Culture Unbound
Journal of Current Cultural Research

Making Place in the Media City

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Abstract

The article discusses practices of placemaking through empirical fieldwork undertaken in the subculture of urban exploration in Copenhagen. The making and experience of place is discussed, firstly, in relation to methodology and academic representation and secondly, in relation to urban space and media. The article begins by suggesting that the ethnographic research process should be grasped as the making of an 'ethnographic place' (Pink 2010), which invites readers/audiences to imagine themselves into the places represented. Based on findings from the fieldwork, the article moves on to the methodologies associated with the examination of urban exploration and its academic representation. The article points to a 'multi-sited' (Marcus 1995) and mobile ethnography (Lee & Ingold 2006) that acknowledges the ethnographer as 'emplaced' (Howes 2005) in the research setting. Finally, urban exploration and the placemaking practices involved are positioned in a wider theoretical framework focusing on social media and urban space. The urban explorers use different social media platforms to share information and pictures, which is said to accelerate 'a mediatised sense of place' (Jansson & Falkheimer 2006). Urban exploration is seen as a practice tied to the late modern 'media city' (Fornäs 2006; McQuire 2010), where spatial experience is transformed due to the increased convergence of mobile and pervasive media with urban space.

Keywords: Urban exploration, subculture, media city, ethnographic place, multi-sided, emplaced

Urban Exploration: Take Nothing but Pictures, Leave Nothing but Footprints

'I never get tired of this place. The view of the city from up here is amazing', says the research participant while placing the digital reflex camera in the tripod.[1] It's late at night, and we're sitting on the roof of the Carlsberg Brewery, which until a few years ago, was functioning and was one of the biggest breweries in Denmark. Today, after more than 100 years of production, the brewery has been shut down. The buildings, the tunnel systems, and the factory halls fully equipped with assembly lines and metal silos for beer storage – it's all there, but the workers are gone, and the place lies silent and abandoned, waiting to be given a new purpose, perhaps in the name of the experience economy. The research participant takes several pictures of the Copenhagen skyline while constantly adjusting the shutter speed of the camera. I take off my mittens and photograph the skyline as well, accepting that without the tripod, which I unfortunately left at home, my pictures will come out blurry. Before climbing out on to the rooftop, the research participant and I had been on a two-hour-long exploration of the shut down factory, walking through it and photographing its below ground tunnel systems and enormous brewery halls. In other words, we had been on an 'urbex', which is the practitioners' abbreviation of 'urban exploration', the exploration and (audio) visual documentation of the city either seen from rooftops or below ground sewer systems or through visits to its abandoned and derelict places.

Copenhagen at night seen from the roof of the Carlsberg Brewery.
Photographed by author

The specific type of urban exploration that this article focuses on is a fairly young subculture into which, to my knowledge, very limited research exists (see Garrett 2010). As a subculture, urban exploration carries with it a subversive potential in the way it transgresses everyday codes of where to go and what to do in the city. It points to an alternative mode of consumption of alternative spaces, while appreciating and making visible an urban landscape otherwise hidden, overlooked, or not designed to be visited. According to Gelder (2007), a trait characteristic of subcultures is their association with territory, which to a large extent characterizes urban exploration. As put by a research participant:

> There are these unwritten rules, that you often make in subcultures – you make your own rules. And they consist of ideas you yourself think of as fair and meaningful, you know… There is this rule, that when you enter a place, you don't damage or change anything. You don't modify the place in any way […] There's this slogan we have: 'Take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints' (Extract from transcribed and translated interview)

The term 'urban exploration' might seem too general to describe a specific subculture, since it can apply to a whole range of practices carried out in urban space: sightseeing, audio walks, guided tours, geocaching, or simply just looking for a specific place or going for a walk. But following the research participants and my online research, 'urban exploration' is the appropriate term to be used, as it is the name by which the practitioners refer to their own practice. Thus, in this article, 'urban exploration' refers to the specific practice of entering and photographing shut down and decaying places and to the online sharing of the pictures taken. The urban exploration dealt with in this article, therefore, unfolds in a dynamic process where explorers come to make place and spatial experience in a practice that continually moves between abandoned places in the city and social media platforms designed for the creation and sharing of user-generated content. In this manner, the urban exploration in question is distinguished from the different sorts of urban walks and strolls listed above.

This being said, it should be noted that the exploration of hidden and restricted areas in the city by no means is a new phenomenon. According to the Oxford English dictionary, a practice like 'slum tourism' can be dated back to 1884. Slum tourism consisted of visits to the poor and slummy parts of the nineteenth century metropolises. Thus, the slum tourist of the nineteenth century and the urban explorer of today can be said to share a common interest in the 'other side' of town. Going even further back, Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet's *Essai sur les cloaques; ou Egouts de la ville de Paris* from 1824 describes the first sanitarian and police-related visits to the poorer parts of Paris. These descriptions bear at least some resemblance to, for instance, the urban explorations done in sewers and subway tunnels today, even though the phenomena differ in purpose. The fascination of the city's derelict and decayed places and the bodily sensation and excitement of finding oneself out of one's ordinary context, therefore, is no novelty. Urban ex-

ploration merely represents a late modern and media-related variant of this urge to explore the unfamiliar, hidden sides of the city.

The practice of urban exploration and the placemaking involved herein, this article argues, is closely related to the use of social media platforms. Social media is defined by Kaplan and Haenlein as 'a group of internet-based applications […] that allow for the creation and exchange of user-generated content' (2010). A search on the word 'urban exploration' generates almost 13 000 hits on YouTube, and visiting the photo sharing application, Flickr, you will find no fewer than 338 000 pictures tagged with 'urban exploration'.[2] On Facebook, I follow three anonymous Danish explorers who generously post pictures each day, harvesting often over 100 'likes' while making the darker and hidden sides of Copenhagen present in my and other followers' white and blue Facebook news feeds. To summarize: The use of social media plays a central role in the practice of urban exploration and in the making of the places visited and the spatial experiences connected to the exploration.

The practitioners communicate and perform through YouTube, Facebook, and Flickr. Having visited, explored, and photographed an abandoned site, the urban explorer uploads and shares his or her pictures on sites such as Flickr or YouTube, where the pictures and videos are commented on and given praise or critique by other urban explorers or others with an interest in photography and/or places in decay more generally. Earlier on, Google Maps also functioned as a site for information sharing amongst practitioners. But eventually, the Google Map became too public for the urban explorer community, and the members moved their communications to private fora. This article therefore grasps urban exploration via a twofold study of the media in the city and of the city in the media. In doing so, it aims at outlining what the spatial experience related to this practice might entail and at discussing the methodological implications connected to the examination of this practice.

The following section introduces the concept of the ethnographic place and suggests seeing the article itself as such a place. Afterwards, the methodologies associated with the examination of placemaking practices in urban exploration are discussed. Finally, urban exploration is presented in relation to a wider theoretical framework, focusing on the role played by media in the shaping of urban spatial experience.

The Ethnographic Place

In my fieldwork, the research participants and I collaboratively construct the spatial experiences connected to the exploration of abandoned places. In this article, the academic remaking of places and experiences comes about through the process of representation of data and findings. In this manner, the process of placemaking becomes central at the different levels:

1. How the participants make place themselves;

2. How the researcher collaboratively makes place with research participants through research practice;

3. How the researcher reconstitutes place in representing the research; and finally,

4. How the audiences/readers of the ethnographic work, that is, 'the ethnographic place', in turn create place as they follow and add to its narratives (Pink 2008).

This attention to place and placemaking at different levels foregrounds a concept of place as being practised, open, and dynamic. This conceptualization of place is in keeping with Massey's progressive 'glocal' concept of place as 'a meeting place' with plural identities and numerous links with the wider world (Massey 1998: 154).

In outlining a sensory ethnography, Pink approaches the ethnographic research process through a theory of place and space, building on the definition, below, of ethnography:

> Ethnography is a process of creating and representing knowledge […] that is based on ethnographers' own experiences. It does not claim to produce an objective or truthful account of reality, but should aim to offer versions of ethnographers' experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced (Pink 2007: 22).

Combining this definition with concerns for the phenomenology of place and the politics of space, Pink arrives at a theory of 'emplaced' ethnography which seeks 'to know places in other people's worlds' by focusing on the sensory aspects of placemaking (Pink 2010: 23). Pink draws on Howes in her definition and use of emplacement as 'the sensuous interrelationship of body-mind-environment' (Howes 2005: 7). This approach recognises the ethnographer as emplaced in and part of a social, sensory, and material environment, or in other words, as an actor contributing to a part of the making of place. The question of experience is attended to by accounting for 'the relationships between bodies, minds and the materiality and sensoriality of the environment' (Pink 2010: 25). Researching experiences implies not only the investigation of the research participants' emplacement, but it also requires the ethnographer to acknowledge his or her own emplacement in and as part of a specific research context. This should be done while still keeping focus on the research participants' experiences, which distinguishes Pink's call for attention to emplacements in the research setting from the autoethnographical focus on the researcher's subjective experience.

Drawing on Ingold, Massey, and Casey, Pink outlines a theory of sensory ethnography involving an understanding of place as 'a coming together and "entanglement" of persons, things, trajectories, sensations, discourses and more' (Pink

2010: 41). This furthermore leads to the question of how ethnographers conceptualize the ethnographic representation of other people as emplaced. For this purpose, Pink introduces an idea of 'ethnographic places' as the places made by ethnographers when communicating their research (Pink 2010: 42). This article comprises such a place, the quotes, the anecdotes, the pictures – all assembled with the aim of representing the research participants' places and experiences. Readers (and audiences) are therefore asked to participate in the co-creation of the represented places. The ethnographic place involves, in contrast to the real places visited during fieldwork, the researcher's 'intentional pulling together' of theory and knowing. But as Pink points out, the ethnographic place is no more static than other places, as it is constantly open to other places and to space, due to its interplay with other theories, findings, politics, and audiences (Pink 2010: 40). The concept of the ethnographic place insists on the distinction between place and the (academic) representation of place. Through this distinction it places a focus on the academic process through which representation (of findings) comes about, thereby encouraging the reader to engage and participate in the construction of the ethnographic place.

In reconstituting the places of urban exploration, I seek to combine and write up data from interviews, field notes, and pictures (taken by myself during fieldwork but also pictures found online, uploaded by urban explorers). In the analysis of spatial experiences connected to urban exploration, aspects and details from the heterogeneous data material collected are combined and put together within a theoretical framework, hereby constructing an ethnographic place. Combining visual and written material, I focus on both my own emplacement in the research context and on the emplacement of the participants. Pink argues that both audiovisual and visual representations offer an audience the possibilities of empathetically imagining themselves into the places occupied and into the sensations felt by others (Pink 2007). This does not imply that an ethnographic place by any means offers direct access to exactly the same experiences felt by those represented, that is, the participants and/or the researcher. Pink (2008: 3) writes, 'It is important not to undervalue the potential of visual images to invite us to imagine ourselves into other people's worlds, and in doing so to empathise with their emplacement – both physical and emotional'. By attending to the placemaking practices involved in ethnographic research processes, Pink calls for an openness towards multiple ways of seeing and knowing and underscores that there are always 'multiple routes to knowledge' (Pink 2010: 8). Obviously, the potentials of visual ethnography cannot be fully unfolded in an academic article such as this one, where black letters on white pages serve as the primary tool for representing the worlds of others. Still, the combination of heterogeneous data here chosen allows for a different, perhaps more dynamic kind of placemaking and thus creates an ethnographic place which, at its best, opens up to the reader and encourages participation.

Examining Spatial Experience

Examining spatial experiences in the media city forces the researcher to consider relations between place, media, and experience. When defining the subculture of urban exploration partly in relation to social media, one needs a research design that attends to both the representation of the abandoned places on different social media platforms and how the platforms are used by the explorers, and to the actual physical places of urban exploration as well as to the mode of spatial consumption associated herewith. This in turn implies epistemological reflexivity on behalf of the researcher on how data is collected in the different empirical settings. Internet ethnographer Orgad stresses the need for reflexivity regarding the construction of ethnographic knowledge:

> The knowledge we generate, and the story we tell as researchers about the context we study, whether based on online interactions, offline interactions, or both, is crucially constructed by the means and the kind of interaction in which we engage. (2005: 63)

When asked about the preparation for an urban exploration, a research participant responded as quoted below, while at the same time using the computer on the table in front of him to show the Internet sites he was talking about. He started by logging on to his profile at Flickr and then moved on to Google Maps. Afterwards, he and I went out into the city in search of the spot marked on the Google Map:

> I've been looking at pictures [on Flickr] from trips others have been on, because I have become friends with them [on Flickr], since we share the same hobby and they are from Denmark and so on. And then there's this guy who uploaded pictures from a plant nursery yesterday, and I thought it could be kind of interesting to visit that place. I have a thing for plant nurseries… when the windows are broken or have fallen out of their frames, and if it's a sunny day, they'll make nice shadows… I've tried to find out, where this place is, and I could just write to the guy who has posted the pictures, because he knows me and knows I'm interested in the same things as he is, so he would most likely be willing to share information about the place with me. And so he wrote me an email with a link to a Google Map, and you can just click on it [he opens the message on Flickr and clicks on the link]. And there you have it [showing me the location on the Google Map]. We should be able to find it. (Extract from transcribed and translated interview)

Research participant photographing a derelict plant nursery. Photographed by author

Researching the spatial experiences of a practice like urban exploration requires a mobile methodology that allows the researcher to follow the participants to the places they go. The physical urban landscape has become entangled with mobile information- and communication technologies (henceforward: ICTs) and social media; therefore, following the participants involves following them both to the places they go in the city and on the Internet. Through the elaboration of a 'multi-sited ethnography', Marcus can be said to deliver part of the methodological framework for such an endeavour. In being multi-sited, Marcus argues,

> [E]thnography moves from its conventional single-site location, contextualized by macro-constructions of a larger social order, such as the capitalist world system, to multiple sites of observation and the participation that cross-cuts dichotomies such as the 'local' or the 'global', the 'lifeworld' and the 'system'. (1995: 95)

Conducting a multi-sited fieldwork is in keeping with the call to 'follow the actors' (Marcus 1995: 106) that is also being put forth in actor-network theory (Latour 1999, Gad and Jensen 2007: 101). Going beyond the single-sited fieldwork in researching the spatial experiences of urban exploration involves meeting the research participants both online, for instance when writing emails and arranging meetings, and offline, when conducting qualitative interviews. Going online with them is an integrated part of the interview in my research design. Going beyond single-sited fieldwork also involves following the urban explorers as they go to experience and photograph the abandoned places. This multi-sited approach seeks to grasp the placemaking practice of urban exploration as constituted

through movements between heterogeneous places and as an imposition of these different places onto each other.

Yet as mentioned above, Marcus' multi-sited ethnography only delivers part of the methodological framework needed. Multi-sited ethnography focuses on the sites themselves and pays little or no attention to the routes connecting the multiple sites. The media city is experienced and created through the combination of ICTs and physical places, but it is also, and this is the point, experienced while being on the move, due to the mobility of the ICTs. Human and non-human actors are constantly interacting and making places as they move between and impose the mediated places onto the physical locations and vice versa. A multi-sited research design can, in this manner, profit from a concern for aspects of mobility and questions regarding the methodological approach to an empirical study of experiences of being on the move with mobile ICTs.

To return to the paper's introductory setting, the rooftop of the Carlsberg Brewery, the research participant and I had been on a thirty-minute walk through Copenhagen before arriving at Carlsberg. Even though the abandoned factory was the aim of the exploration, the route we took to get there and the time we spent walking together before arriving was, however, not without value. It is argued that the movement between places constitutes part of the spatial experience of being, for instance, on an urban exploration. The experience I shared with the research participant, when we explored Carlsberg, cannot be separated from the experiences we shared on our way to and from the factory. In keeping with the point made by Edensor, that places on the margin offer moments of liberation, we shared a mutual feeling of a discrepancy between the city seen from the roof of the factory and the city we walked through after our visit. The city experienced on the street level was the one we shared with everyone else, whereas the city seen from the rooftop was ours, a secret and privileged viewpoint that promoted a specific spatial knowledge and experience of the city only accessible to those who, by chance or through effort, have gained knowledge about how to enter the factory. The female explorer explains in an interview:

> Sometimes, when I walk through the city, I feel lucky to know that here, right below where I'm walking right now, I know there are some great tunnels. In fact, I discovered those, but unfortunately the entrance to them was locked up shortly after, but I got there in time to take some great pictures and tell some of the others about it… But, yes, I find joy in knowing, that probably nobody else walking there, shares that knowledge. (Extract from transcribed and translated interview)

The below ground tunnel systems at Carlsberg and participant's digital camera on tripod. Photographed by author

In my fieldwork, walking with research participants is thus regarded as a way of getting to know their places and as an attempt to tap into their experiences of these places. In the same way, the Internet ethnographic part of the research design, where research participants show their preferred sites on the Internet, is regarded as a route to knowledge about their online practices. Being at places and walking in the city with participants generates a practice based knowledge constructed through my interactions with both the participants, ICTs – in this case the digital reflex camera – and the environments we explore and move through. As such, the research design is in keeping with the notion of place presented above as being sensed and constructed partly through the media used in the placemaking practice in question, a 'thrown togetherness of place'.

Expanding the scope of the research design to incorporate aspects of both localities and the micro-mobilities of everyday life allows, furthermore, for an understanding of places as created by routes and entanglements. In the academic world, the relationship between the making of place and urban walking is no novelty. It has a history in sociological and cultural theories, from the character of the aimlessly wandering *flâneur* connected to the rise of the modern metropolises and discussed by Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin, to the situationist movement led by Debord up to the writings of De Certeau, where the practice of walking is

seen as a 'spatial acting-out of place' (Klausen 2010). An approach to places and placemaking through the combinatory view on movement and localities forms a basis for the point put forth by Lee and Ingold, in which they stress the need for anthropologists to 'understand the routes and mobilities of others' (2006: 68). 'Walking around', they write, 'is fundamental to the everyday practice of social life' and 'to much anthropological fieldwork' (2006: 67). Still, it is rare to find ethnography that reflects on walking itself:

> No doubt the topic of walking figures often enough in the ethnographers' fieldnotes. Once they come to write up their results, however, it tends to be sidelined in favor of 'what really matters', such as the destinations towards which people were bound. (Lee & Ingold 2008: 3)

In short, this article argues that a research design which attends to questions of being there and getting there, of localities and routes – both on- and offline – has a potential to generate ethnographic knowledge about the spatial experiences in a media city, where places increasingly are being experienced on the move and through mobile ICTs and social media platforms.

Exploring the Media City

What is interesting about the phenomenon of urban exploration? Is there anything new to be learnt from investigating the ways and whereabouts of an urban subculture that, roughly put, simply combines visits to restricted areas with a passion for photography? Has the city not always been subjected to explorations, walks, and strolls? And surely there is nothing new in the close relation between photography and the city; as long as (audio) visual media have existed, the city and life in the metropoles have been documented and represented through these media. Still, urban exploration is a particular phenomenon that draws attention to and pinpoints questions of place and media, illustrating how these two are becoming even more entangled today than previously, due to the mobile ICTs and web 2.0 services.

Urban exploration is seen as a spearhead phenomenon in an age where media are omnipresent and thus constitute part of a structure, which, at least to a certain extent, frames our experience of urban space. In this framing of the city via its connection to ICTs and media, the concept of 'media city' is of great value. According to Fornäs, speaking of a media city signifies the overall convergence of two previously distinct disciplines: urban studies and media studies (Fornäs 2006: 1). The convergence comes about as geographers and urban theorists are fusing with media research and cultural studies in combining 'the study of space in culture […] with studies of culture in space' (Fornäs 2006: 1). Fornäs concludes that media and cities should be thought of as two dimensions of the same phenomenon, that is, as the media-city, a co-formation of urban and mediated spaces. This encouragement to regard media and urban space as co-constitutive is shared by McQuire, who goes even further, as he sees modern media not as means of repre-

sentation but as technologies that redistribute and change the urban fabric, hereby providing new ways of experiencing the city:

> [T]he spatial experience of modern social life emerges through a complex process of co-constitution between architectural structures and urban territories, social practices and media feedback […] In this respect, the term media city is designed to foreground the role of media technologies in the dynamic production of contemporary urban space, in Lefebvre's (1991) sense of binding affect and cognition to space. (McQuire 2010: vii)

When conceptualizing the city as a media city, focus is placed upon the transformation of the spatial experience due to the convergence of media, which is increasingly mobile, instantaneous, and pervasive in urban space. This furthermore implies, according to McQuire, a 'critical embrace' of McLuhan's insight that media can be said to constitute an environment (McLuhan 1964/2001), since we constantly negotiate and participate in diverse media flows, whether we are at home or in the street. McQuire discusses the process that turns embedded technologies into embedded media practices of everyday life.

Social media has become embedded in the practice of urban exploration. The use of social media platforms plays a crucial part in the practice of urban exploration as it offers sharing of actual routes – of how to get there – and also offers a platform on which the urban explorer can perform and share his or her relation with the city and the rest of the urbex community. Moreover, the social media platforms used by the urban explorers become virtual spaces of emancipation contesting a more general attitude towards how places can and should be used and where we can and cannot go. When scrolling down the many urbex pages on Flickr, glancing at the photos posted by urban explorers from around the world, one has to admit that the old factories gain a unique and strange beauty in the fusion of the content of the photographs – the derelict factory halls and empty tunnels – and in the use of digital tools, for instance Photoshop, for manipulating pictures. The urbex photo albums become online tour guides to the derelict, hidden, and shut down places in the city, displaying and arguing for the unfamiliar beauty and experiences these places have to offer.

Social media and mobile ICTs play a key role in the placemaking practices connected to the shaping and experience of the general urban landscape today. As stated by Virilio back in 1995, 'The technology question is inseparable from the question of *where* technology occurs' (1995: 99). Going even further into the role of the media today, it is perhaps fair to argue that the media and media use carry with them a subversive or maybe even liberating potential? Through the use of digital and social media platforms such as Google Maps and Flickr, users are able to discover and share, for instance, the localization of the abandoned places visited in urban exploration. These places would have been more or less out of reach, had it not been for the possibilities provided by digital media. Still, while acknowledging the democratic and emancipatory aspects of the media use involved

in the placemaking in urban exploration, it goes without saying that the very same media also entails antidemocratic issues and the question of to whom the information belongs, which is always at stake when dealing with social media. How is the user-generated content processed and represented, and what criteria is it asked to meet in order to qualify as suitable for online sharing? This question points towards the fact that not all information, not all pictures, and not all communities are granted the right to online existence. What gets to be shown and how it is shown is far from the result of democratic processes.

An example of the double role of oppressor/liberator played by the media can be found in the use (and in the end, the rejection) of Google Maps in the Danish urban explorer community. Google Maps came to signify a battle over subcultural capital (Thornton 1995), between urban explorers and other groups who were fighting for the right to the abandoned places. The urban explorers sought to distinguish themselves from other subcultures and to protect the abandoned places and the right to these by moving from the public Google Maps to a private forum on the Internet. At first the Danish urbex community used Google Maps as a tool for pinpointing and sharing places and tricks on how to get there and get inside. Via the URL abandon.dk, you came to a Google Map of Denmark, with red and yellow pins signifying abandoned and potentially abandoned places, with tips on how to enter the different locations. Today, abandon.dk no longer links to Google Maps but to a personal homepage set up by one of my research participants to display some of his photographic work. He explains why the urbex community stopped using Google Maps:

> About two or three years ago some of us began to use a map. I was often one of the first persons to mark sites on it. It was a Google Map where you had, like, sort of a little pin to show a good spot. And you would also add a picture or two so that people could see whether or not it was of any interest to them. The disadvantage here is that it also attracts people with a different agenda than urban explorers… There is this subculture where they, well, they make street art, that's what they call it. They paint graffiti pieces and stuff, and if you are an urban explorer of course you aren't too happy about that sort of thing… It's not like you're enemies with the ones who does graffiti, but you want to get to the places before them, because they kind of ruin it. […] So we moved to another forum. Here we didn't write the names of the places… We had that for about a year, but eventually this forum also became too crowded with photographers, location-hunters and people like that, so now we've made a little anonymous forum. Not because it has to be top-secret or anything, but it is simply to make sure that you share the places with the people you know are interested and have the same approach as yourself. (Extract from transcribed and translated interview)

Due to the fact that Google Maps is public, the Danish urban explorers stopped using it as a tool for site-sharing. On one hand, they sought to protect their community from becoming overpopulated with members and thereby becoming more mainstream than underground, a tendency subcultures generally are faced with (Hebdige 2001), and on the other hand, they sought to protect the abandoned places from being taken over by graffiti painters. A female explorer, who told that

role players and softgun-users had also been interested in the locations on the Google Map, explains the dilemma while commenting on how the urbex online forum gradually became more and more closed:

> It's a funny cross between how we on the one hand actually would like people to be interested in what we do, but on the other we don't want to be some mainstream thing that everyone participates in because it then would lose… Again, you have this thing where we go out in search for places with some sort of magic and special experience, and if there are a lot of people running around the place you just won't find that experience. (Extract from transcribed and translated interview)

Meanwhile, it is not the aim of this article to account in detail for the twofold role of oppressor/liberator played by the social media involved. Suffice to say that the digital media technologies connected to urban exploration – as for any other (sub)culture organized on the internet – both facilitate and restrict the information being shared, or as in the case of the Google Maps example above, information not being shared. Sharing the exact locations via social and public media, in the end, made the places too public.

A Mediatised Sense of Place

In the article, 'Sensing the Ruin' (2007), Edensor writes about the phenomenological experience of being at an abandoned place and walking through the ruins. Edensor focuses on the sensual effects tied to the bodily encounter with the materialities of the environment and argues that the derelict spaces of the city allow the body to move freely, uninhibited by the constraints normally imposed on it by ordered and restrictive public city spaces. Edensor writes:

> Under contemporary urban conditions, sensual experience tends to be minimized by regulatory procedures, planning, cultural conventions and values, and spatial divisions. Yet the unruly effects of sensual stimuli are always liable to break through the carefully guarded city, and, in addition, more powerful sensations may be sought in places on the urban margins, in which a low level of surveillance promotes a rich and varied sensory experience. (2007: 230)

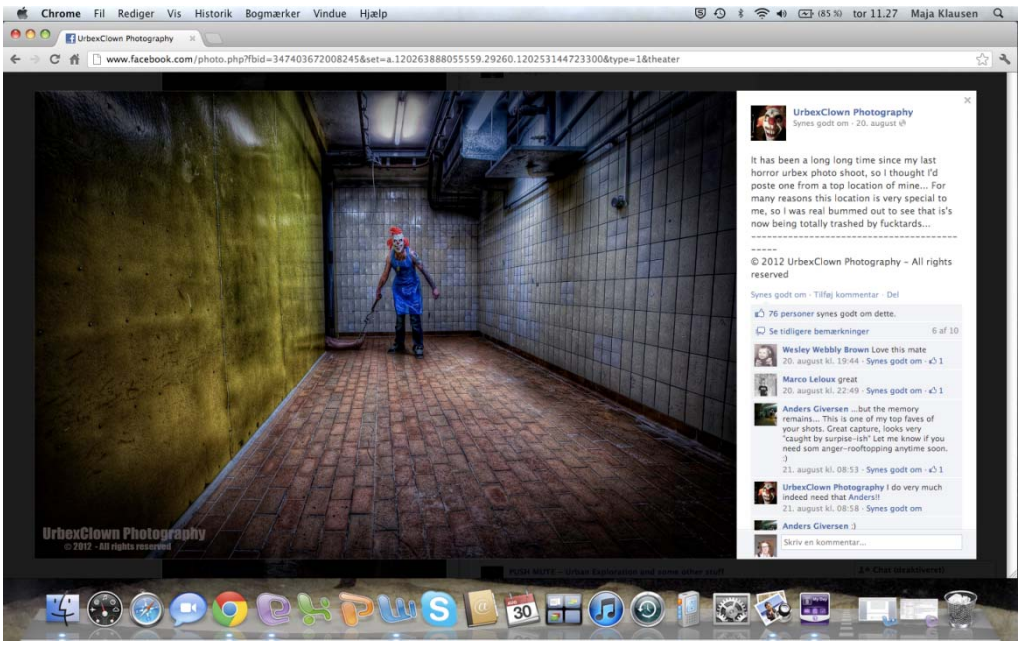
Though I agree with Edensor in his claims about the possibly liberating sensual experiences of derelict places, an investigation of the spatial experiences entailed in urban exploration that does not attend to the role played by the media seems to paint only half the picture. Social media and mobile ICTs afford specific place-making practices in relation to urban exploration, and the urban explorer uses the media before, while, and after exploring:

1. Social media help the explorers to plan explorations, localize, and find out how to enter the abandoned places;

2. The use of mobile ICTs (the digital reflex camera and smartphones) is part of the exploration of the site, as the urban explorer searches for the best angles and lighting condition for the photos; and

3. Social media facilitate sharing of experiences and of the pictures taken.

The abandoned places in cities around the world have come to be displayed on the Internet through the thousands of pictures and movies uploaded by urban explorers. The places become mediated, that is, represented online, where the often very beautiful pictures generate a curiosity and desire on behalf of the viewer to experience and photograph the places for him/herself. The mediation of the abandoned places therefore can be said to accelerate what Jansson and Falkheimer term 'a mediatised sense of place'. This concept points to the manner in which places are consumed and practised according to the knowledge we have about those places via media (Jansson & Falkheimer 2006: 22). An example of the mediatised sense of place in urban exploration is how explorers use the abandoned places to perform scenes we recognise from, for instance, the horror movie genre. One research participant is a horror movie fan and, from time to time, uses the sites as scenes for horror photography. He disguises himself by putting on a scary clown mask that brings to mind Pennywise from the movie, *It*, and acts out macabre scenes such as the one seen in the screen capture from Facebook below, where he's in a slaughter hall, wearing a butcher's apron while dragging a body by a big hook. In particular, the cult film series *Saw* 1-7 inspires this genre of picture, thereby offering a 'script' for the spatial consumption. The concept of 'scripted practices' highlights the extent to which media have come to saturate the experience of space (Lagerkvist 2006: 274). To summarize, digital media provide means to find, consume, produce, and share abandoned places in the cities. Being an explorer of the urban landscape therefore also involves an exploration of social media and their affordances.



Screen capture of photo posted by UrbexClown on his public Facebook profile

The practice of urban exploration unfolds through the simultaneous performance of the potential in the urban landscape, on the one hand, and of specific media technologies on the other. This notion appreciates both the materiality and immateriality of place and points to the emergent properties of place. It also draws on a post-humanist account of placemaking as due to the weight here placed on the digital technologies and their affordances. This is in keeping with Amin's call to grasp the city as an 'entanglement and circulation of human and non-human bodies and matters in general', a 'thrown togetherness of bodies, mass and matter' (2008: 5–8).

In the media city, places become phantasmagorical and are consumed as such. Giddens characterizes the phantasmagorical as the separation of space from its geographical place: 'what structures the locale [the place] is not simply that which is present on the scene; the visible form of "the locale" conceals the distanced relations which determine its nature' (Giddens 1990: 19). Jansson (2002) introduces the concept in media and consumption studies, pointing to how the process of mediations of a place, that is, the pictures of abandoned places found on the Internet, become part of those not-present structures ordering our mode of spatial consumption. In the spatial phantasmagoria developed by Jansson, mediations and properties of physical places are merged through the co-constitutive acts of spatial consumption and production. Urban exploration is, to a high degree, a practice tied to spatial consumption, to a 'being there' on location, 'sensing the ruin', as pointed out by Edensor (2007). Following Jansson (2002), this mode of consumption is partly structured around the production of (new) mediations of place. This accelerates the process of spatial phantasmagoria tied to the late modern media city. In an interview, a male urban explorer talks about the pictures he prefers to take when he's out exploring:

> A good picture consists of… well, it depends on the purpose it'll be serving. I show off my pictures on Internet sites where others with the same hobby go, and then you kind of try to impress the others either by having found a good place or by having taken a nice picture that shows the place in a good way. I like 'the big view', if you can put it like that, where you can see everything in one picture, so often I use a wide angle lens. But then there are those who seek the details. They find a small detail that in a way tells everything about the place and its history […] An object that somehow captures the essence of the place […] But I like the big view. (Extract from transcribed and translated interview)

The phenomenological experience of being there and the practices connected to being there are thus, to a certain degree, informed by the production of pictures meant for exposure on the Internet.

Back on the rooftop of the Carlsberg Brewery, the research participant and I are struggling in the cold to get a good shot of the Copenhagen skyline. It's important to her that the picture conveys a sense of what it felt like to be there, on the roof, that cold March evening. She has been here many times, she tells me, sometimes by herself and at other times together with fellow urban explorers. In

fact, she guided us through the tunnel systems, stairways, and stockrooms as if it were her own home. When we enter the factory through a door left unlocked by another explorer, she walks in front of me, saying over her shoulder, 'Be careful not to slam the door. It can be hard to open again.' Each of her visits to the factory bring with them new photos and new experiences to be shared with the urbex community on Flickr. Earlier that evening, during the interview she also kindly participated in, she talked about the role Flickr plays in her urban explorations:

> Actually, I took some pictures about a month ago in this place called Søjlehallen [The Pillar Hall] in Aarhus. It's a sort of reservoir. It was this great room; an enormous hall with amazing lighting and giant concrete pillars. And it was just below the centre of Aarhus city, and yes well… Suddenly there is this hatch, and you go through it and find a staircase, take it, and find yourself in this really big hall, probably forty meters long and fifteen meters from floor to ceiling, giant concrete pillars – really surprising, this room. And so, I posted some pictures of it, and suddenly I saw that you didn't get a sense of the size of the room by looking at these pictures, not at all… The dimensions had disappeared completely. So I went back and took some pictures with myself standing in the room, and they came out much better. (Extract from transcribed and translated interview)

The places become engaged in a process of spatial phantasmagoria, and the sense of place becomes mediatised, as Jansson and Falkheimer describe (2006). In this process, places are consumed and given meaning through practices involving the exploration of both the physical environment and the affordances of the different digital media. While sitting on the roof, the research participant kindly shows me her pictures on the screen of her camera and lets me know which ones she will post on her Flickr profile. The practice of urban exploration, with its production of digital photos and online sharing, imposes a peculiar mediated obscurity onto the experience of moving about and being present in the abandoned factory.

Concluding Remarks

The notions of place as practised, entangled and 'thrown together' are present at the theoretical, methodological, and epistemological levels of the research presented here into the placemaking entailed in the practice of urban exploration. Grasping the intentional pulling together of theory and data as the making of an ethnographic place points to the ethnographer as emplaced in the research setting. The ethnographic place is, and does not claim to be more than, the ethnographic reconstitution of the places and experiences shared between researcher and research participants.

Researching placemaking practices in the media city through ethnographic methods involves a concern for place, mediations of place, and the movement between places. This concern calls for a combination of a multi-sited and mobile ethnography, which attends to the mediated representation of places on different social media platforms, to how the urban explorers make use of the opportunities

in social media, and finally to the abandoned places in the city and the routes taken to arrive at these.

Focusing on the connections between media and place in urban exploration is characterized as a subculture tied to the media city. It is argued that mobile ICTs and social media are accelerating a process of spatial phantasmagoria, where sense of place becomes mediatised. In this late modern mode of spatial consumption, physical sites and places are being structured and experienced, in part, by the mediated representations of these places, which moreover generates a mediatised sense of place.

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Notes

1 The fieldwork was carried out in Copenhagen during winter and spring 2011 and is still in progress. So far it consists of three qualitative interviews with two male and one female urban explorer between 26-35 years. During the interviews the research participants and I browse the Internet for pictures, thus combining the interview session with an Internet ethnographic aspects. The fieldwork also includes three sessions of participative observation where I have been on urban explorations with each of the participants. These explorations include visiting the shut dowm Carlsberg Brewery, a suburban plant nursery in ruins and an investigation of the possibility of getting inside a tumbledown and locked up sports arena.

2 Search done August 2012

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