project to consider how these interdisciplinary methods enabled different articulations of histories and memory. By focusing upon case studies developed from this research, we will consider what sets of knowledge can be activated through animation practice that cannot be articulated through conventional research methods - or as anthropologist Tim Ingold (2013) put it, how does one think through making? Then we will consider how re-imagined conceptions of space and place, as drawings and animations, can be used alongside interdisciplinary practice to enable an epistemic decolonization.

Decolonial Perspectives: Contexts

Dominant narratives around colonial histories are often tied to specific events such as the Berlin conference of 1884 and the scramble for Africa, or that of the thirteen English colonies on the American continent in the 1600s. However, as scholars of settler colonialism [of Australia, Canada and the United States] have argued it is important to recognise colonialism not only 'as an event but as an ongoing structure. The logic, tenets, and identities engendered by settler colonialism persist and continue to shape race, gender, class, and sexual formations into the present.' (Nakano Glenn, 2015:55). Whilst colonial histories and settler colonial histories are different and should be theorized differently, it is also true in both cases that the legacy of colonialism is key in shaping identity across different geographies and into the present. This is of particular relevance to the two locations where the AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council) funded *ReSpace* project took place; Kosovo and Rwanda. Both locations had experienced forms of colonialism and a recent history of violence and genocide which are interconnected.

In Rwanda, the colonial experience set about the reification of identity and racialised inequality that embedded the divisions that would lead to the ongoing internal conflicts, genocide in 1994 and aftermath war with the DRC (Longman, 2017). As Purdekova and Mwambari (2021) state in a post-genocide and post-conflict era, the colonial legacy continues to leave its imprint. The policies set about by the Rwandan government to de-ethnicize Rwanda and create a new 'Rwandan identity' are part of the formation of a peace-building strategy after the genocide. This means that narratives connected to this history are strongly managed and controlled, underpinned by a historical consensus and repeated emphasis on a united identity (Buckley-Zistel, 2006 in Purdekova).

In Kosovo the experience of periods of colonization, also aimed at altering the ethnic population balance in the region, set about to decrease the Albanian population and substitute them with Montenegrins and Serbs. Following Marshall Tito's death in 1980 and the dissolution of Yugoslavia, Slobodan Milosovic rose to power setting about the ethnic oppression of Albanians in Kosovo. Milosovic's oppression of Albanians that began in the 1980s resulted in a 'parallel system' of self-organization for Albanians in Kosovo. At the time, the differential treatment of Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo was not only experienced structurally but also spatially, whereby schools, and property, became exclusionary and only for the privilege of some. In this context, space was contested, it became both a physical and symbolic resource connected to nationhood and identity (Kostovicov, 2005). Albanians used it as a form of resistance to Serbian control of Kosovo, the Serbian government as a means to exert political control.

Following the trauma of these events, it has been argued that specific narratives tend to emerge. For example 'the Aggressor/Victim/Rescuer constellation occupied the dominant story in Kosovo, and its pervasiveness did not leave room for other narratives about either individuals or communities affected by war.' (Losi, 2001:12) and in Rwanda the peace-building project controlled a 'new historical consensus' (Purdeková & Mwambari, 2021, Longman, 2017). Similarly, Albanian social memory is often discussed in the context of interethnic reconciliation to prevent recurring violence. However, this exists in a context of a post-war that does not have a direct

memory of the Serbian violence of the late 1990s against Albanian Kosovars. This is underpinned by a conciliatory constitution 2008, aimed at promoting inter-ethnic, as opposed to ethno-nationalist positions (Schwandner-Seivers & Klinkner, 2019).

The project discussed here set out to engage a post-memory generation (Hirsch, 1998) that carries with them the memories of collective trauma experienced by the previous one, or 'a transgenerational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience' (Hirsch, 2003: 205), but that also had its own stories to tell. It followed on from earlier research that looked at the educational potential of the arts, culture and heritage 'for more critical and active interrogations aimed at advancing social justice for young people in Kosovo' (Gusia, Schwandner-Seivers, in Cooke, 2019). In *ReSpace*, the youth of a post-memory (Hirsch, 2008) generation in Rwanda and Kosovo were encouraged to reimagine specific sites of memory (and the dominant narratives that emerge from them) through artistic practice without focusing directly upon the genocides.

About the Project

'It is to space - the space we occupy, traverse, have continual access to, or can at any time reconstruct in thought and imagination that we must turn our attention. Our thoughts must turn to it, if this or that category of remembrance is to reappear.' (Halbwachs, 1996)

The *ReSpace Project* was conceived of as an interdisciplinary participatory research that focused upon space (architectural and environmental) and artistic practice as a vehicle to critically engage with history with a post-memory generation. The project was designed by animation scholar Callus, sociologist Gusia, and anthropologists Schwandner-Seivers and Luci, following on from previous research in Kosovo that used arts-based methods for active citizenship. Using participatory methods, the research used archives of rock music and fanzines from the 1980s to explore with young people (anthropology and art students) from Kosovo a historical period that predated the war of the 1998 with the oppression of ethnic Albanian Kosovars. The focus was to consider narratives about histories that sit around the moment of violence and not only the war.

This was part of a larger body of international research stemming from the project *Changing the Story*, which ran for four years across 12 countries, coordinated and led by Prof. Paul Cooke. *Changing the Story* supported the building of inclusive civil societies with, and for, young people in countries affected by conflict past and present as a 'collaborative project between universities, International Non-Government Organisations (INGOs), artists, grassroots civil society organizations and young people across the world.' (Brody, 2021:2) *ReSpace* took place across three countries; UK, Rwanda and Kosovo in collaboration with various partners and stakeholders; the Faculty of Anthropology, University of Pristina; the Faculty of Architecture, University of Rwanda; African Digital Media Academy (Rwanda) and AniBar (Kosovo). The project set out to investigate with young people from each of these places ideas and academic and artistic practices connected to space and place. The participants consisted of architecture (Rwanda), sociology, anthropology (Kosovo) and animation students (UK, Kosovo, Rwanda) between the ages of 19 - 30, who were connected to partner institutions.

Across two years, through dialogue with academics and artists, these youth were encouraged to visit places that they identified sites of interest in order to consider how a place bears witness to often-silenced, everyday histories of, for example, civic resistance and societal cohesion, before or after war and violence. By adopting the architectural concept of the 'site survey', young people used different methods to explore these spaces and reimagine them. The methods were connected to the project themes: *Virtual Spaces*, *Past/Present Spaces*, *Designed Spaces*, *Reclaiming Future Spaces* and underpinned by practices in architecture, animation and anthropology; field notes, sketches, photographic documentation, interviews to name a few. The aim was to investigate memory and history through place and representations of spaces, to consider how arts-based participatory methods can lead to critical discussions about history and decolonial discourse. For each of the different participants, this would take a different format, in the case of anthropology and animation students in Kosovo, they focused upon sites that were important from the past leading up to the events of violence in 1990s; in Rwanda the architecture students and animation students focused upon the future with places that were under threat of development from the urban sprawl of Kigali and the changes brought about in this area; in the UK the animation students were considering documentary animation modes whilst learning about the legacies of colonialism into the present not only in Africa but also in Eastern Europe through their interactions with youth in Kosovo and Rwanda with whom they collaborated¹.

In Rwanda, the site visits took place in the wetlands of Kigali; the Gisimba Memorial Centre, a community centre for the well-being of children focused upon trauma-aware approaches including art-therapy; La Colombiere School, setup in Burundi to teach Rwandan children, then relocated to Rwanda after the genocide, and the local area of Mu Myembe that is home to a community of informal settlements, were visited. During these visits young people used walking as a method (Pink, 2007) to understand the space, they took photos, 360 videos, sketches, interviewed locals, collected materials, found objects and made animations. These informed a collaboration with animation students in the UK to create a 3D interactive experience of these sites – seen as a means to engage in a reimagining of these places. The project combined immersive technologies with causal, factual (evidential, not selective) and affective approaches to history in contrast to essentializing stories of war horrors and victimization.

¹ Although the ReSpace project began before COVID in 2020 with participants meeting in person in the UK, following lock down across different countries, participants' travel was limited to within their own country. Therefore collaboration was mediated using online platforms, whilst participants focused on their own countries for site visits.



Figure 1: Map making exercises included the map created by Rwandan architecture student Iris Iradukunda Nsengiyumva



Figure 2: Photo Documentation of Site of Mu Myembe community outskirts of Kigali, photograph taken by Rwanda architecture student Daniel Rutalindwa Gakwavu

In Kosovo, young people and artists visited the house school of Hertica and the Dodona theatre space to reflect upon the past as personal stories emerged from these places. Working alongside sound and visual artists, they considered ways of capturing and re-telling the significance of these places and ways of looking at space. These served as interactive and exploratory civic educational means for

youth to further an understanding of the histories of the place. In this paper we will turn to these examples as case studies of non-fiction animation used as a means to critically engage with history and testimony.

The Hertica Home-School: Interactive Documentary and Voice

Spaces can elicit memories and stories that often connect to history, 'our physical surroundings bear our and others' imprint' (Halbwachs 1950: 128). Even in the context of collective memory, as Halbwachs identified, space is key in not only remembrance and memory, but also in the imagining of these spaces. This negotiation between the remembrance through documentation of the index (Barthes, 1981) the photograph, home movie or postcard and the artistic interjection upon this offers a different type of knowledge that traverses different points in time, past/present/future. Whilst animation has been conventionally associated with children's fictional content, more recently scholars have argued its ability to draw from a range of artistic practice presents creative opportunities in a non-fictional space (Honesty Roe, 2013, Forceville 2022). *The Hertica Home (2020)*² an interactive 3D animation that was developed in the UK by animation students in collaboration with Erasmus anthropology students from Kosovo and sociologist Linda Gusia (Kosovo), is an illustration of a 'co-initiated' participatory animation documentary (Gaudenzi, 2014:138).

The interactive documentary piece centered around a building that was built as a home for the Hertica family, used as a school, the Sami Frasheri Gymnasium, for Albanian Kosovar students who were not allowed to attend mainstream school, and later repurposed as a museum in Kosovo. Through the participation of Gusia, who attended this school during between 1990 and 1998 as a teenager, this interactive documentary was conceived of in collaboration. Gusia was both participant and subject of the project as it developed. She provided images, photographs, footage, and personal voice, whilst youth from Kosovo gave a different perspective of the building as they retold their own post-memory stories of the place. Using Unreal as a platform to develop this experience, 3D animation students in the UK reflected upon the nature of memory and temporality as embodied in this house. The design of this experience considered the layering of different narratives extrapolated from recordings of conversations with Kosovo youth and Linda Gusia. In the animation, the exterior building resembled the house in a structurally accurate form; on one side of the building the house remained in tact as it was when it was first built; on the other side, the building resembled more recent images of the house ravaged by the war, derelict and in ruin. The soundscape in this space also connected to the house with memories from the past (such as Gusia's voice, sound clips from news footage, Kosovo 1980's Rock music) and commentaries from the present, (Kosovo youth) offer context to the experience. *The Hertica Home (2020)* 'bears no accuracy to the spaces in the real Hertica family house, but instead is designed to evoke a sense of a dreamscape, or memory, that is partial in its rendition.' (Callus, 2020) Students listened to different accounts, and identified particular themes that could be explored through objects as the vehicle that is used to carry stories. From cushions in classrooms, to stacked shoes, posters of bands, and newspaper cuttings. The animators used these objects to structure the experience.

² A play through of the interactive project can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pjtRRwbPhY8>)

There were some underpinning design principles that the animators used for this experience. Firstly, the interactive experience was designed to be different each time as the user navigated through the interior of the building in a surrealistic manner; each room leading to a different space each time the experience was played. This was important as it alluded to the discontinuous and non-linear and fragmentary quality of memory. It allowed the animators to condense different temporalities and capture narratives that went beyond the building itself, such as the student protests that took place in the 1990s. It was also important for the animators to create a piece where the space was not occupied by characters or people and yet it is intended to convey a sense of the people that went to this school, lived in this house, and come from Prishtina. These themes emerged from the conversations with the youth from Kosovo and Gusia that were recorded and then used later as a point of discussion for the animators.



Figure 3: A series of still images from the Hertica Home interactive experience created in the Unreal engine by UK animation students, Ellen Conlan Ellis, Morgan Moore, Nicola Okezie, Gwyneth Tabil, Ivy Ruobing He.

The interactive animation allowed the maker participants, British animators, Kosovo youth, and academics to reconsider concepts of voice, authorship and historical narrative, by facilitating modes of representation that go beyond accuracy in an indexical sense. As an experience it was designed to prompt the user to consider the layering of personal narratives and testimonies that are embodied in physical space.

Mediated Representations

'How, in our present, do we regard and recall what Susan Sontag has so powerfully described as the 'pain of others'?...How can we best carry their stories forward, without appropriating them, without unduly calling attention to ourselves, and without, in turn, having our own stories displaced by them?' (Hirsch, 2003:203)

The interactive documentary *The Hertica Home* (2020), was the first of many other animated experiments that the project developed and the first to bring to light the problematic negotiations that take place when representing an other's experience or memory as well as the politics of representation. This mediated testimony raised important questions about non-fiction animation, how does the production of images in an animation change or alter the testimony of a memory as sound? What are the ethical implications surrounding informed consent in participatory creative work? In a co-initiated context, informed consent is an established fact, and yet the authorship can be disputed or contested as negotiations are made through the design process.

Whilst dialogues, interviews and regular meetings took place with all the participants, the so-called 'burden of representation' was ultimately left to the animators in the UK as they were responsible for creating the digital objects and spaces represented on screen and structuring the experience using the real-time engine.

'Even with cooperatively produced films, the moral burden of authorship still resides with the filmmaker'. (Ruby, 1991:55)

The historical 'Othering' of people in far off places, connected to the colonial expeditions and its histories, has long been a concern of visual anthropology and something that the project was conscious of. Discourses within ethnographic filmmaking and documentary have often pointed to the politics of histories of representation of the 'Other' (Pink, 2020, Tagg, 1988) and whilst efforts were made so that the animation was co-initiated, with an emphasis at the pre-production stage to include participation from different voices (excerpts from recorded conversations) including primary source material such as photographs and videos, the final result elicited different responses from the participants. Gusia described feeling disappointed as the space was not 'how she remembered it' and uneasy that her own voice carried a significant part of the story of this place. Whereas the Erasmus students did not have such strong personal feelings, they were able to reflect upon their own history and the significance of the image and its connection to identities. As for the UK-based students, creating the animation served as a means to engage with questions about documentary and in a wider sense. They were able to consider techniques that can be used to distinguish the role of social, cultural and political spaces in the construction of historical narrative.

'For me, prior to this, I had no knowledge of Kosovo beyond that it existed. Which unfortunately I feel is a sentiment shared by many people across the UK, and through this I have learnt quite a lot, and that there aren't many things that people can access about this, not just about the heinous acts but the way it impacted upon daily life such as schooling.' (Conlan Ellis, 2022)

It is worth thinking about Trinh T. MinHa's reflexive film *Reassemblage* (1982), that serves a reminder of the need for the ethnographic (or any documentary) filmmaker to understand their position in relation to the subject on screen and the need to 'speak nearby' instead of speaking for, or as Tim Ingold (2013) warns, the importance of ensuring that one does not simply 'hear and not listen'. Tim Ingold's work has for a long time advocated 'the movements of making, observing and describing' to go beyond academic convention and I believe that these approaches

underpinned at a very fundamental level the way our research methods developed going forward.

Following this first trial at participatory and collaborative animation, the team reflected upon modes and strategies of collaboration and co-creation and prioritized the agency of participants in making. Ingold in his book *Making* (2013) talks about the relationship between thinking and making and states that perhaps the theorist and craftsman would give different answers; 'one makes through thinking, the other thinks through making' (Ingold, 2013:6). We identified processes that foregrounded subjectivity as opposed to 'objective knowledge' through image-making processes such as drawing with subject-generated content. By commissioning practicing artists, Susan Sloan (UK), Dritero Nikqi (Kosovo) and Alfred Muchilwa (Rwanda), a series of workshops were designed by the artists to use the creative process as a means of investigation.

Drawing with Quill VR to reimagine the Dodona Theatre and Hertica Home School in Kosovo and Mu Myembe in Rwanda.

In particular, we wanted to encourage drawing as a mode of enquiry in both the Rwanda and Kosovo sites. Alongside sound recordings, films, interviews and photography as methods for site surveys, drawing was encouraged as a way of responding directly to the sites using simple tools. Active looking, seeing, and drawing encourages the participant to fully engage with a space or place and encourages a deep in-the-moment investigation. The act of drawing is dynamic and gestural. This process allows for reflection not just afterwards but during the drawing action. Drawing is 'inherently anti-totalizing, committed to carrying on' (Ingold, 2003:127) or non-conclusive (Downs, 2007), which is important if one is to consider the potential of drawing as thinking (Berger, 2005, Kantrowitz, Brew & Fava, 2017). In these instances the focus was on the process and not the final outcome which was for the most part unknown.

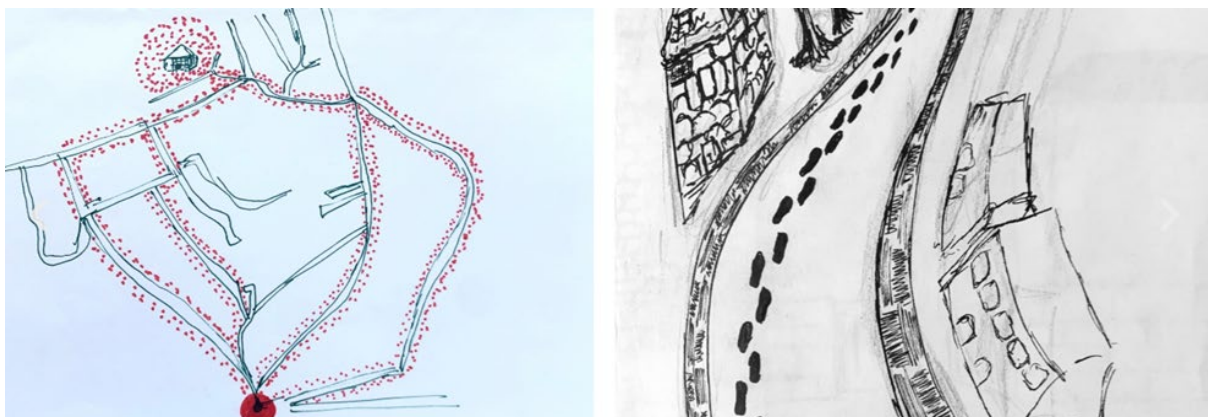


Figure 4: Sensory maps and drawings from walks to different locations in Kosovo

In the latter stages of this project, collaboration between UK-based artist Susan Sloan, Kosovo sound artist Dritero Nikqi and the youth from Kosovo and Rwanda

took place online.³ Embodied experience and the architectural form was something we intended to investigate with all participants across these different locations but due to the restrictions on traveling at the time, for the artists and collaborators that were not resident in each of these countries the visiting of these spaces became a mediated experience through the use of social media platforms. Despite these restrictions, we were able to use Quill VR as a method of reimagining and constructing sites that were significant to the youth. Quill VR is an immersive illustration and animation tool used in conjunction with Oculus Rift headsets and uses gestural hand movements similar to drawing to construct, draw and paint structures. The immersive aspect of the tool allowed participants to occupy their drawn spaces and to traverse the landscapes and structures they were building. They could zoom out to see the structure in its entirety or they could zoom in to move through it and experience it on an architectural scale, situating themselves within the sites in three dimensions. The different viewpoints and perspectives made possible using this tool, encouraged new ways of conceptualizing the representation of space and temporality, projecting or augmenting as opposed to simply describing from memory. Past, present and future were able to converge in this virtual space with fragmented 3D drawings taken from observations on walks to and around these places, memories of stories recounted from personal testimonies connected to these locations, to the imaginings of alternate stories.

'But with my immediate past I have also the horizon of futurity which surrounded it, and thus I have my actual present seen as the future of that past. With the imminent future, I have the horizon of past which will surround it, and therefore my actual present as the past of that future. ' (Merleau-Ponty, 2002:80)

The ability to draw in 3D space allowed a certain amount of expressive freedom to use mark making and drawing techniques that were familiar to them. The lines created using this tool (as with sketching) were effectively 'the trace of a gesture'(Ingold, 2013: 126); a haptic exercise whereby the immersive aspect of drawing in VR resonated with the physical experience of space. These drawn lines and structures could also be animated and brought to life within the software and gave the students the ability to transform their drawings and structures over time. During workshop sessions students brought together outcomes from the activities they had undertaken using anthropology, architecture and art-based methodologies to investigate the sites. The aim was to synthesize this rich body of information using animation, VR illustrations and sound, to reflect on and reimagine the sites and their past, present and future forms.

What emerged from these workshop sessions was a dynamic space for dialogue during the making of the environments. In reimagining the Dodona Theatre site in Kosovo for instance, students discussed the function of the theatre as a place of resistance, but also a puppet theatre, a rock venue, a cafe and an important cultural hub. They collaborated to experiment with the notion of the theatre as a series of interconnected spaces, each serving one of the functions that had taken place there

³ The project's first meeting was in the UK, by the time we planned our second and third meet lockdown had begun and we needed to rethink our methods in light of this. This impacted how we considered modes of participation and collaboration.

before, during and after the conflict. A series of forms that reached out and spread far beyond the physical structures and borders of the theatre itself emerged from the practice and the dialogue. The sensation of being able to virtually walk around this space whilst building it generated ideas and visual forms that were unexpected.

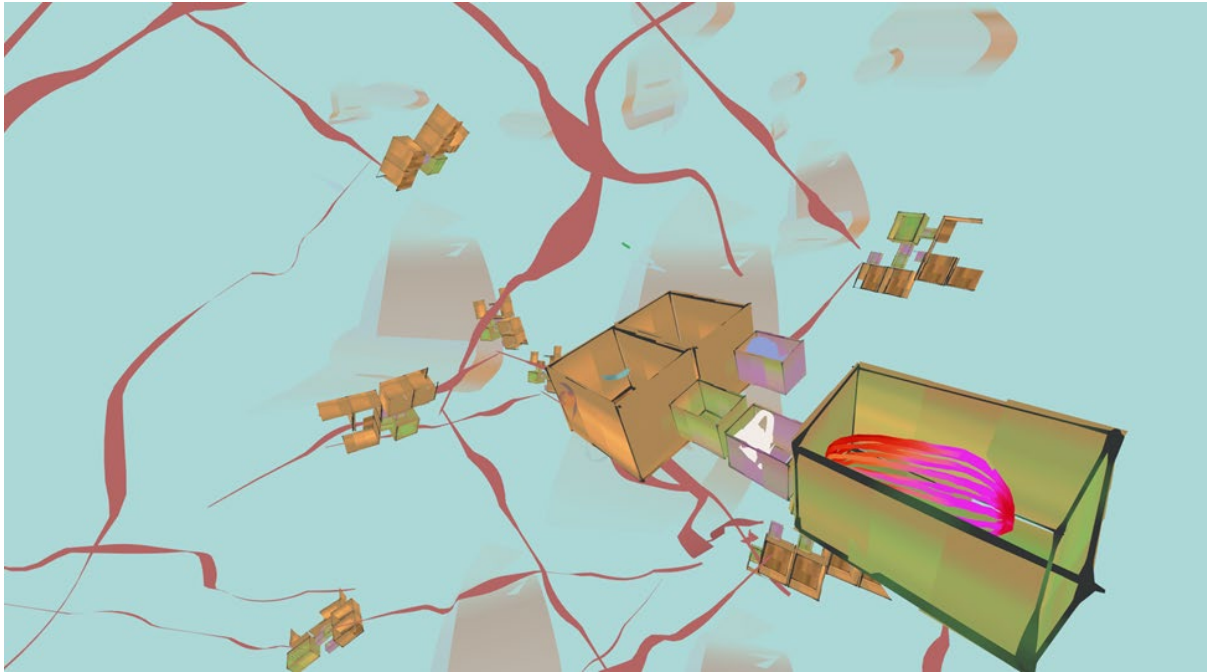


Figure 5: Quill VR reimagining the Dodona Theatre, still from workshop with students from University of Pristina Shpat Shkodra and Renea Begolli

In the cases of the Hertica Home School building in Kosovo and the Mu Muyembe wetlands in Rwanda, one of the catalysts for generating ideas in Quill VR was sound recordings that had been collected during the site surveys. The recordings alongside the walking, mapping, drawing, photographs, and films provided a wealth of layered information about the sites daily use and functions, the people who used them, the material structure of indoor and outdoor landscapes, and how these elements transformed through time socially, culturally and politically. We agreed the sound recordings from each of the sites were especially compelling and we used these to lead the visual elements that were made in Quill VR. Some of the sounds were used to produce audio compositions produced by Dritero Nikqi, a sound artist, and a former attendee of the Hertica Home school based in Kosovo, and others were used in their original form, as soundscapes for the Quill animations produced by Alfred Muchilwa, an animator at University of Rwanda, and his students.



Fig 6: Still from Mu Muyembe site Quill animation, Rwanda



Fig 7: Still from Mu Muyembe site Quill animation, Rwanda

In the Hertica Home School recordings, the very materials and structures of the building, and the actions within it could be heard, such as the crunch of stones underfoot, the opening and closing of doors, chairs scraping on the floor surface, the sound of physical movement through space, multiple voices in a room, reflecting the numerous activities that had taken place within the building. There was a physicality in the sounds and the Quill VR structures responded directly to these material qualities. Again, drawing was an important catalyst for this reimagined space using a pertinent image produced by one of the students who visited the site. The drawing was rich with information and depicts an interior space within the schoolhouse. Centered in the drawing is a hole in the wall leading into another space, and in the centre of that space sits a lone chair. The drawing depicts the remnants of the building's previous function with coat hooks on the walls and empty school chairs.

The Hertica Home School Quill VR animation was co-initiated with Susan Sloan and Dritero Nikqi, who remembered the corridors, classrooms and stairwells vividly from when he was a student there. He talked about the feeling of navigating these spaces. Using drawings and photographs taken during the site visits by the students and verbal descriptions about his experiences, the visual elements of the animation were constructed and collaged together in quick iterative steps using sounds that

Nikqi and the students had collected as a driver for the movement, shapes and forms in the animation as an attempt to express the physical presence of the building and those who had inhabited it. The process of 3D collage that resulted from combining a collection of elements created by different participants, represents the juxtaposition of ideas that emerged in dialogue during workshops and site visits, in fact as Vaughan (2005) stated when talking about collage as method, it can itself be thought of as a conversational. The elements brought together in a dislocated manner and combined to create new meaning.



Figure 8: Participant drawing of classroom space inside Hertica Home School

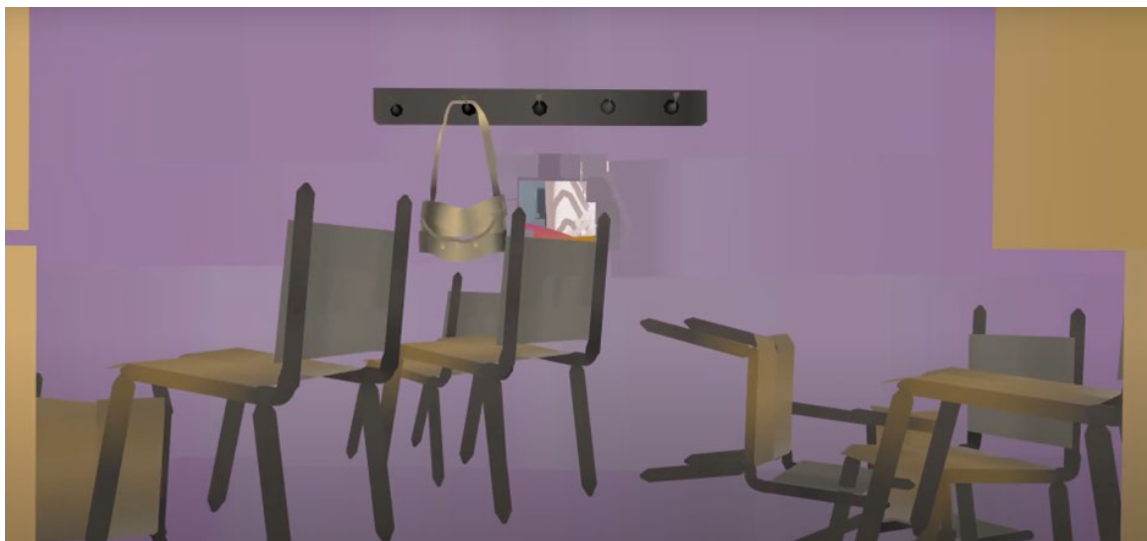


Figure 9: Still from Quill VR reimagining of the Hertica Home School animation

Acts of Reimagining

'Rather than reading creativity 'backwards', from a finished object to an initial intention in the mind of an agent, this entails reading it forwards, in an ongoing

generative movement that is at once itinerant, improvisatory and rhythmic.'
(Ingold, 2010: 91)

The cases cited here are a few examples of different animation exercises in Kosovo and Rwanda that encouraged a reimagining of spaces, whether as a map, interactive experience, using direct animation, stop-motion, or VR. Whilst stories of the past initiated conversations about place, the re-imagining of these spaces was key in establishing agency and new stories to emerge from the youth. The project set out to use place as a means to access narratives tied to location but through a range of artistic methods re-conceptualized these in such a way so as to prompt a reimagining of the building or place to speak beyond the dominant narrative (that in both cases often tied to histories of a recent genocide). In the act of reimagining or 'projecting' beyond direct representation of one place or another, the youth were empowered to tell their own stories or experiences in relation to these spaces. In most cases, the emphasis was not the final object per se but a method of ongoing generation and movement (Ingold, 2013) as opposed to a directed intention. This was particularly important when considering the decolonizing effect this could have on practices within education in Rwanda, Kosovo and the UK, where historical knowledge was presented in a didactic and often in an instructional manner. As Ingold explains, if the maker is a storyteller 'in place of specification without guidance, the story offers guidance without specification' (Ingold 2013:11), a way of learning about place and history through interjections and reconfigurations of images and sounds. Through this 'making' new understanding is made possible, because participants are not taught history as discrete sets of knowledge and instead ushered by participatory artistic methods creating opportunities for reflection on memory, voice, and authorship as elicited through space.

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