

MADE YOU LOOK

Moments of encounter with [ambient] advertising in everyday places

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Fig. 1: A woman stops in the street to look at the torn [ambient]
advert on the lamppost (2024)

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Abstract



This project explores how people encounter ambient advertising as they go about their daily lives. These disruptive, entangled, and contextually-rich media communications are a playful invitation to engage.

They make us look,

pause for a moment in the flow of our lives

and make something from the encounter.

It is the relational nature of ambient advertising, always in the milieu, always tied to context, that sparked my question - how and in what ways do participants encounter, and give attention to, ambient advertising in everyday places? The research is informed by multiple voices, the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Sara Ahmed and Kristadel McGregor, describing how we inhabit the world. It traces ideas of time through Yi-Fu Tuan, Kitaro Nishida, and Henry Bergson. It explores the construction of ambient advertising through Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. It touches the world through the action research of Jean McNiff and sensory ethnomethods of Sarah Pink, the participant encounters recorded on lapel cameras, through photo-voice and micro-interviews. In turn these methods provide 'intimate histories' of not only encounters with ambient advertising but with 'how we live with a variety of media' (Morley, 2006). The research design allows a place for subjectivity, reflectivity and reflexivity through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022) and practice based tinkering through desktop film (Kiss, 2021), using creative methods to get closer to a creative encounter.

Key words: ambient advertising, pause, attention, encounter, everyday, contextually-rich, situated, participants, everyday, action research, assembled, reflexive thematic analysis, tinkering

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INTRODUCTION

The coffee shop is full and customers are sitting outside chatting.

It's a bright wintery day. He takes a photograph of the street. 'OK, so I'm taking a walk along Clockhouse parade. I used to live around the corner.' It has changed somewhat since I was last here...there's a flower shop. He pauses in front of the display to take a photograph 'very cool' He walks on a few steps and comes to a stop once more, 'and just what we need, another nail salon.' 'I'm sure that's what's missing in Beckenham is another nail salon.' He takes a photograph of the nail bar. He walks past a woman and past the bus stop. 'At the end of this parade used to be my favourite restaurant in the whole world, which is now sadly gone.' He turns to his right and takes a photograph of the shutters in front of the hairdressers 'And the hairdressers is gone, but oh, there's a new estate agents' he says with some humour 'that I'll take a picture of' he takes another photograph. 'And down here, this is quite cool, The Three Hounds bottle shop, the little micro brewery, I've been in there a few times.' He stops by The Three Hounds and takes a photo of the sign. 'It gets quite busy actually so it's quite nice.' He walks on 'And then we've got the dog grooming shop.' He turns to the lamppost on his left 'Oh look,' he takes a photo of the [ambient] advert 'there's a thank you for your tax contributions that help pay for all the lampposts that light up the streets.' He walks on thoughtfully 'That's quite nice.' He walks past the cafe towards the Italian restaurant taking a photo of a notice stuck on a door to Save Lewis House '...and then this was my favourite restaurant in the whole of Beckenham which is now a pizzeria...' He takes a photo of the Italian restaurant façade '...but it was at one point the Viceroy, I used to love it in there.' He takes a photo of the Italian restaurant door.

A woman and child cross the road in front of him

A woman and child go into the flower shop

A woman wearing headphones looks in the window of the art centre

A bus pulls to a stop at the bus stop.

Fig. 2: Typographic transcription of participant C9 walk (2024)

Introduction

He runs into a woman he knows who is pushing a buggy with a toddler as he walks down the alleyway. They start a conversation, and she whispers to him ‘There’s a wrapped-up lamppost round there, it’s got a red ribbon, it wasn’t there this morning when we went past. Apparently, my taxes pay for this. I thought, really?’ She laughs and walks past him, ‘where are you going?’ She asks. ‘For some fresh air, for a walk?’ He laughs ‘Yeah that’s right, I’ll call you later’ [time code 2:58] At the far end of the alleyway he notices the lamppost advert and takes a photograph. ‘So, just as Sarah says, there’s a wrapped-up lamppost down here which I think I would have noticed about now.’ He walks towards the advert and takes another photo. ‘The sun is warm, but the wind is cold,’ he states as he comes to a stop in front of the advert. He reads it and then takes a step back to take another photograph. ‘That’s odd, it’s not even Christmas and there’s Christmas paper round a lamppost.’ (it is a couple of days after Christmas) [Time code 3:28] Participant B5, lapel camera footage.

Drawing the eye

As professor of Promotional Culture Anne Cronin reminds us, outdoor advertising adds ‘semantic content to the rich textural mix of city space,’ shaping relations around them even while being shaped by those relations (Cronin, 2010a, p. 42). Though she is commenting on traditional out of home advertising her analysis allows us to think about how much we notice advertising, and how advertising creates experiences in these urban spaces allowing them to become a commercial landscape. This is the context of outdoor/out of home advertising. It is there to be noticed - persuading people to pay attention to things they had no interest in or were not thinking about. And the non-traditional advertising format *ambient advertising* is no different in this regard, it persuades people to engage with it by drawing the eye, intriguing and capturing attention. However, rather than trying to persuade an audience through rhetoric, its meanings are co-created through encounter with the viewer (see chapter 2). Without the viewer making connections with the materiality of the ambient advert, as well as with societal contexts and their own habits, there would be no communication. This much I knew to be true from my many years as an advertising art director.

People behave very differently with ambient advertising than with other more traditional forms of advertising. They also behave very differently when they encounter ambient advertising in their everyday spaces than one might expect (see chapter 4). Bar the odd

exception, such as professors of marketing Katherina Hutter and Stefan Hoffman's research on the effects of surprise in ambient advertising (2014), most current research does not account for this (Sorrentino, 2020c). It is one thing *imagining* how one might respond to an ambient advert in day-to-day life, and it is another thing encountering it in passing in an everyday place (Sorrentino, 2020a). The majority of research thus far presupposes attention in the everyday world and presents research participants with photographs of ambient advertising in real world settings. I will return to the assumption of 'focal interest' in chapter 1 (Wilson, Baack and Till, 2015, p. 232). This research does not do this, it is out in the world.



Fig. 3: Lapel camera footage from participant C9 as he takes a photograph of the [ambient] advert on the street (2024) {fig script}

A man finds himself looking at a lamppost with a gift tag and a ribbon in the middle of a street for no apparent reason (Figs. 2 and 3). He pauses for a moment, stepping closer to it and decoding it. He smiles and walks away. The ambient advert emerged from the background milieu through a combination of the qualities it possesses (see chapter 1), and it became something during this moment of pause in the ordinary flow of life (see chapters 2, 4 and 5). Indeed, this does not only happen with ambient advertising (Sorrentino, 2020a), it also happens when people encounter other forms of communication from residents or community groups (see chapter 4).



Fig. 4: The Polo Snow Stamp [ambient] advert created in 2009 by advertising agency JWT London for Polo

What ambient advertising is, and its qualities will be explored in greater depth in chapter 1, however as a point of orientation it is useful at this stage to have a foundational understanding of the category, from academic literature and from creative practitioners. Ambient advertising makes imaginative use of objects or spaces to communicate a message on behalf of brands or organisations as a form of media (Gambetti, 2010; Krautsack, 2008; Luxton and Drummond, 2000; Moor, 2003). The creative, playful and meaningful use of elements of the environment to communicate a message, such as the use of crisp fresh snow in Fig. 4 by JWT for Polo, is traced in chapter 1. Professor of advertising creativity, Micael Dahlén, outlines how consideration of these ‘creative media choice[s] enhances the perception of target brand associations and increases ad credibility and brand attitude,’ making ambient advertising a good choice for brands seeking positive opinions (2005, p. 89). In addition ambient advertising can be a low-cost method of communication for companies and institutions ranging in size from local charities to multinationals (Hutter and Hoffman, 2011; Jurca and Madlberger, 2015; Luxton and Drummond, 2000; Sorrentino, 2020b). Indeed, it is often the lower production cost and smaller scale that encourages a more personal interaction.

'It makes it easier to do work when there is a decent budget, but with budget comes greater expectation. But I don't think people engage any more than they would have done just because something is bigger. It's perhaps the opposite.' comments Jess Oudôt, then senior creative from Mother London now Creative Director at BBC Creative (Oudôt and Leach, 2019)

Orientation

The term ambient advertising was coined in 1996 by Concord Advertising, a UK agency specialising in outdoor campaigns, though it has a widely accepted connection to a number of outdoor advertising practices throughout history (Bernstein, 2004; Gambetti, 2010; Sorrentino, 2014). It became popular when a senior marketing lecturer and the Head of Marketing at Concord, Avi Shanker and Brett Horton, wrote a paper noting that the UK advertising industry forecast the ambient media sector would be worth £64 million (1999). They drew on the commentary coming out in trade press from Marketing (3 July 1997), Marketing Week (11 June 1988), Campaign (23 May 1997) and Media Week (4 September 1998) with a desire to bring it to the attention of the academic community who had paid little attention to it up until that point.

However, I start this research in the knowledge that *ambient* is not a term that is often used in industry anymore, *'Everyone wants to get an ambient ad out - though you wouldn't call it an ambient ad these days'* notes Victoria Daltrey, senior creative at Mother London at the time of interview, now Creative Group Head at Pablo London (2019). Younger creative teams are even less familiar with the term. Even though the term is rarely used, creative work is still made that fits this loose definition, and this has led to a few category issues. The issues surrounding the term ambient will be detailed in chapter 1. *'I've never come across the term ambient advertising,'* states junior creative from adam&eveDDB, Gaby Grant (Grant from Barker and Grant, 2025).

Ambient advertising is usually a part of a larger advertising campaign *'I can't remember any time when somebody said can you do an ambient ad just by itself - it might be an extension of a campaign you're working on as they are very cheap to do,'* states senior creative Paul Hancock from House337 (2019). It is often part of an integrated advertising campaign, or to use a now old-fashioned term *through-the-line* campaign, which aims to ensure that all media used by a brand share the same message in order to be more effective (Shimp, 1996, 2009). Taken even more broadly it is often part of an integrated marketing communications campaign in which the symbolic language and tone of voice of a brand are aligned across

all media (Duncan and Caywood, 1996; Christensen and Cornelissen, 2010; Christensen, Torp and Fuat Firat, 2005). It rarely stands by itself and so would not be expected to carry the burden of behavioural change on its own.

Unexpected media in an unexpected place

Shanker and Horton differentiated between campaigns using ambient media tactically near a point of sale and messaging that was not near a point of sale, and in their view less effective. They did not consider the medium itself as particularly significant. For them the key factor was the placement of the advertisement near a buying opportunity. Professor of branding and consumer culture, Rossella Gambetti, whose seminal paper on ambient advertising has been taken up by many researchers that followed, made the case for why point-of-sale placement is unnecessary (2010), something I explored in the early stages of this research (Sorrentino, 2020b). The lack of inclusion of medium as method of communication was picked up by Sandra Luxton and Lachlan Drummond's much cited ANZMAC conference paper 'What is This Thing Called Ambient Advertising' (2000).

Luxton and Drummond sought to find a working definition of ambient advertising that could be used by researchers going forward and differentiated ambient advertising from other Out-of-Home (OOH) advertising in terms of audience engagement, discovery, targeting of audiences, semiotics and creativity. They defined ambient advertising in three parts:

Firstly, 'The placement of advertising in unusual and unexpected places' (ibid, 2000, p. 735). This is an uncontested part of the definition repeated by many researchers.

Secondly, ambient advertising is often characterized as a form 'created using unconventional methods' (ibid 2000, p. 735). While this part of the definition is uncontested it is often not applied with any level of consistency in academia even though it is seen as essential by advertising creatives (see chapter 1). This is perhaps because a marketing or business school's definition of 'unconventional methods' appear to be very different from a creative's definition. This discrepancy can be seen in the examples created by researchers from business schools or marketing schools in order to show participants. Serrin Abdul-Razzaq, Lucie Ozanne and David Fortin, from the Business School at Canterbury University, New Zealand (2009), conducted one of the few in-situ studies of ambient

advertising however they used flyers as an example of this category, no creative practitioner interviewed recognised a flyer as a type of ambient advert (see chapter 1). That said, some research from marketing departments do explore unconventional mediums, as Hutter and Hoffman's and Dahlén's work show (please see chapter 1).

The final part of Luxton & Drummond's definition, 'being the first or only ad execution to do so' (2000, p. 735), was more comprehensively contested and later amended by Luxton.

Communicative environments

Around the same time as Luxton and Drummond's paper was published, senior lecturer in media and communication Elizabeth Moor was working on a PhD in which she detailed the then-new marketing activity called 'experiential.' As part of that research, she released what was to become a hugely influential paper, applying philosopher Henri Lefebvre's 'spatial triad' to branded communications. His was a theory that critically addressed the symbolic meaning and intended behaviours communicated through the design of our urban environments (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33). She described how branding and advertising agencies 'expand the 'space' of marketing beyond the traditional sites for such activity using place itself as a channel (2003, p. 57–58). A core concept through her paper, PhD, and later book (2007) was that spatial practice as a form of brand communication would continue to build in ambition and influence.

She drew on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of assemblages, that allows for the creation of a stable territory in a space such as a retail environment, where everyone could understand a brand's values, and a movement away, a deterritorialization, to other spaces and environments. This reaches beyond the limitations of the product, retail environment or existing advertising site to explain how branded spaces work (please see chapters 2 and 5 on assemblages). She shows how retail environment and experiential activities make use of elements like architecture and existing spatial design, the products themselves, customer experiences and behaviours, affect and desire, to create complex and fluid assemblages.

Though she had a focus on experiential and only mentions ambient advertising in passing, it is Moor's portrayal of space and time-based advertising as experiences that influenced many of the researchers of ambient advertising that followed, including Gambetti. Ambient advertising was on the periphery of Moor's research interests, and

she described ambient advertising in largely two-dimensional terms. It was a communicative surface that ‘can embody brand values and ‘narrate’ them to others,’ rather than communications occupying three-dimensional embodied space (2007, p. 146). Nevertheless, this vision opened up the conversation for the researchers that followed who drew heavily from Moor’s understanding of experiences (please see chapter 1). Furthermore, building from Moor’s idea of ‘communicative surface,’ and acknowledging ambient advertising as concrete things in their own right, it is possible to imagine the whole thing as a communication (for a more detailed argument see chapter 2).

The lived and everyday context

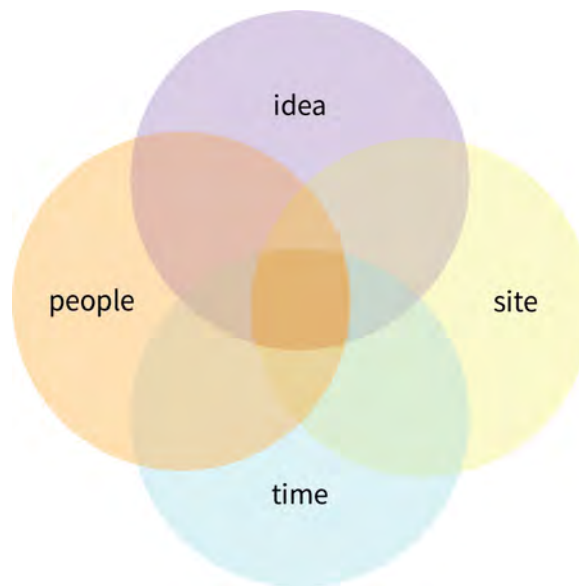


Fig. 5: The lived context of my research (2024)

Most researchers in the field of ambient advertising have not considered the lived and everyday context as an essential part of their research design. When I was working as an advertising creative context was inherent part of any ambient idea. For example, my creative partner and I worked on pitch work to target milk to teens so we started by thinking about the places that teenagers would ‘hang out’ and the activities they would do. We had ideas that used the back seats of cinemas and luminescent ideas on the bottom of swings in parks, places where teenagers go at night. This was the lived and everyday world of our target audience’s lives and consequently was a key part of the idea. We knew that city life had a rhythm, we had access to research on the behaviours and interests of our target markets, we spent a lot of time researching the audience ourselves, we knew who they were and where they were. This is the job of an advertising creative.

When we made work for the brand Always, we created notices that went into beauty spas, communications on condom vending machines and vinyl on changing room mirrors in clothes shops. All of these ambient adverts dealt with how a woman's body changes during different times of the month, but they formed part of our larger campaign 'Talking Your Body's Language'. We were able to convince Proctor and Gamble to add our communications to the wraps around the sanitary towels, really talking to women in that moment of lived relevance.



Fig. 6: Always Talking Your Body's Language Wraps created in 2001 by advertising agency Leo Burnett London for Always

I knew from experience how powerful ambient advertising can be. When I first left industry and entered academia, I wanted to talk to students not only about the practice of ambient advertising but also to give it a more theoretical base. I started to research and found that there was little written on the subject. While some research inspired me to think differently about the practice (Borghini et al., 2010; Gambetti, 2010; Hutter, 2015; Krajina, 2014; Moor, 2003; Turk, Ewing and Newton, 2006) many studies seemed to miss the point. This was typified in the study by Abdul-Razzaq et al mentioned earlier which was more frustrating than most in that it held such promise – the researchers placed ambient adverts out in the world waiting for passers-by to find them (2009). However, the study fundamentally misunderstood what an ambient advertising advert should be and what would constitute an appropriate context. In fact, discussions of context were largely missing from most research with the majority of research taking place in academic spaces and the studies themselves seemed much more focussed on investigating things on a granular level (the effects of scale on effectiveness for example) rather than looking at the bigger picture. For Merleau-Ponty breaking these things down to single moments or granular detail is to miss experiencing the phenomena in the first place (2014).

The tacit knowledge from my career had shown me how central context is for any ambient advert situated in an everyday place, and ensured it was central to my research question. Indeed, how contexts *make* an ambient advert became a central concern in my thesis. The wider context, how ambient advertising is currently practiced, was also an important consideration. This was not purely an academic investigation as I had noticed that the term ambient advertising was being used less and less often. Consequently, the voices of industry practitioners and current advertising practice form part of my contextual review in chapter 1 alongside academic research. As an ex-advertising creative, the intention of this research is not to show current advertising creatives how to make good ambient advertising, this is already their practice, and they already know how to make creative solutions. Every ambient advertising solution is unique and trying to find a formula is not only unhelpful it is counterproductive. *‘The fundamental rule is be interesting,’* comments the then Executive Creative Director of M&C Saatchi and now co-founder of Platform, Justin Tindall, *‘if you’re not interesting and original, everything else is academic and a bit pointless,’* (2019).

The purpose of this research is to show empirically, through a series of small interventions, the potential of ambient advertising, to think through how it is different to other forms of advertising, and to show how we encounter ambient advertising as passers-by. For creative practitioners it can provide ways to reflect on the work they create, to reflect both in-action and on-action (Schön, 1983) and it can provide prompts in the ideation phase to enhance useful qualities (please see chapter 1). The qualities themselves may be of help to awarding bodies to aid categorising ambient work. For fellow researchers in ambient advertising, and other non-traditional or alternative OOH, the research will provide fieldwork from the everyday world, an empirical base from which to theorise attentive encounters. This research will also provide a methodology for use in the field, other ways of knowing about media communications in the lived world. Later it can provide arguments for creatives and strategists that talk to clients from a wide scope of organisations, charities and brands to make more use of these creative interventions.

Aims and objectives

The question at the core of this research asks how and in what ways do participants encounter and give attention to [ambient] advertising in everyday places?

Ambient advertising is a sub-field of OOH advertising, a sub-field itself of advertising which commonly falls under the umbrella of business and marketing. However, as it is a creative and contextual practice it crosses a number of different disciplines such as media and communications studies, creative arts, cultural studies, and social sciences in a very interdisciplinary way. My aim is to advance the sub-field's understanding of how participants encounter and give attention to ambient advertising, by developing and testing a holistic methodological approach capable of capturing the complexities of attention in everyday places. In doing so I will also affect these other disciplines. The objectives to achieve this are:

- 1 To conduct a review of existing literature and methodological approaches used by theorists and researchers to investigate understandings of perception, attention and encounter in relation to ambient advertising in everyday spaces
- 2 To design a multi-methodological framework that blends principles from phenomenology, sensory ethnography, action research with practice to capture the ways in which people perceive and pay attention to ambient advertising
- 3 To apply this new methodological framework (in three phases) in public spaces, to explore the various ways participants encounter and pay attention to ambient advertising in everyday places
- 4 To analyse the contextual elements from the everyday world that co-assemble an ambient advert as something to pay attention to

The right moment

Professor of Marketing Richard T. Wilson, a long-standing and significant researcher in OOH advertising, extracted trends from Economies and Consumer Annual Data (Euromonitor International, 2021). He found that across the world OOH advertising in 2021 accounted for \$39.4 billion in revenues. He noted that OOH was the only media category other than online advertising to grow between 2016 and 2021 (2023). Further industry research found 47% of American inhabitants of large cities noticed OOH advertising much more than they used to, (The Harris Poll, 2022), important in the

attention economy (Nelson-field, 2020, please see chapter 1). Another industry survey revealed that advertising spending in the UK's OOH category is forecasted to reach US\$1.52bn in 2024 with 12% of that spend in place-based work (Statista Market Insights, 2024). Of course, these industry polls from the OOH sector have a vested interest in highlighting this category's growth, and they do favour traditional advertising sites that they can easily own and monetise, rather than ambient advertising. That being said, professors of marketing Sara Rosengren and Eric Modig note that over the last two decades we have seen a growth of different forms of interesting alternative OOH advertising in our public spaces (2015). This sector will be defined in greater detail in chapter 1.



Fig. 7: The right moment for this research (2024)

The reasons that go some way to explaining the rise in OOH can be split into two broad areas: audience behaviour and the advertising creative's preference. With regard to audiences, clients have noticed that their preferred audience - the hard-to-target 18-35 demographic (Eberstadt, 2000) – have changed how they consume media, and are more likely to share interesting alternative OOH on their social media (see chapter 1). *'Ambient advertising seems very Gen Z actually, it's the right time for more of it as they will share it'* comments senior creative Claudio Pasqualetti from PG ONE (2020). In addition, the audience is increasingly mobile 'We live in one place, work in another, play football in another' (Cresswell, 2015, p. 36). Finally, the 'hedonistic aspect of consumption' (Gambetti, 2010, p. 3) can be answered by an experience as easily as buying a product and it is in a brands or a charity's interests to satisfy this audience desire.

For advertising creatives, it is an advertising format with lots of appeal. The proliferation of adverts in the digital environment has meant creatives *'are moving into street stuff, trying to spark joy'* states Lottie Hanson, senior creative at Hubbub (2019). It is also generally accepted in both industry and academia as an effective low-cost tool 'in terms of the ratio of costs and benefits' (Hutter and Hoffman, 2011, p. 42). While it *'can be incredibly effective it doesn't lend itself to measurement which gives it a certain [creative] freedom,'* (Tindall, 2019), which means it is often the element of a campaign that is less susceptible to multiple layers of approval and creative amendments. Advertising is all about communications and ambient advertising can reach audiences in unexpected ways *'and when you reach the person that you want to be talking to, then that's golden really,'* comments Laila Millborrow, senior creative at Leo Burnett (2021). Additionally, unlike much advertising content, there is positive perception among consumers about ambient adverts (Sharma and Sharma, 2015).

These factors provide a compelling reason to make use of alternative OOH and ambient advertising within the advertising mix (Sorrentino, 2020b).

My approach

This is epistemological research that looks at how we know what we know. Though I may wander into ontology at times this is very much a study that looks at how human's experience things rather than a metaphysical discussion of how the universe operates.

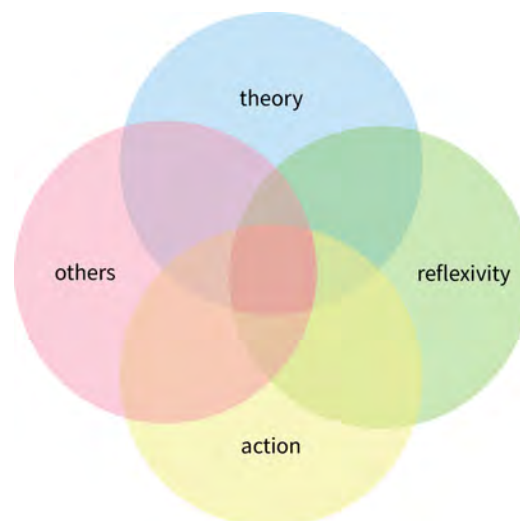


Fig. 8: The intersection of research approaches (2024)

My influences are multiple (please see chapter 2). I draw heavily from the theoretical approaches of phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (with influences from Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger), and the feminist phenomenologists that followed, Sara Ahmed, Kristidel McGregor and Iris Marion Young (with influences from Donna Haraway). I think through the writing of philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari. I borrow from humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan and exoteric Zen philosopher Nishida Kitarō. I explore the world they write through an action research cycle as described by Jean McNiff making use of sensory and visual approaches as outlined by sensory ethnographer Sarah Pink that give access to the context in which an ambient advert would sit. This is an approach that is not trying to be objective but ‘to come closer to understanding how other people experience, remember and imagine’ (Pink, 2015, p. 25).

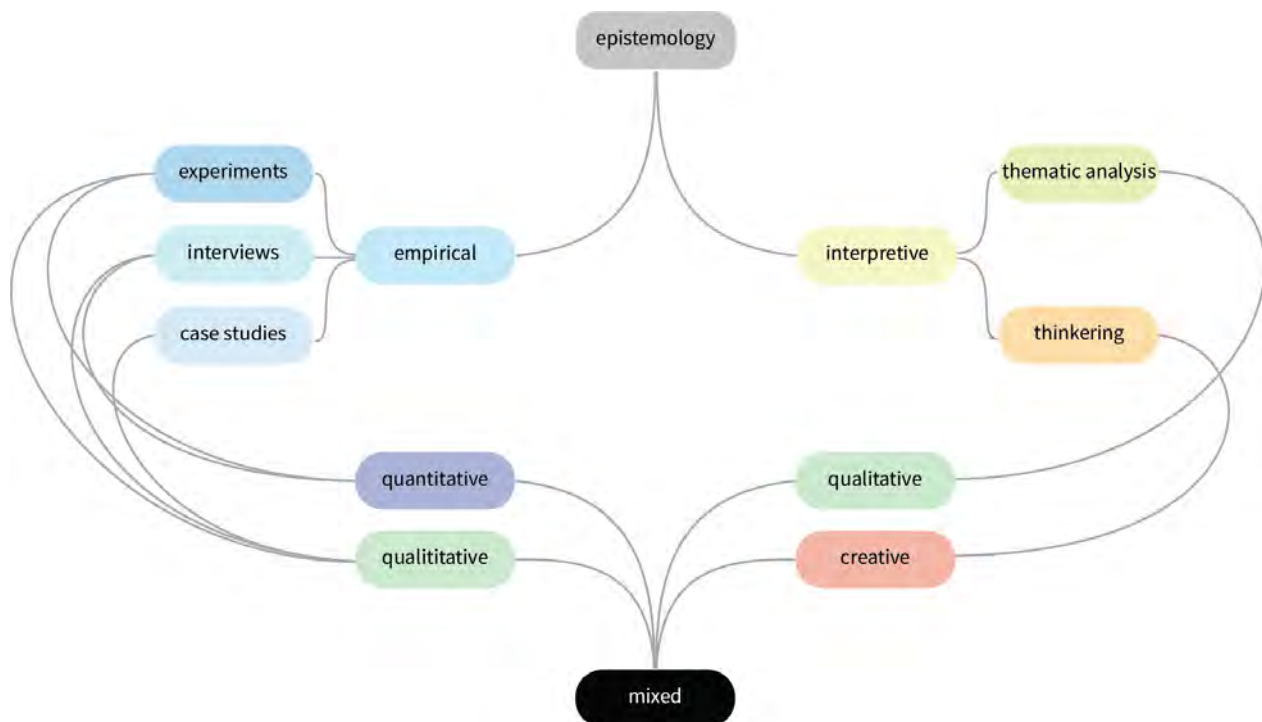


Fig. 9: My approach to the research (2024)

My overwhelming concern has always been that context needs to not only be a foundational element of any research into ambient advertising, but it also needs to be foundational to the representation. This was best answered by taking you (as reader) with me, with cameras, with participant stories, into the alleyway and street, and trying to avoid, as much as possible, single photographs of ambient adverts as their entire representation. Merleau-Ponty understood context

and how we are linked to our environment very well, which is why he is so important for this thesis, but I realised as I reflected on participant encounters in the second place (Pink, 2015, please see chapter 5) that despite his moves towards a more dynamic relationship with the world in his later writing he was too *subject* orientated. This led me to the work of Deleuze and Guattari. Through the research process I came to think about context very differently than when I started. In all honesty, I did not begin this research journey with Merleau-Ponty, I began with theories of place and psycho-geography, media studies and ambient advertising research, and I certainly did not start with Deleuze and Guattari. Chapter 3 details the looping and spiralling way that I came to my framework, through reflective action research and first pass analysis, this was a framework that became through reflective and reflexive analysis in the reflexive thematic analysis, and the thinking makerly practice within the bricolage. Chapter 2 presents a considered theoretical framework as though I entered the research cycle with a full understanding of the literature. This was not the case.

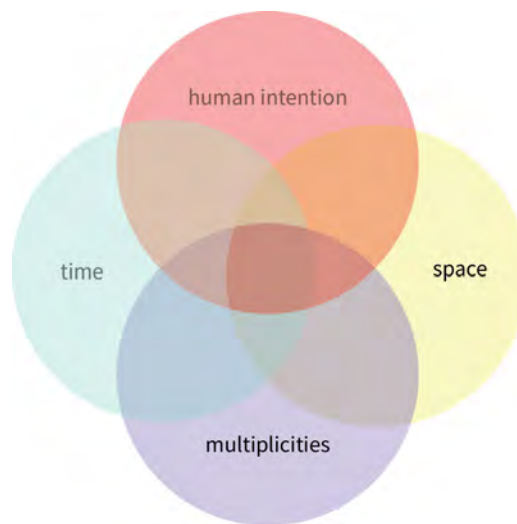


Fig. 10: Intersections of theory (2024)

I spent a lot of time exploring methods as I did not have an off the shelf approach that I could use from other ambient advertising researchers, so I looked further afield to Film Studies and art practice and sociology. The methods used generated huge amounts of data, and it took time to analyse all three phases with all their experiments to understand what they were telling me (see chapter 4). I had stories, because people related stories in their audio diaries, and I also had timekeeping because the body-worn camera generated time code as well as context for the audio-diary, so I knew how long it took participants to notice the advert and how much time they

spent with it. I had participant photographs which more specifically showed attention, but not in the way that I thought they would, and I have had to re-think how the study makes use of photography a number of times. Trying to find the right methods took up a lot of my time yet in this thesis it almost appears pre-planned. It was not. It emerged by revisiting the alleyway in phase 1 on multiple occasions and in conversation with philosophers, participants and practice. Reflection and reflexivity were the energetic drivers of this research. The creative potential provided by reflexively questioning myself, my own philosophy, my influence on the data and reflecting on what happened on site, with participants and with the texts. This is the work (see chapters 4 and 5).

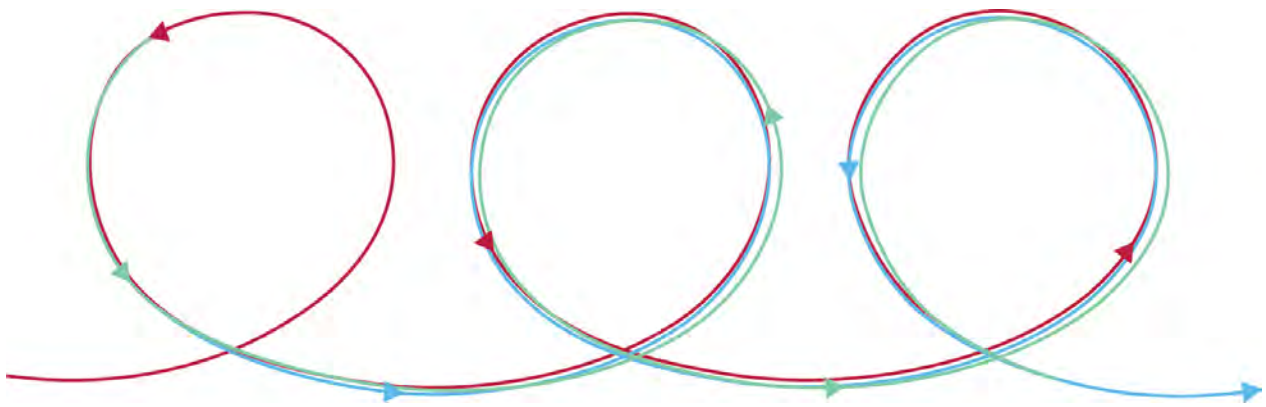


Fig. 11: My bricolage methodology (2024, see chapter 3)

Reflection

The term ‘reflective practice’ comes from the philosophies and educational theories of philosopher and psychologist John Dewey and philosopher Donald Schön. Dewey describes reflective practice as ‘the active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it’ (1910, p. 6). The action of reflection ‘involves constantly examining your own position in the research endeavour, including your assumptions, feelings, and decisions’ (Leavy, 2020, p. 280). Reflection is a key component in action research process which underpins my methodological bricolage (see chapter 3). It is conducted before and after each spiral. It allowed me to consider what methods worked and what did not, whether the philosophical positions I was reading illustrated what I was witnessing, and to constantly re-evaluate my question and beliefs. Reflective film-making, expressed in thinking, moved me forwards (please see chapters 3 and 5). I needed to make films and then watch them, reflecting on my reflections. It is a method that I used to tie everything together, to bring my thinking into focus, and to keep context present.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is the other half of the driving force. Professor of psychology Sue Wilkinson describes reflection as a focus on more external matters and reflexivity as self-reflection (1988). Researchers in health and social care Michelle K. Jamieson, Gisela H. Govaart and Madeleine Pownall describe it as continual, happening ‘before, during, and after the actual research process’ (2023, p. e12735). They build on the work of Professor Carla Willig pointing out that reflexivity asks a researcher to critically think about their own impact on the research and why they are doing the research in the first place (Willig, 2013). It foregrounds my worldview, how this positions my question, my own research process and how I might then influence the participants. It acknowledges the researcher as part of the research and it necessitates that I, as researcher, need to be aware of how I sit within the field of research. It acknowledges that we cannot see the world without ourselves in it, an idea further explored in chapter 2. Everything is contextual and assembled through the researcher. It forms ‘a complex ... reflexive, collage or montage—a set of fluid, interconnected images and representations’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 6). This fluidity allows for shifts in position, in beliefs, in ways to represent the complexity of the world, it allows for the research to affect one’s world view as it happens. Both Pink and feminist phenomenologist Iris Marion Young foreground reflexivity in their writing, the need to step back and think about how who we are affects the research.

Multiplicities

This research journey has been for me a series of journeys in conversation with others; with academics, with practitioners, with participants, with philosophers and with the multiple versions of myself (see chapter 2). The alleyway is the site of phases 1 and 2, and the street is the site for phase 3 (see chapter 3). This is where I placed my ambient adverts. Participants encountered ambient advertising as they walked around the built environment going about their daily business. Phenomenologist David Seamon, building on Merleau-Ponty’s concepts, depicts people ‘subsumed in the world like a fish is joined with water’ (1979, p. 161) living a life of ‘everyday movement in space’ be it walking across a plaza, walking down an alleyway or walking along a street. A multiplicity of journeys. This research is multiple people’s voices as well as my own. Multiplicities is explored further in chapters 2 and 5.

A walk through the thesis

The Introduction establishes my reasons for conducting the research, my question and my overall approach.

Chapter 1 investigates what ambient advertising is. It looks at the slippery term *ambient*, considering whether it is appropriate going forwards, and leaving me bracketing the term [ambient]. It takes a look at the literature and weaves this in with interview comments from advertising creatives and examples of [ambient] advertising. This allows me to look closely at attention and experience, and to draw out the qualities needed to make an [ambient] advert beyond being an unexpected thing in an unexpected place.

Chapter 2 explains why we encounter [ambient] advertising in the way that we do. It takes a philosophical look at how we can understand that moment of encounter. It traces ourselves ∞ encountering ∞ things, through the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger to the multiplicities and assemblages of Deleuze and Guattari by way of Bergson and feminist phenomenologists. It considers how [ambient] adverts are different to other advertising formats - constructed in the pause, described by Yi-Fu Tuan, while we pay it some attention. Though it is the second chapter it outlines the framework I arrived at towards the end of my research built through the observations in chapter 4 and the themes from chapter 5.

Chapter 3 details how we can investigate that moment of encounter. It describes the bricolage methodology I developed to capture what happens when participants pay attention to [ambient] advertising. It sketches out my action research process, the [ambient] interventions created with the qualities from chapter 1, my use of ethnomethods, and working with participants. It then outlines my process of analysis, from first pass quantitative analysis through to reflexive thematic analysis and practice-based thinking.

Chapter 4 chronicles the action research on site, depicting what happened in those moments, illustrating the actions, familiarization and reflections of the pilot and each of the three phases through the rich participant materials. It paints a picture of participant attentive and passive encounters with the first pass of analysis, draws in the qualities identified in chapter 1, and suggests the themes which will be developed in chapter 5

Chapter 5 outlines the themes that were drawn out through a process

of reflexive thematic analysis and explored through tinkering desktop films, in constant dialogue with the philosophical texts. The moment in which an [ambient] advert comes together that happens in the thickness of present. This situated form of advertising is assembled in a pause in our flow, a pause which may only be fleeting, but nevertheless happened. A pause in which we attend as passively or as actively as we wish to.

The conclusion looks once more at the question the research tries to answer and its limitations. It reframes my practice as an academic researcher and a practitioner through reflection and reflexivity. It draws together the preceding chapters with a focus on contributions to knowledge, proposing how researchers could use the research as starting points for new research on [ambient] advertising in light of the participant reactions shown through qualities and themes.

Parameters and limitations

This research project crosses many fields. The breadth and diversity of philosophy, methodology and practice in each field has stretched me in many directions and it has not been possible to follow every one. While I have knowingly looked at ambient advertising through the lens of philosophers and the research has benefited from those perspectives, it is not a philosophy thesis. This is also not a business school investigation, so it is not looking at attitudinal change, purchase intentions or advertising recall. While the interventions I created were for a local council rather than a product the research is not in itself a critique of consumer culture. It is also not a psychoanalytical study though at times it touches on cognitive psychology. It is also not artistic research, looking at how to improve upon a creative idea through trial and iteration. While I make films to understand my own thinking, it is not film-making research. My research is at the intersection of these disciplines and draws from these disciplines, but it is not these disciplines.

This is creative media practice research.



CHAPTER 1

Eye-Catching Ambient advertising



Fig. 12: Play Has No Limits created in 2024 by advertising agency adam&eveDDB in collaboration with Transport for London for Sony PS5

Researching ambient advertising comes with many challenges. As Wilson observed in his bibliometric review, within academic research circles there is only a limited number of studies across the variety of OOH practices. As discussed in the introduction, and to be developed later in the chapter, ambient advertising is often placed within the category OOH. Within those studies, only a few papers about ambient advertising appeared in the most widely recognised academic journals with an advertising focus (2023). In industry it is also difficult to research, not least because the word *ambient* within the term *ambient advertising* is slippery. Pieces created for guerrilla advertising, such as the guerrilla tactic of stickering and other micro interventions, are often portrayed as ambient advertising. At the other end of the scale, pieces that would have been considered ambient not that long ago are now called experiential, activations or installations. In response to the slipperiness of this term across both academic texts and industry practice this review encompasses both academic texts and industry interviews and pieces. Often terms like experiential or activation may appear on a brief in lieu of ambient advertising, though these terms mean something quite different.

'It depends on who talks about it. Clients and suits call it an activation, we probably call it experiential, but it's probably mostly called an activation,' states Matt Leach. 'I don't know,' interjects Jane Oudôt, 'experiential is more interactive, ambient isn't in my mind, it's more something you look at, like a cool piece of outdoor, ambient isn't a word that's used that much now. They might call it special build outdoor now, you don't hear it used anymore,' (Leach and Oudôt, 2019).

The particular focus on the word ambient as being in some way part of the scenery or the background is perhaps one of the reasons that the term ambient advertising is rarely used in advertising practice these days. It is not a term that appears on a brief. Afterall, what brand wants to spend money on materials that might not be noticed and recede into the background?

'It reminds me of when pubs were allowed to become restaurants, and you got that horrible expression gastropub. The clients we were working for hated that phrase. You're caught in a terrible Catch-22 of a horrible definition – in that ambient just sounds like ambient music' comments David Law, Executive Creative Director at Someone (2021).

Research with practitioners on theories about advertising in general is limited, and there is often quite a wide gap between what practitioners think and what academics think. The point that 'agency practitioners resist any empirical generalization that could undermine creativity' (Nyilasy and Reid, 2019) is evident in creative Matt Leach's remark, *'our entire role exists to try and destroy a definition'* (Oudôt and Leach, 2019). In 2015 Silvia Biraghi, Rossella Gambetti and Guendalina Graffigna conducted research with advertising practitioners using semi-structured interviews to understand ambient advertising's 'conceptual boundaries' (2015, p. 5). However, their interviewees were from the strategic and account side of the business rather than the creative side.

It was challenging to find any academic research on ambient advertising that had a focus on the creative's point of view. As a consequence, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with twenty advertising and branding creatives from many different types of agency to provide context for my research. I reference the interview transcripts throughout the body of the thesis, and here in the introduction to both the literature and practice to set context.

Agency	Type of agency	Role
adam&eveDDB	Advertising agency	Executive creative director
adam&eveDDB	Advertising agency	Executive creative director (team)
adam&eveDDB	Advertising agency	Junior creative (team)
M&C Saatchi	Advertising agency	Group chief creative officer
Mother London	Creative company	Senior creatives (team)
Mother London	Creative company	Senior art director
Cravens	Advertising agency	Creative Director
ButterflyCannon	Design agency	Senior designer
YourStudio	Experiential agency	Senior experience architect
HubBub	Environmental campaign design	Senior creative
PG ONE	Creative marketing agency	Senior creative
Engine	Advertising agency	Senior creative
SomeOne	Branding agency	Executive Creative Director
Freelance	Digital experience agency	Creative director
Freelance	Advertising agency	Creative director
Leo Burnett	Advertising agency	Senior creative
Frank, Bright & Abel	Branding agency	Creative director

Fig. 13: Table of advertising industry interviews, please note places of employment may have changed since the date of interview

I wrote a paper for Westminster papers and interviewed the first fifteen creatives about ambient advertising (2020b). I have since conducted other interviews included in this table, and re-interviewed some of the original interviewees, to check if the findings that I described in my paper still stand true. They do. Those industry practitioners and clients that still recall the use of the term ambient imbue the word with the qualities of ambient music, in that it can fade into the background.

‘I haven’t heard the term ambient in ages, a lot of people use ‘activation’ but no-one really knows what that means either - but it sounds active which I’m guessing is why clients like it. Ambient always had some kind of impact though, it wasn’t ever entirely invisible,’ states Ben Tollet, Executive Creative Director at adam&eveDDB (2019).

The implication that a piece of advertising might be seen as background is of particular concern in the Western world where we assume focal interest in an advert rather than its surroundings. Indeed, Mirahmad Amirshahi and Samira Jafari Dizicheh report that academic research over a number of years, by Richard Nisbett, Kaiping Peng, Incheol Choi and Ara Norenzayan (Nisbett et al., 2001) suggests that Western cultures, driven more by analytic thought processes than Eastern cultures, are more likely to focus on a billboard than the area around a billboard (2019). A less 'media-centric' approach is discussed later in the chapter. The term media-centric refers to an acknowledgement by various media theorists that often media has been the focus of research rather than investigating how media is part of the fabric of our lives (see Moores, 2012; Morley, 2007, 2009, Krajina et al 2014). However, as is common in research on outdoor advertising, the studies Nisbett et al. make use of photographs shown to participants in academic spaces rather than holding the discussion, in-situ, in front of the advert in the everyday space in which it was installed. The practice of using photographs of ambient advertising rather than being on site is common in academic research, some exceptions will be detailed in chapter 3, and they form a driver for my own research methodology.

The problem inherent in the category

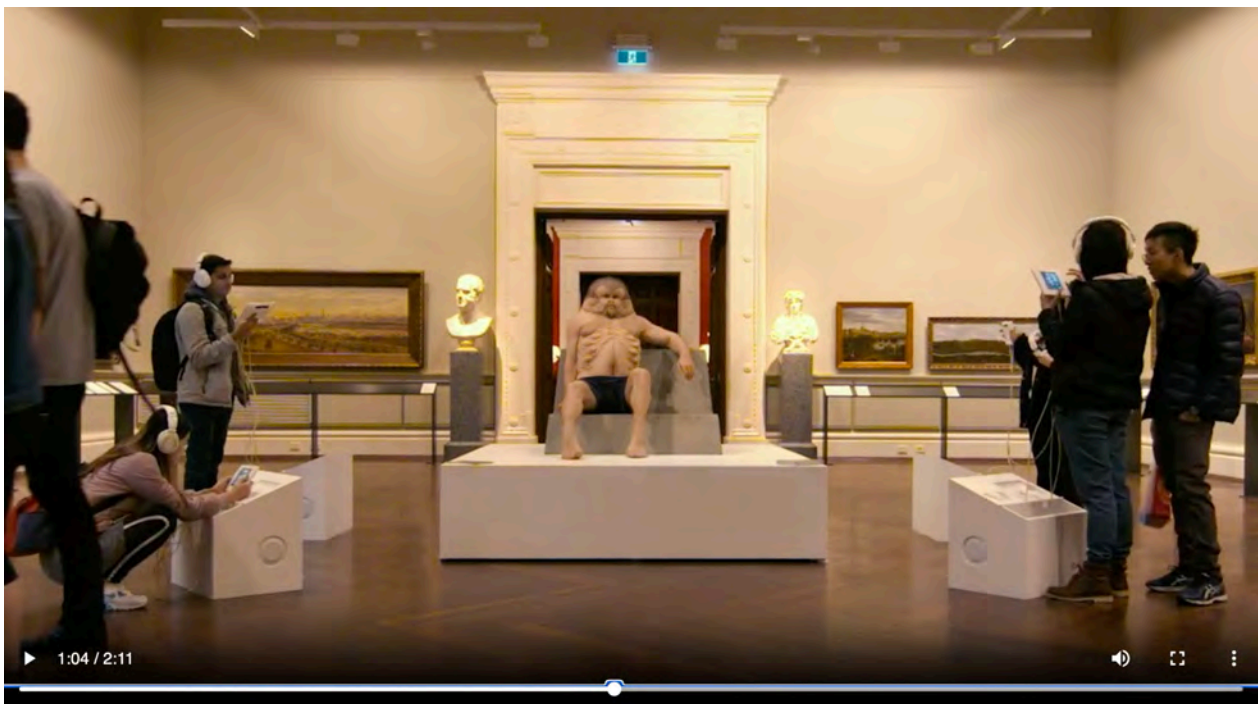


Fig. 14: Meet Graham created in 2016 by advertising agency Clemenger BBDO Melbourne for the Transport Accident Commission (screen shot from case study)

Ambient advertising is assembled through many types of medium, at varying scales, in diverse locations, with different levels of interactivity. The 2017 Meet Graham interactive sculpture for the Transport Accident Commission in Australia provides a good example of scale. This installation demonstrated the evolutionary adaptations the human body needs to make to be able to withstand a car crash and won a yellow pencil in the 2017 D&AD awards for Outdoor Advertising/Ambient (see Fig. 14). However, many of the creatives interviewed questioned whether it is fair to put works of this scale in the same category as smaller interventions with significantly less budget.

‘If you put ambient in the same category as spatial design, I mean it wouldn’t be fair to put some street graffiti up against a Norman Foster building as that clearly affects thousands on a daily basis going through that space, it is a much bigger budget and it has a different intent,’ explains Ant Nelson, Executive Creative Director from adam&eveDDB (Nelson and Sutherland, 2019).

Similarly, The Restaurant of Mistaken Orders in Japan for Daiki Angel Help (see Fig. 15) won a wooden pencil for Direct/Direct Response/Ambient in the 2020 D&AD awards and consisted of a pop-up restaurant experience where all the workers had dementia. These provide two very different examples of the type of work that could be considered ambient, highlighting the problem – there is no clearly defined terminology, and many different types of execution are used, and overlap within and around, the no longer one-size-fits-all term ambient.



Fig. 15: Restaurant of Mistaken Orders created in 2020 by advertising agency TBWA HAKUHODO for DAIKI Angel Help Co

The most famous international advertising awarding bodies have used a number of different categories in order to try to define ambient work. For example, in 2019 The Cannes Lions used the category Outdoor yet in 2023 they used the category Ambient and Experiential. In 2023 the main UK based advertising awarding body, D&AD, used the category Press and Outdoor however in 2024 they asked award entrants to enter '[e]xperiential outdoor work such as activations and pop-ups ... into the [e]xperiential category'(D&AD, 2024). They have no examples labelled ambient beyond 2020 and those from 2020 are extremely limited. Another of the world's big awarding bodies, the US based One Show, started using the category Experiential and Installations in 2024 though in 2019 it categorised this work under 'Consumer; Ambient Media (indoor & outdoor)' and 'Ambient/Environmental,' with creative teams often entering the same work for both (The One Show, 2024). This serves to illustrate how difficult defining the parameters, or even acknowledging the complexity, of this category can be.

The problem around definition has been prevalent throughout my PhD. I have had to explain what ambient advertising is every time I wanted to talk about my research. This in itself is not unusual, as PhD research often has a very narrow focus and not everyone would be expected to know specialist terminology. However, these explanations do not usually need to caveat why a particular everyday word does not mean what you might think it means as a category name. I would often have to default to the terms outdoor and OOH, themselves not easily defined, as descriptors.

Outdoor and OOH

For many years Outdoor and OOH were often used as a default term to capture the various types of advertising displayed in non-domestic spaces, and work that was loosely defined as ambient would fit within these categories. Richard Koeck and Gary Warnaby's theoretical study of the influence of the urban context on outdoor advertising (2014) noted the difficulty in defining the outdoor category in itself, as it can appear in many forms. They describe two-dimensional outdoor advertising as primarily visual, three-dimensional and four-dimensional work as embodied and a form of spectacle, and interactive/multimodal work as performative. While these subdivisions describe the types of work that could be considered ambient, they don't fully capture it as ambient work often traverses sections. From a practitioner perspective, two-dimensional work that actively uses a three-dimensional space could also be considered 'spectacle' and therefore embodied (see Fig. 16 JWT for Kellogg's).

These categories differ from Gambetti's paper, often cited in ambient advertising research (2010). Her categories separate three-dimensional artefacts and four-dimensional work, with four-dimensional work incorporating stunts, motion-based work and interactivity. Koeck and Warnaby's embodied category feels more closely aligned with the qualities of ambient advertising I am researching. It acknowledges the intertwining of spatial and temporal qualities from the lived space and is more in keeping with phenomenological and sensory ethnographic concepts of being in the world (concepts I will develop further in chapter 2).



Fig. 16: Autumn Flakes created in 2008 by advertising agency JWT for Kellogg's Crunchy Nut Cornflakes

Ambient work often fits under the category of OOH and many practitioners, particularly outside Europe, have taken to using the term. This was something I noticed when interviewing for my book as far back as 2012 (Sorrentino, 2014) and is supported by Biraghi, Gambetti and Graffigna who write that the OOH description 'underplays the public dimension in favour of the non-domestic, non-family aspect of communication' (2015, p. 7). Wilson's review defined five key features of OOH advertising (2023);

- It is made to be outside, in other words it is not simply a press advert carried outside
- It is placed on a platform/channel/touchpoint retained by a media owner
- This site must be rentable
- Other companies should be able to hire the site
- The site is in a publicly accessible space

This allows the term OOH to incorporate work that is in a wider variety of spaces, including work that is installed inside for example in train stations and bars. It allows for a broader scope of work than the term outdoor suggests. However, a number of these attributes are problematic for ambient advertising as often there is no media owner, and the site is not recognisably rentable. This highlights the minefield naming in this area can be and how limiting both the terms OOH and ambient are.

Thérèse Roux, De la Rey van der Walldt & Lené Ehlers, provide a thorough overview of OOH media (2013). Though they are focussed on the application of the categories in South Africa their systematic analysis is useful. They propose the following four sub-categories; '[a]outdoor advertising media, [b]transit media advertising, [c]street-and retail furniture advertising, and [d]alternative OOH advertising media' (ibid 2013, p. 387) on a continuum, from (a) traditional to (d) unconventional. While I broadly agree with their findings, I would add a couple of caveats. Firstly, as with Koeck and Warnaby's groupings, ambient advertising traverses Roux et al's groupings. Specifically, it crosses sub-categories (c) and (d) as it often uses street furniture as a medium in itself rather than simply placing ads on street furniture (see Fig. 17 Mother London for Britart.com 2001). Secondly, the proposition separates those in transit from those congregating. However, as Moor (2003, 2004, 2007), Cronin (2010b), Koeck and Warnaby (2014), Zlatan Krajina (2014) and Thomas Dekeyser (2018) remind us, the viewer's act of travel is often a critical part of their interaction with an advert.

The slippery term ambient



Fig. 17: Wall created in 2001 by advertising agency Mother London for Britart.com

Gambetti, described an ‘evolution’ in ambient work in overall aspiration, concept, form and content with more ambitious projects manifesting over time (2010, p. 37). When she wrote her article in 2010 ambient advertising was no longer limited in scale to advertising on toilet rolls or a poster on the back of a bus as described by Shanker and Horton (1999), and it was showing the potential to become larger, more of a spectacle. When ambient started it was much closer to guerrilla advertising, such as the example in Fig. 18 for Weightwatchers, making use of any unpaid-for surface with small unexpected, inexpensive and easy to create interventions (Bond and Kirchenbaum 1998). Since then, ambient work has indeed increased in scale, and new categories have appeared. Notions of scale, spectacle, interactivity and embodied experience highlight the difficulty inherent in defining ambient work as can be seen in Fig. 14 (Meet Graham) and Fig. 17 (Britart.com). Material pieces of guerrilla advertising, such as stickers, can hide in the environment, yet guerrilla advertising can also involve actors, stunts and events rather than *things*, though it would not usually be as structured as Fig. 15 (Restaurant of Mistaken Orders).



Fig. 18: Crack created in 2003 by advertising agency Duckworth, Finn, Grubb, Waters for Weightwatchers

While ambient advertising is not guerrilla advertising, as it often requires permissions, it does sometimes use guerrilla tactics and make use of places that would not normally be seen as a media channel and would not normally be perceived as ‘rentable’. *‘We once got in trouble for putting footprints on the pavement and were told we had to remove it overnight or face a fine,’* recalls David Law (2021), sometimes that disruptive spirit is the point.

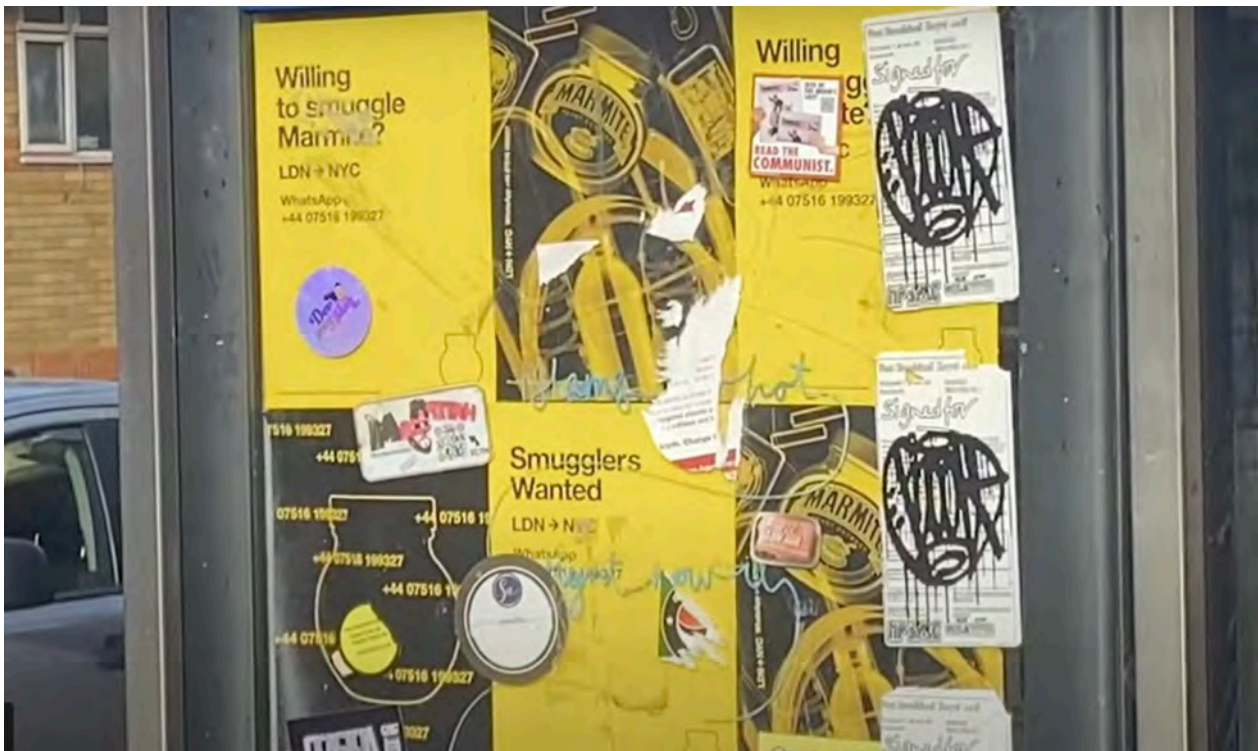


Fig. 19: Smugglers created in 2024 by advertising agency adam&eveDDB for Marmite

Angela Williams argues in her PhD that scale separates guerrilla and ambient works, and, while this is true to a certain extent, the awards bodies, and practitioners interviewed, do not fully support it (2017). Guerrilla work can be stickers, and though this would no longer qualify as ambient as it did in the past (see for example Fig. 18 for Weightwatchers). The larger builds or spectacles that she describes, such as the John Lewis handbag, are more usually called ‘special builds’ in industry rather than ambient, *‘we would call it an installation or special build’* comments senior creative Paul Hancock (2019). That is not to say that the work she highlights could not come under a better umbrella term that fulfils all the intentions of ambient work and expresses its qualities. Sometimes large pieces are called stunts by practitioners and listed as such in briefs, an example of this is Project84 (see Fig. 20 adam&eveDDB 2019). This saw 84 life size male sculptures installed on top of the ITV tower in London for the Campaign Against Living Miserably.

‘I think Calm was more of a stunt than an ambient ad. Experiential is generally something you can touch and feel, and a stunt is something that stands out, it is a spectacle,’ clarifies Mike Sutherland, Executive Creative Director at adam&eveDDB (Nelson and Sutherland, 2019)

That said D&AD awarded Project84 a graphite pencil under the category Direct/Direct Response/Ambient. These pieces, while different in scale and medium seem to be aiming for embodied affects and

need a category name that unifies some of these diverse material expressions, something I will return to later in the chapter.

‘In a way ambient is exciting because it’s something you might just happened upon, it’s something you might want to share and it’s a very PR-able thing,’ explains Madeleine Neighbour, Creative Director at Cravens (2021)



Fig. 20: Project84 created in 2019 by advertising agency adam&eveDDB for CALM

A broader look at ambient advertising research

To date there has been limited research with a specific focus on ambient advertising. As recently as 2023 Wilson, building on a growing body of commentary (Chan, Tse, and Hung 2017; Khang et al. 2016) noted that OOH advertising in general, including ambient advertising, is still under researched and lacks a cross-disciplinary approach (2023). This is surprising as a recent Harris poll found that 91% of American Gen Z adults surveyed would reshare unusual OOH on their social media (2022). The majority of ambient advertising research has been desk-based and conceptual, for example searching for definitions of the field (Dahlén and Edenius, 2007; Gambetti, 2010) yet with no critique on whether *ambient advertising* is in itself a useful term. Other research applies psychological concepts such as Mandler and Parker’s 1976 schema incongruity theory to ambient

advertising (Jurca and Plăiaş, 2013; Mandler and Parker, 1976). Much of the literature originates from business and marketing schools with a focus on effectiveness or from psychology departments, with an emphasis on persuasion (Duff, faber, nan 2019). Other studies analyse consumer behaviours and attention (Dahlén and Edenius, 2007; Dahlén, Rosengren and Törn, 2008; Rosengren, 2008) engagement (Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009; Hutter, 2015; Yuen, 2017; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010b) the element of surprise (e.g., Hutter and Hoffmann 2014), the effect of associative learning (Amirshahi, Jafari Dizicheh and Wilson, 2019; Wilson, 2023) or ambient advertising's value to consumers (Rosengren, Modig and Dahlén, 2015).

There have been studies that have discussed creativity (for example Dahlén, Friberg and Nilsson, 2009, Till and Baack 2005), notably lead by advertising creativity theorist Micael Dahlén whose focus was medium and creativity (Dahlén, 2005; Dahlén and Edenius, 2007; Dahlén, Friberg and Nilsson, 2009; Dahlén, Granlund and Grenros, 2009). Further studies look at consumers and the interest that they have in adverts that are new and unique (Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009; Gambetti and Graffigna, 2010; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010b), while others compare the impact of an ambient execution to a conventional OOH execution (Hutter, 2015). Since branding agencies have extended their hold in outdoor communications (Julier, 2013; Lury, 2006; Moor, 2003) there has also been growing interest in how ambient can strengthen consumer feelings towards brands (Ang and Low, 2000; Gambetti, Graffigna and Biraghi, 2012; Hutter, 2015; Modig and Rosengren, 2014; Rosengren, Modig and Dahlén, 2015; Sherry, Kozinets and Borghini, 2007; Yang and Smith, 2009; Yuen, 2017, Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010). There is some limited research into how charitable organisations and councils might use ambient advertising (Sorrentino, 2020b) and how those organisations might make use of this form in the Metaverse (Vangelov, 2023). This has increasing relevance when one notes the growing number of CGI *ambient* adverts that appear in social feeds (see Fig. 21), for example the London execution of the Sky High Mascara Express advert for Maybelline NY (Maybelline NY, 2023) with over 154.8 million views at the time of writing.

'Ultimately this difference between digital and physical will be not relevant, but even today I would include digital or mixed reality in any of these experiences,' reflects Ioana Iliesiu, Senior Experience Architect at YourStudio (2019



*Fig. 21: Maybelline Sky High Mascara London
Takeover created in 2023 by video artist Ian Padgham
for Maybelline NY*

Experiential as a category

In 1999 Bernd Schmitt observed that experience was a more effective way for a brand to connect with its audience than traditional product features and benefit marketing (1999). If one experiences concepts such as sturdiness or lightness or delight in relation to a product or brand then the message is more impactful (Fill and Turnbull, 2019). Schmitt proved influential for many researchers that followed who wrote about branding and advertising as an experienced phenomenon. He characterised experiences as any private and paid for events that marketers put on for customers and included retail environments within his definition. It is in the context of branded events such as music festivals that Moor detailed the ‘live’ and ‘real-time’ communicative features of branded experiences (2003, p. 43). Schmitt transformed the five characteristics of experience he identified into a framework with which to create five different types of marketing campaigns or Strategic Experiential Modules known as SEMs (sense, feel, think, act, relate). Indeed Schmitt (1999) underpins both Moor’s definition of experiential and Gambetti’s paper that applied the idea of experiential to ambient advertising (2010).

Gambetti's paper then went on to influence a number of other researchers who applied these SEMs as a way to analyse and categorise ambient advertising (see the work of Biraghi, Gambetti and Graffigna, 2015; Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009; Dahlén, 2005; Gambetti, Graffigna and Biraghi, 2012; Klingmann, 2010; Moor, 2003, 2004; Smilansky, 2009; Yuen, 2017; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010). Koeck and Warnaby develop experiential through the creation of 'events and spectacles' drawing on the work of Moor (2003) who had built her understanding of SEMs on Schmitt. For them, and Moor, events and experiential are designed to establish emotional and associative links between people, place and a 'product experience' (2014, p. 1417).

For many creative practitioners in advertising, ambient work clearly is not experiential because it usually does not involve much in the way of sensory or physical experience. This is supported by industry interviews that refer to experiential as its own category, *'experiential is a richer sensory experience'* notes senior creative Paul Hancock (2019)

and is a more targeted form of communication. *'You have a far more profound connection with a brand as a result of an experiential, as a result of it affecting all your senses, it is multi-sensory by its very nature'* asserts Ian Cameron, senior designer at ButterflyCannon (2019). The full richness of sensory experience is not built into the design of an ambient advert. In addition the group that is targeted for experiential is more likely to have a more proactive engagement with the experience and are primed to think more highly of the brand as a consequence of that interaction (Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010a). This overtly designed and planned interaction is not the central point of an ambient advert.

In a similar vein events also require scale and participation. Events are generally hosted by brand representatives that embody brand values in multi-modal forms of communication. In many ways The Restaurant of Mistaken Orders feels closer to an event or experiential than it does to ambient (Fig. 15, Restaurant of Mistaken Orders 2020). There is often a degree of explanation that goes along with an event or experiential, sometimes there are targeted, direct invitations, or brand ambassadors that entice members of the public in. Events and experiences often go hand in hand though they are not the same and there still some fluidity in competition categories and in academic papers between these two categories and in their crossover to ambient.

In addition, research into ambient advertising that has applied Schmitt's components has tended to consider ambient advertising as an overtly sensory experience, though Moor never made the

claim that it was a sensory experience in this way (Gambetti, 2010; Schmitt, 1999; Yuen, 2017; Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010). This is in contradiction to creative practitioner's own view of the qualities of ambient advertising. Experiential creates a whole three-dimensional world around an audience member, offering smells and tastes and sensations. Using Lefebvre's framework of the inherent communication of the built environment Moor was able to show how brands explicitly communicate their brand values through the use of space. Each design decision about the space (how comfortable or intimidating it is for example) has a symbolic reason, and they create spaces and make use of environments that encourage a certain type of behaviour (2004). Ambient advertising, on the other hand, becomes part of the fabric of the world. It relies on the existing environment to provide already attached meaning and emotions. The messages are implicit and suggested rather than explicit. The purpose of experiential is to explicitly get across the feeling and qualities of a particular brand attribute such as sophistication or fun. Every aspect of the activity will be proactively and strategically designed with that in mind.

This is perhaps why overlapping the categories is so uncomfortable and confusing in awards – ambient is not a prolonged interaction so it often does not have time to touch a person's feelings. It is rarely immersive. It is not an experience as described by Schmitt or Moor, it is not in the same categories as experiential, activations or events. It is also not necessarily direct in the sense of tightly targeted to the individual – this is another category that awarding bodies link it to. All messaging is implicit, open to interpretation and it is heavily relational/contextual.

'Ambient is a risk - because you're just putting it out there and hoping for the best, you can't tightly target it in the way that you can with experiences or control it like activations,' cautions Janet Edwards, Creative Director at Frank, Bright & Abel (2019)

One encounters ambient advertising in the everyday world very much in the way that one encounters digital advertising screens as described by media theorist Zlatan Krajina (2014). The concept of encountering is outlined in more detail later in the chapter and in chapter 2.

Attention as a limited resource

It was commonplace when I was in industry to say that advertising only attracts three seconds of attention, particularly poster

advertising. Though this was an advertising ‘myth’ every creative was keenly aware of the need to attract attention quickly. If an advert was thought too subtle then account executives or brand managers were quick to re-brief. Naturally the everyday observation that people travel to work and so are exposed to OOH advertising but they spend much of their time looking at their mobile phones rather than looking out at the corporeal world, has meant there is renewed interest in attention.

‘I think that if someone is looking at your work it’s actually bloody brilliant, they’re taking a second to focus, but it is a whole job to get people’s attention particularly in today’s age when our attention is next to nothing,’ states Millborrow (2021)

There has been a slow build over the years tying attention, as a limited resource, to finance. This was brought together in Richard Lanham’s book, ‘The Economics of Attention’ (2007), but was an idea encapsulated in 1971 by psychologist and economist Herbert A Simon in the term the ‘attention economy.’ However, even before that there has been an interest in attention. Research that looked closely at attention, such as Donald E. Broadbent’s ‘Perception and Communication’, though not a study in advertising itself, theorised how we process information and are selective with our attention (1958). This concept of filtering went on to influence many researchers that followed. After this, psychologist Alfred L. Yarbus’ studies on eye movements revealed how limited and fleeting our attention is by showing how people scan quickly for information, the methodological approach of tracking eye movements was taken up by later researchers (1967). More recently professors of marketing Rik Pieters and Michel Wendel used eye-tracking technology to see how elements of an adverts capture attention (2004). Indeed, manufacturer Tobii now makes wearable eye-tracking glasses for research purposes which have been used in over three hundred scientific studies according to their website (Tobii, 2025).

This strand of attention studies assumes that prolonged and direct visual attention can explain the length or depth of attention. Taking a different approach to attention through types of attention Richard E Petty and John T Cacioppo outlined how we can process advertising messaging through the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), a model that splits the need for thoughtful active attention and those times when we can allocate a lower, simpler form of attention (1986). ELM is still referred to today in Advertising Theory (Haley, 2019). Similar ideas were explored by cognitive psychologist Daniel Kahneman (please see later in the chapter) and Jean Mandler and

Richard Parker's Schema Incongruity Theory (1976). Schema Incongruity Theory helps explain why people may not pay attention to 'things,' such as advertising as an evolutionary adaptation that has allowed us to focus on what is relevant to our tasks at hand and what we have the cognitive capacity for at any given time (Usher et al., 2018). We are able to ignore things like adverts because they require no extra cognitive effort to understand what they are, we know what they are, they are unlikely to be of danger to us or to be something we must pay attention to, such as a new food source. Todd Gitlin terms this a 'willed myopia,' in which we purposely do not pay everything attention in order to navigate our way through urban spaces (Gitlin, 2001, p. 119). Schema Incongruity Theory is still applied today in relation to [ambient] advertising (see later in the chapter).

In 2015 Wilson and fellow professors in marketing, Daniel W Baack and Brian D Till, conducted a field study on billboard advertising in everyday outdoor settings. They wanted to find out what attracts attention and found that; conspicuousness is driven by visual elements, clearly branded pieces aid recall, cluttered adverts can lead to lower attention, scale increases attention and unsurprisingly that attention is required for there to be any further impact (2015). Though not researching outdoor advertising, attention is Professor of Media Science Karen Nelson-field's concern. She has been investigating active attention in digital media environments using eye-tracking technology for a number of years and is influential in both academic and industry circles. She believes you can measure attention, but that it is fleeting and has discovered attention of less than a second in digital environments. What is particularly interesting in her research is that she differentiates between active and passive attention, as advertising can exist on the edge of our awareness, but we do not engage with it. In common with Wilson, Baack and Till she has found that creative executions drive attention, and that context influences attention (2020) . As with Wilson, Baack and Till, she favours creativity and relevant platforms, in other words a relevant contextual environment, over arbitrary targets of reach.

Qualities in [ambient] advertising that encourage attention

While there are many qualities in ambient advertising that theorists have noted over the years, they have tended towards broad conceptual areas rather than practical application. For example, as previously described, Gambetti (2010) identified different types of

experience: sensory, affective, intellectual, behavioural and relational, as well as the creative use of space, entertainment value and spatial dimensions of [ambient] advertising. Marketing specialist Maria Alina Jurca and professor of Business Administration Maria Madlberger describe another four characteristics: creativity, unexpectedness, engagement, and subtlety (2015). However, there are six relational qualities that encourage, to borrow a term from phenomenologist David Seamon, forms of ‘attentive contact’ (1979, p. 99, described in more detail in chapter 2) and communicate meaning through physical presence in the corporeal world that drew my attention as a practitioner from the existing literature. Each one can be interpreted practically as well as conceptually, that can bridge the gap between theory and practice. Firstly, embodiment (Koeck and Warnaby, 2014; Tan and Chow, 2018), Secondly it has lived relevance for the audience in that moment (Rayport, 2013; Rosengren, Modig and Dahlén, 2015). Thirdly, it needs to have contextual fit to medium - a concept that draws ideas from Dahlén’s body of research (Dahlén, 2005; Dahlén and Edenius, 2007; Dahlén, Friberg and Nilsson, 2009; Dahlén, Granlund and Grenros, 2009), Fourthly it is characterised by the aestheticization of elements from the environment which is a practice detailed by Borghini et al (2010). Fifthly, that it is conspicuous, a property noted by Wilson, Baack and Till (2015). Finally, it is encountered, a condition of its existence as a thing in the world, we come across it in our everyday lives, a concept drawn from Krajina (2014) who built on the works of phenomenologist thinkers.

Embodied

Koeck and Warnaby’s description of three-dimensional and four-dimensional forms of outdoor advertising as embodied is echoed in professor of digital media design, Tan Liang (please note Tan is the surname), and associate professor of interaction design, Kenny Chow’s research (2018). They propose an embodied connection to ambient media through phenomenology, reading psychologist James J. Gibson and Merleau-Ponty through professor of psychology Harry Heft (1989). Heft makes the claim that both Gibson and Merleau-Ponty ‘emphasize that perceiving simultaneously entails an awareness of both the environment and the body’ (1989, p. 12). Tan and Chow draw on theories of embodied cognition outlined by Merleau-Ponty (see chapter 2) and later developed by professor of cognitive science Francisco J. Varela, Professor of Philosophy Evan Thompson and Professor of Psychology Eleanor Rosch (1991) to describe this situated awareness. ‘[P]eople’s cognitive processes are tightly related to the interaction between their body and the physical environment’ they note (2018, p. 1).

‘Psychologically I always think of ambient as outside, wherever the public goes in a space they can navigate. I think this is why I talk about it as three-dimensional rather than a surface’ observes Victoria Daltrey (2019).

A phenomenological reading of our interaction with things and the environment sketches out a world in which we perceive the ‘functional significance’ of anything as something for ourselves (Heft, 1989, p. 2; see also Heidegger, chapter 2). In Gibson’s world things have affordances and we are primed to see things in this way. Tan and Chow give the example of a tree stump that at the right height appears to us as a place to sit, it has that affordance. This is an embodied reading of our relationship to the environment and the things in that environment (see chapter 2). Ambient advertising relies on our embodied understanding of our relationship to our environment and the things in our environment. Take, for example Fig. 20 Project84 for CALM 2019. Our eyes are drawn to a number of men standing on the precipice of a very tall structure. As well as all the other functions of the building it also has the affordance of a place from which one might jump. In Gibson’s language, it offers us this opportunity. As a member of the ‘participating audience’ (Tan and Chow’s term) we have simultaneously a physical and conceptual understanding of the potential action. We have an embodied understanding of the height of the building and the figures’ isolation. They are far from us, they are isolated from us, they may use the building to jump. These factors are understood and affect the participating audience. Ambient advertising ‘employ[s] the existing affordances of the environment’ to encourage the audience to engage ‘in embodied interactions’ (Tan and Chow, 2018, p. 3). While Tan and Chow’s focus is on digital, purposefully interactive, pieces of ambient media their characterisation of embodied engagement is useful across all ambient executions. One does not need to touch something in order to have an embodied relation to it.

Their research also makes use of the concept of ‘embodied metaphors’ and is explained as an application of bodily schema (Tan and Chow, 2018, p. 2). We feel ‘lifted’ and light when we are energised, our bodily posture will change to reflect this. Practitioners employ these embodied metaphors not just to bodies but to things to create advertising. A lift used as part of an ambient advert for vitamins becomes something that allows you to feel lifted. We feel the meanings in an embodied way. Sociocultural theorist Kristidel McGregor describes the way that we are intertwined as embodied beings with the material things in the world as a dynamic relationship. Theories of embodiment help us to understand how these embodied metaphors in ambient advertising can work, its effects. Embodiment

will be explored in more detail in chapter 2.

Lived Relevance

Every advert strives to be relevant to its audience. It is written into the brief – identifying the person the advert should speak to and problems that can be solved for them, or desires that they may have and the connections they can make. Relevance is often referred to as a top-down trigger in advertising research, a mental goal the audience member would already want to achieve, and could with aid of the product (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). This is given voice through the insight. To be relevant an ambient advert does not only need to adhere to the overall goal of an audience member it must also be placed where the audience will be, and it needs to have a relationship to the types of activities and interests that the audience member is engaged with *at the time* the audience is engaged with those activities. This is *lived* relevance and allows it to be more meaningful. For example, a communication for dog owners would do well placed near a park, it becomes more relevant if it makes use of behaviours of dogs and dog owners – for example placed on a tree where a dog would chase a squirrel if the communication were around a dog's fitness or entertainment. The *quality* of lived relevance connects the brand/organisation to the audience through a knowledge of behaviours. It is the creative use of that knowledge in an advertising execution that attracts people to engage.

'The power of ambient is because it's not explicitly targeted it's kind of about relevance, and because it exploits context it ramps up relevance,'
comments freelance digital experience creative director Matt Denney (2019)

With a focus on human experience, lecturer in Entrepreneurial Management, Jeffrey Rayport's key instruction is to ensure relevance to the context, the habits and routines, or specific activities of the audience as well as the setting or more specific site (2013). Relevance encourages attention (Ang and Low 2000). Arguably the Meet Graham for the Transport Accident Commission (Fig. 14) would have been more relevant in a Natural History Museum setting, where the audience is often pondering the evolution of man and our place in the world, biologically speaking. Of course, it still had relevance in an art gallery where one contemplates what it is to be human. Relevance holds one's gaze because one wishes to know more about how it can be useful.

Advertising agencies have a strategy department and strategists whose specialism it is to uncover people's habits, behaviours and

concerns in order to develop messaging that is relevant. A full understanding of what is relevant to an audience, what their default responses might be, and targeting a communication in that moment is the advertising ideal. Many strategists make use of ethnographic techniques in order to observe what people are doing, rather than what they say they are doing.

A site adds meaning and has lived relevance for audiences. Coming across Meet Graham within the context of an exhibition changes behaviours and encourages longer engagement and reflection (Fig. 14). That reflective process may be the thing that brokers change. Studies show that consumers will change their behaviours when exposed to cues from the environment through the associations they make (Lutchyn and Faber, 2016). Objects in the world gain their meaning ‘in the relational context of people’s practical engagement with their lived-in environments.’ (Ingold, 2000, p. 168). Contextual cues bring greater value through lived relevance. This is particularly true for ambient advertising write Sara Rosengran, Erik Modig, Micael Dahlén, respectively professor of business administration, assistant professor in marketing, and professor of advertising creativity (2015). This is not a ‘negotiated space’ in which the audience can expect to encounter advertising, it is a hijacked common space which makes it ‘more likely’ that passers-by will ‘be attentive to the appropriateness of advertising’ to them (ibid 2015, p. 23).

It is creative consideration of the context cues that give the audience a relevant experience; one that might resonate. It is this relational element that *‘is at least talking about context and I like that about it’* (Hancock 2019) that resonates with creatives. Associate professor in marketing Swee Hoon Ang and researcher Sharon Y. M. Low ran a study noting how relevance is bound together with creative expression, observing that no matter how creative an advert only becomes meaningful through relevance (2000). In ambient advertising relevance is delivered through the many lived contexts in which the advert is encountered, from the site to politics to sensory considerations.

Gambetti adds that it is

‘context clues (e.g; presence, mood and behaviours of other people, geographical location, lighting, noise, and other sensory-stimuli, and brand-environment fit)’ (2010, p. 44)

that allow for complex communications in ambient advertising and are the drivers for creating a deeper connection with a brand.

Contextual Fit

Behavioural economist, and vice-chairman of the Ogilvy & Mather group, Rory Sutherland believes that creativity mixed with relevance is what speaks to the audience (Parrish, n.d.). A central relevant message is amplified by the creative choices within the communication (Heckler and Childers, 1992). In traditional advertising this would be in art directional choices, for example showing that a car is tough by making it look like a hippopotamus. In ambient advertising this would be through the appropriate choice of medium within a site. For creative practitioners the choice of medium and the overall communications idea are tied together providing an intriguing visual hook.

‘[It is] where medium and message become inseparable, and because they are symbiotic the power is dialled up massively to a point where you cannot ignore it,’ clarifies Justin Tindall (2019)

This creative practitioner view is supported by a body of academic research on the importance of medium and site (see various research by Dahlén et al, Rosengren, Modig and Dahlén, 2015; Sasser and Koslow, 2008). The elements of a site that are chosen to carry the ambient message have something Rosengran et al. refer to as a ‘contextual fit,’ (2015, p. 22). This is a concept Dahlén has previously referred to as ‘congruence’ (2005). The medium itself is able to provide part of the meaning and becomes the advertising channel because its properties express the meaning intended by the advert in some way. Dahlén gives the example of an insurance company advertising on eggs (2005, p91). By ‘creatively choosing a medium to implicitly communicate the message’ Dahlén demonstrates that ‘the ad context is more likely to be processed intentionally rather than accidentally’ (2005, p. 89). it is through contextual fit that much of the advertising communication is made clear. The creative expression is relevant to the message and to the audience.

An illustration is Toxic Toby by McCann London for Breezometer, in which a mechanised teddy bear is attached to street furniture in what appears to be a roadside memorial. The bear coughs as pollution levels rise and it is a communication designed to make you aware of death through pollution (Fig. 22 McCann London for Breezometer 2019). Toxic Toby is in a normal location for roadside memorials and people are familiar with what a roadside memorial is. The noise and smells of traffic surround the viewer and become part of the advert. People may be engrossed in everyday behaviours as they try to cross

the road, but a normal human behaviour is to look at the details of the person who has suffered an accident at that spot, our attention hooked momentarily. The medium chosen, the post and stuffed animal, and the roadside site, have contextual fit to the meaning of the Breezometer, the complexity of this ‘context’ will be explored in chapter 2. Eighteen of the Twenty creatives interviewed believed people would look at ambient adverts describing ‘the importance of placement and medium as a way to provide both physical and cognitive context to ambient advertising’ (Sorrentino, 2020b, p. 100–101, please note the paper refers to the initial fifteen interviewed).



Fig. 22: Toxic Toby created in 2019 by advertising agency McCann London for Breezometer

It is by virtue of its construction with materials from the site, the environment itself, and the everyday routines enacted in place that an ambient advert can become a ‘relational’ object or ‘hub’ (Biraghi, Gambetti and Graffigna, 2015). This is something that brands do knowingly, making use of impactful context, such as shopping centres or landmarks, to add to their semantic content (Amirshahi, Jafari Dizicheh and Wilson, 2019; Roux, van der Walldt and Ehlers, 2013; Wilson, 2023)

Aestheticized Elements

Ambient advertising engages in what Rory Sutherland refers to as ‘mental mischief.’ An idea for the brief is developed, it has relevance for the audience and the brand, and the creative team find a way to amplify the relevance through their creative choices such as placement and material choices of medium, and it can be

felt in an embodied way. In this way these qualities in an idea push the execution towards a realisation in the lived world rather than as a photographic representation in traditional media. In order to be impactful, the creative considers the playful aestheticization of ordinary things in the environment as part of the concept, things that ordinarily fade into the background are foregrounded. Where contextual fit is primarily about meaning, aestheticization is more about attracting attention – our gaze is hi-jacked by something that is visually arresting. This means that elements from the site are incorporated in some way that they become part of the ‘visual.’ Autumn leaves become cereal for Crunchy Nut Cornflakes on a chalk drawing of a bowl (Fig. 16), crisp fresh snow is pressed into Polo Mint shapes (Fig. 4). While playful aestheticization implies all ambient must work for fun brands it really describes a creative state of mind - railings can become implements of torture for Amnesty International. There is a conceptual contextual fit and now there is a knowingly visual dimension.

Ambient advertising borrows heavily from street art and site-specific installation (Borghini et al., 2010). The creative and conceptual relationships between a visual piece of work and the environment in which it sits is central to both. By this I do not mean the publicly commissioned pieces of artwork sited in squares that might commemorate a famous historical figure, rather the conceptual challenges from groups such as the Dadaists and the artist Marcel Duchamp who famously placed a urinal in a gallery, or Piero Manzoni’s *Socle Du Monde* that conceptually presents the world as though it were on top of his empty upside-down pedestal. These artistic ‘tactics’, to borrow Michel de Certeau’s use of the word, allow people to challenge and at times ridicule institutions, practices and norms (2011).

‘The space of Art was no longer perceived as a blank slate, a *tabula rasa*, but a real place. The art object or event in this context was to be singularly experienced in the here-and-now through the subject’ (Kwon, 1997, p. 86).

Site specific art, installation art and environmental art all grew out of this premise. Borghini et al focus on the rhetorical capacity of both street art and ambient advertising identifying seven categories the first of which is aestheticization. They describe aestheticization as a practice in which ordinary things from a location such a pavements or street signs can be transformed into something rather more ‘playful’ (2010, p. 116).

‘Essentially the place itself, or something within the place, is a core part of the ad and you are adding to it, to turn it into something a bit more theatrical that someone never would have expected’ explains Madeleine Neighbour (2021).

As Borghini et al observed, ambient advertising and street art share multiple similarities conceptually, artistically and in audience engagement (2010). While street art was more committed to political resistance, and critique of brands, much of the work looked the same with many of the same street artists producing work for branded charitable organisations. Within their field study they found some work by Mark Jenkins for GreenPeace in Washington, USA. Jenkins is a well-known street artist, playfully provocative, who makes art works from tape. His street art attracted creative team Ant Nelson and Mike Sutherland from adam&eveDDB London who commissioned him to work on Calm Project84 (Fig. 20, 2019).

‘Calm (Project 84) got the attention it did because it was on top of the ITV building. The building became part of the ad, and the ad became enormous’ adds Ben Tollet (2019)

Both street art and commercial ambient adverts take existing ‘things’ or symbols from the environment and use techniques of détournement to give them new meanings. Détournement is a technique developed in the 1950s by the Letterist International and was later taken up by the Situationists. Professor of marketing and branding Douglas B. Holt and chief strategy officer of Amalgamated Douglas Cameron defined it as way of ‘turning expressions of the capitalist system and its media culture against itself (2010, p. 252). While commercial ambient advertising may use détournement as a technique it would not be trying to reveal an underlying ideology, it would be aiming to capture attention through intrigue.

The Drug Dealers Only community campaign by the Columbia Road Cartel made use of the street environment in this way (Fig. 23, Drug Dealers Only 2019). Signs that are used or modified in an environment need to have a shared understanding, a shared context between advertising creative (or street artist) and audience member, so that they are meaningful (Klingmann, 2010). Borghini et al characterise street art as a form that often uses humour, with an inbuilt reward for decoding the ‘joke,’ the familiarity of shared symbols and open-ended, rather than single-minded, communications which are the norm in advertising. This plurality or openness of meanings and the situatedness of the work is common to both ambient advertising and street art.



*Fig. 23: Drug Dealers Only created in 2019 by the Columbia Road Cartel
for the Weavers Community Action Group*

Conspicuousness

As with any advertising, ambient adverts need to attract attention, to be ‘conspicuous’ enough to *stand out*, to be noticeable enough ‘within an individual’s visual field’ (Wilson, Baack and Till, 2015, p. 232). This quality is the one most obviously tied to attention. However, while all advertising has the intention to be noticed, ambient advertising attracts attention and stands out in a different way to traditional advertising formats.

Jurca and Madlberger (2015), building on the work of Mandler and Parker, describe qualities that allow ambient advertising to become conspicuous, to break through the schema we use to navigate our busy and cluttered environments describing creative, relevant and unexpected uses of the environment. ‘[U]nexpectedness is closely coupled with engagement with ambient media’ comment Tan and Chow (Tan and Chow, 2018, p. 15).

‘Ambient still needs to pop out from your surroundings, to make you pay attention to the world outside your own head,’ points out Janet Edwards (2019)

Colour, scale, movement, and digital interactivity can render something conspicuous in an ordinary environment, these things are

often referred to as bottom-up triggers for attention (Pieters, Warlop and Wedel, 2002; Pieters and Wedel, 2004). Tan and Chow note that ‘visual properties mismatching the physical space in function,’ (ibid, 2018, p. 15). For example, the Pride Crossing turned an existing road crossing into a rainbow crossing for the University of Greenwich & Royal Borough of Greenwich (Fig. 24, Pride Crossing 2019). This mischievous play with the perceived function ‘can attract an audience’s attention and increase the perceivability of the affordance for engaging in interaction’ (ibid, 2018, p. 15). Pragmatically all the colours stand out from the dull tarmac of the road. Wilson, Baack and Till, use visual attention theory (building on the work of cognitive psychologist Daniel Kahneman, 1973) to describe the impact of ‘bottom-up’ physical factors such as scale or colour (2015, p. 235) to capture interest, and the effects of ‘top-down’ factors such as the activity one is involved in or pre-existing knowledge of a brand to assign processing activity (ibid, 2015, p. 237). In both approaches the advert becomes conspicuous through a combination of immediate attraction and the necessary allocation of further processing capacity.



Fig. 24: Pride Crossings created in 2018 by the Royal Borough of Greenwich, for the University of Greenwich and Greenwich Maritime Museums

The insertion of anything new in an everyday space is unexpected and mildly surprising, certainly enough to break through the schema at least for a moment. Hutter and Hoffman, building on the work of Schützwohl and Reisenzein note that ‘surprised individuals

interrupt their ongoing activity and focus on the surprise-evoking event' (Hutter and Hoffmann, 2014, p. 94). Their study explores the effects of surprise elicited by ambient adverts on the participating audience (further detail in chapter 3). Surprise implies quite a strong reaction of amazement or bewilderment, a jolt of some sort, whereas I have only witnessed smaller reactions when a participant is caught slightly off guard or is briefly unsettled when they came across ambient advertising. However, Hutter and Hoffman identified something very interesting - an interruption which leads to attention and curiosity (please see chapter 5). Cognitive psychologist Daniel Kahneman also drew a link between curiosity and applying our limited resource of attention in system 2 thinking which I will return to in chapter 5 (Kahneman, 2011, 1973).

Wilson and Till, take a different approach building on their earlier research interrogating attention through capacity theory. They sketch out the 'limited cognitive resources' that are available to 'mobile audiences' to attend to advertising in 'non-traditional environments' (2019, p. 110–113). This suggests that mobile audiences often don't have the capacity to make easy sense of ambient advertising, they have to choose to pay attention to it and decode it. Mobile audiences are very important for ambient advertising as they travel from work to home and on to social life. Hutter and Hoffman, drawing on the work of motivation theorist Daniel Ellis Berlyne (1970), attribute this lack of capacity to the extra cognitive effort needed to make sense of ambient advertising (2014). This is a view shared by Jurca and professor of marketing Ioan Plăiaş who apply this need for extra cognitive effort as a schema interrupter, forcing the audience to pay attention to the ambient advert (2013).

Stephanie O'Donohoe and Caroline Tynan, professors of consumer culture and marketing respectively, built on and reviewed an already existing body of knowledge around advertising literacy in consumers in the late 1980s. They then conducted a further study using small groups discussions and in depth interviews revealing just how advertising literate consumers are in the face of the 'cumulative experience' they have with adverts (O'Donohoe and Tynan, 1988, p.472). People are able to quickly perceive, decode and ignore advertising, in fact the more an advert is flagged up as an advert (such as a poster), therefore not requiring interpretation as a matter of urgency, the less likely an audience is to pay attention to it (Jurca and Plăiaş, 2013). In traditional advertising 'the code is presented alongside the way to crack the code: the advertising frame' (Sorrentino, 2020b, p.102). There is no need to interrupt the schema. Media theorist Zlatan Krajina investigated encounters with digital screens

for his PhD research (2011), which was then followed up with a book, found that ‘all his participants scan and filter ‘messages’ finding only what interests them’ (2014, p. 122).

The frame provided by an advertising channel, such as an Adshell at a bus stop, or a billboard, gives the viewer a way to tie any number of different elements together (Pracejus, Olsen and O’Guinn, 2006). In ambient advertising the relationships between elements are not clear. The unexpectedness of the elements and their connection to the environment and to each other is intriguing. The less it is obviously an advert the more it needs interpretation. The meaning and purpose are not immediately clear and so require decoding. For the Weightwatchers work (Fig. 18) it is not obvious at first glance why there is a sticker on the floor, for the Britart.com work (Fig. 17) it is not instantly apparent which materials are referred to in the description of ‘art’. ‘When the world is re-presented in such playful ways there is a small cognitive pleasure in cracking the code and piecing together the meaning’ (Sorrentino, 2020b, p. 102). All of this suggests that the fact that an ambient advert requires decoding is likely to render it conspicuous.

Ambient adverts become conspicuous through the attributes that make them an ambient advert. There are bottom-up factors that may make it stand out visually from the background. Luxton and Drummond’s original definition of ambient advertising, as described in the introduction, allude to the fact that simply being unexpected also delivers a certain level of conspicuousness in an environment (2000). The normal schema we have developed to navigate our complex environments is interrupted and we are required to give attention to this unknown thing to understand what it is.

Encountered

We travel to and from work to social spaces, to visit family and friends, and to simply buy the necessities of life. Travel is an integral part of our urban experience (Cresswell, 2015; Massey, 2005; Moor, 2004). Everyday movements become part of a habit or routine that is not conscious behaviour; nipping down an alleyway, reaching for a coffee, walking through a park, hopping on a bus (Cresswell, 2015). We are often not consciously walking; we are just performing an action that will get us from one place to another. Michel De Certeau describes ordinary inhabitants of cities as ‘walkers’ that create ‘pedestrian speech acts’ with the choices they make in how they navigate urban environments (2011, p. 97). We choose to go one way or another, to look up or look down, to make eye contact

with another person, and sometimes something prompts us to pay attention to a thing and it holds our attention however fleetingly.

A key quality of ambient advertising is that we encounter it in our everyday lives and practices, encountering is explored in greater depth in chapter 2. Cronin describes a daily commute intertwined with advertising messages, demarcating spaces as appropriate for some and not others through the types of advertising shown. For her advertising is not passive it actively shapes our experiences. However, this is advertising in acknowledged advertising sites, commuters expect these adverts located along their commute (2000). Ambient advertising is not like that, it is messaging encountered in places where we do not expect it. It is seen in the context of simple everyday acts such as walking, window shopping, sitting on a bench in the park 'to take a break'(see Fig. 25 for KitKat 2008), while we are not thinking about product promotions. It is where eyes in constant motion alight on something unusual and we stop for a moment. We come across the stuff of the world in this way, in the context of everyday movements for everyday reasons. This is how we discover ambient adverts, this is how we encounter them.



Fig. 25: Bench created in 2008 by advertising agency JWT London for KitKat

Merleau-Ponty related the human experience of 'being in the world' to our 'everyday movement in space' (2014). This will be explored in greater detail in chapter 2. In a characterisation that in itself references Merleau-Ponty's discussion of movement and rest, Krajina builds on Seamon's portrayal of our lives in the world. Seamon writes that people are 'subsumed in the world like a fish is joined with water' (1979, p. 161) and Krajina adds that this reveals 'that one is

always involved in some sort of interaction with space, punctuated with moments of peacefulness and ‘encounter” (2014, p. 48). For Merleau-Ponty these moments of rest and movement also refer to perception and consciousness, a mind in constant motion with swirling vortices of thought and perceptions. Moments of rest in this movement are essential for how we understand our own place in the world, our situatedness (please see chapters 2). This is explored within the theme of the pause in greater detail in chapter 5.

Rest and movement.

Seamon describes an encounter as ‘any situation of attentive contact between the person and world at hand’ (1979, p. 99). He goes on to characterise this moment as some sort of ‘person-environment mergence’ (ibid, 1979, p. 104) which hints at an assemblage made in that moment of contact, assemblages will be explored in greater detail in chapters 2 and 5. Krajina follows Seamon’s conception of ‘noticing’ as a form of encounter.

Of course, with something that is reliant on encounter there is always the chance that the audience will not come across it, they may walk in a different direction, or as a mind/body in constant movement, may have been focussed on something else and walked right by it. This is a risk as Creative Director Janet Edwards points out earlier in the chapter, but this is also one of its most distinctive qualities.

‘The satisfaction in ambient is that it’s discoverable, if it is too big and too out of context then it is no longer ambient. You find something fresh and that makes you go up to it and try to work out what it means,’ explains Martin Grimer, freelance Creative Director (2019)

The majority of creatives interviewed believed that a person would notice an ambient advert if they encountered it,

‘If it intrigues them then actually, they might go and investigate it, you wouldn’t get anyone investigating a normal ad,’ adds Mike Sutherland (Nelson and Sutherland, 2019).

However, because these encounters are so fleeting claims about affect and effect are also hard to make. A practitioner would hope that there is some effect, for example getting more people talking about male suicide because their feelings have been affected, or they think about buying a KitKat after having taken a break on the KitKat seat because the advert made them smile. However momentary affects are difficult to evidence in research that is conducted after the moment of encounter and relies on recall or that asks a participant to imagine a reaction if they were to encounter an [ambient] advert in their everyday lives.

Conclusion

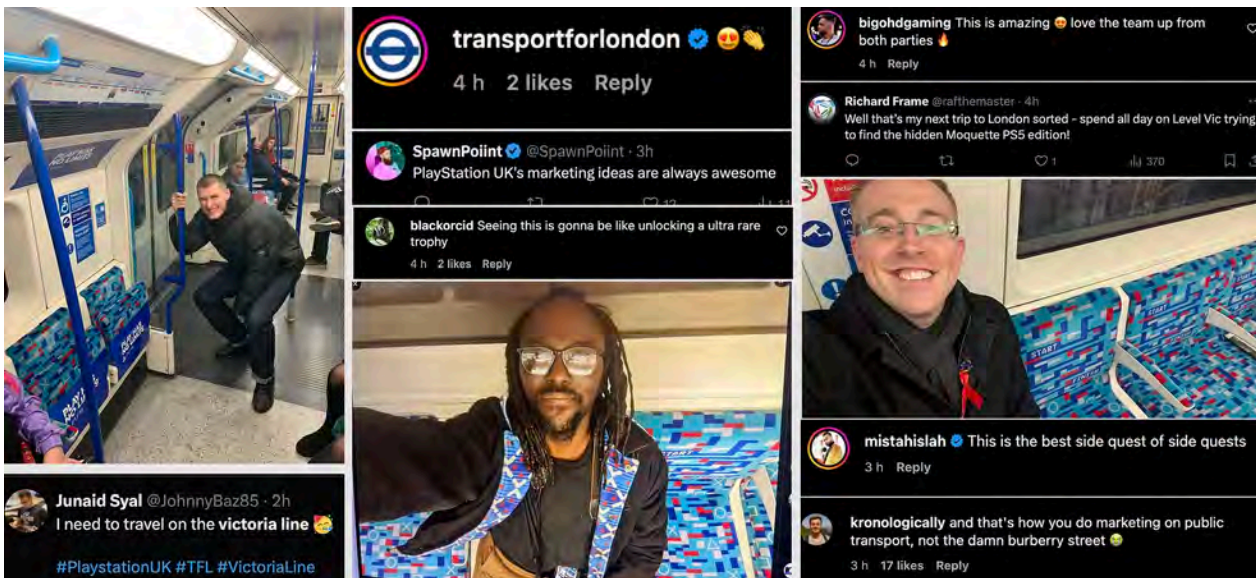


Fig. 26: Social Media comments made in 2024 about Playstation's Play has no Limits collaboration with adam&eveDDB and Transport for London

It would appear that from a broad survey that there are a variety of shortcomings in the literature and in industry practices. Firstly, having a category that appears to be going out of fashion simply because of misnaming seems very short-sighted. As Creative Director Madeline Neighbour noted earlier in the chapter, it is a very PR-able, and as Senior Creative Claudio Pasqualetti commented Gen Z will share it. This is shown in Fig. 26, with the 'participating audience' sharing images and comments on their social media for the TFL/Playstation ambient advert.

Looking at the variety of work, even within this chapter, it is easy to see why industry, and then academia, initially gave these difficult to categorise adverts the term ambient. The wide majority of dictionaries refer to ambient as something that occurs within an existing environment, such a temperature, *or something relating to its surroundings*. This latter definition is in keeping with Gambetti's portrayal of ambient as an active form of advertising which 'employs the urban environment' to make meaning (2010, p. 34). However, common usage of the word ambient does not imply this more active relationship. As described earlier in the chapter, it is generally a term that refers to something that recedes into the background such as ambient music. To summarise, though the category lacks consistency across the awarding bodies, the work itself is always manifested through the qualities described in this chapter. However, to acknowledge the problematic descriptor, something I will return

to in the conclusion, I will in the immediate term caveat it with square brackets [].

This research opened up the potential for a new framework through which I could analyse existing [ambient] advertising, a selection analysed in this way is visualised in chapter 3. [Ambient] adverts are embodied, amplify their relevance for the audience in that moment of encounter creatively, have both contextual fit with the environment and playfully aestheticize elements of the environment, they are unexpected in a way that is ‘conspicuous’ enough to stand out. [Ambient] adverts are not framed as adverts, they are both something recognisable within that environment and at the same moment something ‘foreign,’ that is somehow both out-of-place and in-place (see Fig. 25 KitKat bench). It is in these ways that [ambient] advertising attracts attention. It is an advertising form that disrupts the schema we have developed to cope with our everyday complex environments by stimulating our cognitive capacities –we have to work out what it is. These six qualities, when considered holistically, describe any [ambient] advert no matter the medium, and with further development can provide a more complete and practical tool. This is a tool not just for analysis but as a diagnostic tool for creatives to reflect in-action. It can allow them to ask questions of their work, for example could this be more conspicuous or should it be less? Should it be more readily encountered? Should it be less playful? These practical qualities are something I will use to create my own [ambient] advertising intervention (see chapter 3, Fig. 48).

This chapter also broadly describes the various ways in which advertising thinks about attention and how adverts attract and hold attention. However, what was missing was the types of attention that would not be revealed in laboratory or laboratory-like conditions. It is not possible to see how a world filled with distractions changes attention when attention is either pre-supposed through photography, or the environment is made sterile and distraction-free. The limited research on attention to [ambient] advertising in-situ required further reading in wider fields, in phenomenology, new materialism, human geography and cognitive psychology to find other ways into attention and encounter (please see chapter 2).

[Ambient] advertising is framed by the place rather than by a specific advertising format. Though it is rare to be able to predicate the work on a particular place as an advertising creative, for example the corner of this and that street, or the use of Trafalgar Square, it is not unheard of for a larger [ambient] advert that requires a special

build to specify a place. The Project84 work for CALM had a site in mind. It is, nonetheless, still necessary to pitch the type of place needed for the [ambient] advert to be installed, for example the ticket barriers near a football stadium, posters under hand dryers, bunting near a park, lampposts on a high street. An [ambient] advert is constructed through the complex contextual relations which are formed through our embodied interactions with place and things, and how we perceive those things, consequently both perception and things need to be considered as an intrinsic part of the advert (to be developed further in chapter 2).



Fig. 27: Unbelievable Bus Shelter created in 2015 by advertising agency AMV BBDO London for Pepsi Max

We encounter and pay attention to [ambient] advertising while going about our daily business. Without these routines much of the meaning would be lost. This is not a type of advertising that materialises in front of us in the way that a cinema advert just appears. It is an advert that we encounter while doing something else, waiting for the bus, hurrying off the train, washing our hands in the toilets at a bar. While it is true that much of this can be said for other OOH /outdoor pieces, they are rarely encounters. Advertising within frames is expected (the frame provided by a magazine, a poster site, a television ad break). It is the unexpected quality of [ambient] advertising that makes it an encounter. It is something unusual. No-one is surprised to see a poster at the far end of a bus stop though one might be surprised by an [ambient] advert even

within that demarcated poster space. It draws our attention. Executions that fill up the space with money or turn the space into a live augmented reality screen, mapping animation on top of the scene behind it (see Fig. 27, AMV BBDO London for Pepsi Max 2015), or that turn the roof of the bus stop into a meadow to communicate bee-friendly council policies. These are memorable encounters with something unexpected.

Because [ambient] advertising is encountered in everyday places while we go about our normal routines it is important to find a methodology and a set of methods that can deal with contextual complexity, that does not assume that we will notice it, and that can capture live reactions when one works with participants. Many researchers have called for more on the ground research (see Abdul-Razzaq, Ozanne and Fortin, 2009; Bennett, Kottasz and Koudelova, 2000; Gambetti and Schultz, 2015; Karimova, 2014; Rosengren, Modig and Dahlén, 2015; Wilson, 2023, Yuen, 2017). It is the shortcomings evident in the existing literature to do with investigations on site in everyday spaces, without presupposed focal interest, that make use of live and creative methods that this research seeks to address. There are a limited number of studies that provide some guidance, and they have influenced my research design. My methodological approach will be detailed in chapter 3. Encounters with [ambient] advertising will be detailed in chapter 4. Exploring what happens in a moment of encounter with an [ambient] advert forms the theoretical framework for this thesis and will be discussed in the following chapter.



CHAPTER 2

Moments of encounter

Though the word encounter can carry with it a hint of confrontation from its French and Latin roots, in this research I am referring to a gentler, more everyday use of the word, similar to Krajina's research into encounters with digital screens (2014) (see chapters 1 and 3). The type of encounter I refer to is the casual or chance contact you might have with something or someone that you come across in your everyday practices, that is in some way unexpected or unusual, but it makes no claims to be life changing. This can be noticing a graffitied no-parking sign on the way home, coming across a bush filled with blooms after a week of cold rain, or an encounter with an AR screen on the side of a bus shelter (see chapter 1). To paraphrase Heidegger, it is a condition of being human that we have already 'submitted' ourselves 'to the 'world' which we 'encounter' (2019, p. 121/87). This is a natural and everyday encountering, a part of our human-ness. This research is with concerned encounters with [ambient] advertising. Active encounters can be 'any situation of *attentive* contact' as coined by Seamon, and these are one of the forms of encounter that I am interested in (1979, p. 99, my emphasis). I am also interested in gentler forms of encounter that are perhaps less scrutinizing, a gentler receptive gaze, or a reflective swirling of thoughts. These less tangible or material encounters can still retain *felt sense*. Both types of encounter sit within the broader field of encounters. David Seamon intends 'attentive contact' to describe a level of care and meaningful connection with the environment. This level of respect for things was not necessarily what the participants in my study evidenced. However embodied contact which sometimes demonstrated active attention, and sometimes was less intentional and more receptive, was shown throughout (please see chapters 4 and 5). The moment of encounter is philosophically not a straightforward one. It is a moment that opens itself up to two philosophical traditions, where perspectives meet 'a moving network of agents' (McGregor, 2020, p. 507), between the sensuous perception-based phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and the multiplicities and assemblages of Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. This research is a multiplicity of philosophical encounters, Art theorist Simon O'Sullivan describes his own reading of the works of Deleuze and Guattari as encounter (2006, p. 2). Deleuze writes in *Difference and Repetition*,

'Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental encounter. What is encountered may be Socrates, a temple or a demon' (Deleuze, 1994, p. 139).

While this PhD is not a treatise on phenomenology or Kantian transcendentalism, I do believe it is important to provide you, as the reader, with an account of some of the key moments in the arguments that I judged necessary to my understanding. As my overall intention is to describe how people encounter an [ambient] advert, and to make use of complex philosophical tools to so, I need to outline the theoretical positions that emerged through my research process. These positions helped me articulate my findings and the themes that I draw out in chapter 5, consequently, the theoretical underpinnings are outlined in this chapter. The importance of these positions in relation to the key themes is articulated in chapter 5 after you have journeyed past the [ambient] adverts with my participants in chapter 4. My methodological approach will be outlined in chapter 3.

‘[T]wo entities have to arrive to create an encounter’ writes queer theorist and phenomenologist Sara Ahmed (2006, p. 39). For me that is the research participant - a member of the mobile audience (Wilson and Till, 2019) - and the various relations that dynamically assemble as an [ambient] advert. That moment of arrival in the encounter, as described by Ahmed, is vibrant and connected to contexts, histories and understandings as well as materially connected to place. A multiplicity of encounters in the lived world. Feminist sociocultural theorist Kristidel McGregor acknowledges the utility of ‘phenomenological approaches to experience’ in researching not only ‘human experience’ but also other non-human agents that create ‘phenomenon’ together (2020, p. 507).

This research reads that moment through an interwoven bricolage of phenomenological theory and multiplicity and assemblage as concepts. It places us bodily in that moment when we make attentive contact with a thing. Ahmed pictures that same moment of encountering when ‘[a]pprehending the table as an object means that I must walk around it and approach it as if I had not encountered it before’ (2006, p. 35). This refers to any object – to encounter a thing must be to meet it as though it was something new. This is certainly true of [ambient] advertising as it offers itself up as something one has not encountered before – an unusual thing. Chapter 1 sets out how [ambient] advertising sets itself apart from the ordinary things in the environment one might recognise. O’Sullivan points out ‘[a]n object of an encounter is fundamentally different from an object of recognition. With the latter our knowledges, beliefs and values are reconfirmed’ (2006, p. 1). [Ambient] advertising hopes to disrupt our schema by being a thing a person does not recognise and cannot easily ignore (see chapter 1). However, the person-thing, subject-

object relationship is far from uncontested, it is in fact the problematic assumptions of the subject-object relationship that drew me to read Deleuze and Guattari in the first instance. I will return to it in greater detail later in the chapter. In addition, my position as a reflexive researcher puts me at odds with more traditional phenomenological approaches. Husserl's phenomenology, for example, imagined it is possible to bracket out one's own feelings, beliefs, biases, and reactions to any given thing in order to understand the underlying phenomena. He believed that, on a personal level, one did not have to experience the object anew each time, as well at the philosophical level. One is then able to represent the experience of others authentically. I find that I question how the reflexive researcher can do this. Though we may not experience the object anew each time the object is something that can and does change. Additionally, one is always present in the research however much we may believe we do not influence things.



Fig. 28: My shadow in the alleyway (2017)

That being said, the research takes as a starting point that there are only subjective perspectives and this frames both the theoretical review and the methodology. These subjective and situated perspectives are not only provided by the participants, but also by myself as a reflexive researcher (see the Introduction for more detail on reflexivity). Many feminist political theorists and phenomenologists, such as Iris Marion Young (2005), not only moved away from Husserl's

pure form of looking, that sought to transcend the singular experience, but moved to an acceptance of our embodied nature where ‘being-in-the-world is necessarily situated, contextual, and relational’ (McGregor, 2020, p. 509–510). Feminist perspectives acknowledge their own subjectivity and do not claim objectivity. Many drew on the work of feminist philosopher Donna Haraway, who famously called for acknowledgement of a knowingly ‘situated’ knowledge. This describes how our social positions and whole context affect our knowledge about the world (1988a). For Haraway there was no single objective viewpoint that could provide a universalizing truth, everyone provided partial perspectives, and our perspective might be different to someone else. This was not just a philosophical stance, it was also a political stance, as it highlighted the different perspectives that being a woman, or marginalised group, bring. Unlike Merleau-Ponty she was not trying to find any universalizing truths. Situatedness will be explored further in *In-and-Out-of-Place* in chapter 5.

My positionality, or orientation as Ahmed would term it, towards the literature, experiments and analysis is exposing-ly reflexive, particularly in the thinking (see chapters 3 and 5). There is no hiding my perspective. This moment of contact between participant and [ambient] advert is for me, also an encounter between philosophical traditions, an encounter that is able to happen in the here and now, in this situated moment, in this place, in the context of creative media practice research.

Objectivity/subjectivity

In the late 1600s there were two prevailing philosophical orthodoxies; rationalism, exemplified by the work of French philosopher René Descartes (1596 – 1650), English philosopher John Locke (1632–1704) and German mathematician Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716); and empiricism, exemplified by the work of English philosopher Francis Bacon (1561 – 1926) and Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–1776).

Rationalism was the belief that we cannot rely on the knowledge gained from our experiences as it is subjective and may be incorrect. Descartes outlined a deep distrust of the senses, in particular vision, and the illusions that the senses might carry to the mind. In his treatise *Discourse on the Method* first published in 1637 (1853) he only placed his trust in a process of rational thought and deduction. The mind became a place that the world was projected onto and once the mental representation of the world ‘out there’ was made available it could be considered and judged.

Empiricism, on the other hand, took the position that all knowledge originates from our sensory experience. The empirical and scientific world that could be observed, measured and delivered to our eyes ‘objectively’ was illustrated in the art and sciences during the Renaissance. Advertising Research, both in industry and in academia (by marketing and business schools), often uses methods based in this scientific tradition and is on many occasions quantitative in approach (see introduction and chapter 1). The intention is often to put a case forward for this or that business action in terms of effectiveness and the language and methods chosen are replicable and appear objective. Quantitative research was seen for many years as the only certain way to gain access to accurate evidence-based knowledge about the world. In an industry context this makes a certain amount of sense. One needs to have numbers to back up any potential action. These numbers need to be perceived as absolute, objective and verifiable – measured from an immutable objective vantagepoint. Empiricists, divorced from the subjectivity of the researcher claimed to record the only accurate reality, a supra-human view from which it can describe the world in generalisations and laws applicable in any context (Heidegger, 1977). However, Empiricism is not in itself a neutral position, it is a philosophical position. Arts-based researcher Patricia Leavy (2020) chronicles how the incorrect blending of empiricism with positivism has had ongoing repercussions for research, in particular lending greater credibility to positivist scientific *objective* research.

The later critiques levelled at the positivistic paradigm, particularly in regard to the assumption of a neutral vantage point, gave rise to an interpretivist epistemological position. This acknowledged multiple viewpoints, a socially constructed reality, and the researcher’s place within the research. Interpretivism took the view that we experience the world from our own perspective. We cannot escape from this in order to experience the world without ourselves present.

‘I cannot enclose myself within a universe of science. everything that I know about the world, even through science, I know so from a perspective that is my own or from an experience of the world without which scientific symbols would be meaningless.’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p. 9/lxxii)

The move to a subjective and embodied position as a valid way to explain human beings consciously perceiving and experiencing the world was a project taken on by phenomenologist philosophers. In particular it is the sensuous embodied phenomenological philosophy

of Merleau-Ponty, and the use of embodied sensory ethnographic approaches by sensory ethnographer Sarah Pink, herself guided by phenomenological theories of sensory perception, that grounds me in the world. Sarah Pink's influence on the methodology will be detailed in chapter 3. Merleau-Ponty's statement can, of course, be questioned, and there will be many critical positions that argue against it, particularly from the sciences. However, for me, it takes as a foundational position, that we understand our world from our own human-ness. For this research more broadly, it is important to articulate the phenomenological underpinning of my understanding of human experience of encounters with [ambient] advert.

The development of phenomenology

Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant tried to draw together the empiricist and rationalist viewpoints alongside his religious belief and gave Western philosophy the possibility that the subjective combination of sensory data and conceptual thinking was a legitimate way of understanding the world. He wrote, *The Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), *The Critique of Judgment* (1790) and crucially for phenomenology, *The Critique of Pure Reason* (first published in 1781). In *The Critique of Pure Reason*, he defined the world outside ourselves as transcendental, an 'objective reality,' out there beyond us, of which we are only ever able to see part (Kant, 1922, p. 29). He believed that everything we know about the world comes through our body's sensory tools which have the physical and cognitive limitations of our species. He expressed cognition as a 'synthesis' of 'intuitions' (sense data), which 'present themselves in a temporal sequence and spatial arrangement' which are held in what he terms a manifold in combination with mental content, that is structured 'according to concepts' (Käufer and Chemero, 2021, p. 9). For Kant these organising concepts are a priori, '[I]t is quite possible that even our empirical knowledge is a compound of that which we perceive through impressions, and of that which our own faculty of knowledge (incited by sense impressions) supplies from itself' (Kant, 1922, p. 715-Suppliment IV). Kant believed that 'all empirical knowledge requires synthesis of the manifold by imagination' (Kant, 1922, p. 164). The brain, through reason, must make sense of our sensory data, however without experience we would not produce knowledge.

His philosophy would inspire Phenomenologist founder Edmund Husserl. Phenomenology sought to understand the world through perception, building from sensory experiences and subjective engagement, not just rational thought. Husserl, and the early

pioneers of Gestalt psychology, were taught by psychologist Franz Brentano. In fact, Husserl considered phenomenology a form of ‘descriptive psychology’ and a return to ‘things themselves’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p. lxxi/8). This link to psychology is important as it presented the concept of Gestalt to Merleau-Ponty, and during the course of this research brought cognitive psychologists to my attention. While Husserl considered the body the way through which we experience the world he still described it in ways that implies it is thing between himself and the world writing, ‘The same body that serves me as a means of all perception stands in my way in the perception of itself and is a remarkably incompletely constituted thing’ (2000, p. 159). And while the body remains a thing in between the reality of the outer world and the subjectivity of the inner world for Husserl there remains a ‘fundamental distinction among modes of being, the most cardinal that there is, reveals itself: [to be] that between consciousness and reality’ (Husserl, 1969, p. 77). Husserl continued to straddle the two philosophical traditions. Philosopher Taylor Carman characterises Husserl’s position by stating,

‘[I]t is precisely this conceptual dualism, this idea that consciousness and reality are separated by an “abyss of meaning,” that prevents Husserl from acknowledging the body as the original locus of intentional phenomena in perceptual experience’ (Carman, 1999, p. 209).

As with Kant, concepts of immanence and transcendence are fundamental to Husserl’s writing on perception. Immanence refers to knowledge we acquire from our lived experience, where some thing gives all of itself to us in one go, nothing is hidden, and this also applies to concepts within our consciousness. Transcendence, on the other hand, imagines the subject or object has an identity that is not dependent or limited to our perception of it. It acknowledges that some of our knowledge goes beyond what we experience in a single mental or perceptual act. It also imagines a fundamental essence that transcends the single impression. In the Seefelder Manuscripts on Individuation no.35 Husserl gives the example of the liquid in a brown beer bottle in order to explain transcendence,

‘I perceive - this brown content. It is something that endures. It is constantly the same. It covers a certain phenomenological extension. I saw it yesterday; I remember it today. It has lasted until today. Transcendence!’ (2019, p. 246).

However, this does not take into account that many relations may

change, that the liquid itself may degrade or alter, that it may be perceived as something very different today than it was yesterday for all manner of reasons. And, of course, differently by different people. While I accept there is a distinction between the iconography of the bottle of beer or a beer can and the enduring character of the beer inside, I believe even the enduring character changes according to perception. The brown liquid may be sweeter one day to another, more viscous one day to another – to paraphrase Deleuze and Guattari, are the differences greater than the similarities? The same can of beer was perceived in my experiments by participants differently – once in reference to domestic violence, by another in reference to thirst, and by another in reference to littering and anti-social behaviour. They saw the same can, from similar angles but different perspectives. The qualities of a can containing brown liquid remained, but the character changed. The philosophical problems created by the concept of transcendence will be described in more detail later in the chapter.

Both Kant and Husserl set the scene for the phenomenology of Martin Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre, and from them the phenomenologists that followed. Husserl taught Heidegger at University of Freiburg and thought he would continue the phenomenological project in the same vein as himself, this was not to be the case (Käufer and Chemero, 2021, p. 61). With his focus on the individual subjective being controlling their own projects in the world Heidegger was an existential rather than transcendental phenomenologist. In the introduction to *Being and Time* Carman portrays Heidegger's phenomenology as a method to explore consciousness and being through subjective lived experience of the world, objects and others (2020). Heidegger firmly situates the person in space and time, as a person in the world.

Ourselves

Being-in-the-world

For Heidegger perception and understanding were inextricably linked to our being-in-the-world and he brought to phenomenology the idea of *Dasein* and the usefulness of objects. Though he does not use the term Heidegger brought situatedness to philosophy, describing how we are always situated in our own context and that context then frames our understanding of the world. Our surroundings shape us.



Figs. 29 and 30: Participants D6 and J6b situate themselves within the research (2022)

Heidegger uses the word *Dasein* to talk about a human being in the world, a world in which they are absorbed. However, *Dasein* also has a more global sense than the individual human, it is also the way the human species, in general, exists in the world. This is a world in which ‘*Da-sein** as such always already is,’ (Heidegger, 1996, p. 81/87), this same phrase is translated by translators and theologians John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson as ‘something ‘wherein’ *Dasein* as such already is’ (Heidegger, 2019, p. 120/87). The reason I bring this up here is that the phrase *always already*, which is more commonly used in the 1996 translation by philosopher and translator Joan Stambaugh, particularly resonated with me on a personal level and, although I find that I cannot fully commit to Heidegger’s phenomenology, this phrasing was one of the most beautiful philosophical ideas I have read, and it has sat with me ever since. When we realize ourselves as beings (as young children) with sensations, a sense of our own existence, autonomy of movement, and individual thoughts, we were ‘always already’ in the world, never separate from it. Our hand is always already in relation to how far or near it is to that thing or person, it always already feels the breeze. It is very much through this notion that I connect with Merleau-Ponty – we cannot perceive ourselves without the world that has always already been with us, ‘[s]ensing is this living communication with the world that makes it present to us as the familiar place of our life’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p. 53/79). However, *Dasein* is not simply about physicality, it also refers to how human beings relate to the horizon

of meaning, that is to the full range of possible meanings one could understand from an experience with a phenomenon.

Before Heidegger most theorists believed that there were subjects and there were objects. These were very distinct things that did not come into relation with each other. For Heidegger the subject and the object are both produced as a consequence of their being in relation to each other, the relation is the primary thing ontologically. For Heidegger there is no world without that relation. Dasein is that relation. This centring of the human is another of the critiques levelled at phenomenology and will be explored later in the chapter. Heidegger sought to address the problems of the scientific approach - which creates the illusion of detached, objective viewer and transforms the world into a picture that can then be investigated in ever greater detail - by acknowledging the subject as being-in-the-world (1977). In comparing the sciences almost dismissive attitude towards subjectivity in his writing he outlines how 'this 'subjectivity' perhaps uncovers the 'reality' of the world at its most real' (1996, p. 141/106). As with Merleau-Ponty, subjectivity must precede science. Husserl sought to transcend the singular perspective and theorised a pure form of looking that lies below the individual, a form shared by all humans that is not subjective (Husserl, 1969). Unlike Husserl, both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, did not reach so determinedly towards transcendence but towards being-in-the-world and intentionality.

Embodiment

Merleau-Ponty took a more embodied approach to phenomenology than his predecessors. For him our consciousness is derived from our embodied interactions with the world. He brought Husserl's intentionality, Heidegger's being-in-the-world and a focus on perception in a bodily relationship with each other. This is where his situatedness is centred, in the body and perception, our physical experiences framing the way we understand the world. Situatedness in relation to [ambient] advertising will be explored in *In-and-Out-of-Place* in chapter 5.

For Merleau-Ponty the subject was immersed in the world as both an object/body. 'I am a body that rises up towards the world' he writes (2014, p. 78/104). 'I am' both 'conscious of my body through the world,' and 'conscious of the world by means of my body' (2014, p. 84/111). There is no thing called a body in between oneself and the real world, oneself is both. Our impressions are singular 'and never

[the] doubled subject' which has separation of body and thought (2014, p. 515-516/477-478), and in thinking about the body in this way he sought address the problem of Cartesian dualism. This echoes philosopher Baruch Spinoza's seventeen century consideration of the source of dualism which comes about because consciousness does not believe itself to be material. Deleuze notes, 'Spinoza offers philosophers a new model: the body' (1988, p. 17).



Fig. 31: Participant T7b photographs some berries that she feels compelled to touch (2022)

Merleau-Ponty's 'lived body' is linked to the world through fields, for example, sensory fields, a transcendental field and an impersonal field on which our milieu plays out. These fields run through us. The phenomenological field is 'infused [impregne] with an immanent meaning [signification]' (Busch, 2014, p. 58). These fields or resonances seem to hold traces of his later exploration of 'flesh' in the posthumously published *The Intertwining/The Chiasm*, and perhaps hold a suggestion of Deleuze and Guattari's planes.

Merleau-Ponty's commitment to embodiment is important as it set the scene for many of the feminist and queer phenomenologists that followed, as it was not the basis of traditional phenomenological texts. McGregor reports that '[t]he idea of consciousness and subjectivity as produced by embodied encounters with the world is a major theme of feminist phenomenology' (2020, p. 510). In a footnote Carman comments that Heidegger, throughout *Being and Time*, is

uncomfortable with Dasein's 'corporeity,' considering embodiment to contain an inherent 'problematic' (1999, p. 224). Carman goes on to point out that Merleau-Ponty does not deny the internal mental world but understands that this is dependent on 'a background of perceptual activity that we always already understand in bodily terms, by engaging in it' (1999, p. 206).

Perspectives

The body is 'the place where consciousness and reality in fact come to occupy the very same conceptual space' (Carman, 1999, p. 210). Young takes this further stating that 'consciousness that constitutes its world is the body as lived in a tangible encounter with human and nonhuman others' (2005, p. 8). Embedded in a concept of individual flows of time the conscious 'thinking subject' is 'a field of presence' within the world, and the individual gaze issues from this flow (Carman, 1999, p. 210). We are an 'absolute' flow of continuous 'consciousness,' writes Merleau-Ponty (2014, p. 515-516/477-478) in language that refers to philosopher and psychologist William James and philosopher Henry Bergson (please see chapter 5). Kant proposed the world is filtered through our sensory apparatus; we sense the world through the condition of our humanness. While it is embodied it is also a situated perspective; it is in a moment in time and a location in place. This gives us unique or singular perspectives on any given thing, a specific point of view at any given moment. This perceptual structure delivers objects with only one side available to us, an 'incompleteness' (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p. 347/389). This is how we encounter things, perspective-ly. Other perspectives remain hidden until we move, and they disclose themselves to us. We disclose ourselves as a consciousness through perspectives. Through the flow of time (expanded on later in the chapter and in chapter 5, *The Thickness of the Present*) a human appears,

'perspectively to its own gaze as "a consciousness" (or as a man or an embodied subject) because it is a field of presence - presence to itself, to others, and to the world - and because this presence throws it into the natural and cultural world from which it can be understood.' (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p. 477-478/515-516).

But the subjective perspectival gaze is not only how we appear to ourselves and others, it is also how the lived world is known. Merleau-Ponty writes '[t]hings and instants can only be linked together to form a world through this ambiguous being that we call "subjectivity"' (2014, p. 348/390), through the absolute flow of consciousness.

Intentionality

From a phenomenological point of view this subjective perspective must also have intention. Intentionality in phenomenological terms has a very particular meaning and it refers to the intent to perceive, a concept outlined by Husserl, and according to Merleau-Ponty, it is ‘too often cited as the principle discovery of phenomenology’ (2014, p. lxxxii/17). Indeed, Ahmed notes that ‘[t]he radical claim that phenomenology inherits from Franz Brentano’s psychology is that consciousness is intentional: it is directed toward something.’ (2006, p. 27). I believe that in order to understand the moment of encounter with [ambient] advertising it is important and necessary to address intentionality.

The term intentionality for phenomenologists describes our consciousness of something and how our consciousness is fundamentally engaged with the world. We perceive the world using ‘an intentional structure of consciousness,’ and we perceive all meaningful acts by intending individual objects (Busch, 2014, p. 58). ‘We can intend objects that do not actually exist’ in front of us, as it were, in the corporeal world, as they may be something we remember or they may be a fantasy (Käufer and Chemero, 2021, p. 39). This can be seen in one of my early thinking films *Everyday Encounters* (2023a) as described in Chapter 5. Merleau-Ponty outlines in his preface that intentionality, as distinct from idealism’s constituting consciousness, allows us ‘to grasp the total intention - not merely what these things are for representation’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p. lxxxii/19). To perceive something, we must intend towards it. This is, of course, an extremely ocular centric position, and Martin Jay puts forward a comprehensive argument against the scopic regime that we live by (1993). We also perceive the world through our other senses, some of the sensory information we receive will be passive such as a smell, and we may not have intended towards it. However, while [ambient] advertising sits in context, or set of relationships, that we may understand through passive sensation much of what we perceive we will have to actively seek, and much of what we find is visual, generally speaking it is our eye that is first drawn to the [ambient] advert.

Merleau-Ponty sketches out Husserl’s differentiation between act intentionality (the things we think about, make ‘judgements’ about and focus on, the thinking we do about the past or future), and operative intentionality (our attention and bodily ‘relation’ towards the world often expressed through our ‘desires’ and in ‘our landscape’ (2014, p. lxxxii/18). Operative intentionality refers to our innate,

routine, everyday attention to the world, in other words the way a human naturally inhabits and relates to their surroundings. This position is not dissimilar to Heidegger's who takes the view that we were always already in the world, not observing it from an external position, or from inside our brains through mental acts watching representations. All intentionality is bound to our temporal flow in both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, though for Merleau-Ponty operative intentionality comes before act intentionality. It is operative, innate, intentionality that allows us to carry out our acts (2014, p. 453/492).

For Merleau-Ponty we are an embodied perspective on the world that is,

‘underpinned by an “intentional arc” that projects around us our past, our future, our human milieu, our physical situation, our ideological situation, and our moral situation, or rather, that ensures that we are situated within all of these relationships. This intentional arc creates the unity of the senses, the unity of the senses with intelligence, and the unity of the sensitivity and motricity’ (2014, p. 137/170) (This is explored further in *The Thickness of the Present* in chapter 5).

The intentional arc is our consciousness directed towards something; it is a strand that connects us with the fabric of the world. In his later writing Merleau-Ponty might even consider it a tissue of sorts that connects us and the world (1968). Our thinking is done through embodied means. As Tan and Chow point out, for Merleau-Ponty, the term “intentional arc” denoted the inseparable relationship between the perception and action that underpins conscious thinking’ (2018).

This situated and relational understanding of ourselves, although facing outwards through perspectives and intentionality rather than in symbiosis with, shares some similarities with Deleuze and Guattari (explored later in the chapter). Intentionality brings me back to embodiment. Embodiment is the underlying framework through which one can experience experiences, through which one can encounter the world. Indeed, the intention of phenomenological enquiry is to reveal the underlying systems that frame and create our experiences. Embodiment leads me on to perception. ‘In perception’ Carman writes ‘we understand ourselves not as having but as being bodies’ (1999, p. 208). Yet, although ‘My body is constantly perceived,’ (2014, p. 92/119) Merleau-Ponty states ‘it remains on the margins of all my perceptions’ (2014, p. 93/119). The body is the background

to all my perceptions. While I am often unaware of it, I can never actually escape the me-ness of my perceptions, the hands that extend outwards, the sharp noises that startle me, warm sunlight on my skin. My perceptions are how I bring the world into myself even if I forget my body in the moment.

Encountering

Perception

Professor of philosophy David W Hamlyn makes the point that ‘perception is in some respects passive’ as it is partially reliant on sensory information, yet it is also active in that ‘it involves interpretation, classification and the like’(2022, p. 187). He puts forward a suggestion from philosopher Gilbert Ryle that there are two forms of sensation, one of which is a bodily feeling (such as a tickling sensation), the other of which is akin to perception. This form of sensation describes the world to us, a ribbon that is slippery, a lamppost that is cold to the touch (ibid 2022, p. 189). Perception is the process through which we encounter and experience the world. It allows us to make meaning, identify and relate to the things we sense. The multiple nuanced meanings in the term perception, derived from the word ‘perceive’, which in common usage means to believe something, become aware of something through the senses, to understand or notice something not obvious to everyone else, reveal that it is not a simple term (Cambridge Dictionary Online), this is the discussion that Hamlyn comes back to as he ponders whether sight can be considered a sensation. Professor of psychology, Soledad Ballesteros, makes the point that ‘most of the relationships that we establish with the environment are carried out through perception, especially visual perception’ (2016, p. 3). This is what makes the ideas of a more active attentive contact or a more passive receptive gaze so compelling to me, an embodied encounter that does not necessarily require touch but does involve all of the senses in our situatedness.

Our world is rich with stuff that has the potential to be perceived. Some thing might attract our attention and we might then focus upon it using one of our body’s sensory tools, using our nose to sniff jasmine in the air, using our eyes to watch the play of shadows on a door (Fig. 32, the play of shadows). This sensory data passes through our body to be interpreted by our brains allowing us to consciously perceive the object. At this point we are able to interpret the information, apply our schema and decide whether something warrants further action. Shall I pick that flower? Should I turn my head towards that sound? Senses and cognition working hand in

hand. Intending towards the world.



Fig. 32: A still from *Theories from the Alleyway*, looking at the play of shadows on a door (Sorrentino, M, 2022)

I reached a point in my research where perception became really important to me and my understanding of our encounters with [ambient] advertising. My understanding of perception emerged from the relationships between the different authors that developed out of phenomenology and its history. However, I realise that it is far from the only theoretical position on perception and attention. There is a lot of literature around perception in neuropsychological studies (see for example Latimer and Stevens, 2016; Rock and Mack, 2016) and cognitive psychology (see for example Hochberg, 2016; Melamed and Melamed, 1985). Notwithstanding their insights I am not following those paths because this particular research is not focussed on a detailed critique of the brain. I am looking at perception through the lens of [ambient] advertising as a practice and as an embodied experience. Perception provides a way of understanding how we encounter [ambient] adverts in the world which draws on cognitive psychology in part.

The perceiving subject has a number of everyday interactions with objects of perception, from changes in light, to other people's emotions, to [ambient] adverts in the environment. For Merleau-Ponty this was encapsulated in the psychological concept of Gestalt, in which the perceiving subject becomes aware of a 'figure' or object that comes to the fore from the background milieu. This foregrounded figure is a vibrant and meaningful whole that is part of a field rather than a singular object. Within this interpretation of perception, the context from which the figure emerges, and the ambiguities that surround it, are an integral and meaningful part of it. That is not to say that Merleau-Ponty agreed with all points made

by Gestalt theorists, though he did consider it the central perceptual framework (Sheredos, 2017). The problems of Gestalt and its biological underpinnings are beyond the scope of this chapter. However, what is interesting in Merleau-Ponty's use of Gestalt is that,

- we are motivated or have intent to perceive
- perception causes figures to appear
- objects appear within a field they are not separate to it
- Gestalt tries to make sense of a jumble of sensory data into a meaningful whole
- when we move our perspective changes providing us with a new Gestalt.

For Merleau-Ponty, following Husserl, perspectives come with an object-horizon structure. The object itself is always within a horizon, the lived world is made up of horizons. When I come across an object,

‘I come before it with my sensory fields, my perceptual field, and finally with a schema [typique] of every possible being, or a universal arrangement with regard to the world’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p. 453/492).

Within this context of horizons Husserl outlines the *Lebenswelt* or ‘lifeworld’ (Toadvine, 2014, p. 20), which provides our cultural knowledge. Husserl describes horizons that provide ‘the background of meaning against which an object of perception stands out’ (Käufer and Chemero, 2021, p. 58). Merleau-Ponty's world is a world full of meaning. In this world ‘objects solicit our bodies, that is, ourselves, and we complete their meaning within the setting where they appear to us’ (Evans, 2014, p. 186). Objects and the world are not separate things they are unified in our perspectives; objects arrive to us with their context.

The inner horizon provides our personal knowledge about the construction of a bus stop, or what we might expect of a lamppost, and the outer horizon provides wider background knowledge about bus transit or the purpose of lampposts, the typical associations and relations. ‘The perceived world’ expands to become Merleau-Ponty's equivalent of Husserl's ‘lifeworld’ (Toadvine, 2014, p. 20). The object sits within a web of possibilities and perspectives. This is the object's horizon. Our hold on the world and an object or ‘spectacle’ is never ‘complete’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p. 311/350).



Fig. 33: Participant A10 photographs a bus stop notice commenting on how many people will not be able to use the bus stop (2023)

The subject in the phenomenological account perceives an object that has some sense of meaning. We perceive it in ways that are intrinsic to our humanness, we do not look at grass and perceive it as food for example. For Heidegger these objects are disclosed to us in ways that describe their relationship to us and a referential totality '[t]o the Being of any equipment that always belongs a totality of equipment,' giving the example of a hammer for hammering (Heidegger, 2019, p. 97/68). Useful things reveal themselves in order for us to be able to do something with them should we need to. We swiftly forget about their 'presence-at-hand' and only consider their usefulness to hammer, their 'handiness'. For Heidegger objects disclose themselves to us with that structure/meaning – a perception becomes a definition. Philosopher Henri Bergson, a significant influence on Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze noted that a function of perception is to separate things from the whole, reducing things to how they serve our needs,

'[I]t shows them less the things themselves than the use we can make of them. It classified, it labels them beforehand; we scarcely look the object, it is enough for us to know to which category it belongs' (Bergson, 2010, p. 114).

Merleau-Ponty characterises the judgements inherent in perception as the way in which we make sense of the world, without which

we would not have ‘things that emerge[] from the formless mass by offering themselves to our body as things “to be touched,” “to be taken,” or “to be climbed”’ (2014, p. 465-466/504). He goes on to caution that perception does not give us command of objects in the way that we might assume. We also adjust ourselves to objects, ‘reaching them out there where they are, beyond us,’ these objects should not be conceived as purely ‘imminent to our intentions’ or we could not then be ‘in the world, ourselves implicated in the spectacle and, and so to speak, intermingled with things; we would have merely a representation of a universe’ (ibid, p. 465-466/504). For phenomenologists this complex subject-object relationship is inherent to our being-in-the-world. In addition, perception does not simply mean that we have found something within the confusing world of available sensory data, rather it refers to a more dynamic relationship in which the ability to be perceived means that something always already had sensory qualities. Objects have sensory givens that are capable ‘of filling me and reaching me,’ stemming from their own properties that ‘solicits and obtains a certain vibration from my gaze’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p. 515-516/477–478). This sensuous and symbiotic world of lively and vibrant matter that entangles with the viewer prefigures and opens out to New Materialism (briefly detailed later in the chapter).

Attention

Intentionality, attention and perception are bonded together in phenomenology. Attention can be considered a form through which intentionality is expressed. One’s consciousness (I am using the phenomenological term consciousness even though it is not without critique) is focussed and directed towards something.

Perception allows an [ambient] advert to emerge for the viewer from the general stuff of the world in this, the moment of encounter. We have to be receptive and let the environment connect with us through that intentional strand that links us to the world (see earlier in this chapter). This activates attention which in turn ‘enriches this perception,’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p. 29/51). Attention as a form of intentionality frames how we look at things in the world, objects are given qualities according to what we consider to be important. We ask - what exactly is this thing? These moments of emergence require audience attention as a creative act of choice. Attention brings figures to the fore, sometimes we are surprised into paying attention (please see chapter 1, Hutter and Hoffmann, 2014) but this is not always the case, sometimes people are just a little curious (please see chapter 5).

Instantly noticeable. Size
and red ribbon drew
attention to it.



Fig. 34: Participant E9 shares a photo over WhatsApp describing how his attention was taken (2023)

Merleau-Ponty ties motivation to attention within operative intentionality. He makes the claim that motive is always ‘present in the decision’ to take any action, including attention (2014, p. 270/308). Things become interesting or motivating to me when I am in the state where they have become relevant or interesting. If I did not ever use the light from a lamppost, I may not be motivated to look at it. The lamppost would remain where it is, un-looked at. However, the very fact that this lamppost had unexpectedly acquired a bow, that gave it a certain out-of-placeness that rendered it conspicuous, allowed it to solicit a response from my participants (Fig. 34). *Conspicuousness, lived relevance, contextual fit* disclosed in *encounter* are all qualities found in [ambient] advertising described in chapter 1. Seamon labelled attention in this context as noticing, categorizing two separate modes (1979, p. 108). The first he calls ‘world-grounded noticing,’ in which our attention is attracted by something in the world for example a bright ribbon (see chapter 4). The other is ‘person-grounded noticing,’ which refers to being attracted by one’s own interests, noticing Christmas wrapping paper because one is thinking of Christmas (Seamon, 2018, note 11, see chapter 4). The [ambient] advert from Fig. 34 will be detailed in chapter 3.

Humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan suggests that paying attention lends significance to what we notice. For him it is a way we can both passively and actively know the world through our senses and

cognition. I was very interested in humanist geography from the start of the PhD, having reached there from writer Georges Perec (see chapter 4) and psychogeography, and I spent a good deal of time in that first pilot year immersed in Tuan and Tim Cresswell (see chapter 3). There was a clear relationship with my experience of the place of the alleyway and their descriptions of how humans inhabit and make place, how participant S7b has always enjoyed the shadows on the pink wall (Fig. 35, picture of shadows). Tuan saw place as something sensory and meaningful and spatial. His was an affective geography and he was a big influence on geographers that followed such as Cresswell (2015). The things that we attend to, give meaning to, and are affected by, after the initial attraction, were key features of their writing. The gentle descriptive, expressive, often poetic, way that they approached writing, not dissimilar to Merleau-Ponty, very much influenced my approach to my pilot phase (see chapters 3 and 4). However, I realised as I worked over that first year that I was not so much interested in place as I was things, and I came to see things in the way that Doreen Massey envisions place, as infinitely connected beyond the visible site to organisations, rituals, and power relations.



Fig. 35: Participant S7b stops to take a picture of a shadow they really liked on a wall (2022)

Tuan suggested an idea that was tightly linked to a form of embodied noticing and attention, a way of knowing that could have passive and active qualities. It was something that sat with me lightly yet

consistently throughout the research, an on-going influence one might say. A little bit like the concept of always already it was something that I found incredibly beautiful, and it resonated with me as something I recognised from my own experience.

Tuan spoke about *the pause*.

Yi-Fu Tuan is the only philosopher that I have found that wrote about a pause explicitly, however he discusses the pause in relation to place. For him place becomes more than simple coordinates through the act of pausing and reflecting. It allows us to form a deeper, more meaningful connection. We have chosen a moment of stillness in that place. It was his use of the word pause that created a little conceptual seed around which an eddy formed in my own thinking, and linked back to Hutter and Hoffman's *interruption* described in chapter 1(2014). While the pause for Tuan was something that marked out a place, for me it was a meaningful physical expression of attention and the potential for new thought through movement and time, a concept to be explored more fully in chapter 5 in *The Pause*. Tuan was interested in the objects that make a place; however, I was simply interested in the encounter with the things in that place. A person walks down a street that is filled with things that have the potential to be perceived. Something might attract the person's attention as they walk, and they focus on it by turning their head. The data is interpreted by their brains to consciously perceive the object, and they apply their schema to decide whether it warrants an action. This is attentive contact, though the person encountering may only appear to be offering a receptive gaze. This action requires the activation of another sensory tool, and the person reaches out to touch the object, perceiving it through sensation. Sometimes it requires more cognitive activity to decode it, and they may comment on it. Sometimes the action is as simple as a pause.

'[T]he pauses may be of such short duration and the interest so fleeting we may not be fully aware of having focused on any particular object: we believe we have simply been looking at the general scene. Nonetheless these pauses have occurred' (Tuan, 2007, p. 161).

As participants encountered an [ambient] advert *The Pause* (2025) became one of my key themes (please see chapters 5.) In research that seeks to capture encounters it became clear through reading philosophical texts that there was a need to capture pauses, and this influenced my use of live methods. Audiences may not be aware that they have focussed on any particular object, thus they wouldn't report it to a survey, nonetheless it would have occurred. The methodology for capturing encounters will be covered in chapter 3

Movement

Spatiality is built into the world and the things of the world - objects and space are woven together. Spatial understandings allow us to encounter things in the world. We have a 'spatial existence that is the primordial condition of every living perception' (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p. 112/140). Indeed, Tuan dedicates a chapter to how children develop spatial awareness building on psychologist Jean Piaget's psychological concepts. Like Merleau-Ponty he believed we come to understand the world experientially through our senses. Tuan's interest was largely around kinesthesia, understanding our body's position in space through movement and sensory data.

When we understand our potential for independent action it comes with the spatial world that we were *always already* part of. We understand context, others, objects only through a spatial understanding via our embodied experience, 'the human body is the measure of direction, location and distance' (Tuan, 2007, p. 44–45). We ask how far am I away from that thing? How big is that thing? What is that thing in relation to that other thing? This can be in the movement of our body or the movement of our eyes. Ahmed highlights a key point that Merleau-Ponty makes in that 'the body is "here"' and it is from the "here" of bodily dwelling' that the world unfolds as a set of relations between different points and our central perspective (2006, p. 8) This central perspective is at the same moment 'affected and shaped by its surroundings' (ibid 2006, p. 9).

Though we dwell in place we are never in exactly the same place. Human beings experience the world through continual movement. Sociologist John Urry describes the relationship of people to objects in the world as 'something sensed often through movement and experienced in a tactile kind of way' (2007, p. 73). Our small movements are often imperceptible and barely come to our own attention, for example the slow movement of a finger as it hovers above a keyboard, perhaps in part subject to gravity rather than intent, or the movement of our eyes over the computer screen or a street scene – though arguably this is still intending towards the world. Bigger movements are clearly intentional. Theorist David Morris, outlines Merleau-Ponty's view on movement, describing how 'bodily movement itself is meaningfully "about" things, [it] is intentional' (2014, p. 116). We turn our eyes towards things, and walk towards things, to enrich our understanding of them - this is an 'active engagement' (2014, p. 116). Participants meaningfully walked towards the [ambient] advert, detailed in chapter 4.

We also know the world through a sensory activation of touch through movement, the knowing touch of our fingertips as we touch a ribbon, the passive touch of our feet as we walk on concrete, extending beyond our body to the world. In this way both movement and time become part of our sensory perceptions, ‘they actualise the articulation of a tactile surface, just as light sketches out the configuration of a visible surface’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p. 329/371). [Ambient] adverts exist in places of traffic. As a rule, they are encountered as people walk past them, engaging sensory perception in movement and time, because movement happens both through a place and in time.

Time

I acknowledge that there is an entire corpus of academic work which discusses time, critiquing how one might measure time, or imagine time, how fundamental it is, or how plastic it is and the relative merits of each researcher’s position. Time is a subject of vast philosophical (and scientific) complexity. That said I believe it important to include a discussion of how time relates to my research in order to equip me with the right set of tools to be able to continue to work theoretically. It is impossible to address movement (of body and thought) without time and, for me, it is not possible to investigate [ambient] advertising without acknowledging that it is encountered through movement. Engaging with this here allowed me to form a suitable ground upon which the rest of the research could sit. These concepts are explored through the themes *The Thickness of the Present* and *The Pause* in chapter 5.

Philosophy has been grappling to address the concept of time over many centuries. For example, in ‘Being and Time,’ Heidegger sketches out how we are always part of time including those moments where we are still. For Heidegger these still moments are not empty, they allow us to connect on a deeper level with our own existence, and to become fully absorbed in the present moment rather than thinking about the past or the future. He does this through the concept *Sorge*, translated to care or concern, we are present in the moment and open to what is around us, a concept echoed in Seamon’s ‘attentive contact’. Philosopher Nishida Kitarō (please note Nishida is the surname) follows the Exoteric Buddhist tradition in which reality, and self, is not constructed by a subjective finite mind because that creates a beginning and an end. Though Nishida was frustrated by phenomenology he introduced Husserlian thought to Japan, believing in the primacy of experience, considering it foundational

to his entire philosophy. Nishida describes consciousness and time as part of something bigger than oneself, part of a complex interconnected pattern and cosmic rhythm. Bergson thinks of time like a continuous flowing river always moving and changing. His conception of time was very much related to the realm of consciousness and not so tied to the material world. Merleau-Ponty's view of time is similar to Bergson's but with a stronger focus on how perceptual experience through our bodies, and the world, shapes our sense of time. Neither Bergson nor Merleau-Ponty believed that time was purely external, they thought that we created it through our own experience.

Bergson calls this lived time duration and he grounds his philosophy in it, 'duration is the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances' (2022, p. 4). A key idea here is the idea of change and becoming. In explaining concepts such as intentionality, consciousness, and perception phenomenologists also took a strong interest in time. Heidegger dedicated half of his thesis in *Being and Time* to the concept of time, and Merleau-Ponty dedicated a large part of *Phenomenology of Perception* to it. Being situated in the world requires not only place but time through which we can exist. For Merleau-Ponty we are not carried by time, we are time. The flow is not outside us, it is within us as we are a flow of consciousness. 'There is at the core of time a gaze' he writes, not that time only 'exists for someone' more 'that time is someone' (2014, p. 445/484). Breaking up time into *moments* of time is an expression of subjectivity - past, present and future exist as a consequence of subjectivity.

Any event requires a subject to view it; to carve the event out from the flow of time, an [ambient] advert can be viewed as an event philosophically (though not in marketing terms as described in chapter 1) as it is encountered in time. The idea of the event derives from process philosopher Alfred North Whitehead and is given contemporary relevance by philosopher Alain Badiou. While process philosophy is incredibly important it is ontological, a description of how the universe operates. It is a metaphysics, a description of everything in its entirety that does not privilege the human. I have not included process philosophy in this thesis because I have taken a human-focused perspective, it is sensory and embodied research. The human is fundamental to a description of experience and encounter with [ambient] advertising. "Events" are carved out of the spatio-temporal totality of the objective world by a finite observer' writes Merleau-ponty (2014, p. 433/472).



Fig. 36: Participant C2b takes a photograph of something she has always liked - the rust bleeding into the concrete, a thing that happens over time (2018)

Whitehead provides the link between Bergson and Deleuze. For Deleuze ‘everything is [an] event,’ a comment picked up by professor of philosophy James Williams from a lecture Deleuze gave on 10 March 1987, ‘[a]n event is a process’ he continues in which ‘transformations’ can come about ‘through novelty...even apparently inert objects are events’ (2011, p. 80–81). James Williams describes Deleuze’s reading of an encounter as an event, it is a transformative process. In the encounter something is produced that has difference, it is a new thing brought about through the multiplicity of relations in which everything constantly changes (2006). The encounter allows a thing to become, a concept to be explored more fully later in the chapter and in chapter 5 *Assembled*. The encounter or event requires time.

For Merleau-ponty without a viewer there is simply a series of present moments, there is no temporality, or duration to borrow Bergson’s term. Time allows us to know a variety of perspectives and ‘an instant of the world’ in which ‘I am present to my present, to the entire past that has preceded it, and to a future’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p. 346/387). A moment is not a self-contained unit, moments are ‘overlapping’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p. 443/482). A consciousness is able to grasp separate events as a totality and to merge the events together through duration, but duration is also in the natural world outside of human subjectivity. At this point it should be noted

that Bergson used the term psychic states rather than the more problematic term consciousness. Professors of psychology Thomas Suddendorf, Donna Rose Addis, Michael C Corballis' refer to the human brain's ability to think about the future and the past as *mental time travel*, describing it as innately human behaviour (2009). Time is not linear in our brains, a concept I will return to in chapter 5 *The Thickness of the Present*.

Merleau-Ponty is indebted to Bergson who describes time as a succession of events though it should be acknowledged that Merleau-Ponty thinks Bergson wrong to explain time through continuity believing that this conception in some way negates time. Merleau-Ponty describes our relationship with time as though we were sat on the train that Bergson dismisses as a metaphor, but the past is not static scenery rather it is a 'milieu' that pulls away from us at the same moment that we move on (2014, p. 444/482). Later, in 'The Visible and the Invisible' he prefers to see time a swirling connected pools, 'it is a cycle defined by central and dominant region and with indecisive contours - a swelling or bulb of time,' he writes (1968, p. 184). Lifelong Scholar of Merleau-Ponty, Professor Glen Mazis notes that,

'the certainty of this moment for Merleau-Ponty is in the fact that the future will return to this moment to find it as it was and yet as it never had been until that moment' (1992, p. 55)

Everything changes and is always becoming, a position not dissimilar to Deleuze and Guattari. For Bergson it is clear that beings do not live a life in which their timeline is laid out like a railway line, by which all past moments and all future moments are present to be observed. This is how time is often conceived and is why he refers to duration rather than time, so that we do not think of it spatially. We do not move through time in a carriage. No-one lives unchanging, locked in the moment on a track. Time is a process, and it changes everything. We always already have our past flow into us, and our future stretch out before us as we 'lean into future' (Bergson, 2001, p. 101). Past and present come together in a whole, 'a mutual penetration, an interconnexion' (ibid, p. 101). Memory allows these separate states to connect. Both Husserl and Deleuze use the example of a tune, a tune is not a singular note in the present but the memory of, and the leaning into the future of, other notes.

Nishida also took his conception of time from Bergson. Moments linger within the following moment and the preceding moment. It is this depiction of our existence in a cloud or relation of time that has resonated most strongly with me.

‘Although it is thought that time continuously flows from past to future, in order to establish the unity of time, it must be that in some sense the past, although already passed, has not yet passed and that the future, although not yet come, has already appeared. Thereby we can think various forms of time on the basis of how one sees the present. If one regards the present as instantaneous, then the form of time will be linear; yet it is also possible to conceive a form of time that possesses no instant. There is linear dimension, but there is also the experiential dimension.’ (Nishida, 2012, p. 64–65).

The many participant recordings I have collected of different people encountering an [ambient] advert reveal moments as described by Nishida (detailed in greater depth in chapters 4 and 5). In the moment in place, a participant may be crunching through leaves on the ground, while at the same moment remembering walking through leaves as a youngster, and yet also in a different past walking through leaves with their own child and also imagining doing it again in a potential future. They are holding all of these things, past, present and future together a kind of cloud. In the films *Everyday Encounters* (2023a) and *The Thickness of the Present* (2024) I explore these concepts (please see chapter 5). Bergson dislikes spatialisation of concepts and though I do not wish spatialise, it has a kind of roundness or thickness about it that is not a *timeline*. This seems to be how people are in the moment - in that they are not always in the moment, they are often in multiple moments. They are elsewhere but also here, crunching through those leaves while they feel the bite of the cold wind on their skin. They are here on a street with the [ambient] advert but also writing lists for Christmas presents they are yet to buy. This thickness will be explored further in chapter 5.

Merleau-Ponty characterises this dynamic relationship with the body, our thoughts and actions which are expressed through time by stating, ‘man is not a psyche joined to an organism, but rather this back-and-forth of existence that sometimes allows itself to exist as a body and sometimes carries itself into personal acts.’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p. 90/117).

Time can also normalise things. If we are exposed to things over time then they stop being new and unusual, we do not need to pay closer attention to make sense of what is in front of us. An encounter needs to be with something unusual. In ‘Phenomenology of Perception’ Merleau-Ponty, uses a classic psychological experiment, The Tilted

Room, to explain this concept. Someone walking through that tilted space perceives it as slanted but over time the brain adapts, and at some point, it becomes normal. Objects within this space help to anchor the brain and perception. In many ways this is accommodated by the concept of duration. An expectation of what would be considered normal, for example an ordinary street, an ordinary lamppost, an ordinary bus shelter is built up through a 'continuous progress of the past' (Bergson, 2022, p. 4). Something changes that allows something to become different. This is what gets noticed in an encounter. If it were to continue then it would simply become the new normal through duration. We would get used to it because we experience it over and over again as it endures through time. [Ambient] adverts disrupt things because they are only installed for a short period of time (see chapter 1). We do not have time to get used to them. This adds to their conspicuousness and through being time specific this can add to their relevance (see chapter 1). This newness is something which is commented on by the participants in my research (see chapter 4).

Of course there is time outside oneself. The phenomenologists do not claim that all time is purely subjective and there is no world beyond one's own time. In fact, 'I am swept along into personal existence by a time that I do not constitute' (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p. 362/404). Merleau-Ponty uses the concept of our personal temporalities to explain how we can encounter and understand other consciousnesses/subjectivities intertwining in 'the thickness of the pre-objective present' (ibid, p. 457/496). We are able to access objective time rather than subjective time through the fact that time has preserved what has passed and that the future is 'destined to pass by' (ibid, p. 443/482). Merleau-Ponty goes on to quote Heidegger 'temporality temporalizes itself as a future-that-goes-into-the-past-by-coming-into-the-present' (ibid, p. 443/482). It is interesting that the various philosophers that I have engaged with view time so differently. Bergson seems to read time from the past and Heidegger from the future. Tuan believes that '[l]ife is lived in the future, which may be as close as the next meal or as distant as the next promotion up the ladder of success' (2007, p. 132). Merleau-Ponty reads time as a sensuous present that unfolds to reveal entities. Time, he writes, 'reveals the subject and the object as two abstract moments of a unique structure, namely, presence' (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p. 454-455/494). Nishida came to my attention in his account of experience in which 'pure experience' is the basis of every sensory and perceptual encounter and comes before the separation of subject and object. He is interesting for this thesis at this point because he does not have a distinct subject separated from a distinct object. He

reads time as continual and experiential.

Time is essential for a person to encounter ∞ the thing is the other entity in the encounter.

Things

The purely phenomenological way of reading encounters became more problematic when I came to *things* as I was unable to maintain an entirely human focus. An [ambient] advert is a thing, yet it is far from inert. It is not a discrete thing that stuff happens to. I knew this instinctively as an advertising practitioner but also through my action research with participants (this will be detailed in chapters 4 and 5). The phenomenological subject's relationship with objects/things was problematic as things were much denser and more connected than appearances and utility could account for.

Merleau-Ponty sketched out in 'Phenomenology of Perception' how '[vision] is accomplished and fulfilled in the thing seen' (2014, p. 395/435). There is a relationship in which human intent is realised through a thing, and sight 'escapes itself into the thing that is seen' (ibid, p. 395-396/436). This is where there is attentive contact. For him vision resided in the subject but is drawn into and only made real by the object/thing, by the world. We see an [ambient] advert, this is our first point of encounter. There are two parts to this encounter, the person seeing and the thing seen.

Merleau-Ponty comments, in reference to philosopher George Berkeley, that,

'the thing can never be separated from someone who perceives it; nor can it ever actually be in itself because its articulations are the very ones of our existence, and because it is posited at the end of a gaze or at the conclusion of a sensory experience that invests it with humanity' (2014, p. 334/376).

This is a very human-centred way of imaging the world, things only exist because of our perceptions. Perhaps this is in part because we only understand our own bodies through our interactions with things. The subject reduces a thing through perception to something as it appears for one-self. It is not a thing that exists by itself. This articulation of the actualisation of something by way of perception does not feel very far from Deleuze and Guattari's personae within the assemblage and this will be looked at later in the chapter and then again in chapter 5 as the key theme *Assembled* (2025).

Heidegger prefers to use the term *zeug* which translates roughly to 'stuff' tending not to use 'the word 'object,' which has traditionally been used to name objects of cognition' (Käufer and Chemero, 2021, p. 62). For Heidegger the world has plenty of stuff ready to be used in service of Dasein. We perceive usefulness and that is for Heidegger our relationship with things (Carman, 2020). Heidegger uses 'ready-to-hand' or handiness to describe the relationship of objects with usefulness. Unlike Dasein, stuff does not have a world of its own. Objects exist 'in order to' perform a certain function, this is the relation (Heidegger, 2019, p. 97). The object comes to our attention within a framework of meaning and use. Objects that are intended as signs, such as road signs (see Fig. 37, road signs), are also 'ready-to-hand' for the driver (ibid, p. 109). Objects relate to other objects in an interconnected set of relations and categories that are relevant to human-beings known as the 'referential totality'. For example, spoons relate to forks relate to plates relate to place settings relate to lunch time. These objects are 'in serviceability for' but are not signs that simply point at another thing, rather they allow their context to become visible (ibid, p. 109).



Fig. 37: Signs that are part of the referential totality of street signs (2019)

This gives all stuff a relation that is realised through Dasein. And the context referred to is one of use. Value is given to the encounter if it is useful. This is of course problematic. Seeing the stuff of the world as things that we can use at will can only lead to a disrespect for the thing and the world, and this is how it played out in Heidegger-

ger's own life. Additionally seeing all things as functions of categories limits the richness and capacity inherent in all things. A plate may relate to lunchtime in this conception, but in another's eye it can become a piece of art, a hat, a wheel. [Ambient] advertising is noticed precisely because it is not easy to categorise, and it is open to being many things (see chapter 1).

The matter of matter

There is a relationship in Merleau-Ponty's later thoughts on vision that is more connected and relational than appears at first sight in 'Phenomenology of Perception' but, for me, at least, was always already present. We are sensuously and perceptually connected to matter, histories and meanings. In his later life he imagined the world as flesh, with a chiasmic relationship between viewer and viewed. 'It is as though our vision were formed in the heart of the visible, or as though there were between it and us an intimacy as close as between the sea and the strand' (1968, p. 130–131). The world had become thick with interaction. We experience the real world, not a projected world, and this world of 'the "real" is the insurmountable plenitude' (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p. 337/379). It is everything all at once and connected. But the world is so huge that as humans, with human perceptions and perspectives, we cannot see it all at once, things can only appear to us as a thing if we allow other things to be backgrounded. This is both spatial and temporal as we also have a present, foregrounded from the flow.

Bergson expresses this connection rather beautifully in 'Matter and Memory',

'matter thus resolves itself into numberless vibrations, all linked together in uninterrupted continuity, all bound up with each other, and travelling in every direction like shivers through an immense body' (1994, p. 208).

This is important in relation to process philosophy and relations. There is a certain thickness to existence and our experience of things. It paints a picture of the world, or perhaps it would be clearer to say a picture of a plane of existence, or plane of immanence to borrow the term from Deleuze and Guattari, in which we are part. We are made of the same matter as things. Within his argument is also the seeds of becoming, a concept that was later developed notably by philosopher Whitehead, then further by Deleuze and Guattari, and yet further by feminist theorist and physicist Karen Barad. Humans tend to abstract and create discrete things. We

imagine stable things that change, rather than things in the process of continual change. The philosophical concept of becoming is very interesting ontologically, and I have touched on it a few times in this chapter however this research has as its focus human experience and a human encounter. I touch upon process philosophy here because it is a foundational element of both Barad's and political theorist Jane Bennett's thinking (Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010). These theorists underpin McGregor's paper which brings Phenomenology and New Materialism together.

Merleau-Ponty's later thinking shares some similarities with Nishida, in his view that the body is not separate from the world, there is a flesh that is an inseparable part of a whole. Nishida dismisses Phenomenology's reliance on the transcendental and the supremacy of the human. He notes that we should not think of things as 'absolutely passive' or that to imagine that things are 'subsumed within' the viewer (2012, p. 36). He cautions that 'what is acted upon must also be that which acts. Thus, to the extent that two things mutually interact, both together lose their independence and are unified by a single force' (ibid, p. 36). By this he does not mean that 'a thing acts,' rather that 'it can be thought that a thing is caused to move' (2012, p. 37). Participant M5 moves the ribbon, and the tag is caused to move (Fig. 38).



Fig. 38: Participant M5 touches the [ambient] advert

A similar idea is picked up and expanded upon by Barad in her exploration of New Materialism, this time conceiving of very active material properties exemplified in her lyrical description of a bolt

of lightning (2015). It is a mutual action expressed in movement. McGregor draws some interesting parallels between feminist phenomenology and New Materialist thinking in which ‘matter co-constitutes human subjectivity,’ (2020, p. 508). McGregor goes on to comment that,

‘The lively matter of the world—buildings, floors, books, animals, plants, people, the sounds of the train going by—is entangled. This entanglement is what Barad calls an ongoing intra-active phenomena, becoming not just a collection of things together, but an entanglement of relationships and shifting patterns of agentic forces’ (2020, p. 509).

I read agentic forces not as personification, that imagines and extends a version of human intentionality and desires upon the energy and material of the world, but as the type of act described by Nishida, as one that creates and unites through symbiotic action. New Materialists do not imagine material with subjective intentionality or emotional capacity, simply that all material has some agency. Barad portrays the human as undergoing constant change through intra-action between the human and non-human parts of the world. In her reading of the world not only is there is no stable subject at the centre of a subjective viewpoint but also the centre itself may not be human. Here, there are also no independent things there are only entities that emerge from intra-actions. As McGregor points out in her analysis of Barad’s philosophy, the phenomena or relation is what causes the existence of things. It is an entanglement of the various relations between things with agency. The importance of embodiment and lived experience is acknowledged from this phenomenological place yet there is a reaching out towards Deleuze and Guattari. In the dynamic aspects of materiality, I found a synergy with assemblages made of becoming networks of human and the non-human. Here embodiment and lived experience could have a relationship with lines of flight in order to escape existing ways of thinking and find new possibilities. This leads into the concepts of multiplicities and assemblages that follow and later explored in *Assembled* and *In-and-Out-of-Place* in chapter 5.

McGregor asks, ‘if human subjectivity is no longer seen as the entry point to the phenomenon, is it still phenomenology?’ (2020, p. 508). The phenomenologist argument is one in which we see things as an object for our actions, or it is formed by our actions. At a surface level this would appear to be true. As an advertising practitioner I form the [ambient] advertising materials that will be placed in the world, they are subject to my intentions. They did not form them-

selves into typography printed on a card. However, these things then act upon other things (including humans) and intra-act in the world in ways beyond my control. Things act. This could be witnessed in the films provided by my research participants (see chapters 4 and 5). The entanglement of the material world in an encounter from a thing to a human and back again is clear within the observed world, for example when we shield our eyes from the reflection of the sun's rays in a window. The seemingly empty air between the stuff of the world is thick with intra-action. Physics and Barad have taught us this much.

[Ambient] advertising is a material thing in the world and part of the world that affects and is affected, much more so than with advertising in framed media spaces (see chapter 1). A hand that flips over a tag (see chapter 4), a foot that crunches leaves scattered over a chalk drawing of a bowl of cornflakes (see chapter 1) are one part of the encounter. However, within the moment of encounter there is also a ribbon curling and twisting in the breeze glimpsed by an eye (see chapters 4 and 5), and a turnstile that jars temporarily stalling a body mid step. This would be the agency of Bennett's 'lively matter' (2010), and the act of Nishida's mutual interaction (2012), and our sensory and perceptual entanglements (Merleau-Ponty, 1968).

Active ∞ passive.

Inert ∞ mobile.

Matter affecting matter.

The complexity of an [ambient] advert does not stop here, even more so than with material affects, an [ambient] advert is subject to a myriad of societal contexts. Relations and connections that are multiple.

The multiplicity

Multiplicity is a concept that seems to be drawn directly from Bergson, though it is fundamentally part of a wider age-old philosophical conundrum - is our reality made up of one reality or many? Deleuze refers to the 'dialectical opposition of the one and the multiple' pointing to Bergson's body of work in which he 'continually denounces the dialectic as an abstract thought, as a false movement that goes from one opposite to the other,' (Deleuze, 1969, p. 1). Even if we imagine anything as singular, it can be broken down into smaller parts, so it becomes the many once more. There is no logical way out of this dualism, even thinking about it creates a tautology.

‘Everything is a multiplicity,’ writes Deleuze, ‘Even the many is a multiplicity; even the one is a multiplicity... Instead of the enormous opposition between the one and the many, there is only the variety of multiplicity - in other words, difference’ (Deleuze, 1994, p. 182).

It is the human condition to ‘live among actual multiplicities (and are ourselves multiplicities)’ notes professor of philosophy Jonathan Roffe, in this way ‘we are always elements and actors within the world’ acted upon and acting on others and things (2010, p. 182).

Bergson introduces multiplicity to talk about the whole and the many in *Time and Free Will* (2001). To make this clearer he describes our habit of thinking of a number spatially, as separate units that can be sliced into smaller units. This is a numerical multiplicity. However, we cannot think of many things in that way. For example, I cannot be three times happier than I was earlier or I cannot add one more unit of happiness. Some things can only be described in intensities and cannot be reducible to singular units. There is not a whole happiness that can be cut up into happy units. Time is imagined as a multiplicity formed of intensities and so too is happiness. The happiness is in process, which is not whole or many, the intensity can grow or recede. Deleuze and Guattari build on this in *A Thousand Plateaus* expressing that they ‘do not have units (unités) of measure, only multiplicities or varieties of measurement’ adding that temperature cannot be divided (2020, p. 7).

Deleuze makes the point in *Difference and Repetition* that mathematical thinking reduces everything to units of sameness (or identity), which then can be reduced to the many once more. ‘Identity is opposed to multiplicity, in that multiplicity is both uncountable and not open to a reductive logical or mathematical analysis’ (Williams, 2010, p. 127). Mathematical thinking, and the many and the one are precisely what Bergson and Deleuze feel we need to move away from to understand anything at all.

Deleuze’s depiction of multiplicity in *Difference and Repetition* can be quite elusive and slippery. He talks about substance, which we usually think of as a thing with material properties, but he does not mean it as a anything that we can identify as a thing. Where Bergson does not like us to spatialise a concept, Deleuze does not like any form of representation. Where I might draw the analogy that substance here is not formed and is changeable like smoke, that already gives it an actuality that is misleading. ‘[A]ll multiplicities are flat,’ write Deleuze and Guattari, ‘in the sense that they fill or occupy all of their dimensions’ (2020, p. 8). This multiplicity exists

on a plane filled with connections, the Plane of Consistency. For Deleuze the substance he refers to is difference, the infinite variety, potentiality. Thus, multiplicity is, for him, essentially virtual. It is created through not yet settled variables, by way of changes within and between these variables, and through the actualisation or definition of these variables in relation to each other – it is a three-part structure (Deleuze, 1994).

While this discussion may feel overly theoretical, conceiving of [ambient] advertising as a multiplicity of relations between variables rather than a fixed thing is very useful. There is no pretending that [ambient] advertising exists on the virtual plane; it is most definitely something that exists in the lived world (notwithstanding digital executions that were discussed in chapter 1). However, there is no fixed form, it can be engaged with from any number of points, the variables cannot all be defined in advance of the piece, and it changes in relation to changes in the variables that actualise it. It is in this way that an [ambient] advert becomes an assemblage, please see chapter 5 *Assembled*. Deleuze and Guattari write that,

‘[a]n assemblage, in its multiplicity, necessarily acts on semiotic flows, material flows, and social flows simultaneously (independently of any recapitulation that may be made of it in a scientific or theoretical corpus)’ (2020, p. 24).

It acts on, and is actualised by, these many flows and the unsettled variables from within the multiplicity. The [ambient] advert encountered is a multiplicity rather than a discrete thing.

Assemblage

Assemblage is a concept that was coined by Guattari in 1964 but has since been expanded upon by Deleuze and Guattari and philosopher Manuel Delanda. It first appeared as the term *agencement* but has since been transformed through translation into *assemblage*. Philosopher Thomas Nail characterises *agencement* as a whole arrangement that has been actively constructed through a number of different elements, which may be, for example, material, agential, semiotic (2017, p. 22). Professor of Communication Studies J. Macgregor Wise adds that it is important to remember ‘that *agencement* is not a static term’ rather it is a ‘process’ that brings things together (2011, p. 91).

The concept of assemblages has been brought to advertising and

branding in a handful of texts. In her PhD Moor draws on assemblages to understand how brand experiences and environments such as Nike Town are complex and fluid and make use of elements like architecture, design, products and customer experiences as one (2004, p. 75). She went on to write about how branded experiences use territorialisation, deterritorialization and reterritorialization to gain new customers and create new meanings. Importantly for [ambient] advertising she noticed that agencies had re-conceptualised medium, enabling the van delivering products to store to become as important, in terms of commercial communication, as any products inside the van (2004, p. 88).



Figs. 39, 40 and 41: Participant G9 photographs a series of chairs from her favourite places on the street (2023)

Researcher and architect Anna Klingmann looked more broadly at the relationships between branding and the built environment. She describes how meanings are developed in an experience economy in which architecture works as a language of signs. ‘Companies’ she writes ‘compete with one another in a war of signs,’ (2010, p. 56). Her key example is Disneyland which she considers the perfect illustration of brandscaping. This is a whole world created to embody Disney’s brand values. Flagship stores often do the same. Both Moor and Klingmann focus on how consumption is woven into the creation of branded spaces. Seating outside an establishment becomes part of the wider assemblage of the brand’s communications about its values (see Figs. 39,40 and 41).

Another key figure is Celia Lury who describes brands as ‘a set of relations between products or services’ (2006, p. 1, my emphasis). While she is specifically describing brands, branding organisations,

consumers, products and ideas, her depiction of brands as ‘devices for the reflexive organization of a set of multi-dimensional relations’ is useful (2009, p. 77). Identifying material properties such as logos and retail environments, to the more abstract such as associations and values, to public-facing interactions and experiences, to financial considerations. It allows us to look again at the complexity of social, ideological, historical, material, managerial, strategic and imaginary relations within a commercial context. Brands and branding are more than semiotic devices to communicate desire and consumption, they are a set of relations between heterogeneous things.

More recently professors of marketing, Wanderklayson Aparecido Medeiros de Oliveira and Marcelo de Rezende Pinto bring assemblage theory into a relationship with Consumer Culture Theory (CCT). CCT is interested in how consumption forges identities, social relations and common languages and culture more broadly. An analysis of CCT is beyond the scope of this thesis, however it worth noting that the professors of marketing that first introduced CCT as a theory, Eric J. Arnould and Craig J. Thompson, describe it as a way to ‘address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meaning’ (2005, p. 868). Many of the critiques levelled at phenomenology were that it did not take these factors into sufficient consideration. Oliveira and Pinto’s focus on ‘material semiotics,’ and the ‘networks of relationships in which they are located,’ to show how assemblage can accommodate ‘the fluid nature of socio-material collectivities’ both allow ‘contingent relationships between components[,] and continuous revision’ (2023, p. 24). They argue that assemblage theory brings a level of complexity, dynamism and interconnectedness that is missing in traditional CCT, that tends to focus on individual interpretations. Through assemblage they can attend to the new things that are created in the minds of consumers, seeing consumers as active and not passive, and their behaviours as fluid within this context.

Deleuze and Guattari outline assemblages as a set of relations that materialise across two axes. To spatialise for a moment they imagine the horizontal axis as separated into two parts. The first containing ‘a machinic assemblage of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another,’ entities and elements (2020, p. 102), the second ‘a collective assemblage of enunciation, of acts and statements’ signs and laws (2020, p. 103, *their emphasis*). The vertical axis also is imagined in two parts, one part that ‘stabilize[s],’ by creating a territory for itself and the second part that consistently allows for a movement away, a ‘deterritorialization’ a

re-imagining (ibid, p. 103, their emphasis). They give the example of feudalism. The assemblage is formed along; the x axis through the feudal system itself, Kings, lords, peasants, weapons and knights, and the laws and beliefs that support this, and the y axis through the existing territories that support the feudal state and the 'line of deterritorialization' that takes the knight and his crusade elsewhere (de Oliveira and Pinto, 2023, p. 24) Intrinsic to this example, and to their understanding is that the assemblage cannot be dissociated from its historical, social, ideological and semiotic relationships. Assemblage theory 'allows for constructing descriptions in which materials (tangible things) and semiotic elements (expressions of various kinds) become interconnected and shape each other' (de Oliveira and Pinto, 2023, p. 24). All assemblages share three characteristics, multiplicities, the abstract machine, and personae.

The abstract machine, 'is not a thing or object that exists in the world, but rather something that lays out a set of relations wherein concrete elements and agencies appear' (Nail, 2017, p. 24). As such it is not concrete but abstract, or a potential plan – a diagram of sorts. It is a field of potential relations, the virtual. This is a plane of immanence 'which at every instant causes the given to be given, in this or that state, at this or that moment. But the plane itself is not given' allows the live relation, the assemblage to unfold (Deleuze and Guattari, 2020, p. 309). The abstract machine is the diagram of relationships that can be drawn between the constituent parts.

The concrete assemblage is actualised from any number of potentials from that plane, whichever components that are of use. These components are the constituent parts of the assemblage. So, the feudal assemblage is made of metals and leathers, human bodies and horses, earth and grain, laws and profanities - to name a few of the parts. It is the interaction of these various components through the conditions in which they present themselves that creates the machine and is created by the machine. Professor of Architecture, Graham Livesey, notes that '[a]n assemblage emerges when a function emerges; ideally it is innovative and productive' (2010, p. 19).

If we were to take, for example, the 2019 McCann London [ambient] advert Toxic Toby for Breezometer (Fig. 22 as discussed in chapter 1), we can conceive of it in this way. The abstract machine is the relationships that can be drawn between the constituent parts, such as the relationship between pollution and coughing, the relationship between memorials on street furniture and road deaths. These relations are what allow such vastly different elements to reach towards each other. The concrete assemblage is the elements that

through their connection create the advert 'like the configurations of a machine' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 36), The x axis of the assemblage would be the road, traffic lights, road crossings, buses, cars, cyclists, pedestrians, the lamppost, the teddy bear, the note, the behaviour that puts up memorials to those killed in road traffic accidents, the traffic noise, the exhaust fumes, the 'systems of signs' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2020, p. 504). The y axis would be the road system, the belief that road traffic is necessary to be a productive society, laws around pollution, laws that govern road safety, and the 'line of deterritorialization' allows the place for a memorial to become a place for a warning about pollution, allows us to imagine a place without pollution. Through the content and expression of the assemblage there is communication and affect, 'expression in it becomes a semiotic system, a regime of signs, and content becomes a pragmatic system, actions and passions' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2020, p. 586). To adapt Livesey's statement if I may, an [ambient] advert emerges when a function emerges; ideally it is innovative and productive.



Repeat of Fig. 22: Toxic Toby created in 2019 for Breezometer

For Deleuze and Guattari everything in the world is a multiplicity, there is no base unified thing. This is evidently so in [ambient] advertising whose various heterogenous constituent parts form a multiplicity. All of these variables do not need to have the specific actualisation, the specific lamppost, the specific street, a certain unit of exhaust fumes, the specific appearance of the teddy bear, consequently there is no fixed form – the bear could be on a lamppost or

on a stop sign, it can have flowers or no flowers, the note could say something different, the bear could be a rabbit or a giraffe if the mechanic is transferable, the cough can be different, the density of traffic can change. All these elements do something rather than simply are something. The variables cannot all be fixed in advance of installing an [ambient] advert and they are not strictly important in their details; they are part of a diagram of relations. The [ambient] advert cannot exist until all things come together.

‘Assemblages’ notes Nigel Thrift ‘will function quite differently according to local circumstance not because they are an overarching structure adapting its rules to the particular situation but because these manifestations are what the assemblage consists of’ (2005, p. 94).

What is true of assemblage is also true of [ambient] advertising, in that if one part of it was removed the whole thing is altered – without the coughing bear, without the very human behaviour of putting up a street memorial to a lost loved one, without the fumes there is no [ambient] advert. DeLanda points out that we need to consider the parts, if a part is removed not only will the whole assemblage change but the part itself will also change (2019). The bear is just a moving bear without the lamppost and the traffic. Delanda also notes that for Deleuze and Guattari an assemblage is unlike an organism, in an assemblage the parts can be separated, they are interrelated but are not entangled in the manner of a kidney and its blood vessels. The [ambient] advert can also be engaged with from any number of points, passer-by may see the teddy bear, the flowers may trigger a memory, they may hear the cough, they may be crossing the road, they may be stood next to it looking up air quality on their phone. The final constituting part of an assemblage is a personae. Assemblages need active situated perspectives to realise them. For Deleuze and Guattari these perspectives are not subjects, as are more commonly understood in phenomenological accounts of experience, they are personae who bring about the assemblage. ‘[T]he conceptual persona is needed to create concepts on the plane, just as the plane itself needs to be laid out’ they write (1994, p. 75–76). The personae creates the map of relations. Nail notes ‘one cannot have an assemblage without agents that bring it about’ (2017, p. 27). Yet, these personae are also created through the assemblage, they exist in the third person as an entity that is itself a set of relations, ideologically, culturally, societally (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994). The theme of assemblages will be revisited in *Assembled* in chapter 5.

The gap between the personae and a situated perspective, between

Deleuze and Guattari's active becoming things and a more phenomenological reading of the encounter has perplexed me throughout this research, and I touch on it in *In-and-Out-of-Place* in Chapter 5. If this were a philosophy PhD I would pursue it further. However, this is not a philosophical enquiry, I am simply using philosophical tools to help me understand this moment of encounter in a practical sense – a passer-by encountering an [ambient] advert – so I have to leave this gap here, something for further research.

Conclusion

This chapter works closely with chapter 1, and brings the thinking of philosophers, ethnographers, media theorists, human geographers, cognitive psychologists to work alongside the advertising theorists and practitioners to better understand attention, perception and encounter. It was necessary to significantly broaden the literature when I noticed how existing advertising frameworks for theorising interactions with [ambient] advertising did not explain the complexities of a person encountering an [ambient] advert in the messy and everyday world, a world full of distractions. It is closely coupled with chapter 5 and the deeper themes that I drew out from the participant data.

In this chapter it was important to me to take the reader through the ways that various philosophies developed and interacted with each other, to better explain how they affected my understanding of that moment. I went into the research believing I could tackle this with some grounding in spatial philosophy, Lefebvre and Tuan with some input from the situationists and Perec. I imagined a very functional PhD that perhaps tested different executions in place. After conducting fieldwork on the ground (please see chapter 4), I came to understand that this would not be the case. I started to look at situatedness, embodiment and the role of the human. I realised that all these things require some theoretical reflection without necessarily burdening myself with a full critique of the position. While Merleau-Ponty and other phenomenologists created opportunities of thought, and philosophical tools that allowed me to engage with participant experiences, they have also thrown up some barriers that I had to find new ways to think through.

Phenomenology came in through the action-research cycle (please see chapters 3 and 4). By reflecting on participant materials and reading new texts I realised that I needed better tools to understand behaviours. Led by on the ground research I could see that phenomenology was not fully dealing with the [ambient] advert or

the context, or indeed my findings. The inclusion of Bergson in this chapter is because I appreciate the contribution that process philosophy has made, and that it is part of a theory I need to understand encounters with [ambient] advertising, one that is made by reaching towards multiplicities and assemblages while not fully leaving the human.

Phenomenology based its understanding of the world on some core assumptions, and it is these assumptions that have proven problematic to many philosophers that followed. As this thesis makes no claims to be a philosophical critique of phenomenology, I can only address the problems that I encountered with the texts, and when dealing with the material provided by my research participants (detailed in chapters 4 and 5), even while finding phenomenology an extremely useful way to understand human experience. I found myself questioning the assumptions that,

- There is an essential world
- The world is unchanging
- A singular experience can be transcended and extrapolated to the universal
- The universal experience is male, white, straight and able-bodied, the impacts of, for example, neurodiversity or enslavement could be bracketed away.
- The person experiencing is a stable, never-changing subject
- Things in the world can be seen as separate objects with no relations that are not centred on human perception or use

Husserl described a phenomenological form of pure looking that is shared by humans. In order to get to universal truths about experience our singular consciousness needs to be transcended and as a consequence he introduced the transcendental reduction. All non-essential information would be bracketed out in order to reveal an underlying and present essential world. Even within phenomenological circles the idea of a transcendental reduction was not without critique, for Merleau-Ponty a true transcendental reduction was something that could not be achieved. Deleuze and Guattari write dismissively, 'Transcendence: a specifically European disease' (2020, p. 19). Art critic Jonathan Crary, referring to Foucault's 1971 book, *The Order of Things*, described a fundamental problem with a philosophy 'in which man emerges as a being in whom the transcendent is mapped onto the empirical' (1995, p. 36). The transcendental

experience is taken as a universal fact. Professor of Literature Kenneth Surin adds that because phenomenology was unable to rid itself of 'transcendental subjectivism, The phenomenological paradigm was increasingly perceived to have struck its equivalent of the proverbial iceberg' (2011, p. 26).

The universalising of singular experience was also a critique levelled by philosopher Theodor Adorno who felt that both human experience and the society in which we live are subject to change over time. The impacts on a person's experience of the world by way of societal expectations, ideologies, economics, representation, laws and language, are rarely commented upon in traditional phenomenology. Feminist Consumer Culture theorist Usva Anastasia Seregina, points to CCT's reliance on phenomenological approaches at the expense of ideological, societal and cultural understandings (Seregina, 2020). The concept of an unchanging stable subject, an 'I' that instigates all intentional acts, that is somehow immune to pushes and desires from the ideologies and societies they come from is problematic. Philosopher Rosi Braidotti asks us to remember that 'the Deleuzian subject is produced through a multiplicity of connections that unfold in a process of becoming' (2010, p. 151). '[O]ur body is not the object of an "I think" writes Merleau-Ponty in language not too dissimilar to Deleuze, 'it is a totality of lived significations that moves towards its equilibrium' (2014, p. 155/190). It is a grouping of lived meanings, a multiple.

In addition to the stable self a further problem was identified as the reliance on a subject-object relationship. Objects in the world are thicker, more connected and less passive than would appear. Take for example a lamppost, a lamppost that will become a part of the [ambient] advert intervention detailed in chapter 3 and encountered by participants in chapter 4. The lamppost is its height, its position, its colour, the material it is made of, its texture, the sound it makes when it is knocked, how light plays on its surface, its relationship with inevitable decay. However, the lamppost is also the connection to the electricity grid, the belief that societies need to be lit at night, relationships to law, safety and punishment, relationships to property and ownership. It is the company that built it, the designer that designed it, the people that installed it and the system they live in. In addition to that, it is also connected with our behaviours, desires and lived experiences. Lury points out that in various marketing sub-disciplines, and this would include [ambient] advertising, 'there is a clear concern with habits and precepts, and attempts to understand the temporality of a body by plugging it into a field of action' (2009, p. 75). This lamppost becomes part of our habits, we are comforted by the presence of light at night and walk on the side of the street

where it shines its light, during the summer months communities may attach baskets of flowers to it, in the winter it activates earlier. The lamppost is not the same for everyone, it is not even the same for the same person at different times of the day (this will be explored further in chapter 4), if one can speak about the same person at this stage.

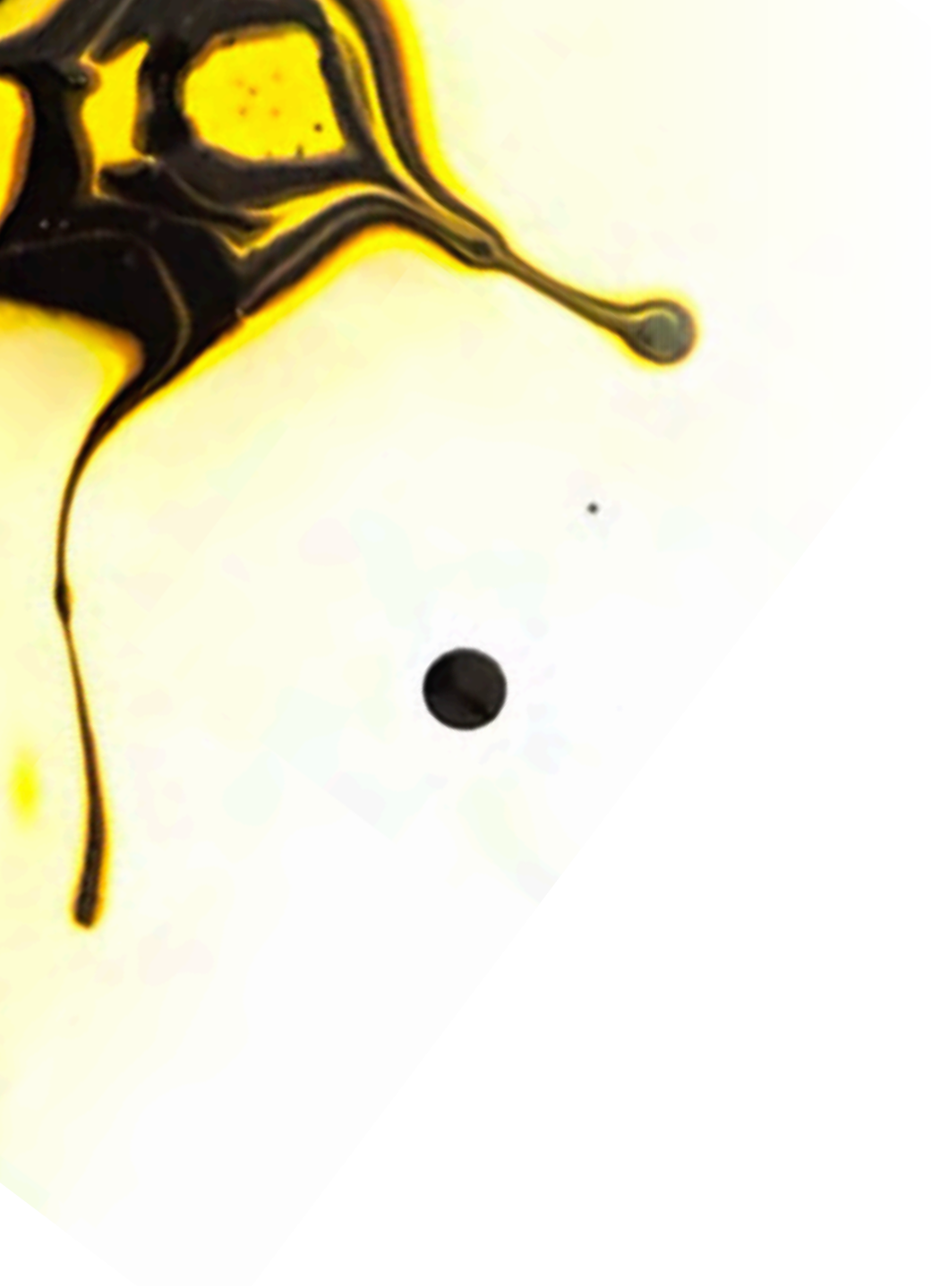
My thesis and research is reflexive precisely because I do not believe my own experiences can be bracketed out and I believe I bring my worldview to the research (see chapter 5). My research is reflective. It is the conversations I am having internally in my head with myself, with the world, with my subject of research and with my reader. It is part of my process (see chapter 4). My research is multiple because I do not believe the singular experience can be mapped onto the world as a universal, in fact the impacts of gendered experiences were made evident by participant comments (see chapter 4). We understand the stuff of the world as we encounter it, as Seamon describes it through 'attentive contact' (1979), further explained through the themes in chapter 5. Deleuze depicts certain encounters cause a change in direction of our thoughts, as that which 'forces thought to raise up and educate the absolute necessity of an act of thought or a passion to think' (1994, p. 139). However, encounters need not be so forceful as to stop us but they may cause a pause in our flow (Tuan, 2007), a shift (please see chapter 5). '[A]ccidental or chance encounters do happen, and they redirect us and open up new worlds' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 19). My research sought to capture moments of encounter with, and attention to, [ambient] advertising and in doing so the research became something more philosophical (see chapter 5).

ourselves ∞ encountering ∞ things

This is fundamentally the framework that has developed throughout the PhD.



Fig. 42: Filming the movement of marbling inks in order to think about moments of contact, (2024)



CHAPTER 3

Capturing Moments of Encounter

Advertising is an interdisciplinary field encompassing disciplines such as media and communications studies, creative arts, cultural studies, social sciences, and business studies. This zone/expanse/neighbourhood is regularly subject to territorial disputes, is under co-ownership from time to time, and has small, unexpected zones of terra nullius. I have experienced this in industry, in research and teaching. While research about advertising has tended to come from one neighbouring discipline or another, for me, as a resident in creative media practice, the development of a methodological framework to learn about and understand people's encounters with [ambient] advertising in everyday places, and the contexts that affect that encounter, was always likely to draw upon the interdisciplinary nature of this field, make use of a multi-method approach and bring in practice

An overview

The use of multi-methods woven together is often described as bricolage (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). My entire research design is assembled as an epistemological 'bricolage' through different ways of knowing and methods (Freeman, 2007, p. 491 referencing Lévi-Strauss, C, 1966). It can be traced back to a form of constructiveness explored by Heidegger and developed through post-structuralism and postmodernism that gives rise to an acceptance of multiple viewpoints and perspectives (Turkle and Papert, 1991). Additionally it allows various methods to work orchestrally, 'in concert with one another,' each doing what it does best, cross-validating, supporting and ultimately creating something that could not have been made singularly (Brewer and Hunter, 2005, p. xiii) . Please see *Desktop ∞ thinking* in chapter 5 for a return to the orchestra.

In addition to multi-method, a mixed methods approach was taken to bring together the qualitative and quantitative data that emerged through the use of time-based tools and photography. Mixed methods is a methodological approach that has been acknowledged by a number of different disciplines (Alise and Teddlie, 2010; Ivankova and Wingo, 2018), allowing researchers to integrate both qualitative and quantitative findings (Tashakkori and Creswell, 2007; Sorrentino, 2020b). 'It allows for diversity of thought and accommodates real-life experiences and 'contextual understandings' (Sorrentino, 2020b, p. 99 building on Ivankova and Wingo, 2018, p980).

The starting point for my research was as a practitioner. I had made [ambient] advertising at various agencies back when [ambient] advertising was more common. The act of coming up with an idea that would be placed out in the world was a normal thing for me. Both in industry and upon entering teaching I had been curious about the type of attention given to [ambient] pieces and, as described in the introduction, I was quite frustrated by the limited research conducted outside in everyday places. My research was driven by a desire to learn about people's experiences with [ambient] advertising in context. This tilted the research design towards an inductive approach, working from the bottom up, from the practice to the theory.

My experience as a creative practitioner opened up the potential of action research, a framework that allowed me to put up [ambient] advertising interventions in the world and capture what happened. Action research draws on both Dewey and Schön and their consideration of practitioner knowledge within the action-reflection cycle (McNiff, 2017). It was a framework in which the practitioner was at the core. There are many types of action research; Reason and Bradbury describe a contemporary action research scene in which there is a 'whole family of approaches to inquiry which are participative, grounded in experience, and action-oriented' (2008, p. xxiv). It 'can and should incorporate a range of methods from other approaches' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2011, p. 49). This freedom to combine methods works well in practice research (Tashakkori and Creswell, 2007).

Central to action research are participants and the perspectives they bring. Acknowledging that these consciously situated knowledges have the potential to reveal insights that are not accessed through more scientific and 'objective' methods (Haraway, 1988) was in line with a more phenomenological approach (please see chapter 2). Situatedness was to become a key concern in my later analysis and tinkering (please see chapter 5). Merleau-Ponty's description of how we intend towards the world and perceive things sensorily and cognitively is very important (see Chapter 2). It gives us the human part of the encounter. The advert emerges from the background milieu as we pay attention, but it does not do this immediately and with full meaning; it impresses itself upon us over time in the pause as is constructed with us. By the time we see it as a figure distinct from the background, it has brought the context, the field of meaning, and relations with it. What we perceive is not a senseless tangle of data but a complex set of potentialities.

The question at the core of this research asks how and in what ways do participants encounter and give attention to [ambient] advertising in everyday places.

The objectives to achieve this are:

- 1 To conduct a review of existing literature and methodological approaches used by theorists and researchers to investigate understandings of perception, attention and encounter in relation to ambient advertising in everyday spaces
- 2 To design a multi-methodological framework that blends principles from phenomenology, sensory ethnography, action research with practice to capture the ways in which people perceive and pay attention to ambient advertising
- 3 To apply this new methodological framework (in three phases) in public spaces, to explore the various ways participants encounter and pay attention to ambient advertising in everyday places
- 4 To analyse the contextual elements from the everyday world that co-assemble an ambient advert as something to pay attention to

These objectives drew the research towards live ethnomethods that could actively chronicle attention, such as photography, film and audio diaries. I trialled several methods that use such technologies (detailed later in this chapter). I avoided methods such as eye-tracking as I felt it overly emphasised active looking as a measure of attention, and it brought ‘measuring’ to the fore.

It should be noted that action research is a framework that has rarely been used to investigate advertising (Wiggins, 2019). Researchers attribute this to the outward-facing nature of marketing companies (See Eng and Dholakia, 2019; Kates and Robertson, 2004), noting that they have a more ‘external focus’ and a responsive relationship with the ‘eternal reality of customers and competitors’ (Perry and Gummeson, 2004, p. 318). Additionally, in common with the broader aims of action research, these researchers apply the framework to the study of marketing organisations and their contexts rather than the study of adverts themselves.

As is the norm in action research, in conjunction with experimentation,

I read, evaluated, analysed and reflected in a spiral. The reading was ongoing and helped shape my understanding of the participant data and suggested new themes. To analyse the data, I made use of two other methods that I will explore later in more detail; reflexive thematic analysis, to help familiarise myself with the material and to draw out themes, and a practice method, tinkering, to help me reflect on the themes, think more deeply and make connections that I may not have otherwise made. The use of practice as a method is an approach which can uncover ‘new data through real experiential activity’ (Gray and Malins, 2004, p. 105). Seregina notes that it is not without precedent to use more creative methods to investigate consumer culture as it ‘has a long - standing history of using alternative research methods’ (Seregina, 2020, p. 514). Action research, Reflexive thematic analysis and tinkering all have reflection and reflexivity as core parts of their process. Reflectivity and reflexivity necessarily make the research subjective (please see the introduction for more detail).

Subjective research is often termed phenomenological research because it researches experiences from an individual perspective, however it need not use a phenomenological methodology. Sensory ethnographer Sarah Pink recounts an approach to ‘new ethnography’ in the 1980s that ‘emphasized the centrality of subjectivity to the production of knowledge’ (Pink, 2021, p. 4). This chimes with Merleau-Ponty’s belief that ‘things and instants can only be linked together to form a world through this ambiguous being that we call “subjectivity”’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p. 348). Pink acknowledges that Merleau-Ponty and psychologist James Gibson are central to theory in this area describing how ‘a sensory ethnography must be informed by a theory of sensory perception’ (2015, p. 13). Research such as mine that asks for situated perspectives in moments of contact need not have an ethnographic framework though may well use ethnographic methods. Estelle Barrett notes ‘embodied vision involves seeing something from somewhere’ and favours practice-research approaches (2018, p. 145). Projects that involve practice have subjectivity embedded; the researcher’s voice is present within the practice as part of the new knowledge. Reflexivity, tinkering and reflexive thematic analysis grounded me as a researcher within the study with my own consciously situated knowledge sitting alongside that of my participants. This could not claim to be an objective study, nor would it wish to be.

Advertising research with context in mind

To fulfil Objective 1, I had to conduct a review of existing literature

and methodological approaches used by theorists and researchers to investigate understanding of perception, attention and encounter in relation to ambient advertising in everyday spaces. This necessitated a contextual review in Chapter 1, a theoretical review in chapter 2, and in this chapter a closer look at methodologies.

There has been relatively few academic studies researching [ambient] advertising in the everyday urban environment. They are more commonly conducted within academic spaces or using online resources (Abdul-Razzaq, Ozanne and Fortin, 2009; Borghini et al., 2010; Hutter and Hoffman, 2011; Turk, Ewing and Newton, 2006). And, with the exception of the 2010 multinational ethnographic study by Stefania Borghini, Luca Visconti, Laurel Anderson, and John Sherry, Jr, who investigated how the creative use of media and execution can enhance consumers' perceptions of brands, the focus has been on effectiveness (Abdul-Razzaq, Ozanne and Fortin, 2009; Turk, Ewing and Newton, 2006) and the physical elements of ambient advertising that encourage engagement (Hutter and Hoffman, 2011; Yuen, 2017). Industry funded surveys such as The Harris Poll are particularly interested in the translation of engagement into 'real-world action' which they judge through recall (The Harris Poll, 2022, p. 3). The majority of academic research takes place in the artificial conditions of a laboratory, limiting contexts and other distractions from daily life (Duff, Faber and Nan, 2019) and they 'presuppose focal attention' (Wilson, Baack and Till, 2015, p. 232). The glimpse and the glance are lost, the context is lost, the everyday interweaving between life and media is lost. A number of researchers have identified the on-going need for fieldwork observing the reactions of passers-by, environmental effects and engagement (Abdul-Razzaq, Ozanne and Fortin, 2009; Bhargava and Donthu, 1999; Bennett, Kottasz and Koudelova, 2000; Gambetti, 2010; Gambetti and Schultz, 2015; Karimova, 2014; Rosengren, Modig and Dahlén, 2015; Yuen, 2017) though few have gone into everyday spaces to do it (exceptions will be discussed shortly). In associated fields there is a small, but growing interest, from geographers such as Anne Cronin (2006, 2008, 2010b, 2011). Her research into the impact of outdoor advertising in our urban environments is leading to fieldwork, though not on [ambient] advertising specifically. There is also some work from media theorists that look at advertising as concrete objects in the world (Dekeyser, 2018; Krajina, 2014) though they do not look at [ambient]. It is these rare latter exceptions that ground my understanding that this eclectic form of advertising needs to be experienced and researched on site in the corporeal world.

One of the most compelling reasons to look at [ambient] advertising in everyday environments, rather than in a detached space with

photographs, is that it is designed to be encountered in real-world contexts.

There are a handful of research studies whose methodology was predicated on investigating how media communications, such as [ambient] advertising, are encountered in our everyday lives. Wherever advertising is sited, the place itself and the communication are not separate from their surroundings, people move in and out of a place (Massey, 2005), and all manner of external influences seep into it changing and adding to its character (Moore, 1993). This taps into a non-media-centric strand of research conducted by media researchers with a foundation in phenomenology such as Morley, Moore, Krajina, Joke Hermes and Nick Couldry (Krajina, Moore and Morley, 2014). The consideration of this context and the network of relations and associations were very influential to my research design.

David Morley and Charlotte Brunson's Nationwide study from the 1970s conceived of the audience as active rather than passive. To research how people make sense of media they conducted ethnographic research, observing participants as they watched a television programme. They did not ask them to recollect a programme (2005). They then used Qualitative thematic analysis to interpret the findings applying Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model. Their research detailed how people that may seem very similar can have very different interpretations of any piece of media. That is not to say the methodological approach was not without issues. Ien Ang points out that removing the subjective 'I' from the write up attempts to artificially remove the researcher's presence almost suggests that a researcher's presence in that space would have had no effects on participant behaviours (Ang, 1989, p. 106–107). Nevertheless, a clear argument for investigating how the social context of consumption would have an effect on reception by conducting research was made through this ethnographic approach.

While Brunson and Morley looked at active audience understanding of traditional advertising it is in the context of advertising and branding's flow into branded events, such as music festivals, that Moor detailed the 'live' and 'real-time' communicative features of branded experiences (Moor, 2003, p. 43). Like Brunson and Morley, she used ethnographic observation from branded events, however she also asked her research participants to record their experiences through writing and photographs and encapsulating them in case studies. She interviewed industry insiders to get a perspective from advertising practice, and made use of existing cultural, philosophical and sociological theories to give depth to her understanding and to help pull out themes from the data with

thematic analysis. It was through researching on site that she was able to reveal how a brand acquires meaning from its relationship to the space where an event is held, giving their older perhaps more tired brand personalities an edge that is new and exciting. She established how this is felt in the moment of experience though she noted that the methods chosen artificially interrupted normal behaviours (a similarity shared with mine).

Working within the healthcare advertising sector Tahir Turk, Michael Ewing and Fiona Newton researched the effect that [ambient] advertising could have in communicating information about HIV/AIDS awareness in Indonesia (2006). They worked with participants splitting them into a control group and a group that experienced an advertising intervention. This was followed up with participant questionnaires. They then analysed the material quantitatively and conducted a comparative analysis with the control group. Their work was informed by theories of behavioural change. Rather than recreating what an [ambient] advert in this context might look like in an academic space they collaborated with an advertising agency in Jakarta to create credible [ambient] interventions. The resulting posters were installed in the toilets in bars, a 'sector [that] is seen as one of the most popular forms of ambient advertising' (Turk, Ewing and Newton, 2006, p. 336). Though the posters are not strictly [ambient] advertising, in that a creative practitioner would be more inclined to put the messaging on existing mirrors making use of the onsite medium, it did function in many ways as an [ambient] advert. It made use of the context of our everyday practices in washrooms – looking in mirrors to see ourselves – and the type of medium we might find there – a mirror. This allowed them to collect in person, in-situ data revealing that the medium of the mirror created 'further curiosity' from the participants to engage with the messaging (Turk, Ewing and Newton, 2006, p. 339). They found that participants appreciated the use of medium, a finding replicated in Katharina Hutter and Stefan Hoffman's field experiment (2014).

Borghini et al's (2010) ethnographic and netnographic study conducted over four countries looked at the link between guerrilla advertising, [ambient] and street art through rhetoric. They built on the research of Dahlén (Dahlén, 2005; Dahlén and Edenius, 2007; Dahlén, Rosengren and Törn, 2008; Dahlén, Granlund and Grenros, 2009; Dahlén, Friberg and Nilsson, 2009) and Sasser and Koslow (2008), but rather than staying within an academic space they went out on to the streets. They established trust with street art communities and using a variety of ethno-methods, such as taking photographs and videos, both observing and interviewing, they captured

the process of creating work and meaning on site. They also interviewed sixty people caught in the act of ‘consuming’ street art while going about their everyday practices, revealing how people behave around this kind of work. They used consumer and sociological theories to give depth to their understanding and to help pull out themes with thematic analysis, developing new theory by using grounded theory across their four sites. The often-hidden nature of peoples’ relationships to these disruptive pieces was revealed through their use of creative methods and through being on site to observe the process from creation to consumption. It opened up a number of questions about that moment of encounter, not through rhetoric but through embodiment and being in the world.

Hutter and Hoffman’s study a few years later used a multi-method approach, making use of both qualitative and quantitative methods as well as making test [ambient] advertising interventions to put on site. To study ‘behavio[u]ral reactions’ they observed the reactions of nearly 2,500 passers-by, interviewing over 300 of them, comparing three different executions for a shoe shop (Hutter and Hoffmann, 2014, p. 98). Working with an advertising designer they created a giant shoebox, some vinyl footsteps and a line of real shoes. They positioned the [ambient] advertising interventions directly outside a shoe shop as point-of-sale and observed behaviours and sales. The ‘use of [a] non-traditional advertising medium’ has long been a key indicator of ambient work (Dahlén and Edenius, 2007, p. 34) and this is born out in the industry interviews (chapter 1). Their understanding was grounded in literature on consumer behaviours, advertising and psychology. They analysed their data through quantitative analysis and comparison across their experiments. They then used triangulation with sales data to explore how incongruity and surprise affects audience responses, finding that those ‘that successfully resolve the incongruence...feel relieved, amused, proud, or both’ (Hutter and Hoffmann, 2014, p. 104). From a practitioner perspective, though the interventions were not really [ambient] advertising, as they were closer to a point-of-sale in style (as there really has to be more communicated than a brand name or ‘walk this way to this shop’), the study empirically demonstrated that people will engage with [ambient] advertising and that the use of creative interventions in-situ in research are a good way to study the encounters.

In 2011 Zlatan Krajina completed his PhD and then in 2014 published a book on participant encounters with digital screens in everyday environments (2014; 2011). He took a qualitative ethnographic approach based in a phenomenological and mediated understanding of the world and used ethno-methods to work with material gathered

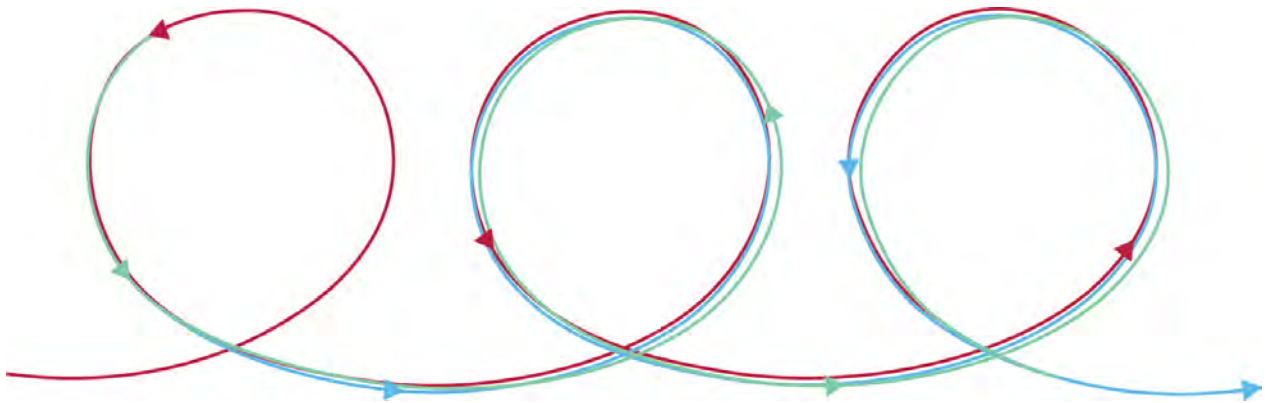
from participants in four different locations. He made use of a voice recorder to capture participants live behaviours as well as fuller interviews and observing the sites himself. He then applied grounded theory to compare the reactions and insights from these four different case studies, developing a theory around the unexpected and negotiated uses of screens made by passers-by. Central to his thinking was how people come across these media objects in their everyday social and spatial world. While his research had an artificial start and cut-off point and consequently is not fully embedded in a person's everyday activities, an observation he makes about the limitations of his research and a similarity shared with mine, he was able to reveal often invisible behaviours. The use of live methods on site allowed him to witness the use by women of the screens as a form of lighting and the use of the screen as a focal point rather than engaging a stranger's glance. These hidden, invisible moments became visible, and the variety of encounters documented.

These highlighted research projects conducted on site are often multi-method and participatory in approach. They take the context of the encounter as a starting point, and this informs their research design and choices of methods to capture data. They do not presume focal interest and consequently their research has a certain amount of risk built in – that is the risk that no-one will notice the thing being researched. This uncertainty makes the research a rarity and consequently any subsequent findings so rewarding. A number of approaches used by these theorists stuck with me:

- Brunsdon and Morley's use of ethnography and responses from the moment of consumption
- Moor's industry interviews, participant photography, philosophical underpinning and understanding of space, and use of thematic analysis
- Turk et al.'s experiments with [ambient] advertising interventions and their quantitative comparisons of behaviours
- Borghini et al.'s use of live visual ethno-methods such as photography and video, their sociological and cultural theories, and their use of thematic analysis
- Hutter and Hoffman's experiments with [ambient] advertising interventions, their understanding of theories of consumer behaviour, advertising and psychology
- Krajina's qualitative ethnographic approach based in phenomenology, his use of ethno-methods and his distinct understanding of the context of media

These ideas served as the foundation for the development of my methodological design.

The Bricolage



Repeat of Fig. 11: My bricolage methodology (2024)

My research design is that of a ‘bricoleur.’ The construction of this bricolage makes use of methods that are drawn from the social sciences, media communications and the creative arts. Bricolage allows me to be responsive in my actions and analysis through reflective practice and reflexivity (see introduction for more detail on reflective practice and reflexivity). A bricolage is a construction, a creative assemblage of sorts. Livesey comments that ‘the assemblage is destined to produce a new reality, by making numerous, often unexpected, connections,’ (Livesey, 2010, p. 19). This is the hope with a multi-method bricolage.

I have been able to adapt the methods and tools, for example how I have used photography. The tools were chosen to fulfil the purpose of my research, to understand people’s experiences with [ambient] advertising in everyday places ‘but that purpose itself is shaped in part by the tools and material available’ (Freeman, 2007, p. 491 referencing Lévi-Strauss, 1966, p15). This does not mean that the methods are chosen at random; rather they are from a broader eco-system of related approaches that together form ‘a developmental set, which is coherent’ (Gray and Malins, 2004, p. 72–74). The bricolage is ‘complex,’ ‘reflexive’ and ‘fluid’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 6). The methods wrap around each other in the action research spiral. They form a triple helix; action research, reflexive thematic analysis, thinking; each helping the other move forwards through moments of reflection and adaptation. Estelle Barrett describes how artistic practice ‘can be viewed as the production of knowledge or

philosophy in action' (Barrett and Bolt, 2018, p. 1). Bricolage itself is similar to artistic practice in which multiple strands are assembled together, indeed Denzin and Lincoln describe it as a 'collage or montage'(2005, p. 6).

Central to all of this movement was reflexivity, what do I think and feel about what I am learning through the various ways of knowing? What themes do I perceive? How does this change the direction of the research? What else do I need to learn? The reflexive and reflective findings are explored in chapters 2, 4 and 5.

The Phases

The research was split into three distinct phases working with participants, and a pilot phase. Fig. 43 illustrates the timeline of these phases. I began with a pilot phase followed by three phases of experiments. Phase 2 has been given more visual space and that is to represent the amount of time spent in this phase. This is the time when the world-wide pandemic impacted my research. Unable to conduct experiments with participants, and locked inside my house, my research took a more philosophical turn. I journeyed through texts that described perception and attention, philosophy of consciousness and the poetics of film. This time spent indoors changed the trajectory of my PhD for the better and when I went back outside with participants, I had a fresh way of looking at the world and participants' engagement with [ambient] advertising.

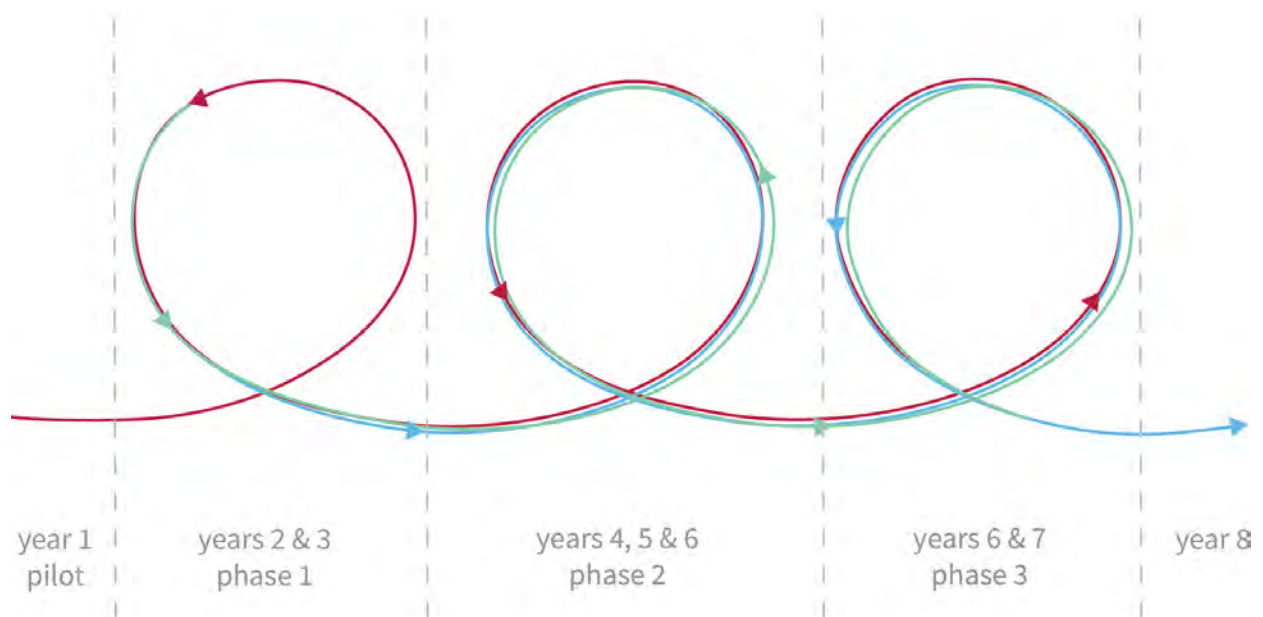


Fig. 43: Timeline of phases (2024)

	site	Experiment number	participants	Intervention (detailed later in chapter)
Pilot	Alleyway	0	myself	0
Phase 1	Alleyway	1	10	1
		2	10	1
		3	9	1
		4	10	2
Phase 2	Alleyway	5	8	3
		6	10	4
		7	10	5
Phase 3	Street	8	9	1
		9	10	3
		10	9	3
		11	9	6

Fig. 44: Breakdown of phases and experiments (2024)

The Pilot

The pilot was an autoethnographic study conducted over the course of the first year. The purpose was to observe my own attention to things within the site that I planned to use in phase 1. This phase allowed me to think through the texts that I was reading while simultaneously starting some fieldwork. I made use of simple tools for recording my walks through the alleyway, a voice recording application on my phone and my sketchbook. The findings from the pilot are covered in detail in chapter 4. During the pilot I also injured my spine and was unable to walk for a number of months. This lived experience brought me to the work of sensory ethnographers Sarah Pink and Shanti Sumartojo and a deep consideration of how we are in and of our bodies. This then led to Merleau-Ponty.

Action Research

To the best of my knowledge there is little within the broad field of advertising research that makes use of action research (Eng and Dholakia, 2019). Action research is more usually used to improve the inner workings of the organisation. That said participatory design approaches are more common for researchers working with industry and community groups. These approaches share similarities with

action research though they are not the same as action research. The researchers and/or advertisers may co-create advertising or brand values and participant responses are collected with a method such as interviews which in turn may then be thematically analysed (Willmott, Schmidtke and McLeod, 2024).

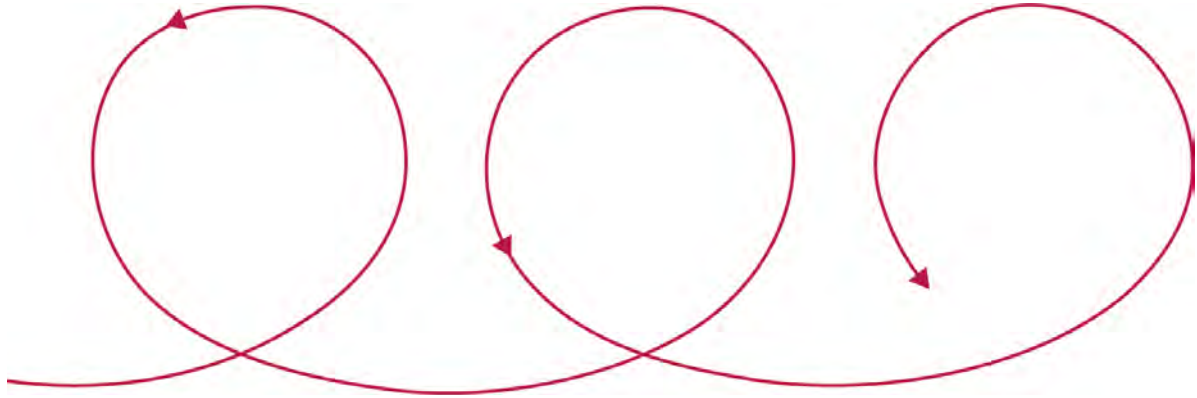


Fig. 45: The Action Research loop (2024)

Professor of Educational Research, Jean McNiff, states that ‘action research is a practical form of enquiry that enables anyone in every job and walk of life to investigate and evaluate their work’ (McNiff, 2017, p. 3). This simple explanation is the core of my action research methodology. I am in part investigating and evaluating my own practice as a researcher of advertising communications in everyday places as well as investigating encounters with [ambient] advertising. These two things go hand in hand. How can I investigate people’s encounters with, attention to, and perspectives on, [ambient] advertising without first finding the best way to capture those moments? Experimentation with tools and methods was an integral part of the research process and took up all of Phase 1. It is an inductive approach to research, making use of learning through participation and experience.

I conduct first person action research (McNiff, 2017). At the start the participants that work with me do not know what I am researching specifically, they only know that I am interested in what captures their attention. My specific interest in [ambient] advertising is made clear at the end as they may wish to remove themselves from the study (the ethical process is described shortly). I began by asking myself, as McNiff suggests, what the current situation is in [ambient] advertising research and how can I improve it, with an aim of ‘improving practice and generating relevant theoretical knowledge’ (Kates and Robertson, 2004, p. 419). We do not have sufficient research to know if people pay attention in everyday places not near a point of sale. In many ways I follow a classic action-research

structure which moves ‘in a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of planning, action and the evaluation of the result of action’ (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1990, p. 8). McNiff, building on Mellor (1998, 2001) writes ‘the process itself is the methodology and this is frequently multidimensional, haphazard and experimental ... you start with an idea and follow where it leads’ (McNiff, 2017, p. 46).

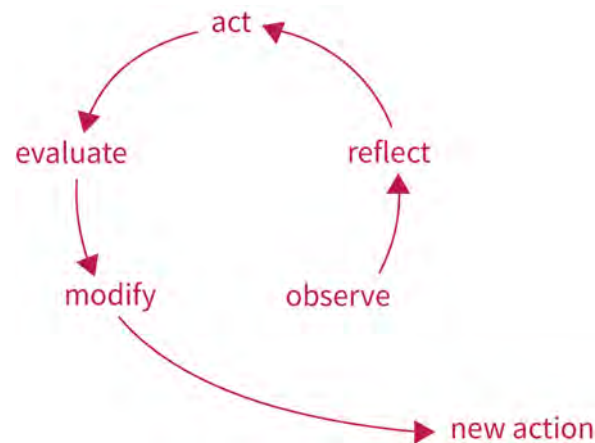


Fig. 46: Spiral of steps, based on Jack Whitehead and Jean McNiff's 2006 action research model (2024)

I gather information by reading literature and taking stock of my current findings, I not only know if they pay attention, but I also find out where they linger, what they remark upon, what connections and relations they make. I reflect on the themes and thoughts that arise which allows me to plan an action/intervention which will tell me more, I enact the action and work with participants, collect data, I then reflect on my findings in order ‘to act choicefully and with awareness’ (Reason and Bradbury, 2008, p. 6) in order to plan the next spiral, modifying my experiments as I go.

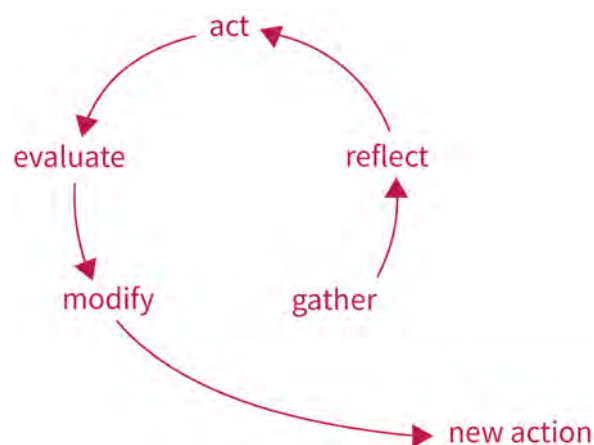


Fig. 47: My action research spiral of steps (2024)

The actions took place in three phases with participants over the full length of the PhD. I was conducting auto-ethnographic experiments in a pilot phase before my first-year documents had been accepted and I was still conducting experiments with participants while I was writing the chapters. The pilot phase, phases 1 and 2 were staged in an alleyway and the final phase takes place on a street filled with shops near a train station. Each phase has a series of experiments. The experiments themselves will be covered in greater detail in chapter 4. Between each experiment there is reflection and an evaluation of ethnomethods and findings. This allows for the planning of new actions and the recruitment of more participants. There is always a process of familiarisation with the material, as is common across all three methodological approaches. As I collected a greater body of data, early analysis and reflection, I started to involve reflexive thematic analysis and a process of tinkering (both will be covered later in the chapter). It was the involvement of the latter two approaches that enabled me to think more deeply about my findings and draw in more philosophers to help me consider what was happening in these encounters

Participants

For McNiff action research does not step back and take a ‘spectator approach’ but it investigates problems with others (2017, p. 41). I research with participants.

Phase 1 participants were recruited initially from a local school’s ‘mum’s WhatsApp group.’ The advantages of this purposive sampling technique (Etikan, 2016) was to find ‘existential insiders’ (Relph, 1976, p. 53). For this group the location has meaning, and they are likely to notice something unusual or new. These individuals are also more inclined to make time for the project because of proximity. Following this first stage a snowballing recruitment technique was applied, generating a roughly equal male/female ratio and ages ranging from 18-53. For Phase 2 neighbourhood WhatsApp groups were approached and the invitation posted. There are clear limitations using this method of sampling. The individuals are from broadly the same socio-economic group and people with ages from late 30s upwards were more likely to participate though a number of 18–30-year-olds did become involved through the snowballing technique, as did a number of retired people. In Phase 3 people were stopped in the street on their way to and from the train station. These participants were more likely to be ‘outsiders,’ a ‘younger, upscale, affluent, active’ group (Cronin, 2008, p. 100), and while I did get slightly more participants in the 20-30 age range the demo-

graphics were not as dramatically different as I thought they might be. The activity was in a public space where there were plenty of other people, so I was not putting myself or others at risk by working with strangers. All participants in all phases were advised that they must not put themselves under any undue risks for the sake of the research. At all times I was explicit that there was no pressure to contribute, and they have a right to refuse participation for whatever reason they wish even after they have completed the walk.

At this point it should be noted that these participants are not advertising or research practitioners, nor are they working with me to improve their environment or workplace. For many this is a fundamental principle of action research, Perry and Gummesson make the point that this level of involvement 'may not even meet the requirements of traditional action research' (2004, p. 312). The participants become involved in my study purely out of curiosity. This means that I do not adhere to all the contemporary principles of action research though I would argue that I follow Schön and Dewey's earlier aspirations for action research. I use this framework simply to change my own practice and understanding and through that to change others. I learn through action learning (Perry and Gummesson, 2004).

[Ambient] interventions

I designed, made and installed an [ambient] advert as an intervention on a lamppost near the middle of a participant walk. There were a total of six named interventions that were variations of the same idea.

The advertising interventions for the experiments consisted of a message on behalf of the local council. It adhered to the original criteria set down by Luxton and Drummond (2000) an unusual execution in an unusual location and built upon by subsequent researchers (see chapter 1), and Hutter's discovery that only one in five [ambient] adverts communicates goods to consumers (2015). I ensured that I applied the qualities that I had drawn out from the advertising and media texts explored in chapter 1.

Embodied This was to be an [ambient] advert that would make some use of the three-dimensional world without extending so far as to be a special build. The elements brought to site were designed to be seen and interacted with in an embodied way. The scale of the components were larger than would be usual so that they would attract the eye, however they were still to a human scale. The textures were recognisable, such as the shiny silky ribbon. The components

could move a little. It was a piece that invited both sight and touch.

Lived Relevance I decided upon an advert on behalf of a local council. This allowed the advert to have brand relevance to a greater number of participants. However, it should be noted that this was a social or political advert rather than a product advert and there may have been some subsequent effect on the types of responses given. The copy described lighting up the streets, a topic that had potential for relevance for a wide group of people, particularly through the alleyway which could get quite dark at night.

Contextual fit The purpose of the advert was to thank people for their tax contribution as it allowed the council to light up the streets. The lamppost was the present from the council, so the lamppost itself became the perfect medium for the message, it simply needed to be framed as a present.

Aestheticized elements As I planned to use the alleyway as the site for phase 1 (following the pilot), I needed to find something within the environment that could be playfully transformed. All three phases made use of existing street furniture – a lamppost in the very centre of the walk. The lamppost was turned into a present with a gift tag and ribbon and in some experiments the lamppost was partially wrapped with wrapping paper.

Conspicuous The large brightly coloured bow and large gift tag were noticeable, and in colour distinct from the background. The interventions with wrapping paper were even more attention grabbing. Ambient adverts attract attention by disrupting the norm (Nelson and Sutherland, 2019).

Encountered The literature and interviews identified that it must be part of the environment in the audiences' social spaces. The [ambient] advert was installed before the participants arrived so they would not be aware that anything had been placed in either the alleyway or the street. Discovery is an important part of the attraction of [ambient] advertising (Abdul-Razzaq, Ozanne and Fortin, 2009; Nelson and Sutherland, 2019).

This static radial diagram was a practical diagnostic tool that allowed me to plot the relative levels of each quality for the [ambient] adverts that I describe in chapter 1 (Fig. 48). I could then ensure my own advert adhered to the qualities and compare it to existing adverts.

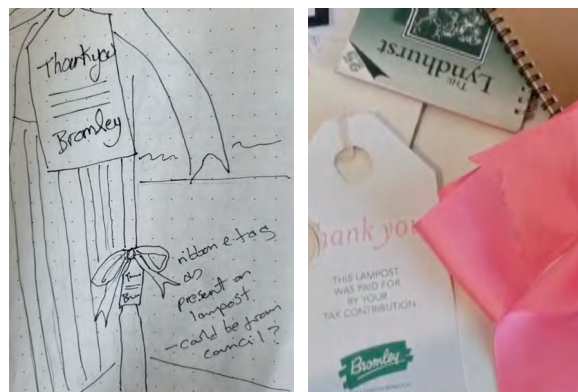


Fig. 48: Map of Qualities with initial exploration of how it could be applied to both my own [ambient] advert and a selection of the adverts from chapter 1 (2025)

The qualities have a Likert scale that is ordinal, with 0 representing none of a particular quality and 5 representing an abundance of this quality. At this present time the scale is a subjective judgement based on the relationship to other [ambient] adverts I have observed and researched. The dashed line implies the ability to go in-and-out-of-place (please see chapter 5). I have only applied the dashed line to the conceptual stage of the diagram rather than to examples. It is there as a useful tool for in-action reflection for creatives, and for analysis on-action afterwards if research had collected participating audience members in-situ in-the-moment responses.

- Embodied: 0 = no sensory qualities - 5 = multiple sensory qualities
- Lived relevance: 0 = no relevance to place or time - significant relevance to place or time
- Contextual fit: 0 = the medium bares no relevance to the message - 5 = medium perfectly fits the message
- Aestheticized elements: 0 = nothing in the environment has been transformed - 5 something in the environment is transformed into something else
- Conspicuousness: 0 = it does not stand out from the background - 5 = it stands out significantly from the background
- Encountered: 0 = it is not in a public domain where it may be encountered - 5 = it is in multiple locations and many people may encounter it

At this stage I realised a diagnostic tool of this sort could prove useful for creatives, to help them reflect on their own work. However, this is at its very early stages. To be more widely useful it needs to be workshopped with industry, each element of the Likert scale developed (in particular the scale for encounter) and it needs to be compared to traditional models. I will return to this in the conclusion.



Figs. 49 and 50: Sketch of the [ambient] advert and some physical components on my desk

Intervention	Name	Execution
1	Ribbon ST	Large pink bow, oversized gift-tag with copy ‘Thank you. This lamppost was paid for by your tax contribution.’
2	Xmas paper – trees ST	Large silver bow, oversized silver-backed gift tag with copy ‘Thank you for your tax contribution which paid for all the lampposts that light up your streets.’ The lamppost was partially wrapped with branded Xmas trees wrapping paper.
3	Xmas paper -trees LT	Large red bow, slightly larger oversized red-backed gift tag with copy lines and slogan, and branded Xmas-trees wrapping paper.
4	Xmas paper -trees LT	Large red bow, slightly larger oversized red-backed gift tag with copy lines and slogan, and branded Xmas-trees wrapping paper. Repetition over two lampposts
5	Xmas paper – trees and baubles LT	Large red bow, slightly larger oversized red-backed gift tag with copy lines and slogan, and branded Xmas-trees and Xmas - baubles wrapping paper. Variation over two lampposts
6	Small Ribbon LT	Pnk bow, oversized red-backed gift tag with copy ‘Thank you for your tax contribution which paid for all the lampposts that light up your streets.’

Fig. 51: Breakdown of [ambient] interventions (2024)



Figs. 52-54: Printing the wrapping paper for the [ambient] interventions 2-5 (2019)

Action

Participants were asked to walk through a location well known to them where the [ambient] advertising intervention was installed, documenting and commenting on things that interest them. The things they documented could be objects, memories or fantasies. Movement and time through place became key components in the research. The methods used will be detailed later in the chapter.

Abdul-Razzaq et al (2009) noted that the effectiveness of [ambient] advertising is increased if the environment is an enclosed space, so the pilot and phases 1 and 2 took place in an alleyway. Because of the high boundaries on either side of the alleyway the participants, like every-day pedestrians, were unable to see preceding or upcoming sections and became captive to the alleyway environment for the duration of their walk. This controlled environment also meant that all the participants would walk past the [ambient] advert (please see Fig. 55, the pink circle represents the lamppost). This allowed the experiments to focus on the usefulness of the methods to collect information about attention and engagement rather than whether the participants walked past it at all (please see Chapter 4 for further detail about the alleyway).

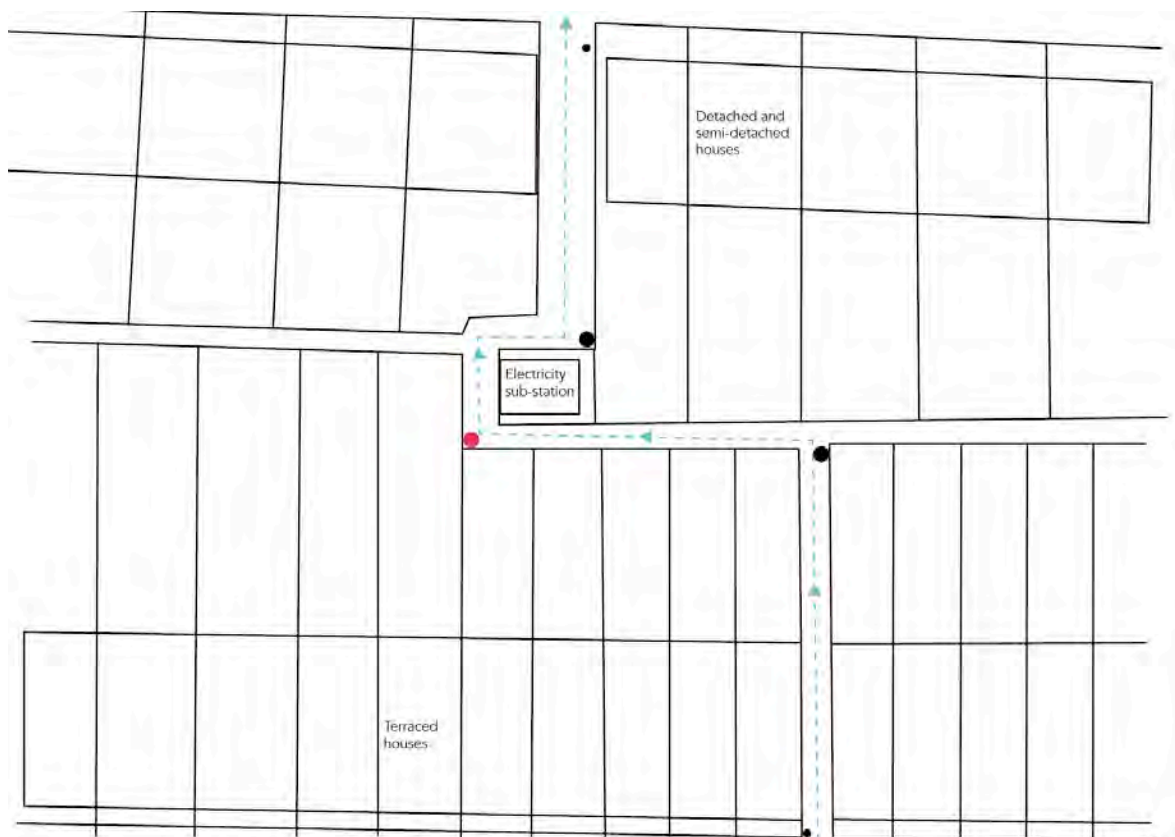


Fig. 55: Diagram of the alleyway site for autoethnography and experiments 1-7 (2024)

However, in everyday life, people do not spend all of their time in enclosed spaces. Certainly, when moving from place-to-place people spend a fair amount of their time in open environments, so Phase 3 took place on a street with a parade of shops. The street is a fairly busy main road with a small parade of shops, bars and coffee shops on one side, and a set of apartments on the other. It is next to a busy train station and near a gym and library. Unlike the alleyway there were no boundaries to vision with an abundance of visual and auditory distractions available. Similar to the alleyway the participants were captive to the environment for the duration of the walk as they walked from the train station across a junction and to the end of the block following initial instruction. While they could have crossed the road, no-one chose to. (please see Chapter 4 for further detail about the street). The [ambient] advert was similarly placed centrally in their walk (please see Fig. 56, the pink circle represents the lamppost).

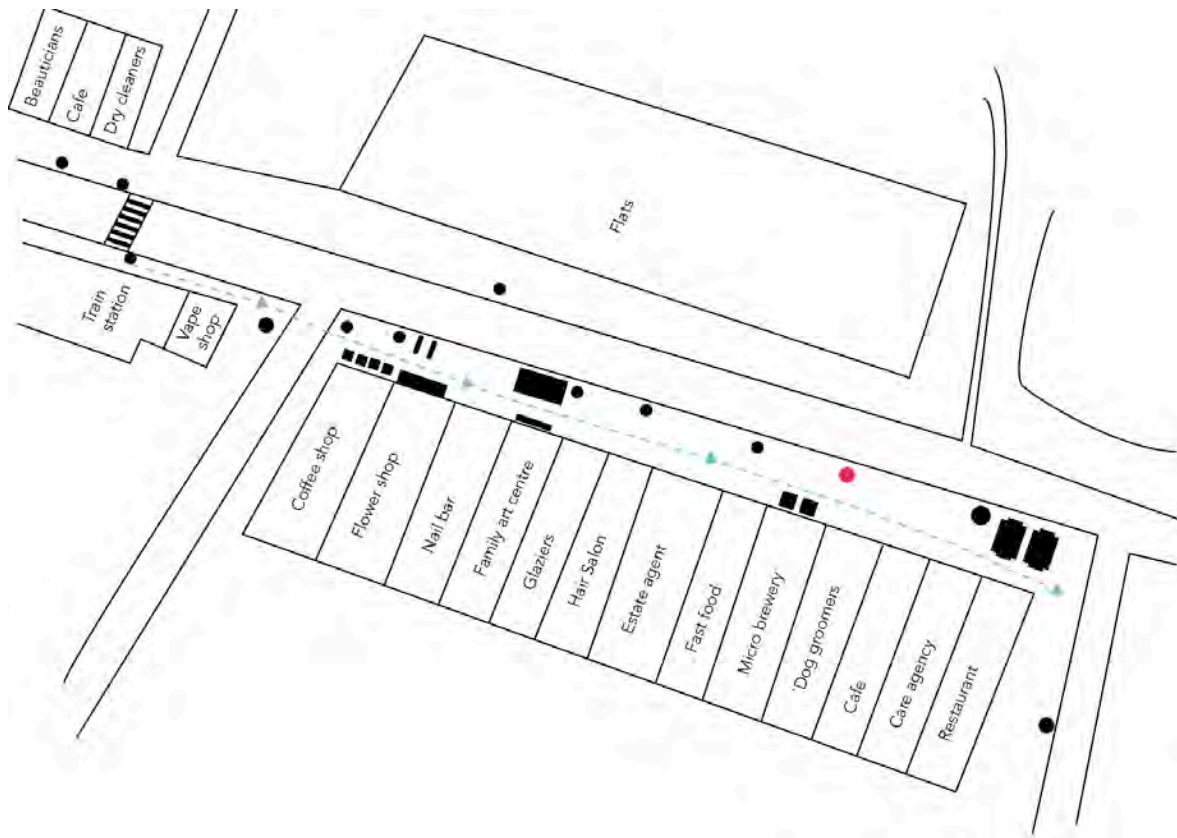


Fig. 56: Diagram of the street site for experiments 8-11 (2024)

Ethical considerations

Of course, there are multiple ethical considerations when entering into any research that involves participation. For example, the participants may feel a pressure to participate once asked, or to agree to the use of their recordings, and as researchers it is incumbent on

us to ensure that our research is ethical and safe.

At the start of the walk, I asked the participants to document anything that they noticed or found interesting without being directive. As the specific focus of my research had to be hidden at the start, yet informed consent was essential, I used a three-stage informed consent form at both the beginning and at the end of the field research. The first consent form did not reveal what I was looking for as that would lead the participant (Krajina, 2014). The second stage stated that I was interested in their impressions, if any, of advertising in the context of their walk. I made it clear that no response to any advertising is as relevant, useful and interesting to my research as a response. It was important that participants did not feel foolish if they had not noticed the thing I was researching. The final consent form gave them the option to look over their own recordings as there are additional considerations around ownership of these created research materials. I recognised that the participants have legal interests and rights in their recordings and all recordings to be published should be cleared with the participants (Pink, 2021, p. 76). No participant asked to see the recording and they completed this consent form on the day of the action rather than delaying it as I suggested in my briefing.

There are a number of further ethical considerations when dealing with visual materials (Pauwels, 2008; Pink, 2012). Participants may still be recognisable, as may any non-participants that may happen to walk past. While I have it in my power to edit out anything I would consider compromising it was still important that the participants consider this. I explained within the accompanying letter and my verbal explanation of the task that any recordings and photographs may well be used in their raw form as film rather than as anonymised data and gave them the opportunity to withdraw consent or choose not to participate. I also made them aware that their anonymity could be compromised if they were to photograph or film themselves. However, the participants were able to photograph anything of their choosing, as any tourist can while they are on a public right of way, there is no presumption of privacy for individuals in a public place and there is the question of how it is even possible to get consent from everyone in a public space.

The participant materials and data were stored in a secure manner under the Data Protection Act in a lockable room. Personal Data was kept securely in a locked cupboard and retained only as anonymous data and remains confidential. All participants are referred to in code.

Ethnomethods

Visual and sensory ethnographer Sarah Pink recounts an approach to the 'new ethnography' in the 1980s that 'emphasized the centrality of subjectivity to the production of knowledge' (2021, p. 4). The sensory and visual ethnographic approaches feel closer to the spirit of sharing the world of another embodied subject as imagined by Merleau-Ponty than even his own experiments, 'the experiencing, knowing and emplaced body is ... central to the idea of sensory ethnography.' (Pink, 2015, p. 28). The world and things are understood through perception through the senses in everyday contexts instead of the rather more extra-ordinary experiments Merleau-Ponty devises to illustrate his philosophical points. Pink expresses ethnographic practice as 'concerned with the production of knowledge and ways of knowing rather than with the collection of data.' This is an approach that is not trying to be objective but to remain 'as loyal as possible to the context, the embodied, sensory and affective experiences' that participants have (Pink, 2021, p. 40). 'We aim to come closer to understanding how other people experience, remember and imagine' (Pink, 2015, p. 25). While this is not an ethnographic research project it does make use of ethnographic methods. Indeed, one of the primary objectives for the research was to explore which combination of methods would best to capture the context(s) of participant attention. Ethnographic practice allows researchers to get below the surface of everyday activities and practices (See Pink, 2007; Rose, 2012). It has potential to go beyond football studies and interviews, common in Business School research (See, for example, Ozer, Oyman and Ugurhan, 2020) to explore through and with participants, in their 'actions, thoughts, language, institutions, and their interconnections between the categories' (Venkatesh, 1995, p. 27–28).

Walking

McNiff's characterization of action research as 'conducted in the real world' rather than behind a desk drew me to this framework in the first instance. It is a framework that takes place in the noise of everyday life (Eng and Dholakia, 2019, p. 755). The participants were asked to walk through a space in the everyday world. Walking is a method that through 'everyday movement in space' (Merleau-Ponty, 2014) reveals the practices of everyday life (De Certeau, 2011). Walking normalises the research activity encouraging more natural and embodied reactions (Lee and Ingold, 2006; Sumartojo and Pink, 2019).

The use of sensory and live ethnographic methods appeared to

unify many different philosophical strands of this research as they drew 'from theories of human perception and place to propose a framework for understanding' (Gunn and Donovan, 2012, p. 7). They tied Merleau-Ponty's theories of perception to my use of methods. Indeed, the need for live methods that can trace audience intention and attention, in the moment, was outlined by Tamsin Lorraine as she expanded upon Deleuze's thinking, 'There is a gap between what we perceive and what we say 'as though intentionality denied itself' (Lorraine, 2010, p. 207 in reference to Deleuze 1988, p109). Surveys and interviews could not capture the moment of encounter.

Walking diary - lapel camera

The lapel camera provided participant video, commentary and temporal information. It was able to record a walking diary with immediate and live, off the cuff, commentary from participants that is pre-reflective and allowed participants to not only note what they see but also to put it in a social context (Krajina, 2014; Pauwels, 2012). The video recorded on a lapel camera is a visual research method allows interactions and context to be captured (Pink, 2007; Pauwels, 2012) without a conscious decision to record by the participant. In addition, it can give clues to the embodied experience of the participant (Sumartojo and Pink, 2019).

Photovoice – mobile phone camera

The participants used a smart phone camera so they could record whatever captured their interest or found significant. In Phase 1 I gave them a phone but they were not all comfortable using it. In the following phases they used their own phone and sent the photographs. In Phase 1 they used use autophotography as a method (Glaw et al., 2017; Johnsen, May and Cloke, 2008). They were told they could take as many or as few photographs as they wished to. Phase 2 this had changed to Photovoice, the reasons for this change will be explained more fully in Chapter 4. As editing is part of the photovoice method I was able to ask participants to take up to 20 photographs and edit them down to around 10 that they considered to be an accurate reflection of their walk down the alleyway. Additionally using the editing functions within their own camera application meant that participants could indicate exactly what they were looking at by circling it or drawing an arrow to it. However, I discovered that as I moved to the street the participants paid less attention to the instructions for Photovoice and often returned photographs with little editing or with too few photographs similar to autophotography.

Micro-interviews

Micro-interviews conducted in-the-field after the walk revealed contextual information that the other methods did not capture. For example, during Phase 1 and Phase 2 women disclosed that they often felt scared when it became dark and were cautious about using the alleyway, adding that they appreciated the lampposts. Participants of both sexes would also add comments about the council during this conversation. These micro-interviews continued to reveal the fact that very few participants linked the [ambient] advert to my PhD study. On a practical level the micro-interviews were able to ascertain whether participants had commented on and photographed everything that they had considered to be important (Krajina, 2014; Kvale, 1996).

Analysis

As discussed in the previous chapter, place and context are extremely important for [ambient] advertising; without context, or situatedness, the [ambient] adverts themselves are only partial things. However, the participant material cannot be analysed in the everyday places where the adverts are sited. There needs to be a more comfortable and quiet space for reflection, sitting with the material, familiarisation, note taking, revisiting texts and reading new ones, following lines of enquiry through the internet, drawing diagrams, and assembling arguments. There needs to be time away from the site. Though analysis is a part of fieldwork for any researcher; for those using ethnographic methods it is 'a process of continual re-shaping' of themes and insights (Pink, 2015, p. 143). I did not start the research trying to prove a hypothesis, rather my research is exploratory, gathering new information from fieldwork with participants to see where that leads. My time away from the site in analysis was an essential part of the action research process in order to be reflective, reflexive and to analyse.

The sheer volume of material, or data, generated through the use of sensory, visual and live ethnomethods, particularly from multiple participants, can feel overwhelming. I coped by familiarising myself with it experiment by experiment, yet it was still hard to retain all the information in my head at the same time over the course of one hundred and four unique walks. That said it should be acknowledged that the numbers I deal with here are significantly smaller than would be found in traditional quantitative studies. Ethnographic filmmaker David MacDougall describes visual materials created in the 'corporeal' world as 'images of the body behind the

camera and its relations with the world,' (2006, p. 3). In this way both photography and the lapel camera video are 'inherently reflexive' as they refer to the situatedness of the participant. Pink's depiction of the 'situatedness' of this material (2021, p. 158) is what ultimately convinced me that the ethnomethods were worth pursuing however difficult they could be to manage as a single researcher. Additionally it was the 'specificity of experience...that grounds us in our fieldwork sites' depicted in the participant materials that ensured that I would not be separated from my fieldwork (Pink, 2021, p. 159).

The participant material is able to bring me back to the place and the various moments of participant interactions. Pink counsels that 'we should be careful not to trust the feeling that videos might likewise transport us into the experiences of others' as we can only 'imagine that person's situatedness in relation to our own' (Pink, 2021, p. 159). Inherent in these methods and approaches is reflexivity, an understanding that any arguments and linking themes found were 'an expression of our own consciousness,' referring to the researcher, rather than something that emerged spontaneously from the data (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 12).

Qualitative data

Action research generates large amounts of data and thematic analysis is often used to work with it. In order to get a 'deep and intimate knowledge of [the] dataset' write academics and psychologists Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke I needed to immerse myself in the data (2022, p. 45). I had to watch things many times over and write up transcripts, while doing this I started to make notes of the embedded time codes. I had to sort through multiple photographs and log them. As I wanted to know what things participants typically photographed, I started to take notes of the content. The reflexive thematic analysis and tinkering that were my primary forms of analysis will be outlined later in the chapter, however in the first instance I had overwhelming quantities of participant materials to sift through. Developed by Braun and Clarke reflexive thematic analysis is a version of thematic analysis that gives weight to the researcher's role in framing the research, from their biases to their processes. This is different to traditional thematic analysis which sits more comfortably within broader qualitative research that aims for a more objective view, often expressed through the development of a codebook and the use of multiple coders that are able to discover the same themes. Reflexive thematic analysis emphasises the creation, rather than the discovery, of themes by virtue of the researchers own interests and the data that is collected. This makes it very personal,

iterative and subject to change. This iterative quality is a perfect fit to action research. Although reflexive thematic analysis is a qualitative method designed to develop themes from a knowingly subjective perspective, and thinkering is a practice-based form of research, during my process analytical and familiarization process I engaged in basic quantitative analysis. Participant data was coded and added in tables so that I could access it all at the same time. These periods of familiarization were the mixed-methods elements in my research design. Braun and Clarke caution that quantitative data focuses too much on relationships between variables in an attempt to generalize information and give the illusion of an impartial observer (2022, p. 6). I did not use it to try and claim an impartial position, but it did give initial insights and highlighted things I may not have noticed during the familiarization stage, for example the time spent in some sort of engagement with the [ambient] advert, or the numbers of people that shared memories. The numbers point to ‘partial truths.’ As I seek to learn about and understand people’s encounters with [ambient] advertising, I may feel they pay attention at a particular moment whereas someone else, or indeed an AI, may consider that if a participant’s attention is diverted, if even for a second, that they were not engaged. The story created from the numbers is also subjective.

The screenshot shows a spreadsheet application window titled 'phase 3 experiments data table'. The interface includes a menu bar (File, Edit, View, Insert, Format, Data, Tools, Extensions, Help) and a toolbar with various icons for editing and viewing. The spreadsheet itself is a large grid with multiple columns and rows. The top section has a header row with a green background, followed by several rows with different colored backgrounds (green, blue, purple, red, etc.) representing different data categories or phases. The data is organized into a structured format with many cells containing text and numbers. The overall layout is complex and detailed, typical of a large-scale data analysis project.

Fig. 57: Screenshot of a summary section of one of the data tables from the first pass of analysis (2024)

As much as anything the tables gave me something to muse on while trying to think through what participants were noticing and engaging with, and what emerged as the wider context for their encounters. During my analysis I was able to have tables on my desktop, data visualisations, films playing, folders of photographs open, all the while looking at books and articles and websites. This was the start of the process of thinkering as well as reflexive thematic analysis.

Reflexive thematic analysis

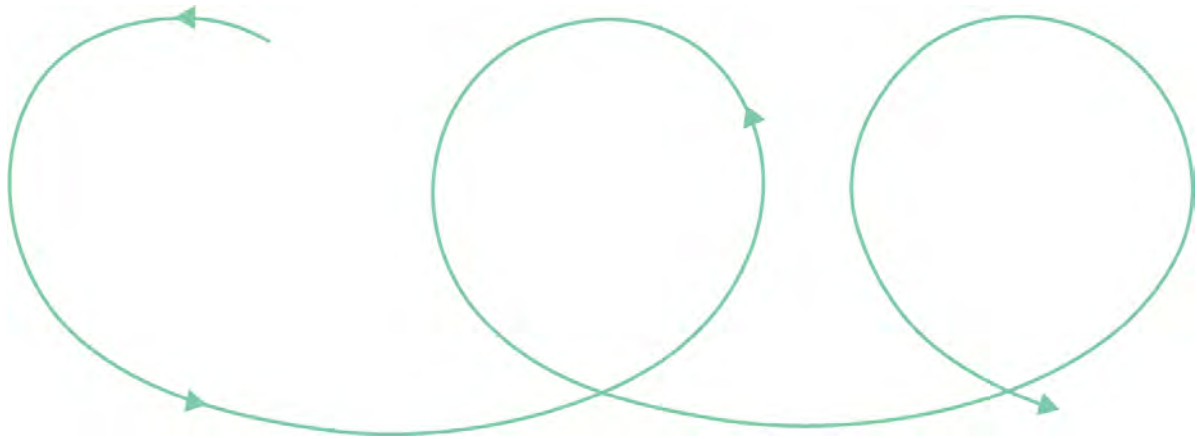


Fig. 58: The Reflexive Thematic Analysis loop (2024)

While thematic analysis is commonly used in social science research and has been used in some of the qualitative advertising research that I have pulled out from the broader review of literature (please see Borghini et al 2010, Moor, 2004), the newer reflexive method has been used considerably less often. Within the field of Health and Social Care (Kennedy, Fitzgerald and Melia, 2025) and within the field of Educational Studies (Ceylan and Çomoğlu, 2022) there are a small number of researchers that have applied action research and reflexive thematic analysis. There are even fewer instances that make use of both action research and reflexive thematic analysis explicitly to look at audience interactions (an exception being Gopee and Shamma, 2021).

Reflexive thematic analysis is ‘more-or-less, a method for data analysis, rather than a methodology’ (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 4) and the specific version that I am making use of is reflexive, a version that values ‘a subjective, situated, aware and questioning researcher’(ibid, 2022, p. 5). It is a method with few ‘explicit guidelines on how to undertake it’ (Xu and Zammit, 2020, p. 1), precisely because there is an understanding that every researcher is situated. I am using reflexive thematic analysis because it allows me to analyse complex and often small interactions from a fairly large data set in a flexible way and allows me to move along the inductive and deductive continuum.

Braun and Clarke set out the six stages of reflexive thematic analysis (2022):

- Familiarisation
- Initial codes
- Develop themes

- Review themes
- Define themes
- Write report

The reflexive thematic analysis process was wound around action research, and I started to code towards the end of Phase 1 as I realised that quantitative analysis was not going to answer the types of questions that I wanted to answer. I found that the stages did not have to progress in an entirely linear format, and that they lent themselves very naturally to the spirals of action research.

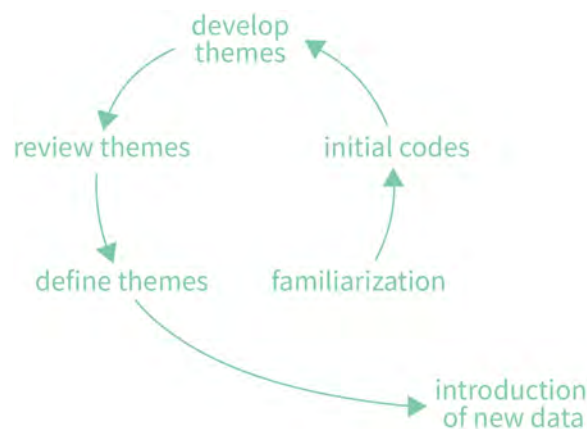


Fig. 59: My Thematic Analysis spiral of steps (2024)

Familiarization

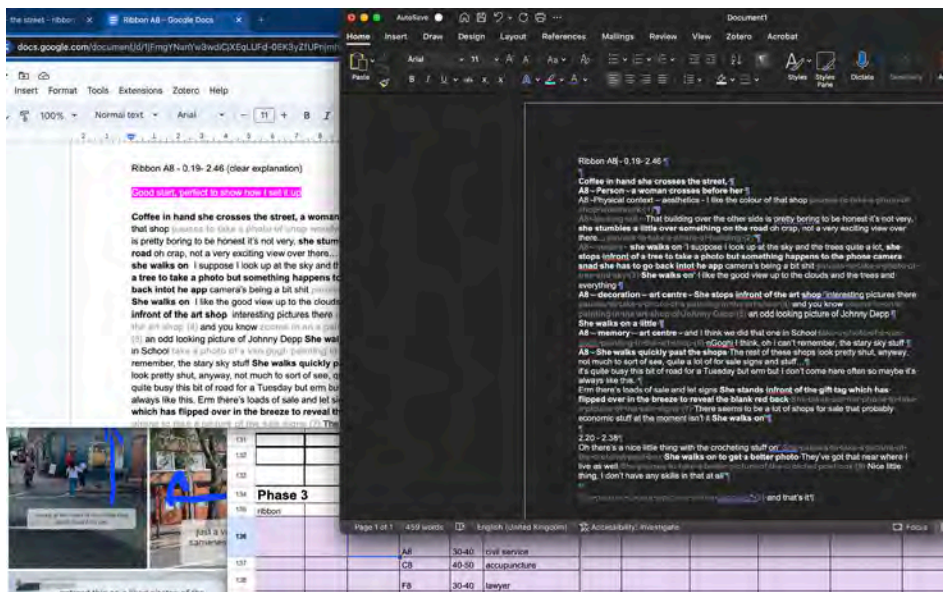


Fig. 60: Screenshot of my desktop during the Reflexive Thematic Analysis coding stage with multiple files and programmes open (2024)

I used reflexive thematic analysis to bring together themes that surfaced from a close reading of the participant materials – for example commentary on the behaviour of others, whether that be good or bad, or commentary on the Council. The codes that I developed while interpreting the data were part of ‘an organic and evolving process’ framed through my own subjectivity (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 54–55). This was part of an inductive process but was also deductive as I brought theory to the dataset. Initially this was from either industry and trade publications or discipline-based research that was largely from business schools. However, as I explored media theory and philosophy my codes and themes changed. I applied layers of analysis and went out into the world conducting action research.

S7a 0 - 3:32		
0:00	contingency	She takes a photo of the bicycle light (1)
0:05	substantive	she starts to walk through I wouldn't walk through here on my own in the dark
0:10	contingency	she starts to walk through I wouldn't walk through here on my own in the dark
0:15	contingency	mind you it's quite clear, no dog's mess, which is quite a photo
0:20	contingency	as she walks she takes photos of some cars, rubbish
0:25	contingency	she notices the hamsterburger dog waste sign and pauses taking a photo of the hamsterburger dog waste sign (2) off to look at that, a notice about dog's mess
0:30	contingency	she turns and faces the back alley and takes a photo from that is a mostly alleyway she turns and starts walking along the central part of the alleyway
0:35	contingency	can't be clearer, oh it's quite clear down here
0:40	contingency	she walks on somebody has got a nice new fence
0:45	contingency	1.43 1.58 She notices the lamp post ad she takes a photo of the lamp post ad on the 2nd lamp post (3)
0:50	contingency	she pauses in front of the electricity substation it's always so messy in there, she takes a photo of the substation fence (4) and walks on
0:55	contingency	1.55 2.30 She slows down coming to stop in front of the first lamp post ad she takes a photo of the lamp post ad on the lamp post (5) as she reads it she takes a photo of the lamp post ad in close up (6) when Bromley Council don't replace her council tax
1:00	contingency	she takes a photo of the lamp post ad on the lamp post (6)
1:05	contingency	as she reads it she takes a photo of the lamp post ad in close up (6) when Bromley Council don't replace her council tax
1:10	contingency	she turns the corner and walks on, she stops in front of a can that has been thrown behind the fence of the substation she takes a photo of a can behind the fence (8) she takes a photo along the side alleyway and moves down there she takes a photo of another can (7)
1:15	contingency	1.43 1.45 she walks around the substation and notices the 2nd lamp post ad she passes it and takes a photo of the lamp post ad on the 2nd lamp post (9)

1:43 1.45	contingency	she walks around the substation and notices the 2nd lamp post ad she passes it and takes a photo of the lamp post ad on the 2nd lamp post (9)
1:45	contingency	and more rubbish she walks on and pauses in front of a mess on the floor, she takes a photo of a mess (9) and why people can't take their mess home with them I don't know, they're so desperate to walk she walks on spotting some more rubbish on the floor, she stops to take a photo of a mess on the floor (10) and more rubbish, one thing that really annoys me is people leaving their rubbish
1:50	contingency	and more rubbish she walks on and pauses in front of a mess on the floor, she takes a photo of a mess (9) and why people can't take their mess home with them I don't know, they're so desperate to walk she walks on spotting some more rubbish on the floor, she stops to take a photo of a mess on the floor (10) and more rubbish, one thing that really annoys me is people leaving their rubbish
1:55	contingency	and more rubbish she walks on and pauses in front of a mess on the floor, she takes a photo of a mess (9) and why people can't take their mess home with them I don't know, they're so desperate to walk she walks on spotting some more rubbish on the floor, she stops to take a photo of a mess on the floor (10) and more rubbish, one thing that really annoys me is people leaving their rubbish
2:00	contingency	and more rubbish she walks on and pauses in front of a mess on the floor, she takes a photo of a mess (9) and why people can't take their mess home with them I don't know, they're so desperate to walk she walks on spotting some more rubbish on the floor, she stops to take a photo of a mess on the floor (10) and more rubbish, one thing that really annoys me is people leaving their rubbish

Micro-interview		
S7a	contingency	S7a-Bromley Council is well known to her - recognised logo. She mainly uses ability to get to the top and the parade of shops, wouldn't go down in the dark. She was thinking about the good and taking up her front garden on her way in. Day of the rubbish and there seemed driving along rubbish

Fig. 61: Thematic analysis transcription for participant S7a walk with each action or statement coded to a theme (2024)

As described earlier, the global lockdowns during Covid altered the trajectory of my PhD. I read many more philosophy texts and was part of a PhD reading group that met online weekly. I started to make use of complex philosophical tools for rather more practical ends such as coding. Reading philosophical texts made me become acutely conscious of my multiple perspectives, as a practitioner, as an academic, as a teacher. My thoughts were fluid; sometimes I held contradictory positions on things as I noticed that some of the ideas that I read resonated and then I would search for examples of that in the data, trying to maintain a critical distance. Because my codes were based on my interpretation rather than searching for an ‘objective’ truth reflexivity was built into the process of analysis. The reflexive researcher takes account of their own situatedness and their own partial perspectives and how this will lead all aspects of the research and analysis (Berger, 2015, p. 220). I was always situated within the data not least because I am researching my own practice and field.

During phase 1 I had already incorporated reflexive thematic analysis alongside quantitative analysis. By the time I was into Phase 2 I was recoding. There was consistent participant commentary

and photographs around memories, the space itself, other people's behaviours, as well as discussion around the advert itself. The variety of contexts that affect an encounter with an [ambient] advert came to the fore. I felt that I had come to an understanding with my research and could create pretty substantial codes and themes by the end of Phase 2. However, when I started phase 3, and was out in the street rather than the alleyway, I realized that some of my themes would need to change and that I still needed to be flexible and adaptive. Some of this came about in simply noticing the speed that people walk in a street situation, and how the amount of time they gave to anything changed. The mixed-methods approach was used in all the gathering and reflection stages in each action research cycle in order to inform myself, a back and forth between data tables, participant materials and thematic transcriptions. This is the familiarization phase of my reflexive thematic analysis. After this I had to revisit my overarching themes. I found that some of my themes were not specific enough, or the boundaries between other themes were too thin. At other times another interpretation would become available through reading new texts.



Fig. 62: Reflexive thematic analysis for all participants printed, colour coded to themes, cut up into strands and separated into thematic piles on my desktop as part of my analytical process (2024)

Part of the requirement of all stages is to 'critically engage with the data' (p43) to try to make meaning from the material and to develop themes. Braun and Clarke describe familiarization doodles as help in the early stages. During my process this surfaced as tinkering (detailed later in the chapter). Rather than doodling diagrams of

connection I would put things together in film. Before I even had a name for it thinking was a process that I was using - a reflective and reflexive practice as well as an analytical practice throughout. Though they were not desktop documentaries as described by Kiss, even at early stages of my research I would present films of my process to my supervisors, in research presentations at my own university and at conferences (Sorrentino, 2020a, 2020c). Braun and Clarke characterise writing and analysis as working hand-in-hand 'because the analysis is in the writing around your data'(2022, p. 118). For me this always felt as though it happened largely in writing the scripts for the films and in putting the visual material together. I found a way to tell the story of the themes that developed from the data in a way that worked for me.

thinking

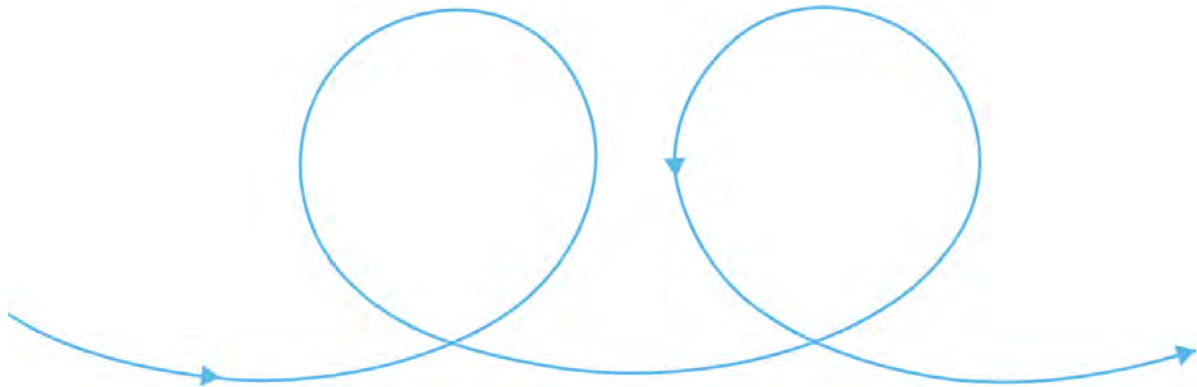


Fig. 63: The Thinkering loop (2024)

Coined by film theorist and researcher Miklos Kiss 'thinkering' is a process of situated documentary filmmaking created by revealing the thinking that emerges through tinkering with research materials (2021). He applies this directly to desktop documentary filmmaking. This weaving of thinking and tinkering has many similarities with bricolage and a translation of 'bricoleur' is to tinker. As with other practice methods it is an approach which can uncover 'new data through real experiential activity' (Gray and Malins, 2004, p. 105). Parisi et al link tinkering to experiential learning, which allows for a 'direct encounter with the phenomena being studied rather than merely thinking about the encounter' (Borzak, 1981). Pioneers of experiential learning Kolb and Fry expressed the process as a continuous spiral, though their early diagrams used an illustration of a closed circle moving from experiencing, to reflecting to conceptualising to applying (Kolb and Fry, 1975).

Parisi et al illustrate how tinkering with materials can answer the first and last of Kolb and Fry's stages, while more conceptual design

approaches, which they term ‘envisioning’, can answer the other two (see Fig. 64). For them this allows for ‘a richer and more complete development of the projects’ (2017, p. 1169).

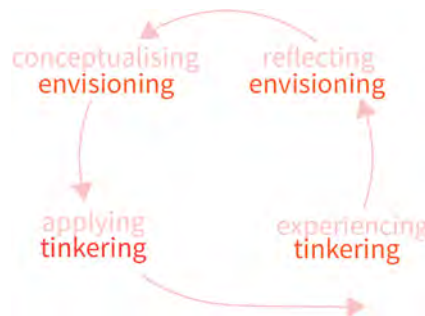


Fig. 64: My interpretation of Parisi et al. tinkering cycle (2017) as they apply their theory to Kolb and Fry's 1975 Experiential Learning cycle

In contrast to a process of two parts described by Parisi et al, Kiss's tinkering does succeed in uniting thinking and material exploration together throughout. A thinking process through materials. It is the ‘iterative process as you go between script and material and back again, reflecting on what and how something is being communicated this is what turns the material tinkering into a tinkering process.’ (Kiss, 2021, p. 102, in reference to Kiss, 2020).



Fig. 65: My interpretation of Kiss's tinkering theory (2021) as a cycle (2024)

Applied to videographic practices the material tinkering can happen in software such as Adobe's Premiere Pro, or through the desktop's ability to play and capture video. Sometimes editing would occur on the desktop ‘as live,’ compiled ultimately in Premiere Pro. This material tinkering can allow tacit, non-verbal and practice-based knowledge to emerge. Reflection on the findings, ‘sometimes even the very personal exhibition of the thinking itself’ and the discovery of purposeful new lines of enquiry are typical of desktop films practices (Kiss, 2021, p. 110). It can make evident the multiple contexts in

which a piece of research sits. I began my own thinking practice by directly recording from my desktop and over time this involved the use of more sophisticated software that gave me more control of the material, letting me move backwards and forwards in time.

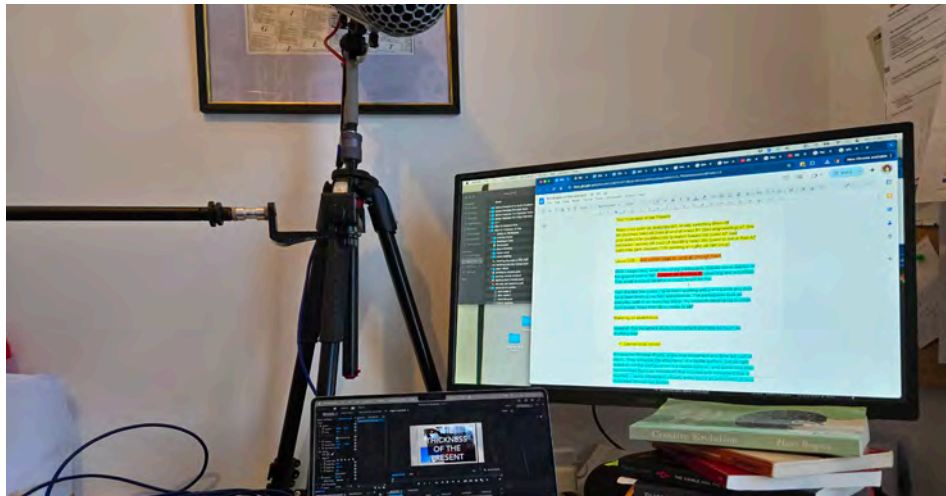


Fig. 66: *Thinking activity across my physical and digital desktops (2024)*

‘The material engages tinkerers on a very deep level, establishing intimacy with them’ (Parisi, Rognoli and Sonneveld, 2017, p. 1170). Playing and replaying film clips, juxtaposing clips against each other, chasing lines of enquiry within the familiar playground of the internet, the interfaces of various softwares and apps were all digital materials I was able to both thinker and tinker with. I played multiple participant clips next to each other and edited them together with photographs and theories. It generated a deeper understanding of both the material properties of the collected digital artefacts and the content of those artefacts (see chapter 5).

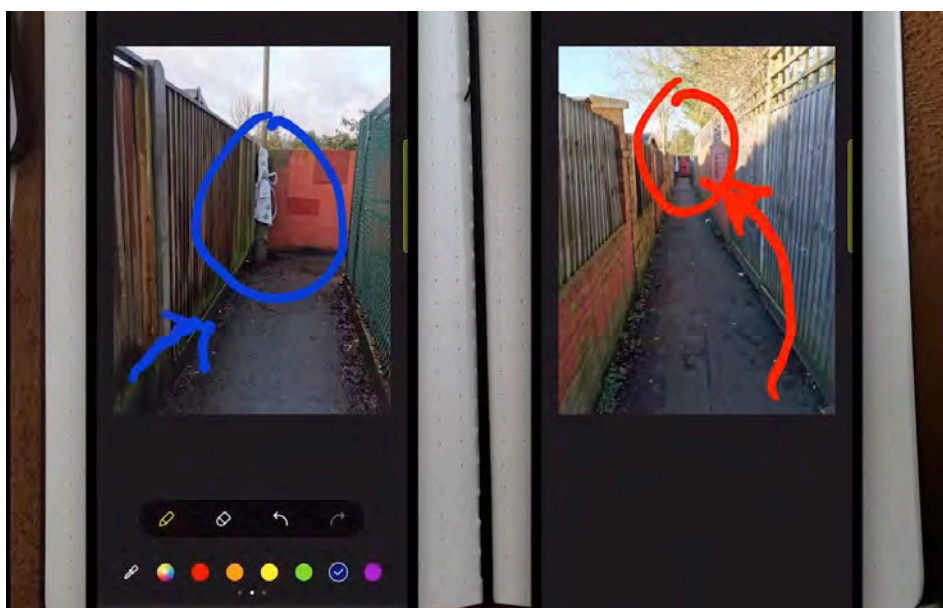


Fig. 67: A still from *Theories from the Alleyway*, demonstrating the phone editing tools participants can use for photovoice (Sorrentino, M, 2022)

thinkering is the term that explains how desktop documentaries work, in which temporality is artificially collapsed allowing the filmmaker to both make and present a video in the same moment (Kiss, 2021, p. 101). The 'presentation' emerges in two ways; firstly, it presents as a completed film even while it documents its own making and secondly, the performative presentation of the research narrative is the content of the film. thinkering as a method combines 'the joining of hand, eye and mind [of] material thinking' (Barrett and Bolt, 2018, p. 30) with a performative, and situated film practice. The filmmaker/researcher reveals 'their thinking and tinkering research process (as unfolding, step-by-step, in front of our eyes) and the presentation of the outcomes of such 't(h)inkering' (Kiss, 2021, p. 102). For Kiss academic and filmmaker Kevin B Lee is the archetype of a desktop documentary filmmaker, and for him desktop documentary is the practice that best exemplifies thinkering.

In March 2015 Lee gave a Masterclass on his desktop films and documentaries at Re-frame: Conversations at the University of Sussex (Grant, 2015). In his presentation he described his own process of weaving together research and filmmaking. The focus of his presentation was his film, *Transformers: The Pre-make* (a desktop documentary) (2014). During his research process he had shot 50 hours of film around Chicago, had collected 355 YouTube videos shot by passers-by that were watching *Transformers 4* being filmed at various locations, as well as finding numerous websites anticipating the release of *Transformers 4*. He was able to bring this, as he described it, 'overwhelming' material together in a film set on his computer desktop – a virtual environment that for him felt very real. Pink describes recordings created from the corporeal world as 'place-making on a second level...place is simultaneously remade as it is recorded in the camera' (Pink, 2015, p. 125). Place is created through everything that comes together 'within the research event' (Pink, 2015, p. 118) yet the research event with thinkering continues to happen in 'a new ethnographic place' away from the fieldwork site and 'phenomenological context' (Pink, 2015, p. 143) 'in our most familiar environment,' (Kiss, 2021, p. 102) – the researcher's desktop.

The desktop and the software that reside on it are able to play time-based media. It can play and display multiple digital materials at the same time, materials themselves collected at different times. This was key to understanding what happened when my participants encountered an [ambient] advert. Between the digital desktop and the ability to screen record and edit, my ability to film on my mobile phone, and the capabilities of Premiere Pro I was able to think with time-based participant materials and the multitude of connected and contextual reference materials.

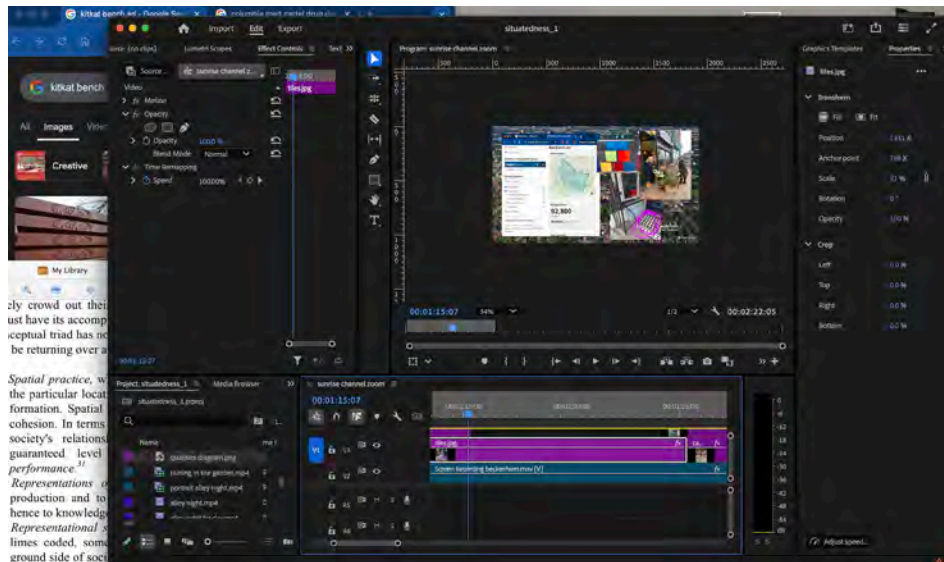


Fig. 68: A screenshot of the thinking process during *In-and-Out-of-Place* (2024)

‘We are in and toward the world,’ writes Merleau-Ponty ‘even our reflections take place in the temporal flow that they are attempting to capture’ (2014, p. xxviii). I needed a place that could deal with time-based media that allowed me the ability to think with multiple pieces of film, photographs and assorted other research materials at the same time.

I needed to be able to experience the experience of experience.

This place to do this turned out to be my desktop.

Through the facility of screen recording Lee was able to make use of ‘the computer screen as both a camera lens and a canvas’ or as Kiss terms it ‘a setting’ for the ‘unfolding research story’ (2021, p. 113). Lee’s desktop canvas is the central location of his film from which all other locations could be reached. He moved in an easy back and forth from the apparent neutrality of sources such as Google Maps and various newspaper articles, to more personal commentaries from fan videos on YouTube as they moved around in the corporeal world. It also allowed him to make connections and develop themes in a cross-disciplinary and multimedia way, each artefact able to contextualise the other. In this way he was able to track participation and fandom while attempting ‘to reveal the transnational socio-economic context’ of the Hollywood machine (Drăgan, 2021, p. 122). Lee also made visible some of the more hidden aspects of digital environments and montage by revealing the delay in opening up multiple files, and the various programmes used to access and work with digital artefacts. This is both a visual and conceptual technique earlier used by Nick Briz (2013).

Filmmaker and lecturer Ariel Avissar questions whether desktop documentary practice is ever an accurate reveal of the research process, describing it in the film as ‘a wholly artificial construction’ (2023, 2:07). I agree in part with his critique, as materials have to be found ahead of time and a script has to be formulated, so it is not research as it happens naturally, it is a performance of research. However, tinkering, for me, is not simply an illustration of the research process, it is the thought at work. tinkering is how I think. It is where my thoughts, the participants’ experiences and [ambient] advertising come together at the same time. My films as illustration of the research are a secondary feature, communicating to others new understandings and findings, and in this way they are an unfolding research story as described by Kiss (2021), please see chapter 5. In the first instance the purpose of my tinkering act is so that I can think, a tinkering assemblage. No studies thus far have made use of tinkering as a method for generating and presenting process work during the iterative stages of advertising research and concept development or for documenting the experience of engagement with advertising.

Conclusion and Applying the Framework

To answer Objective 1 in chapters 1 and 2 I conducted a review of existing literature and methodological approaches used by theorists and researchers to investigate understandings of perception, attention and encounter in relation to ambient advertising in everyday spaces. This highlighted that there were gaps in knowledge, and that nuanced and subtle attentive contact between people and things in the world was difficult to capture and theorise. Analysis of the existing literature further revealed some researchers whose methods I could weave together to research with participants in the everyday world. This led me to Objective 2, to design a multi-methodological framework that blends principles from phenomenology, sensory ethnography, action research with practice to capture the ways in which people perceive and pay attention to ambient advertising.

I developed this spiralling bricolage methodology as an interdisciplinary framework that could address my research question - how and in what ways do participants encounter and give attention to [ambient] advertising in everyday places? This not an entirely new methodology, however it combines existing methods into an innovative new bricolage that I have tested. It has proven itself iteratively in three phases through the action research cycle addressing Objective 3. It enabled me to explore the various ways participants pay attention to, perceive, and encounter in-situ [ambient] advertising.

Indeed, the methodology disclosed many moments of encounter with things of the world that were straightforward, but at other times revealed connections that were ambiguous or complex (please see chapter 4). However, the methodology went beyond my more pragmatic intentions and opened up a dynamic and immanent creativity within that moment of contact in ways that I had not anticipated (please see chapter 5). This allowed me to answer Objective 4, to analyse the contextual elements from the everyday world that co-assemble an ambient advert as something to pay attention to.

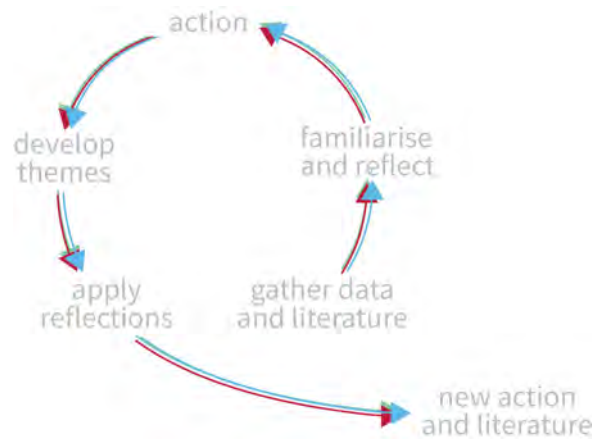


Fig. 69: My bricolage methodology as a spiral of steps (2024)

The research spiral I follow (Fig. 69) binds Schön's concept of the reflective practitioner, the reflexivity and situatedness of Pink's ethnomethods and Kiss's tinkering, the participation and actions of McNiff's action-reflection cycle (McNiff and Whitehead, 2011, p. 9), with theories of perception, experience, time, encounter and relations to things from Merleau-Ponty, Tuan, Bergson, Nishida, Ahmed, McGregor and Deleuze and Guattari. It is situated in a body of research that is sensitive to the importance of place, spatial relationships, relations and everyday behaviours in regard to advertising communications (Chéron and Pau, 2009; Gambetti, 2010; Krajina, 2014; Moor, 2004). The reflective and reflexive design brings together my previous experience as an advertising creative and my current experience as a researcher and lecturer, with a wider understanding of relevant theoretical and epistemological positions.

The linear and quite artificial format of a thesis structure can make it appear as though the action research happened, followed by analysis, followed by filmmaking. However, the methods happened in tandem as I moved between the corporeal and digital world, between my two places of research. Ahmed describes Husserl sitting at his desk in his study writing, noting that 'it is from here that the world unfolds' (2006, p. 28). The research unfolded before me and

within me at my desk as I continually brought to the table participant films, audio diaries, photographs, books and articles, websites and films (see chapter 5, *Desktop ∞ thinking*).

Action research gave me access to the sensory corporeal world and multiple situated perspectives. The participants shared their time and observations generously, purely out of curiosity. They had nothing obvious to gain, though the majority commented that they enjoyed the experience as it made them reflect on their environment and their own habits after the walk had finished. The use of live ethnomethods allowed me into those small moments participants might forget, or simply not notice. The cyclical nature of action-research gave me time to think, consider new actions, analyse material and build my understanding slowly over time.

Mixed methods through quantitative data analysis helped manage the volume of material and organise it in such a way that I could draw some early conclusions and comparisons, and it helped me familiarise myself with the details. It allowed for percentages, time codes and data visualisations to be pulled from the experiments. While, for me, it was a blunt tool, I did mean that I could look across photographs, films and micro-interviews to find patterns and omissions, and it did serve to flag perceptible or appreciable observations, reactions and transformations hidden within such dense materials.

Reflective thematic analysis provided a very tactile way into the participant transcriptions and micro-interviews. By splitting the transcripts into coloured themes and coloured experiment groups, printing them out and cutting them up, I had physical material I could move around my desk, from one pile to another, to another. This helped define the themes. It also helped me find those moments in which participants create new lines of thought and make unexpected connections. It is a very fluid process which suited being woven through action research. Themes changed as new data came in, as new books were read, as films started to be made, as I reflected.

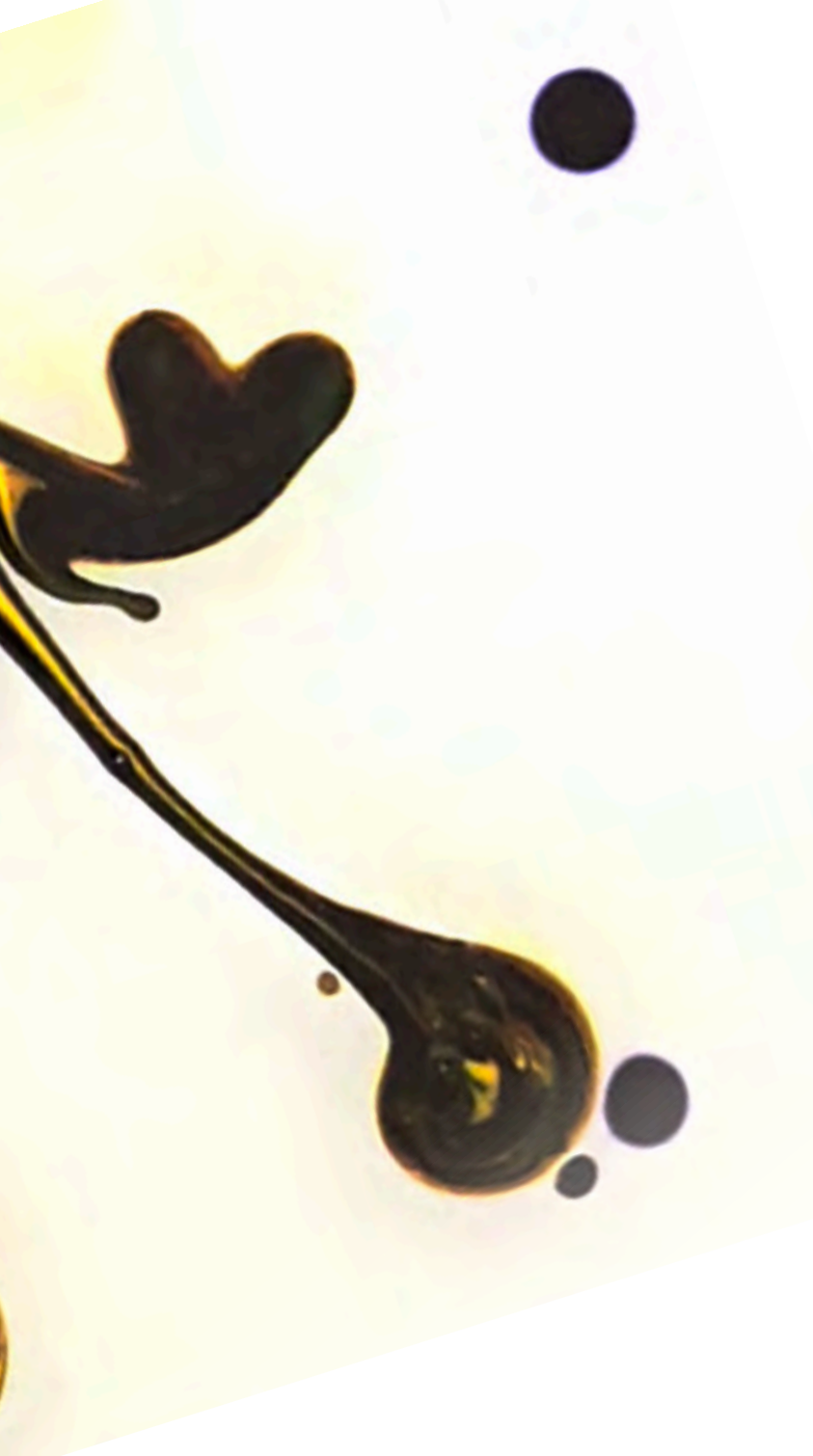
Thinking is the product of processing the materials through the years of doing this research, and of trying to reach points of articulation along the way – an unfolding research story indeed. The early thinking films were an attempt to analyse participant materials and explore theory. As the experiments were conducted, the participant material was watched and transcribed. A process of reflection followed, and the material was then incorporated into films while being simultaneously coded and re-coded. More reflection followed, and new actions were planned and enacted, and the

cycle began again. It was relational and dynamic, wound around action research and reflexive thematic analysis. Though the process of thinking started within phase 1 and continued through phases 2 and 3, the final films in chapter 5 were developed in tandem with writing chapter 5. It simply would not have been possible for me to reach these concepts until I neared the end of my research. Although I have not stuck closely to all of the more common techniques of desktop documentary that Kiss refers to when describing thinking – the full *unfolding* research story – I have followed in the spirit of a research story told through the desktop. In the end the final films are a rather more processed version of my brain, a more linear narrative than a fully unfolding research story (please see chapter 5). They are that moment when I finally understood why all the internet tabs were open.

The action research cycle, alongside quantitative analysis, forms the basis of the experiments in Phases 1, 2 and 3 so will be detailed in chapter 4. The development of the themes through reflexive thematic analysis and thinking will be traced in chapter 5.



Fig. 70: A woman stops in the alleyway to look at the [ambient] advert (2022) but I am no closer to understanding her encounter by simply taking a photograph of her



CHAPTER 4

What is Everyone Looking at?

*The participant stops in front of the lamppost advert and turns away looking at the substation. A man and a woman walking through the alleyway from the other direction come to a stop in front of the ambient advert. The woman exclaims ‘Oh look!’ The man replies, ‘**They’ve put them all over there, how strange.**’ Participant D7 joins in their conversation, ‘**That’s my thought exactly, it’s very strange.**’ Film footage from Participant D7 as other people walk past the [ambient] advert variation and come across the first [ambient] advert.*

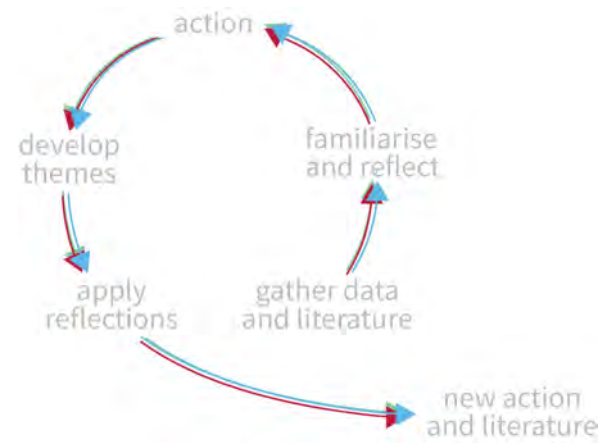
[Ambient] advertising is designed to be encountered in everyday environments in the context of everyday life. Because of this the research was conducted in everyday environments. Real-world sites are not labs, the weather changes, people occupy the space for a variety of reasons, and they are always on their way to doing something that has nothing to do with the research. Things within the space come and go. For example, in phase 1 graffiti went up and was painted over, during phase 2 residents put up their own communications about things that were significant to them, in phase 3 scaffolding was erected in between visits and a post box topper was stolen (this will be detailed later in the chapter). Every day the weather changed, often over the course of the same day. In other words, these sites were not controllable. During the research timeline, we all experienced a world-wide pandemic, local elections were held, council policies were enacted, football teams won and lost games. In other words, wider social contexts were also not controllable. This was a fundamental part of the research - the contexts in which an [ambient] advert sits, the complexity of the things that we encounter, the messiness of human experience.

Tuan notes that,

‘[M]uch of human experience is difficult to articulate, however, and we are far from finding devices that measure satisfactorily the quality of a feeling or aesthetic response. What we cannot say in an acceptable scientific language we tend to deny or forget’ (2007, p. 200)

Setting the Scene

As described in chapter 3 the purpose of my pilot phase and the following eleven experiments is to answer empirically how and in what ways do participants encounter and give attention to [ambient] advertising in an everyday place. To do this I needed to find a methodology that could capture that moment, and finally I needed to analyse the contextual elements that co-assembled as the [ambient] advert. By placing my [ambient] advertising interventions in everyday places and working with participants I would have data from lived-world experiences. I will be applying the research spiral of steps that I identified in chapter 3.



Repeat of Fig. 69: My bricolage methodology as a spiral of steps (2024)

Each phase had a slightly different focus and allowed me more time for reflection between blocks of experiments. Phase 1 focussed on methods. Phase 2 on Christmas messaging and repetition. Phase 3 investigated if the same results would be repeated in a busier environment. Context, and the six qualities identified in chapter 1; embodiment, lived relevance, contextual fit, aestheticized elements, conspicuousness and the encounter itself will be addressed at the end of all the phases to avoid repetition. As described in chapter 3 the pilot study and phase 1 tested methods. Once the methods had been decided there was a consistency of methods used in phases 2 and 3. Please see chapter 3 for more detail.

	site	Experiment number	participants	Intervention	Methods/tools
Pilot	Alleyway	0	myself	0	Autoethnography, sketchbook
Phase 1	Alleyway	1	10	(1) Big Ribbon	Maps, field notes
		2	10	(1) Big Ribbon	Lapel camera 1, autophotography, micro interview
		3	9	(1) Big Ribbon	Lapel camera 1, autophotography micro interview
		4	10	(2) Xmas paper – trees, silver bow	Lapel camera 1, autophotography micro interview
Phase 2	Alleyway	5	8	(3) Xmas paper -trees , red bow	Lapel camera 2, photovoice micro interview
		6	10	(4) 2 x Xmas paper -trees. red bow repetition	Lapel camera 2, photovoice micro interview
		7	10	(5) 2 x Xmas paper – trees and baubles. variation	Lapel camera 2, photovoice micro interview
Phase 3	Street	8	9	(6) Pink Ribbon - repetition	Lapel camera 2, photovoice micro interview
		9	10	(3)Xmas paper – trees	Lapel camera 2, photovoice micro interview
		10	9	(3) Xmas paper – trees	Lapel camera 2, photovoice micro interview
		11	9	(1) Big Ribbon	Lapel camera 2, photovoice micro interview

Fig. 71: Breakdown of experiments, participants and methods (2024)

Beckenham

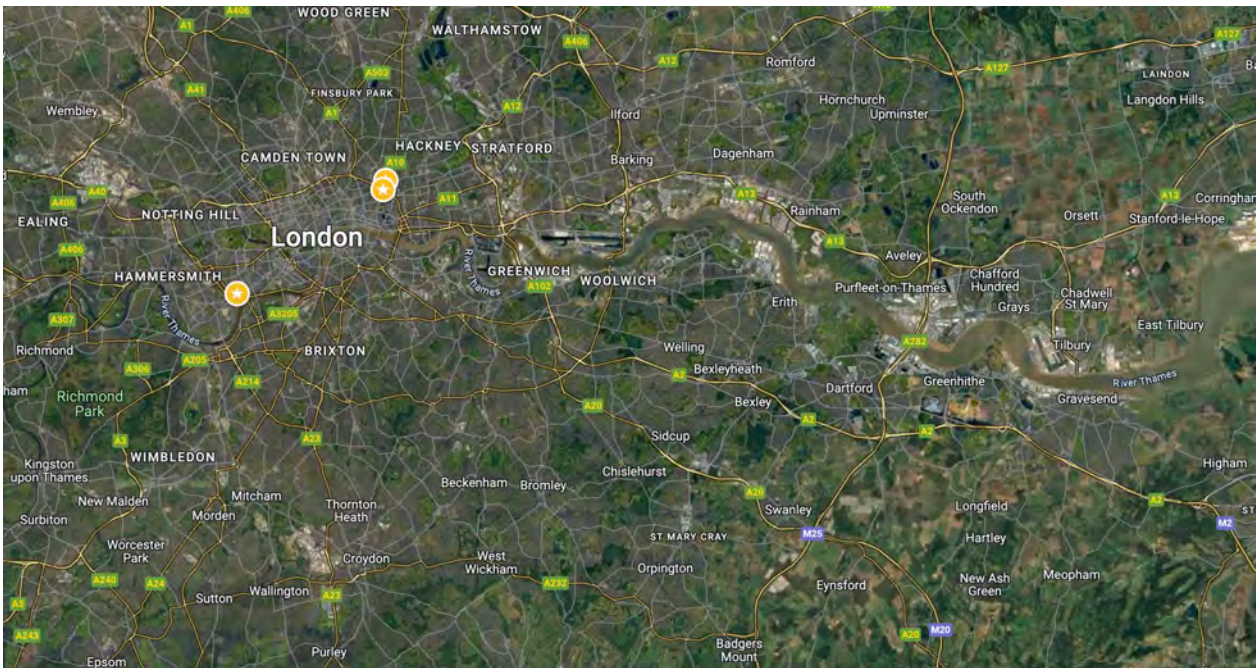


Fig. 72: Screenshot of London and Beckenham (2024)

London is a sprawling city that has consumed a number of smaller towns and villages that had once been on the outskirts. Many places that would have been considered towns in the home counties are now form part of the Greater London commuter sprawl and are almost indistinguishable from London itself. Families that would have bought property closer to the centre are now priced out and have moved to suburban areas such as Beckenham. Beckenham has a population of around 45,000 and it is the third largest town in the borough of Bromley. Access to work through the rail network is fairly regular and straightforward, houses are relatively affordable with gardens and parking, there are a number of schools and green spaces, and the high street has a mix of chains and local shops. This has attracted a wide variety of media aware residents, often working in media themselves, though there is limited ethnic diversity.

The crime rates are relatively stable, with the most reported crime as violence and sexual offences. The crime rate in the borough of Bromley is roughly identical to similar areas the average crime rate across similar areas (Police UK, 2025).

While Beckenham has typically voted Conservative, Labour won the seat in 2024. Bromley borough council however is Conservative and has been since 2001. This has led to a diversity in political views in the area.

The alleyway

The alleyway connects a busy residential street with larger houses and gardens to a smaller residential street with smaller houses and gardens. The busy residential street connects to another street which leads to the train station that connects to Central London. Directly opposite the northern entrance (between numbers 55 and 57) is a crossroads to a wider residential street. This wider street is a pedestrian and vehicle thoroughfare to the main road with access to shops and leisure facilities. This residential street also leads to the local hospital and local park. The south-eastern entrance to the alleyway (between house 80 and 82) connects to another street leading to a local school. The smaller south-western or side alley, leads to another residential street. These destinations provide reasons for the alleyway to be in fairly constant use throughout the day and the evening.

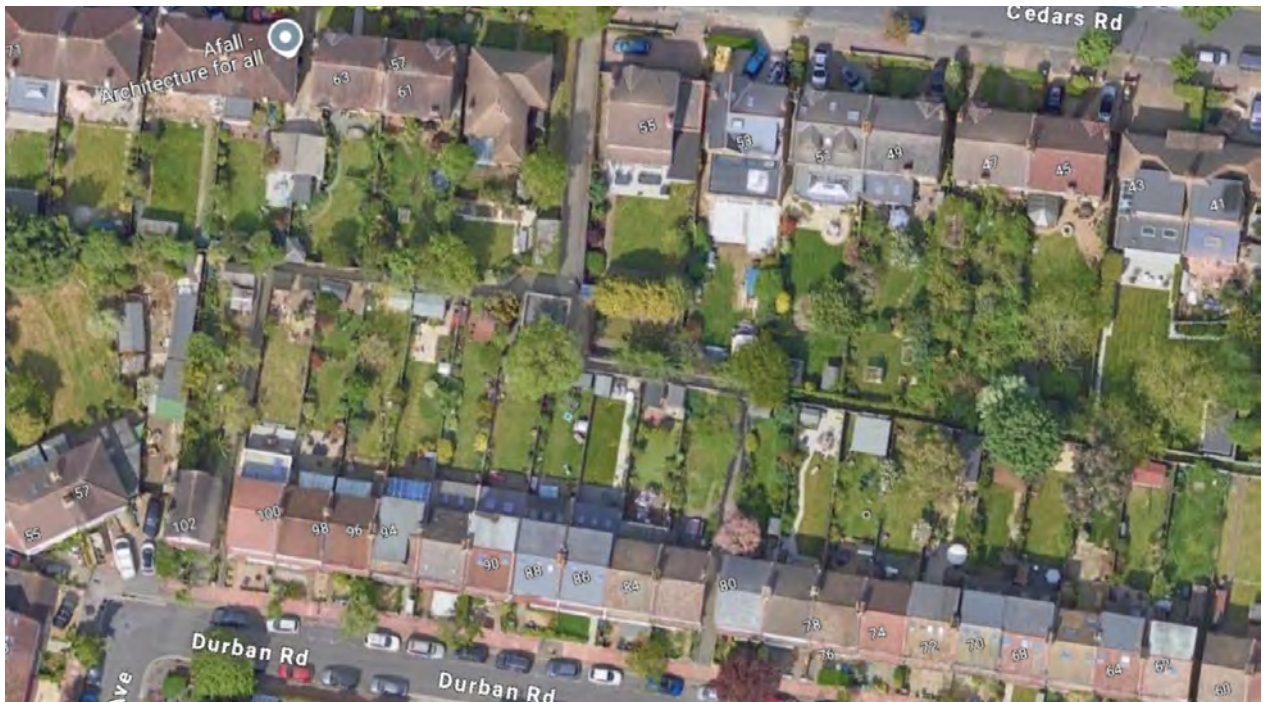
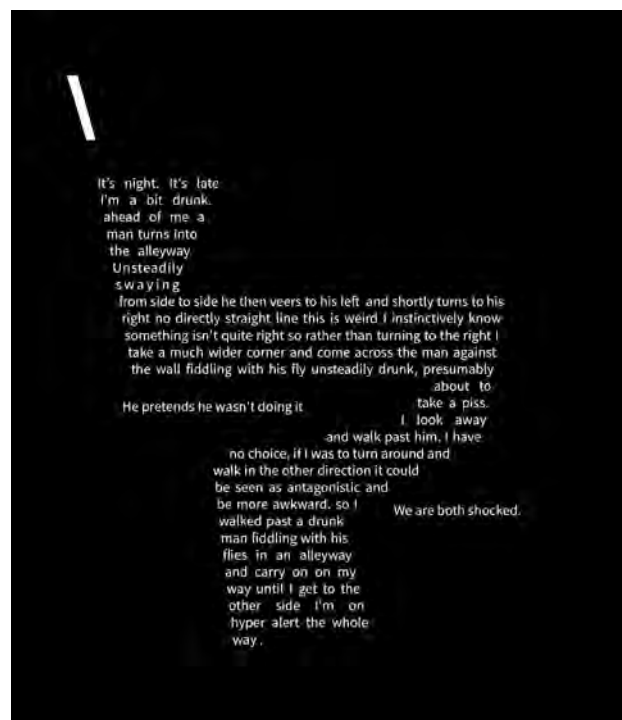
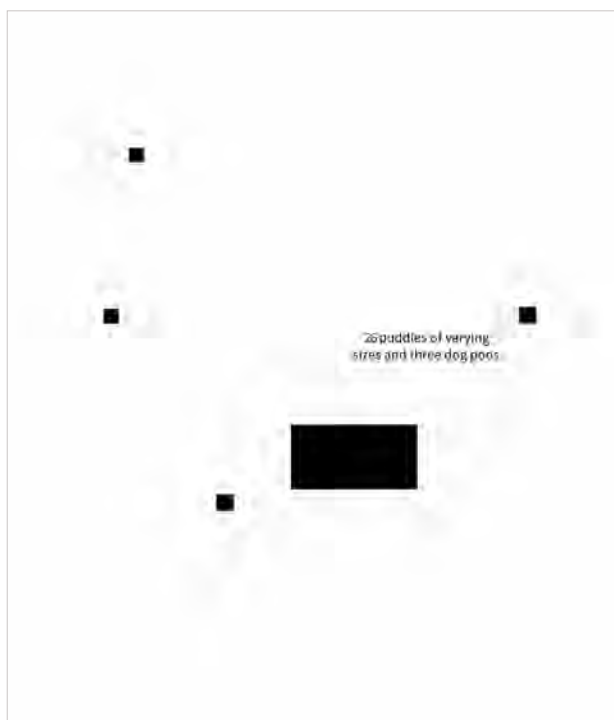
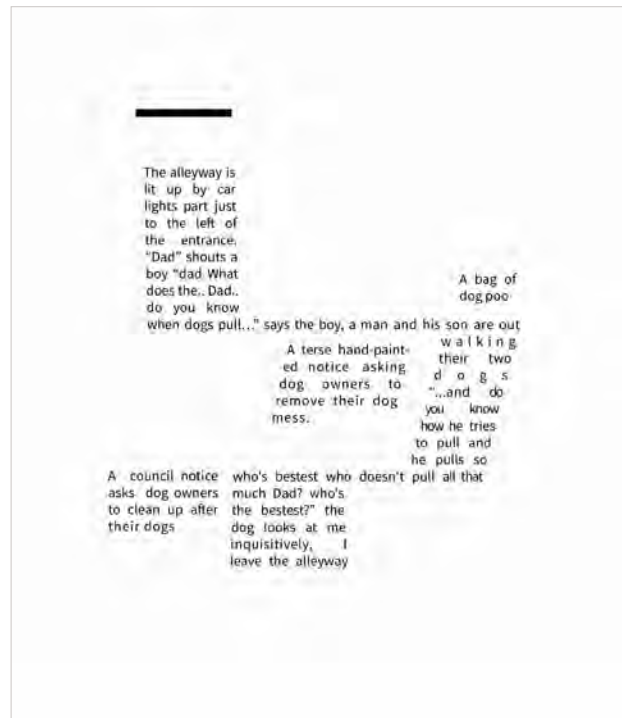


Fig. 73: Screenshot of the alleyway (2024)

As a council acknowledged thoroughfare it is concreted, with tarmac in places. An electricity substation forms a peninsula in the centre with access via a widened portion of alley on the Northern side. It is formed of five separate sections and three of the four blind corners have lampposts. There are a variety of council signs on walls, lampposts and around the electricity substation. It has a long narrow side alley running into it in one corner. There is also a garden-access only back-alley, without flooring and over-run with vegetation that has no access to the road.

Pilot



Figs. 74-77: Typographic transcription of autoethnographic stories
from the alleyway, Pilot phase, (2018)

Gathering information, familiarization and reflection

The pilot study ran in tandem with an expansion in my reading which together formed the gathering phase of this first loop of the action research spiral. While I continued to expand my knowledge of academic ambient advertising research I also started to delve more deeply into texts and practices that explored everyday places. Heavily influenced by the writings and observations of Perec (2008a, 2008c, 2008b, 2010), the pilot study sought to explore a specific physical place by paying close attention to encounters with things and people, and the effects that the context would have on behaviours. Perec was also a conduit to his early employer, Lefebvre and his interest in ordinary places. During this year I came across Krajina's study of encounters with digital screens in everyday contexts that was to influence the philosophical grounding of the PhD.

Action

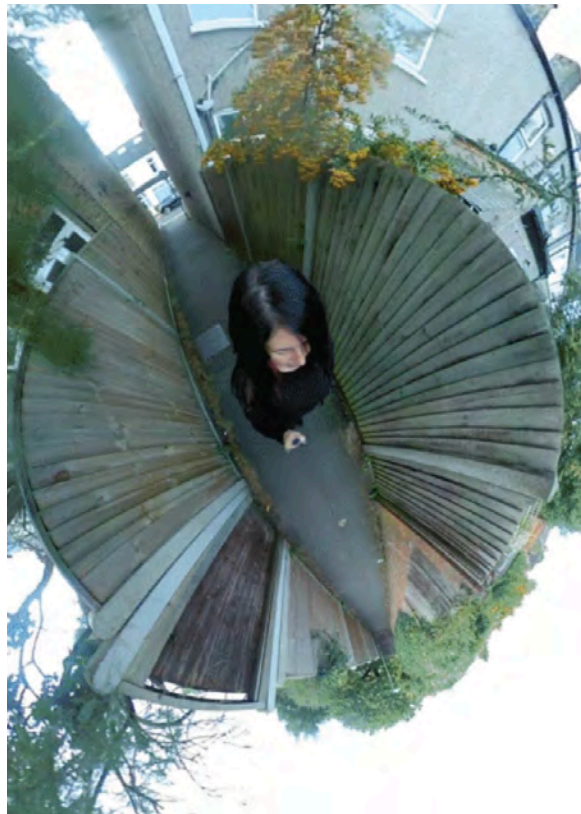
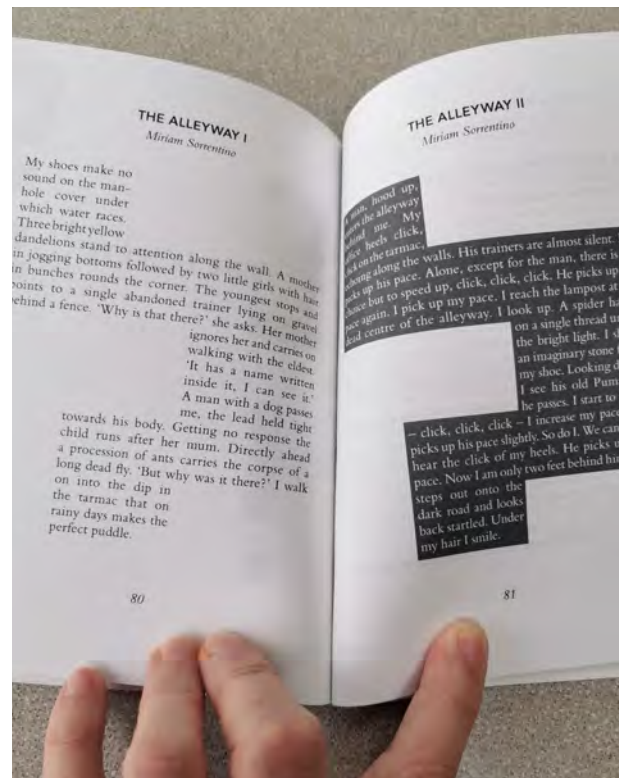
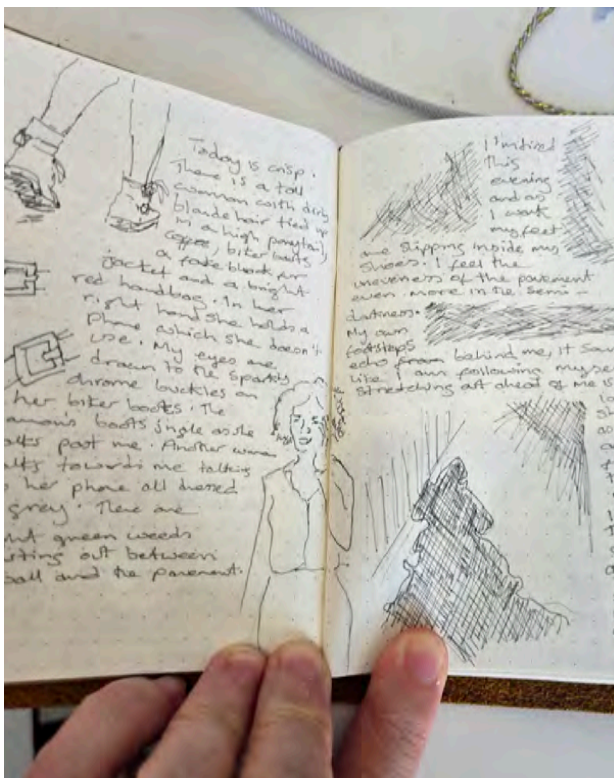


Fig. 78: Still from 360 film of the alleyway (2018)

Over the course of the year, I detailed activity in the alleyway. Almost every day I recorded what I encountered and the wider context as I felt it. Patterns of alleyway use were sketched out indicating that the alleyway is used in a combination of work related, school related and leisure related activity. Some of these patterns of activity intersect but often they form distinct time periods. During the week the alleyway

is busy from 7 am - 9 am with people entering the alleyway from the South and leaving at the Northern exit. The alleyway is relatively busy for the rest of the day with families and older people to-ing and fro-ing. From 6 pm - 8 pm workers returning home enter the alleyway in waves from the northern entrance to the main Southern exit. After 8pm the alleyway is used less frequently but between 10.30 pm and 11.30 pm it is marginally busier with those coming home after evening entertainment. At the weekend the alleyway is quieter, and it is almost exclusively used for leisure activity. The pilot study entries were recorded using sketchbooks and audio diaries as ethnomethods. In this way I created a year of stories from the alleyway.



Figs. 79 and 80: Autoethnographic stories in phase 1 sketchbook (2018), two of the stories were published in *Story Cities* (Davies, Potts and Rehal, 2019, p. 80–81)

Development of themes

Though this research is interested in how things, such as [ambient] advertising, are constructed this started with a level of curiosity about how things in general are constructed in our experience of them and the role that context played. During this pilot I saw that the components that construct anything in the alleyway were mixed and dissimilar in all sorts of ways. The lamppost was made up of the post, the lightbulb and the connection to the electricity grid, but just as much as it was made of these things it was also made of

its context. I knew that context affected everything on an intellectual and tacit level – this was the premise for my PhD after all - but, encountering it in the moment, over and over again over the course of the year was a very different thing.

The qualities of **embodiment**, **lived relevance**, **conspicuousness** applied to all manner of encounters with stickers and graffiti over the year. In particular I felt **embodiment** keenly. The alleyway was different at night to during the day. The lamp post became a thing at night, it was near invisible during the day. It was different when it rained and the grey clouds muted the colour of the post and drew it back towards the fence, to when the sun shone brightly and the post would stand proud of the wall, a gleam on its surface. I felt consciously that I walked through this space as a woman walking past this lamppost. At night, and particularly when encountering a man in that space, I became very aware of the potential for danger. The pool of light that surrounded the lamppost in the dark provided a sense of safety and I would hurry towards it, feeling hope as I neared it and some regret at leaving it – a feeling of holding one's breath until the next lamppost was reached. It was encountered with these feelings at night and yet still it was an everyday thing and not given much consideration during the day. As described in chapter 3, during this time I injured my spine and was unable to walk for a few months, and when I did walk I had to use crutches. I became aware of pain, my own feet touching the floor, hazards in my path, negotiating others – people with dogs or buggies. For a few weeks in the year the light in lamppost stopped working and this provided an economic or political context, how often are these things checked? What priority does the council give it?

My encounters with everything changed according to the context(s). The alleyway and lamppost were different when I was hurrying to catch the train or dawdling past it to go for a swim and I might notice a fly caught on a spider's web spun between the lamppost and the wall, the lamppost forming part of the web. What brought these various things to my attention? What made something conspicuous? What made it relevant? I only encountered the fly in the spider's web if I was not locked in my own mind thinking about train times and in those moments, I noticed how the lamppost had become part of the web. How things are *assembled* from heterogenous elements started to emerge as an interesting theme.

Applying reflections

During the pilot I started to think about how I would involve other

perspectives in the research. I approached planning for the next phase as both a researcher and a practitioner. I sketched out ideas for [ambient] adverts that would apply the qualities from chapter 1. I became aware of the need to know more about how a person exists in the world, what it is that makes a person look at a thing and what happens in that moment of encounter. This motivated the next set of reading. This is how Krajina's research led me to phenomenology.



*Figs. 81-83: Various [ambient] advertising ideas
from phase 1 sketchbook (2019)*

My process began with auto-ethnographic practice, to better understand the types of things people pay attention to, however I realised the limitations of auto-ethnographic practice – our perceptions are inherently limited by our own viewpoint. I needed the multiplicity, and I made plans to contact participants. I had identified assemblage as something interesting. Other themes and qualities will be discussed after all phases are described.

Phase 1

A2a

■ She stands at the entrance of the alleyway "I'm taking a photo of my feet because I like my feet "but the first the first thing I'm photographing is the 'Bollocks to Brexit' sticker. I walk through this alley multiple times a week, sometimes really really late at night - and it's really dark then - and I have never gone round the other way because I think the other way is scarier, but I really don't want to walk the long way around...' She loses her train of thought. "it's really rather nice and autumny at the moment, it does tend to be a place that gets all the fly-tipping." She notices a movement up in a window above the fence ■ "So, there's something on the lamppost down here." She picks up her pace and walks towards the lamppost "You have to be careful of this lamppost because sometimes people put dog poo at the bottom of it - in a bag with a dog poo in it" She states with some annoyance "and they don't manage to get it home."

■ *"There's a man up there." She stares up at the loft window, "and now I'm talking to myself."*

■ *A cat walks along the top of a fence, she notices it and exclaims "Bestie you're still here, hello, She stops to pet the cat "Hello, here's a cat." The cat meows "hello you're a lovely boy. he's called bestie because my daughter called him her best buddy cat photo and I kept telling him not to talk to strangers because I was worried about the cat killer." the cat meows again as if in response "see you later," she says to the cat.*

■ *"ooh" says the girl as she sees the participant. "ooh" A2a exclaims as she comes to a stop in front of the lamppost "That's weird, that's new"*

■ A Child's voice can be heard from around the corner "come and see" she says insistently. The alleyway is quiet except for the sound of a child's running feet. They come to an abrupt stop in front of the lamppost. "No real-life mummy" the little girl calls back to her mum who is emerging from around the corner with a younger boy in a buggy. The woman calls out as she rounds the corner ■

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ "Georgia please wait" "real life mummy " shouts the little girl emphatically "It's got a pretty ribbon on it look," says the woman to her little girl, She looks at A2a and asks "is it the lamp posts birthday?" A2a laughs "it seems to have a gift tag on it" They both laugh together, and Amy looks at the tag more closely. Having read it silently she drops the tag. The mother of the little girl picks up the tag to read it and the little girl strokes the ribbon. The mother smiles at A2a and they both walk away from the lamppost. A2a looks at the floor and comments "a bit of rubbish" She stops and turns back to the lamppost with the bow and gift tag again "I'll take another photo of the lamppost" She walks round ■ the corner "There's another lamppost round here but this one doesn't have a big pretty ribbon on it, that's a shame..." Amy sighs. "... but there's no rubbish which is good. "Danger of death, I always like that one" she whispers" I'm rambling now... ■ quite often up this bit there is fly-tipping...always rubbish and weeds." "Sometimes there is really good weeds and the guinea pigs like to eat them so on the way home from the gym I pick the weed s. more rubbish, not too much rubbish today... and something resiliently growing." A plant growing through the cracks in the tarmac, a splash of yellow and green against the grey and the brown autumn leaves.

Fig. 84: Typographic story of participant A2a walk (2019)



W4



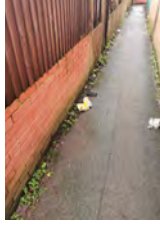
F3



J4c



A2a



J4a



C2b



S3b



S3c



M4c



S3a

Fig. 85: Phase 1 participant journeys through the alleyway 2018- 2019 (2024)

Gathering information, familiarization and reflection

The lack of academic research on advertising creatives perspectives on [ambient] advertising provided a push to interview creatives from a variety of agencies (see chapter 1 Fig. 13). This broadened my understanding of the state of [ambient] advertising in current practice. Reading theorists such as Sarah Pink developed my understanding of what I needed the participants in this research to do, the most productive way to do it and which methods to employ. Accessing multiple viewpoints and perceptions had the benefit of seeing if there were responses and behaviours in common. At the same time, I began reading Merleau-Ponty's and Heidegger's accounts of being-in-the world, immersing myself in phenomenological texts, and reading Tuan's experiential accounts of place in which memories and senses are bound (please see chapter 2).

Action

This phase aimed to investigate if any attention was paid to an [ambient] advert and to establish the best methods to capture this. Participants were recruited and two different [ambient] interventions were installed over the 4 experiments in this phase (please see Figs. 86 and 87). This phase took in many different types of weather. Weather was a factor that interested me in terms of embodied context. In experiment 1 participants drew maps and I observed their walk and took notes. From experiment 2 Participants wore lapel cameras and were asked to take photographs of whatever attracted their attention and to describe anything that came to mind.



Fig. 86: Participant C2a photographs [Ambient] advert used in experiments 1-3 (2019).

Fig. 87: Participant M4b photographs [Ambient] advert used in experiment 4 (2022)

Development of themes

I analysed the data in tables, experiment by experiment as detailed in chapter 3 and drew comparisons. Attention paid to anything was detailed by virtue of both the phone cameras as a tool and the audio diary. Over the course of the four experiments the participants provided great quantities of information about the site itself, the [ambient] advert and broader societal contexts. The alleyway was rich with stuff. participants, on average, depicted a place with,

- Abundant foliage, with 62% of participants taking photographs of plants and berries and 62% talking about them in general
- The physical perimeter of the alleyway, the fences, walls, side alleys, including overhanging foliage with around 82% taking photographs and 59% commenting
- Decorative elements, the red wall with painted squares, specific berry bushes and flowering trees with 42% taking photographs and 44% commenting
- What they can see outside the alleyway with 32% of participants speaking about it and 30% of them taking photographs
- The mysterious electricity substation, with 20% photographing it and 34% discussing what they imagined about it in greater detail
- Other street furniture which featured in 32% of participants photographs and in 36% of comments – this was largely to do with the vent attached to the side of a house that issued steam in an obvious way in the winter months



Fig. 88: Lapel camera footage from participant J4c as he takes a photograph of the overgrown back alley that gets very dark at night in experiment 4 (2022)



Fig. 89: Lapel camera footage from participant F3 as she takes a photograph of the sign at the substation in experiment 3 (2019)

Encountering the [ambient] advert

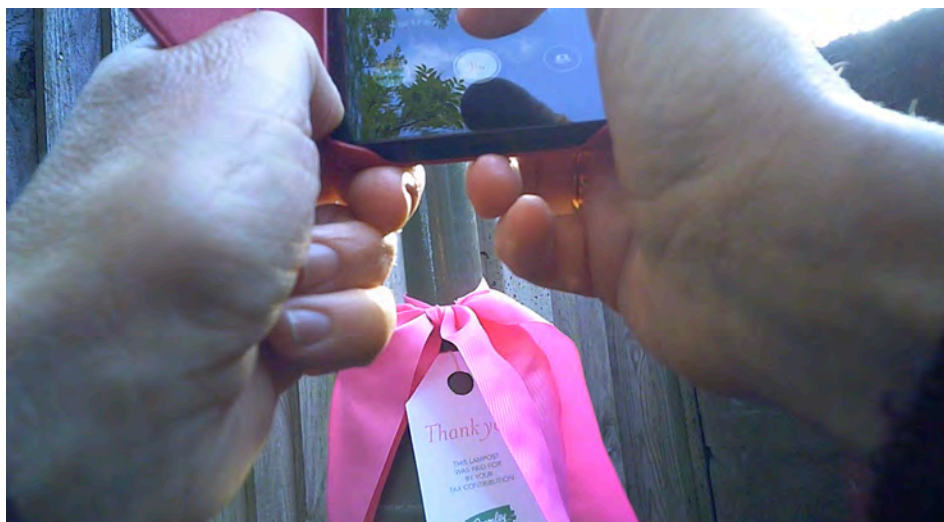


Fig. 90: Lapel camera footage from participant S3c as she takes a photograph of the Big Ribbon [ambient] advert in experiment 3 (2019)

Given that the alleyway is clearly a place with abundant distraction and things for participants to pay attention to a surprising 97% of the 39 participants paid attention to the advert, the ones that did not appear to encounter it at all were busy thinking about things that were not in the alleyway, one about work and the other about flowers in people's gardens.

Experiments 2 – 4 made use of autophotography and 85% of the participants elected to take photographs of the [ambient] advert. This was the most common thing in the alleyway to be photographed. The participants that noticed it commented that it was either new to the alleyway (81%), or that it was unusual or surprising. This piqued

their curiosity sufficiently for them to have a closer look at what it was. 59% read out the advertising copy with 69% commenting on it further.

They spent on average of 26 seconds involved with the advert in some way, including walking up to it. There was often an obvious *pause* where they looked at it more closely, reading it and continuing to comment on it after leaving.

- Experiment 1 – no time code
- Experiment 2 – 25 seconds
- Experiment 3 – 23 seconds
- Experiment 4 – 28 seconds

Participant attention to the [ambient] advert was high in both numbers and curiosity, in addition the lapel cameras picked up non-participants engaging with the adverts. Generally speaking, if a participant interacted with the advert, they then continued to talk about it. This was evident within experiments 1-4 individually and phase 1 in total; the numbers did not vary greatly. At this point, despite the small numbers of participants ‘there was clearly some robustness to the consistency of responses’ (Sorrentino, 2020b, p. p106).

A fairly dramatic difference between experiments 1-3 and experiment 4 was the number of participants distracted by other features within the alleyway. Participants were intrigued by the larger ambient advert with Christmas wrapping paper in experiment 4 some time before they got to it. The small boost in scale and production value for experiment 4 increased focus but it didn’t change attitudes towards the brand – this had already been framed by the context the participants brought with them. ‘In experiments 1-3 around half of the participants from each group remembered the local council brand. However, all the participants in experiment 4 recalled the brand.

Encountering other communicative objects

Participants also noticed other ‘communicative objects’ (Sorrentino, 2020a), See chapter 1.

- Official signage from the council or utility companies, with 27% of participants taking photographs of the signs and 15% talking about these signs
- Unofficial communications such as stickers and graffiti with 27% taking photographs and 27% going on to comment further

Discussion of methods

To fulfil Objective 3, I had to apply my methodological framework in public spaces to explore the various ways participants encounter and pay attention to ambient advertising in everyday places from the very start of my work with participants.

Field observations in a sketchbook as a method in experiment 1 proved to be more intrusive than I had imagined. A positive was that participants did not take part in activities that they would not ordinarily undertake – such as taking photographs – so their walk followed a more natural rhythm. However, the fact that someone was observing them made the participants self-conscious. In general, across the phase 1 experiments 67% of participants showed self-awareness, however this figure is skewed by the fact that 90% of them demonstrated self-awareness in experiment 1, referring to

She walks up to the lamppost advert and looks closely at it, 'This is a new thing,' turning to me she asks, have you seen it before?' Participant E1b notes from sketchbook.

the situation or turning to me to ask me questions.

Detail was also lost in field notes in phase 1 experiment 1 as I was unable to keep up with actions and behaviours as they happened – for example the sighs, the change in tone, the change of physical pace. In addition, I was also unable to accurately capture the time that things took.

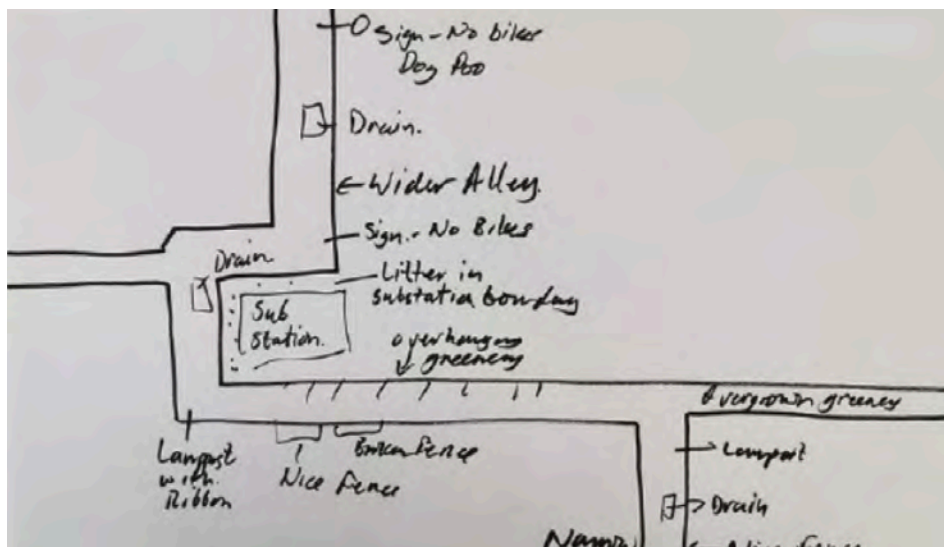


Fig. 91: hand drawn map created by participant O1 during interview (2018)

I had thought that map-making would be a useful record of what participants found engaging during their walk in experiment 1. Indeed, as a tool to provoke further discussion in the interview that

followed it was productive, though more as a distraction than as a data collection method. The need for live methods emerged from the discrepancy between the information given after the walk in the semi-structured interviews and the levels of engagement with things in the alleyway that I observed.

I introduced autophotography in experiments 2 – 4 and began using a lapel camera to record a walking diary to capture more in more detail in-the-moment interaction and attention in experiment 2. Map-making was replaced with an app in experiment 2, installed on the phone that I handed out to participants. It could keep track of exactly where they walked in an effort to keep the interview at the end to a minimum to ensure the data was as live as possible. In line with map-drawing, the mapping app also proved to be unnecessary within the context of the alleyway. Mapping was discontinued in experiments 3 and 4.

Autophotography proved to be a productive method to capture participant attention. However, it revealed unexpected problems. In order not to lead participants I told them to take as many or as few photographs as they wished to, the result of which was that some participants took a handful of photographs and others twenty or thirty. As a researcher I did not know the significance of individual photographs, for example, did the participant really mean to take five photographs of a tree or did they struggle to take one photo that accurately captured the thing they were attending to? Trying to find out what was important to a participant would lead to extending the interview time, something that I was reluctant to do as I wanted to keep the data as close to the experience as possible. It also made it difficult to compare findings with such wide-ranging numbers. This prompted me to re-think if and how I could make use of photography.

By experiment 3 I had realised that a lot of the information I had thought would only come out in longer interviews could actually be gathered in a micro-interview conducted in-the-field while talking to the participant as they signed the final consent form. While only 18% of participants commented on walking through the alley at night in the films, 62% shared this context in the micro interviews. It was often at this point that the women revealed that they found the alleyway dark and intimidating at night and that they appreciated the lamppost. Participants also commented on their attitude to the council at this point. These micro-interviews, that took between one and two minutes, revealed the fact that very few thought the ambient advert had anything to do with my study.

The lapel camera proved to be an excellent way to collect video, audio diary and time code. It also had the additional benefit of capturing participants in the act of taking photographs, a very visual way of demonstrating attention.

Applying reflection and moving forwards

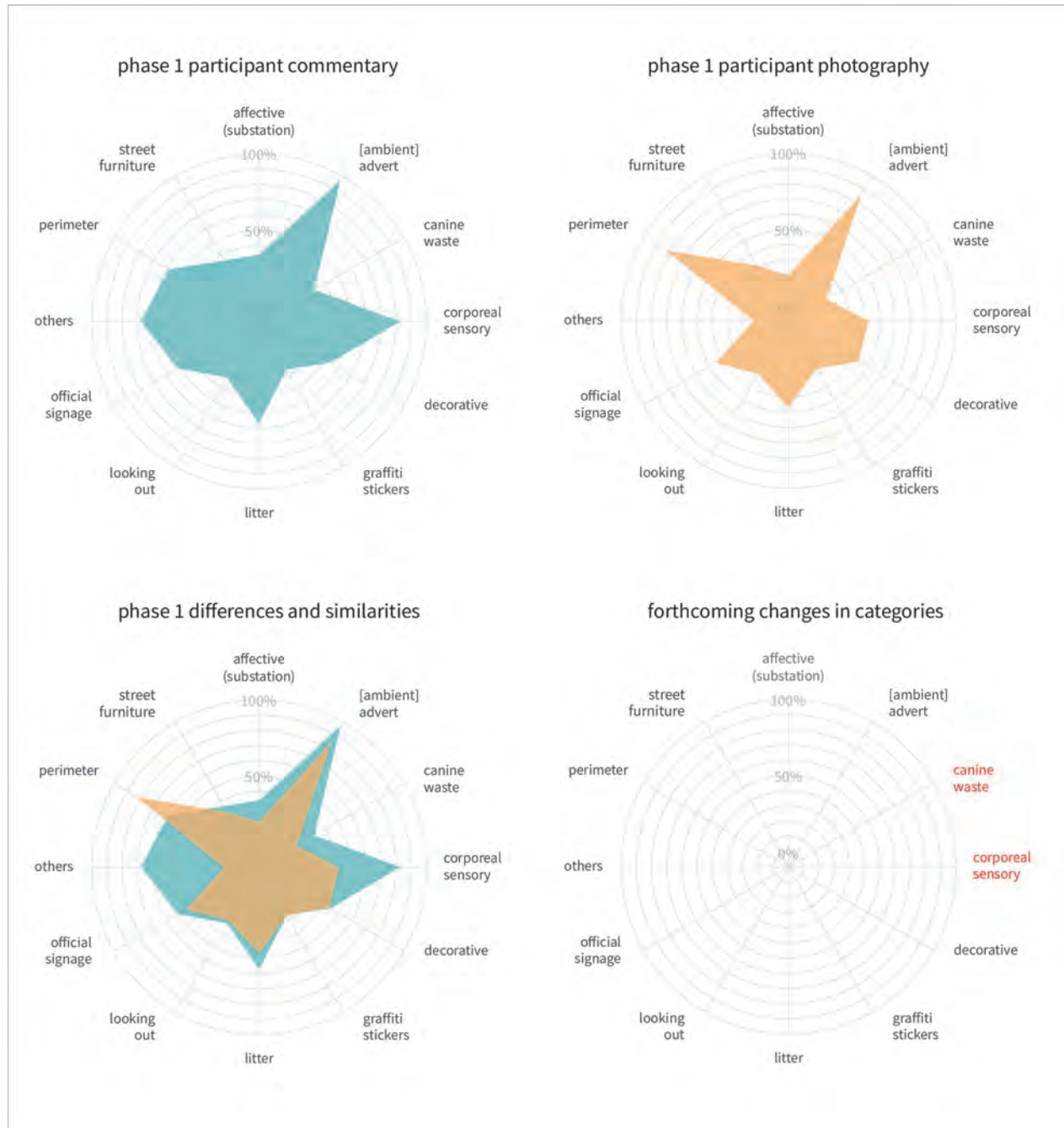


Fig. 92: Data visualisation of participants' most common topics of commentary and photography in phase 1 summarising findings across the four experiments (2025). Changes in category codes for phase 2 and phase 3 noted in red

Merleau-Ponty describes our consciousness as emerging from our embodied interactions with our world. This is illustrated by the ways in which the participants perceive, interact with, and understand everyday things within the alleyway.

Participant encounters detailed in data visualisation Fig. 92 seemed to fall within common categories. Alongside the unconscious and more embodied experience of walking through the alleyway, recorded as a matter of course through the lapel camera, more conscious reflexive commentary and photographs emerged as the participants sought to document their experience.



Fig. 93: Lapel camera footage of participant M4a as she takes a photograph of her shadow (2019)

I published a paper in *Westminster Papers* to share the findings from this first phase and to triangulate it with practitioner interviews (Sorrentino 2020b), spoke about communicative objects at the *Meccsa Conference* (Sorrentino, 2020a) and discussed encountering brand experiences in the everyday at the *European Communication Research and Education Association conference* (Sorrentino, 2020c).

I decided to continue to use the lapel camera and micro-interview, and to reconsider autophotography as a method. I had identified time code and *the pause* as something interesting. Other themes and qualities will be discussed after all phases are described.

Phase 2

A6

“This lamppost here never works, don’t know if that’s a deliberate thing” he sighs and stops to take a photo looking up at the lamppost light . He steps forward to look down the smaller back alley which is covered in damp brown leaves. On the floor in front of him is a handwritten sign, slightly damp in the cold weather. “This sign here reads the sign show some respect and take your dog litter home” he continues. He takes a photo of handwritten sign that has been left by a resident “I’ve never noticed it being too bad” he says reflectively. He turns to face the leaf strewn back alley and takes photo. “These alleyways are constantly full of rubbish,” he looks up at the overgrown plants poking out of fencing “I wonder what it’s like to live on the back of this alleyway...not very high fences” he adds with some thought. He pauses at the electricity substation “the old substation there,” he walks on “always very well protected from everything, little spikes.” He comes to a stop in front of a lamppost

*“What’s this then?
Helped pay for all the lamp posts
that light up the streets...
thanks for paying your extortionate
council tax, my pleasure”*

It is wrapped in Christmas wrapping paper with a large tag poking out from under a shiny red ribbon. and takes a step closer to the advert to take a photograph. He walks on rounding the corner “erm” he pasues “this wall has normally got a fair bit of graffiti on,” he takes a photo of the graffiti that is currently up on the wall “but someone seems to wipe it off.” He walks towards the next lamppost “Oh look, another thank you, are these new lampposts? Can’t say I’ve ever noticed them before!” He takes another photo.

Fig. 94: Typographic story of participant A6 walk (2022)



A6



K7



E6a



B5



A7



E5



H6



D7



S7a

Fig. 95: Phase 2 participant journeys through the alleyway 2022 (2024)

Gathering information, familiarization and reflection

As described in chapter 3, this phase was by far the longest though not by design. Phase 2 began just as we were all subject to the world-wide pandemic. We were locked in. My participants could not participate. I could not investigate encounters. Stuck in my own house I began an extensive programme of reading. In many ways, the philosophical underpinning of this thesis owes its existence to my own situated context – in time, in place, in privilege. When I was not teaching, I could read. I was part of a PhD reading and practice group and we shared texts and thoughts and our research each week. I was exposed to a number of theorists I might not have come across on my own and I will be forever grateful for that. My mind travelled even if I could not. When I was once more able to go into the alleyway to conduct research with participants, to paraphrase Heraclitus, it was not the same alleyway, and I was not the same person. My perception of the alleyway and the things within it had changed.

The experiments in Phase 2 began after the lockdowns. A large proportion of the population had been offered vaccines. We were allowed out, but people routinely took COVID tests and wore face masks. This context is important because it had a direct effect on the kind of rubbish left behind in the alleyway and commentary on masks was quite high, whereas it did not appear in Phase 1.



Fig. 96: Participant J5 takes a photo of a face mask thrown onto the floor in experiment 5 (2022)

He stops and looks down. On the floor in front of his feet is a discarded surgical mask. He takes a photograph of the mask on the floor. 'Oh, a mask. One of the collateral damage of 2020/2021, imagine the amount of those going to landfill.' Participant J5, lapel camera footage.

The research continued to be informed by the philosophies of Merleau-Ponty, particularly his focus on the embodied being entangled in the world through contextual fields and I expanded my reading of phenomenological texts. However, the construction of the [ambient] advert did not feel fully addressed by phenomenologists, so I found myself reading Deleuze and Guattari and this resonated with the theme of things as assembled that was emerging.

Action

Phase 2 was designed to investigate if encounters with and attention to [ambient] advertising change if there are more contextual cues. Christmas interested me in terms of wider societal context. This phase was split into 3 experiments (please see Fig 71).

- Experiment 5 had a single Christmas advert
- Experiment 6 had a repeated Christmas advert
- Experiment 7 had a variation of the Christmas advert

The underlying interest in context(s) and attention continued. Photovoice was used as a method for capture rather than auto-photography. This phase could only take place around the Christmas period. This meant that the alleyway was colder for more of the experiments than phase 1 and dates were more beholden to the weather. While people may walk about in the rain and cold for their own projects all the time, I cannot ask them to do that for my research. As this is a lived space and not a laboratory, things came and went, the stickers available in Phase 1 had decomposed and the graffiti had been removed but newly available stuff emerged, new graffiti, resident interventions, lost items and surgical masks.



Fig. 97: Participant S5 takes photo of the Christmas [ambient] advert in experiment 5 (2022)



Fig. 98: Participant E6b takes a photo of the first Christmas [ambient] advert Christmas tree ad in experiment 6 (2022). Fig. 99: Participant S6 takes a photo of the repeated Christmas [ambient] advert in experiment 6 (2022)



Fig. 100: Participant T7a takes a photo of the first Christmas [ambient] advert in experiment 7 (2022). Fig. 101: Participant S7c takes a photo of the second Christmas [ambient] advert (2022)

In addition to the [ambient] advertising interventions local residents had put up two other interventions that I would classify as communicative objects, if not [ambient] advertising (Sorrentino, 2020a).

Resident intervention 1 was a visual communication and the meaning was not disclosed. It consisted of a set of flowers in a plastic vase attached by cable ties 8 foot high (see Fig. 102)

Resident intervention 2 was a handwritten sign on hardboard. This was a purely written communication and had no visual consideration beyond legibility (see Fig. 103).



Fig. 102: Participant D6 takes a photo of resident intervention 1 during experiment 6 (2022). Fig. 103: Participant A7 takes a photo of resident intervention 2 during experiment 7 (2022)

Development of themes

Across the three phase 2 experiments the experiential richness of the alleyway became evident as it had in Phase 1. Similar numbers of photographs and commentary over the stuff of the alleyway emerged, please see Fig. 110.

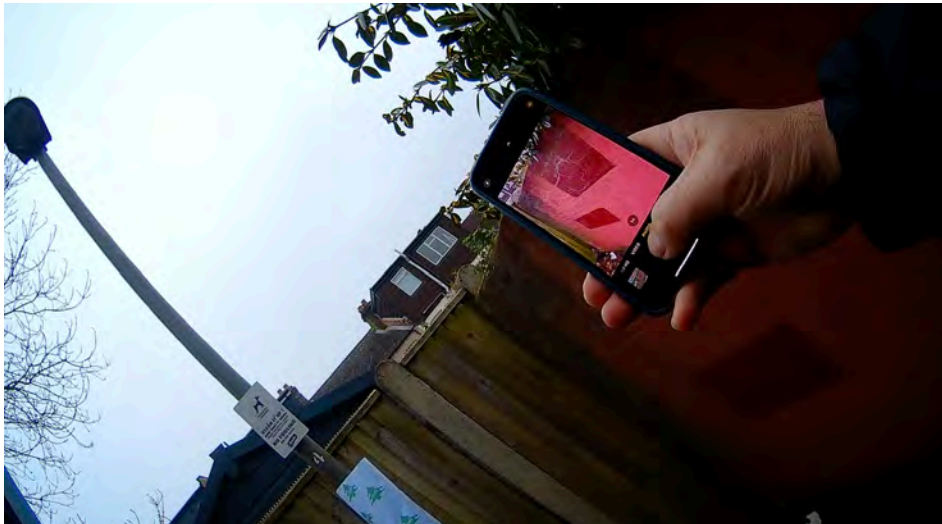


Fig. 104: Lapel camera footage of participant J5 taking a photograph of a decorative element in the alley during experiment 5 (2022)

The electricity substation continued to arouse interest with 27% taking photographs of it and a further 31% of participants commenting on it, broadly similar percentages to phase 1.

'I don't even know what this is...' She states as she pauses to look at the electricity substation. She takes a photograph of the Danger of Death sign. 'Danger of Death,' she says with a smile in her voice 'that's always fun to have near a school'. Participant A7, lapel camera footage.

A number of participants also paid attention to, and paused at, official and unofficial signage was also broadly similar.



Fig. 105: Lapel camera footage of participant J5 taking a photograph of graffiti during experiment 5 (2022)

Encountering the [ambient] advert

The high level of attention given to the advert continued in Phase 2 with 96% of the 28 participants taking photographs of the advert. The data visualisation in Fig. 106 demonstrates that the [ambient] advert continued to be the most common intentionally communicative thing in the alleyway to be photographed. 93% of participants spoke about it.

'There's a thing here from Bromley,' He picks up the tag. "Thank you, your tax contribution helped pay for all the lampposts that light up the street...ahh that's beautiful.. Participant S7b, lapel camera footage.

Across the three Phase 2 experiments the majority of participants that noticed the advert went on to comment on it further (80%). They also spent on average of 26 seconds involved with the advert(s) in some way, the same average time as Phase 1 participants. As in Phase 1, the [ambient] advert comes to the participants attention and they pause the flow of their ordinary actions and thoughts if they are curious, they then may move closer to engage with a thing.

- Experiment 5 - 27 seconds
- Experiment 6 - 22 seconds
- Experiment 7 - 28 seconds

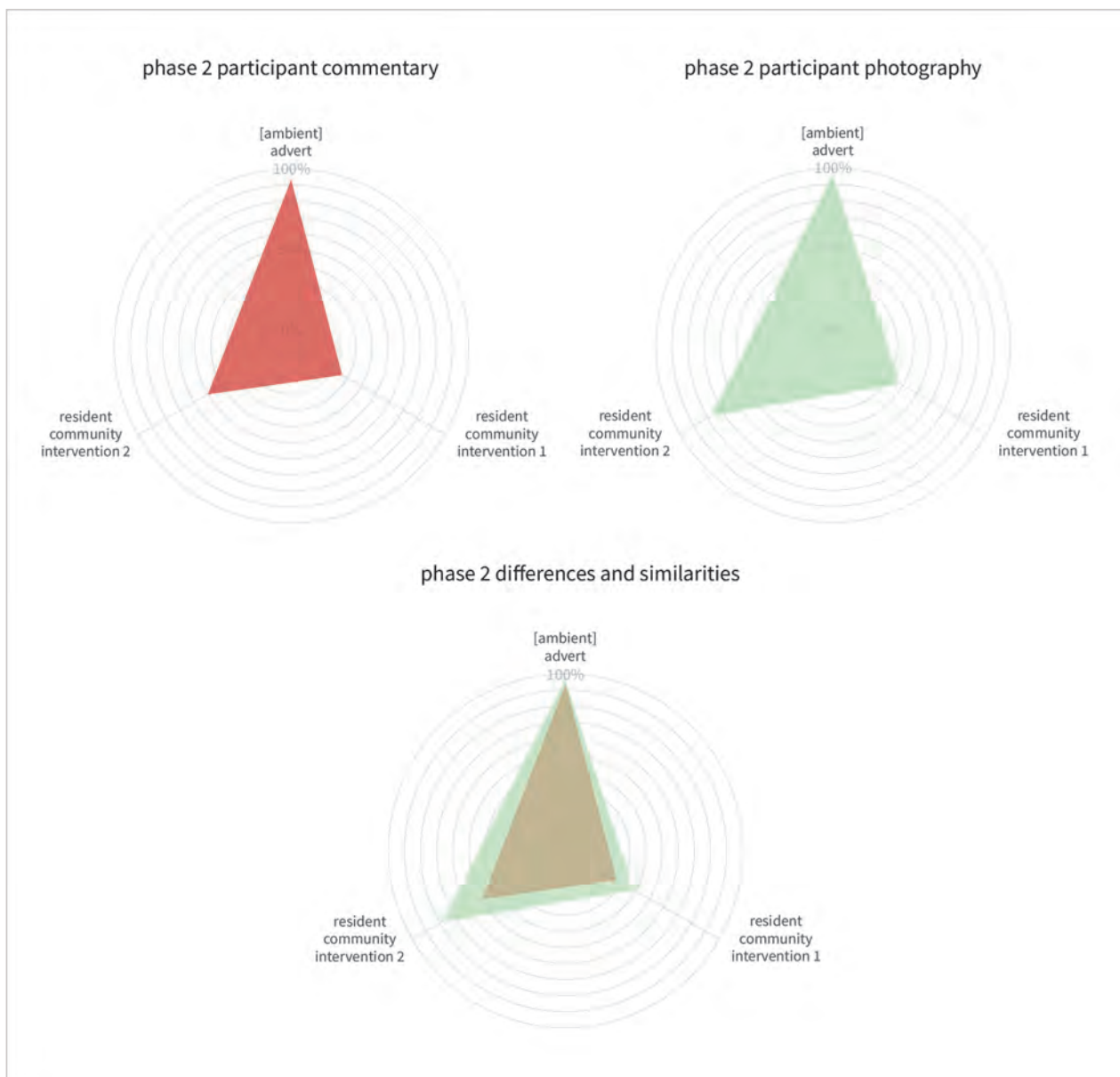


Fig. 106: Data visualisation that summarises of participants' attention given to the three communicative encounters in phase 2 across three experiments (2025). Resident interventions will come under the joint category 'community comms' going forwards

Of all the stuff in the alleyway the ambient adverts triggered the most curiosity. Curiosity emerged from the Phase 1 experiments as a pre-cursor to active attention with 83% of participants registering some sort of curiosity and confusion about the unexpected and unusual thing. Curiosity reveals itself by watching the films in-between the lines, in the tone of voice, in the pauses, consequently it is easier to discern in audio-visual analysis, which maintains the temporality and doesn't not collapse it into snapshots and tables. Curiosity was not marked by bold statements, it was marked by pauses, changes in the flow and speed of commentary, intentional acts such as approaching for a better look or taking a photograph, and questions such as 'what's that?' This pause will be developed in chapter 5.



Fig. 107: Lapel camera footage Participant M5 pauses to take a photograph of a Christmas [ambient] advert during experiment 5 (2022)

Encountering a repetition



Fig. 108: Lapel camera footage as Participant H6 pauses to take a photograph of the second Christmas [ambient] advert during experiment 6 (2022)

There is little research on the effects of repetition in advertising (Phillips and McQuarrie, 2004; Schmidt and Eisend, 2015), and much less so on the effects of repetition in [ambient] advertising. In experiment 6 there was repetition of the advert and in experiment 7 there was an advert with a variated pattern installed on the lamppost that followed. 100% of participants photographed at least one of the ambient adverts and 60% of participants photographed both.

'Ooh!' She exclaims, 'That's nice.' She comes to a standstill by the first lamppost advert. 'Ahh!' She continues in an upbeat tone of voice, 'Your tax contribution helped pay for the lampposts that light up your streets, a little Christmas message from Bromley council, not seen one of those before....' She walks around the substation, slows down and looks at the second lamppost advert. 'How nice, these tree-wrapped things.' She takes a photograph. Participant H6, lapel camera footage.

An unexpected finding was that though the time spent with the adverts did not increase between the single advert experiments and the double advert experiments, the micro interview revealed that brand recognition increased. Experiment 5 had 62% brand recognition, experiment 6 had 70% brand recognition and experiment 7 had 80% recognition. 90% of the participants across Phase 2 experiments 6 and 7 stated that the ads were the main thing that they noticed.

As she walks around the corner she notices the second lamppost advert, 'There's another council sign there.' She takes a photo of the lamppost advert. Participant J6b, lapel camera footage.

The participant films revealed participants' engaging with the first ambient advert, commenting on it as they walk away then noticing a variety of other things available for attention such as walls with foliage, or cans on the floor, or lost gloves. This could appear as though they had lost all interest, however, the [ambient] advert is still on their mind, often intertwining with other things that they saw. In addition the gap between adverts was also meaningful, it appeared to give the participants time to decode the advert (Schmidt and Eisend, 2015; Janiszewski, Noel and Sawyer, 2003).

Encountering other communicative objects

During Phase 2 two resident interventions were displayed (see Figs. 102 and 103). These communications were unexpected and had not been part of the research design as such. However, in the same way that graffiti and stickers come and go, there was an expectation of variables in a lived space. Anything available for encounter became legitimate data. What was particularly interesting about these communications was that they functioned in many ways as ambient communications and were not part of a referential totality of council signs or instantly recognisable unofficial street communication such as graffiti. This meant that participants needed to pay some attention to them in order to understand what they were.

She notices the flowers on the lamppost 'That's strange, there's flowers up there on the lamppost. I wonder what that's doing up there. I've never noticed that before. It's full of poppies is it? Oh nice.' There are no poppies. Participant S7c, lapel camera footage.

She stops and takes a close-up photo of the dog waste sign. 'I looked at this sign because it stood out amongst the leaves.' Participant E6a, lapel camera footage.

The lack of craft and finish categorised them part of the referential totality of unofficial communications quite quickly with participants understanding they were local resident communications. Not everyone noticed the same things, some participants stopped at the resident interventions while others strode past them without seeing them.

- 39% of participants took photographs of resident intervention 1 and 27% commenting on it further. They spent on average 12 seconds with this
- 78% of participants took photographs of resident intervention 2. 50% of participants went on to speak about it further spent on average 12 seconds with it



Fig. 109: Lapel camera footage of participant T7a as he takes a photograph of resident intervention 1 during experiment 7 (2022)

While they did not attract the same level of interest and time as the [ambient] advert, they did attract some attention.

Discussion of Methods

Two of the primary objectives for the research was to design and then apply a multi-methodological framework that can explore and capture the ways in which people perceive and pay attention to ambient advertising. A Key component to answering Objective 2 is the iterative exploration of methods and tools made possible through action research. This was pursued thorough addressing Objective 3.

The lapel camera, which provides participant video, commentary and temporal information continues to be the bedrock of the research design. However, it is still prone to falling inside clothes or

flipping sideways and I needed to find a better clipping mechanism. It is an unobtrusive tool and participants in Phase 2, as in Phase 1, quickly forgot that they were wearing it and revealed information that was rich and surprising. Visually the dual screen capturing of participants through the lapel camera continued make evident participant attention.

Photovoice was a productive and stable way to capture participant attention and answered many of the issues that autophotography brought up. As editing is part of the photovoice method I was able to ask participants to take up to 20 photographs and edit them down to around 10 photographs that they considered to be an accurate reflection of their walk down the alleyway. While not all participants returned 10 photographs the numbers did not vary as wildly as they did with autophotography. The use of participant editing to give them voice and the use of the participants own phones to take photographs meant that they were able to send me the photographs that had meaning rather than all the ones that were on a phone dedicated to the research. Additionally, using the editing functions within their own camera application meant that they could indicate exactly what they were looking at by circling it or drawing an arrow to it. Street furniture such as the vent featured less once participants were asked to edit.

Applying reflection and moving forwards

The participant films exposed different ways that the participants' encountered things, and echoed Merleau-Ponty description of intentionality (2014). Attention did not mean that they had a laser focus on the [ambient] advert to the exclusion of all else. Certainly, some participants did indeed walk straight to the [ambient] advert once their attention had been engaged, and the encounter had begun. This demonstrated act intentionality, in which the thing thought about created an action. However, for many participants their attention wandered, they were attracted by a lot of other stuff immediately after noticing the advert. This was an automatic and normal part of their operative intentionality, their natural attentiveness, towards the world (Merleau-Ponty, 2014). They had the [ambient] advert on their mind as something that required decoding, they had a certain intentionality towards it, but it did not crowd out everything else. Participants appeared to begin a pause in the ordinary flow of their actions and thoughts in which they could apply some attention to the unknown thing, their attention became passive until they re-engaged with it.

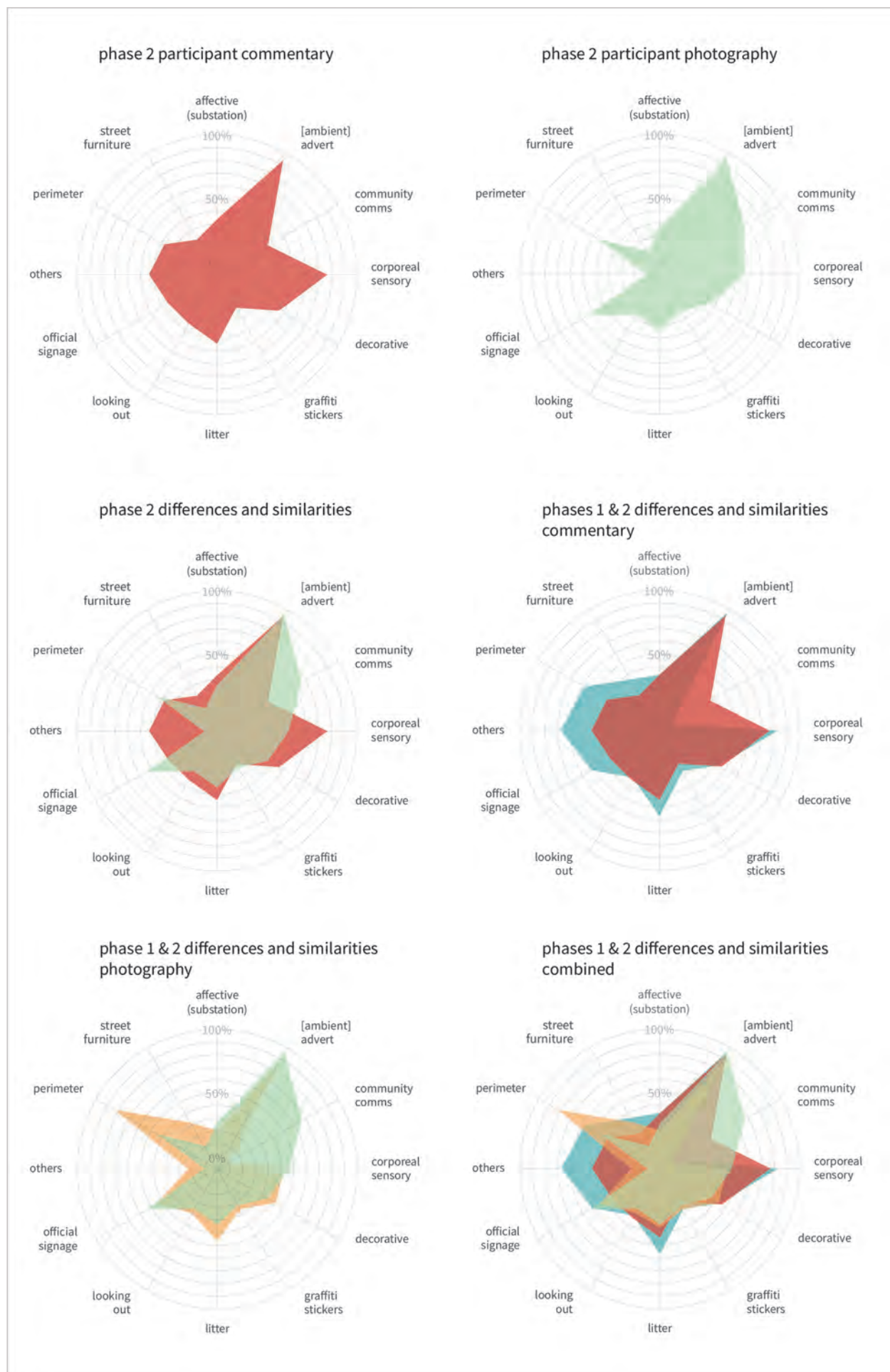


Fig. 110: Data visualisation summarising participants' most common topics of commentary and photography in phase 2, then summarising those findings across the three experiments, and finally comparing to the summary findings in phase 1 (2025)

The data visualisation in Fig. 110 compares the things that attracted attention through either photography or commentary across the two phases. Participant engagement with the stuff of the alley fell into roughly the same categories as phase 1. In keeping with phase 1, experiment 4, the phase 2 participants were drawn towards the larger Christmas [ambient] advert earlier. It drew their attention away from the perimeter, street furniture and towards the vicinity of the [ambient] advert. This also drew more attention to the substation (affective place). Phase 2 had less attention to the perimeter in general, and this may have been because it was colder. However, the photographs that were taken of the perimeter were around foliage that reminded them of Christmas.

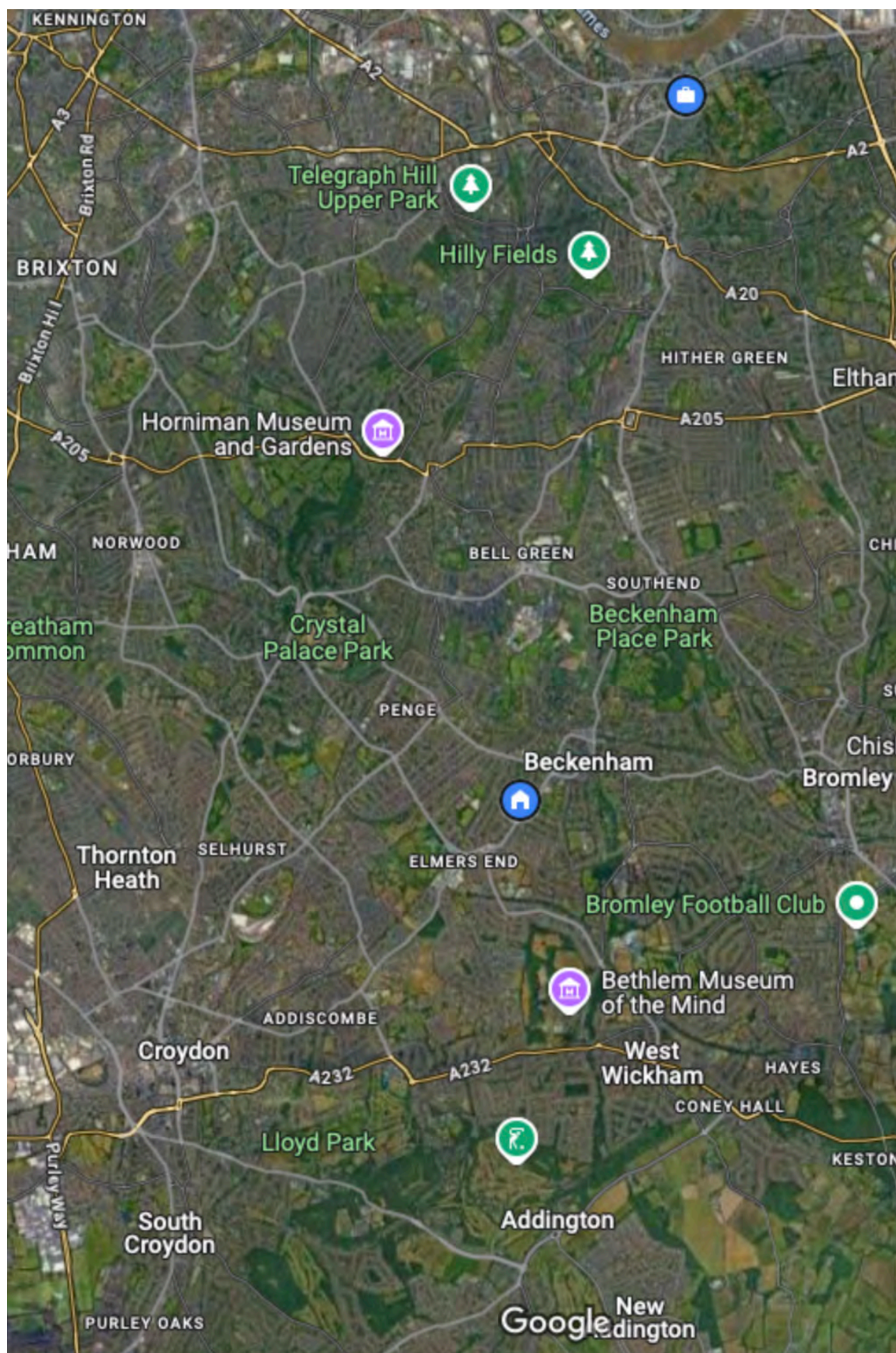
It is clear from both phase 1 and 2 that participants drew relevance from various contexts. I had thought that the contexts would be reframed by the advert but actually what seemed to happen was something more complex, that the advert and the various contexts came together in the participants' gaze as a thing. Deleuze and Guattari's depictions of assemblages formed from multiplicities started to resonate with me (2020).

As with Phase 1, participants were in the present but also travelled mentally to the past and into the future, there was a *thickness* to the *present* that had started to emerge from the footage, please see chapters 2 and 5.

He stops and takes a photograph of the Danger of Death sign on the substation. 'I always remember these. I worked for the power company and some of the situations in the substations were not very nice.'
Participant T5, lapel camera footage.

This phase explored repeating the advert on subsequent lampposts to check attention within a larger encounter. Repetition appeared to give participants time to decode the meaning of the advert before they came to the second [ambient] advert. It ensured that everyone had encountered an advert. However, it did not appear to offer any additional information about how participants encounter, perceive and pay attention to an [ambient] advert and so I decided that although repetition is an important part of campaigns that include [ambient] advertising it is not the main focus of this research project.

The alleyway creates a captive audience, of course this is ideal for [ambient] advertising and is often the type of site that an advertiser would look for - a place where the target audience cannot help but walk past. But it also creates a set of similar behaviours which would not necessarily be the case somewhere else. I needed to know how the [ambient] advert would be encountered in a busier environment outside the alleyway site.



Section of Fig. 72: London and Beckenham (2024)

Introducing the Street

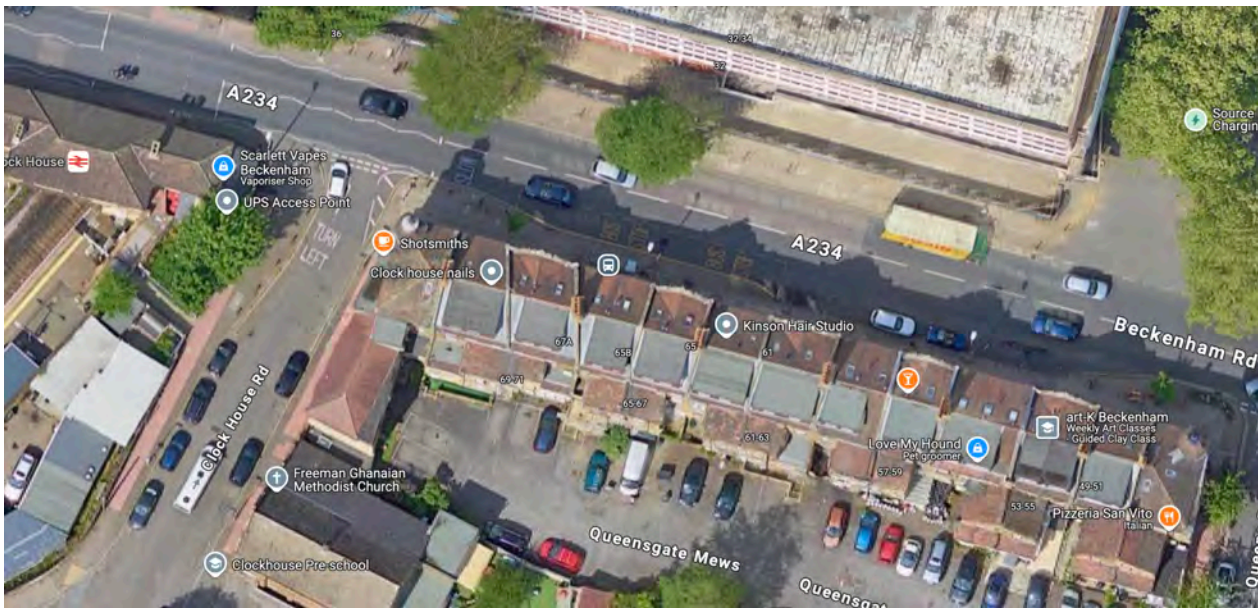


Fig. 111: Screenshot of the street (2024)

The street connects Beckenham to Crystal Palace. It is a busy A road with a number of mini roundabouts, junctions and traffic lights. There is a train station, which has trains that regularly connect to central London with passenger numbers at around 1 million a year. There is a tram stop and several bus stops. There are a number of shops, cafés, restaurants and pubs as well as a library and leisure centre. Residential streets with terraced housing, semi-detached housing and blocks of flats lead up to it with some smaller parks, alleyways and pedestrian tunnels. There are distinct time periods when the stretch of road is at its busiest and these are during the morning and evening commuting hours, from 7 am – 9.30 am and in the evening from 5pm – 7pm with people arriving in waves. The coffee shops have queues outside until 10 am on many days and are full again from 4pm until 5pm. In the middle of the day there are people that wander about to stop in the cafés or to pick up something from the shops. From 7pm until 9.30 pm the train station and bus stops are quieter but still busy, the street itself has a few people visiting the restaurants or pubs. This drops off after 9.30 pm but picks up again at 10.50pm when there is a sudden rush of people leaving the train station. After this trains and buses come in but there are far fewer people around and significantly no-one is in the train station office. At the weekend the street is busy all day, but it is almost exclusively used for leisure activity; families going swimming, families going into London for the day, children and teenagers going to their friends' houses, there is no morning rush hour.

Phase 3

S11b

A woman sits outside the coffee shop with papers and a coffee on the table.

It's a cloudy summer's day, She walks past the coffee shop and notices a tree on her left. She stops "I mean," she takes a photo of the tree " I find that interesting, the thing that's protecting the tree."

Infront of her is an adshell for the Bad Boys film. She looks in the windows at the nail bar window on her right and pauses "very plant inspired here, but I realised that I wanted to find out if that was a real plant or fake plant," she takes a photo of the plant in the window display. She walks briskly down the street humming to herself. She notices the large pink ribbon and starts to slow down coming to a stop in front of the [ambient] ad. "obviously this is not what you expect on a lamppost , also" she says as she takes a photo of the ambient advert. She pauses as she reads it "hmm..." she says as she walks on. She looks in the window of love my hound "I have a cat, but this seems very dog focussed so...what was I going to say?"

Two people stand waiting for the bus just ahead of the stop.

A man is waiting at the bus stop

A man wearing headphones walk past.

Cars drive past

She turns away from the window display and starts to walk down the street, a woman in sunglasses walks past

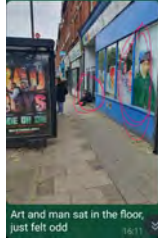
"This is quite good" she says as she walks up to the postbox.

She looks around it and then takes a step towards the tree that is behind it. She takes a photo of the tree with the notice and reads the notice "hmm..." she says as she walks on.

Fig. 112: Typographic story of participant S11b walk (2024)



C10



E11



W10



F8



M9



S10



S8



N11



M8b



D9a

Fig. 113: Phase 3 participant journeys down the street (2024)

Gathering information, familiarization and reflection

I was reading the work of feminist phenomenologists, such as Ahmed, McGregor and Young (see chapter 2) that built on the embodied, sensory and situated philosophy of Merleau-ponty. These texts drew phenomenology towards contemporary interpretations of the human's place in a world that we share with other things, new considerations of perspectives and actions, other ways to think about subjectivity. I also found in Deleuze and Guattari's thoughts on assemblage a way to address some of the issues I had found with subject-object relationships (see chapter 2), and started to think about brand communications as a complex assemblages (Lury, 2009; Moor, 2007; Klingmann, 2010, see chapters 1 and 2). As a set of theories, it also seemed to take into account the very literal assemblage of physical elements from a site and the imported and produced elements of the [ambient] advert (see chapter 2).

The combination of the first two phases of quantitative tables and the thinking and reflexive thematic processes that I had begun also brought to the surface the need to think more deeply about time. Participants were sharing memories and speculations as well as observations. They were sometimes in the moment but at other times not. The phenomenologist account of time did not seem to fully fit with my own developing understanding of the moment of encounter as a pause in which attention can be active or passive. I began to read Bergson and Nishida for a different account of time, a version in which things become (see chapter 2). I went into the street with many different philosophers in mind.

Action

Phase 3 was designed to investigate if encounters with and attention to [ambient] advertising change if the site is busier and there are more distractions available. The street itself was filled with shops and general hustle and bustle. As participant S10 commented, *It's incredible how, actually, much is happening in this stretch of road.* As a live environment there was ongoing change. Scaffolding and community interventions came and went, and Adshell adverts were updated. There were more people around generally and people featured more prominently in the commentary. The 37 participants were not recruited through Wattapp groups but were asked on the street if they wanted to participate. The participants were inevitably on their way to something else, a few of them were with others, a couple of these did the walk with another person, and couple of the participants did the walk with their dog. Participants seemed to be a bit more self-aware in this environment than in the alleyway.

Three different [ambient] interventions were installed over the 4 experiments in this phase (please see table Fig.71). This phase took in many different types of weather. As with phase 1 I tried a few different interventions in this scenario. This phase was split into 4 experiments (please see Fig. 71 for a breakdown of experiments). Experiment 8 had a slightly smaller pink ribbon and tag but was repeated over two lampposts. Experiment 9 and 10 had the same Christmas wrapping paper as experiment 5 (from phase 2). Experiment 11 repeated experiment 1 (from phase 1).



Fig. 114: Participant R8 takes photo of the first small ribbon [ambient] advert during experiment 8 (2023). Fig. 115: Participant M8b takes photo of the second small ribbon [ambient] advert during experiment 8 (2023)



Fig. 116: Participant V10 takes photo of the Christmas [ambient] advert that was used during experiment 9 and 10 (2023). Fig. 117: Participant P11 takes a photo of the big ribbon [ambient] advert during experiment 11 (2023)

In addition to the [ambient] advertising interventions that I placed in the street a local community group had put up another three communicative objects, knitted post box covers, that I would classify as an ambient form of communication (see chapter 1). That said intervention 2 during experiment 9 was stolen shortly after being installed.



Figs. 118 - 120: Participant A8 takes a photo of the first community knit & natter post-box cover during experiment 8. Participant C10 takes a photo of the third community knit & natter post-box cover during experiment 10. Participant P11 takes a photo of the fourth community knit & natter post-box cover during experiment 11 (2023)

Development of themes

The experiential richness of the site became evident as it had in the previous phases.

One of the things that became more evident when I moved from the alley to the street was the attention given to the perimeter of the space. 40% took photographs of the perimeter of the street (shops as background, the road and traffic), and 94% commented on something to do with the setting. This was unpicked more through reflexive thematic analysis and tinkering (see chapter 5). In the alley the perimeter was made of fences, walls and plants whereas on the street this was shops and traffic. As with the alley sometimes the perimeter faded to be background, sometimes it came with personal opinion, and sometimes with memories.

He walks towards the Italian restaurant ‘There’s a very nice Italian shop here,’ he pauses to take a photograph of the Italian restaurant banner ‘even though they support the wrong football team.’ Participant A9, lapel camera footage.

This is similar to a participant statement from phase 2 in which they take a photograph of a wall but the reason they took the photograph is to do with memories and opinion.

She takes a photo looking down the length of the alleyway. ‘I’ve been coming down here since I was really little,’ she takes another photo ‘and I’ve always loved how pink the walls are. I don’t know a lot of other alleys that have really pink walls.’ Participant X7, lapel camera footage.

46% of participants additionally photographed window displays, this was in many ways like plants within the alleyway – specific attractive bits of scenery. I have re-categorised this as *decorative* to aid my understanding across phases.



Fig. 121: Lapel camera footage Participant M9 takes a photograph of the window display during experiment 9 (2023)

She walks down the road and faces the dog parlour - Love My Hound. ‘Nice doggy window display’ she says as she takes two photos of the Love My Hound window stickers. She only sends one of the photographs. Participant M9, lapel camera footage.

The walk started by the train station and one of the first places people came across was the coffee shop, this drew a number of comments,

‘I just bought a coffee from this coffee shop.’ He stops and takes a photo of the coffee shop ‘which is the best coffee in town.’ Participant R9, lapel camera footage.

While this may have been because it was the first thing on their walk the commentary revealed that it was because a lot of people held some of the places, for example the coffee shop, the pub and the Italian restaurant in great affection. I named them *affective places* in my categories and was able to go back to the substation from phases 1 and 2 and put it in the same category.



Figs. 122 - 124: Lapel camera footage Participant V8 takes a photograph of the coffee bar during experiment 8 (2023). Lapel camera footage participant E9 takes a photograph of the pub opening up during experiment 9 (2023). Lapel camera footage participant R11 takes a photograph of the Italian restaurant during experiment 11 (2023)

Like the electricity substation in phases 1 and two, the pub was also subject to a fair amount of imagination and speculation.

They come up towards The Three Hounds ‘Ah!’ he exclaims softly as he speaks to his son, ‘We’re too early for a beer...Do you know they’ve gone into that now?’ he says nodding to the neighbouring shop. ‘They’ve bought that and they’re going to do things in there as well.’ Participant N11, lapel camera footage.

Encountering the [ambient] advert

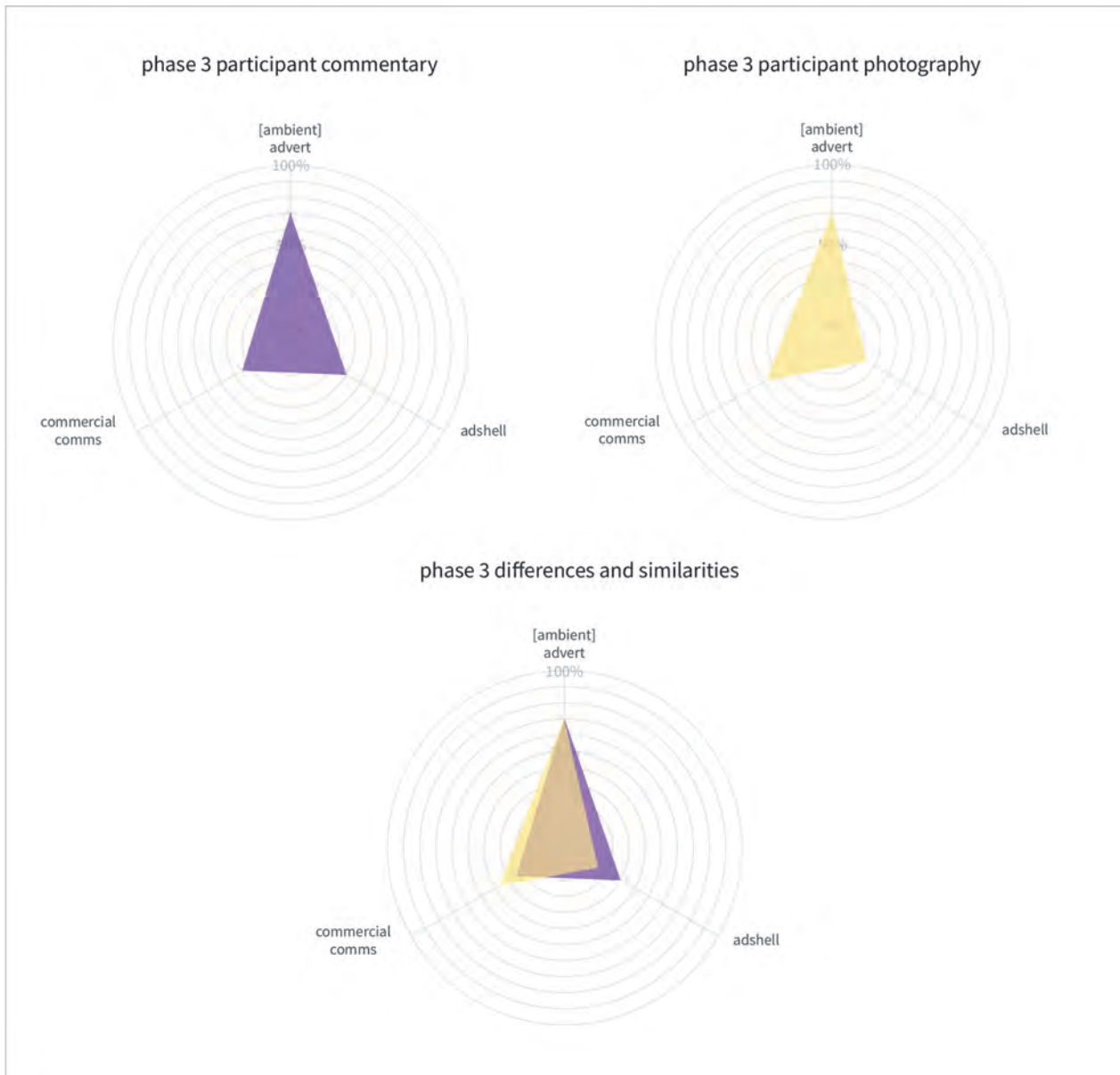


Fig. 125 Data visualisation summary of participants' attention given to the three communicative encounters in phase 3 across four experiments (202). The category commercial comms includes retail and branding signage as well as the bus stop adshell.

Across the four experiments 70% of participants took photos of the [ambient] advert and 70% spoke about it. This was greater with the Christmas [ambient] ad (experiments 9 and 10) in which 84% took photographs and 84% spoke about it. As in the alley it remained the single communicative thing most photographed and spoken about. The only category that was larger for commentary was *other people*. Participants also spent on average of 18 seconds involved with the advert(s) in some way. This topline is quite deceptive however as some participants spent 36 seconds and others 5 seconds.

- Experiment 8 – 17 seconds
- Experiment 9 – 21 seconds
- Experiment 10 – 26 seconds
- Experiment 11 – 8 seconds

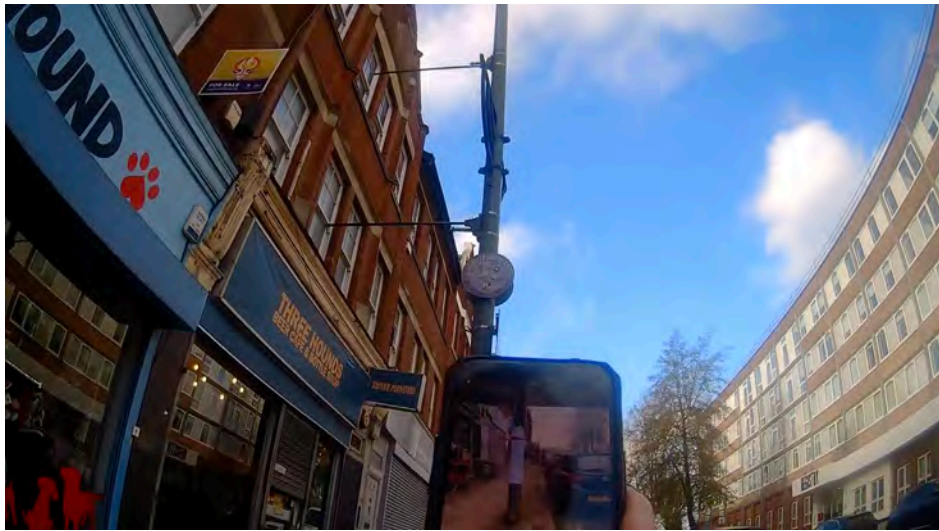


Fig. 126: Lapel camera footage as participant M9 turns back to take a photo of the Christmas [ambient] advert during experiment 9 (2023)

The most significant difference is between the average time with the Christmas [ambient] advert, 24 seconds, and the two ribbon [ambient] adverts which averaged to 13 seconds. Similar to the difference between the ribbon adverts and the Christmas adverts in the alley, participants are more interested in the Christmas adverts. As in Phases 1 and 2, if the [ambient] advert comes to the participants active attention, they pause the flow of their ordinary actions and thoughts.

She slows down in front of the [ambient] advert and stops to read it 'Thankyou your tax contribution paid for all the lampposts that light up the streets.' She takes a photo 'Are these new?' She asks as she walks away slowly 'So those lampposts have been there for a while but that's nice to see that our council tax is paying for something ...' she starts to pick up her speed a little '...decent' Participant C8, lapel camera footage.

While the time spent with the adverts is less than in the alleyway it is still by far the one single thing that was noticed the most and attracted significantly more attention than the other forms of communication, including the adshell. The repetition in experiment 8 appeared to generate more overall attention but only one person noticed it at a sufficiently conscious level to take a photograph and comment. This does not lead me to believe that repetition is in itself unimportant, the findings from phase 2 were pretty persuasive, rather that it I placed it poorly. The pink ribbon advert in experiment 11 that was single garnered significantly less attention. This may be because the participants had not been primed by their exposure

to the advert on an earlier lamppost or because it was installed on hot sunny days and people in general stopped for less time with all things.



Repeat of Fig. 114: Participant R8 takes photo of the first small ribbon [ambient] advert (2023)

Encountering other communicative objects

As described earlier, the site is not controllable, it is not a lab. The Community Group 'Knit and Natter' put up three interventions during phase 3. Experiment 9 did not have an intervention. During experiment 10 Community intervention 2 was installed and then stolen.



Fig. 127: Lapel camera footage as participant C10 takes a photograph of the post box topper during experiment 10 (2023)

In experiment 8 five of the nine participants took photographs of the Community Group intervention, six mentioned it and spent on average 15 seconds with it. All of this indicated that as with phase 1 experiment 4, people are more likely to attend to something that has had more money/time spent on it, quality makes it feel less grubby.

In experiment 10 only one participant witnessed the post box topper before it was stolen, they photographed it and spoke about it. A further two took photographs of the notice stating it had been stolen.

In experiment 11 three of the nine participants took photographs of the Community group intervention, with a further seven of the nine speaking about it. They spent on average 12 seconds with it.

He walks towards the post box with wife and child, his phone held up ready to take photographs. He takes a couple of photos of the post box topper (but only sends one). 'Look at all the people' says the girl to her mum and dad 'Yes,' says the woman 'and there is a big globe at the top,' she says to the girl. 'I can't see' says the girl. He lifts her onto his shoulder 'look they're all wearing woolly hats, wow, what's that, is that our planet?' he asks his daughter as he tries to take a photograph. Participant P11, lapel camera footage.

The street had a number of other communicative objects. There was an adshell poster site on the side of the bus stop. The adverts changed regularly. 14% of participants photographed the adshell and 30% commented further however, the majority of these comments were very limited.



Fig. 128: Lapel camera footage of participant R11 as he takes a photograph of the film poster in the adshell (2023)

38% of participants photographed a variety of general commercial communications such as a 'Just Eat' sign and 24% of participants

commented on them.

She walks slowly down street in the hot summer sun, 'So, I notice the Western Union sign.' She pauses to take a photo. Participant R8, lapel camera footage.

Only 1 of the participants took a photograph of official signage and 10.8% commented on it further. Graffiti and stickers were more interesting with 14% of participants photographing them and 11% commenting on it. And there were a few notices in shop windows which occasionally drew attention.

Father and son walk past the Italian restaurant. The man spots a notice in the window and turns to his son and says with a smile in his voice, 'There...you can get a job as a waitress'. Participant N11, lapel camera footage.

There were other street objects that expressed content such as the benches outside the Italian restaurant that attracted participants. They did not just think they were colourful benches, they understood that they were part of the Italian restaurant, in part because of proximity, but also because they were painted the colours of the Italian flag.

She takes a photo of the tables and benches outside the Italian Restaurant 'Loving these benches, they are so on point,' she says with a laugh. Participant G9, lapel camera footage.



Fig. 129: Lapel camera footage of participant G9 as she takes a photograph of the benches by the Italian restaurant (2023)

Discussion of methods

These experiments continued to make use of the lapel camera, photovoice and micro-interviews. Across these three methods an

extensive set of data was collected which provided rich material for analysis. That said there were still some small issues with the methods.

The lapel camera is an unobtrusive tool that participants felt comfortable with and quickly ignored. Unfortunately, in order to be small and unobtrusive the clipping mechanism could not be altered. Although this camera was significantly better than the first lapel camera it did not attach properly over every type of coat and jacket that participants wore. This had some unintended consequences, for example, participant film M8b was mostly beard, and E10 accidentally switched off her camera during her walk while trying to reclip it. However, there were plenty of delightful moments in which participants really shared encounters with things and the contexts in which they are connected.



Fig. 130: Lapel camera footage of participant N9 as he takes a photograph of the benches outside the closed chicken shop (2023)

He walks down the street, headphones in, singing along to a tune ‘...Mmm I’ve got to...toss and turn I can’t sleep at night, oh Tainted Love got to...’ he pauses, ‘the designs on these benches are cool.’ He stops and takes a number of photographs of the benches and then continues down the road, picking up the tune where he left off, ‘... sleep at night, oh, Tainted Love, got to, Tainted Love, got to..’ Participant N9, lapel camera footage.

The participants used the camera from their own phone as a tool and then sent the photographs to me. However, a phone with a camera function is still a phone,

He answers his phone ‘Hello?’ He pauses just outside The Three Hounds. ‘I’m just in the middle of doing something and you are currently being recorded... alright then. champion, see you in a bit, bye.’ Participant M10, lapel camera footage.

In contrast to the alleyway, where participants listened to the instructions for photovoice intently, and by and large returned 10 photographs, the street participants did not. Perhaps there is something about being given instructions on a busy street, where one might already be self-conscious, that seemed to cause nearly every participant to forget the instruction. They returned any number of photographs from 4 to 25. This was reminiscent of the wide-ranging totals from autophotography in phase 1. The difference, however, was that Photovoice enabled participants to precisely indicate what they were paying attention to. While the numbers varied the photographs showed things they were specifically interested in, and not just anything they came across.

Applying reflection and moving forwards

There were a number of considerations that resulted in a philosophical shift from purely phenomenological readings of the encounter during the phase 3 first pass of analysis and the comparisons between the previous phases. While these factors had been nudging me towards the inclusion of less human-centric interpretations in phase 2, they became inescapable during the phase 3 analysis.

I became more convinced that the relationship between [ambient] advert and participant could not be conceived as a purely human encounter. Nishida asked that we do not think of things as ‘absolutely passive’ (2012, p. 36). He cautioned against believing a subject is able to reduce things in the world to things for themselves through perception in such a way that they are ‘subsumed within’ the viewer. Things are not inert, and things do indeed mutually interact. As McGregor described it is both human experience and non-human agents that create ‘phenomenon’ together (2020, p. 507).

In phase 3 the [ambient] adverts placed in the open environment of the street were certainly more active. On various days the ribbon playfully swayed and flicked in the breeze. On other days it hung motionless, but its surface gleamed as the sun’s rays bounced off the shiny fabric. On windier days the tag would swing, and on a few occasions it flipped over revealing its red back, until the wind, or a person turned it back round. Experiments 9 and 10 took place during winter. The tag often swished in the air and the ribbon curled and flicked about with each gust, its surface glinting in the low winter sun. The wind was particularly strong for an hour or so during experiment 10 and two of the participants encountered the [ambient] advert at this time. Just before they participated a few strong gusts tore the wrapping paper apart, leaving just a strip and causing me

to run down the street after the torn paper. They encountered a different thing than the one I had put up. The component changed but was still part of the assemblage (see chapters 2 and 5).



Fig. 131: Lapel camera footage of participant R8 as she takes a photograph of back of the tag that flipped over in the breeze during experiment 8 (2023). Fig. 132: Participant M10 takes a photograph of the Christmas [ambient] advert whose wrapping paper has been ripped during experiment 10 (2023)

***‘Ahh interesting, another sign,’** she comments. The tag has flipped over so only the red back is visible. She pauses to take a photograph. **‘Not sure that this one says anything.’** Participant R8, lapel camera footage.*

*She slows down in front of the [ambient] advert. The wrapping paper has been torn by the strong wind so there is only a narrow strip left wrapped around the pole. She holds out her hand and grabs hold of the tag to read it. **‘Taxes are for the community good,’** she states. She takes a photograph as she flips over the tag. **‘Well, whatever it is, it is quite sweet.’** Participant C10, lapel camera footage.*

Simplifying the data visually across all three phases enabled me to see what I had felt as a practitioner for all those years, but also what I was experiencing in thematic analysis and thinking. Participants were simply more interested in encountering the [ambient] advert than other things in that environment, even the fairly basic execution that I installed.

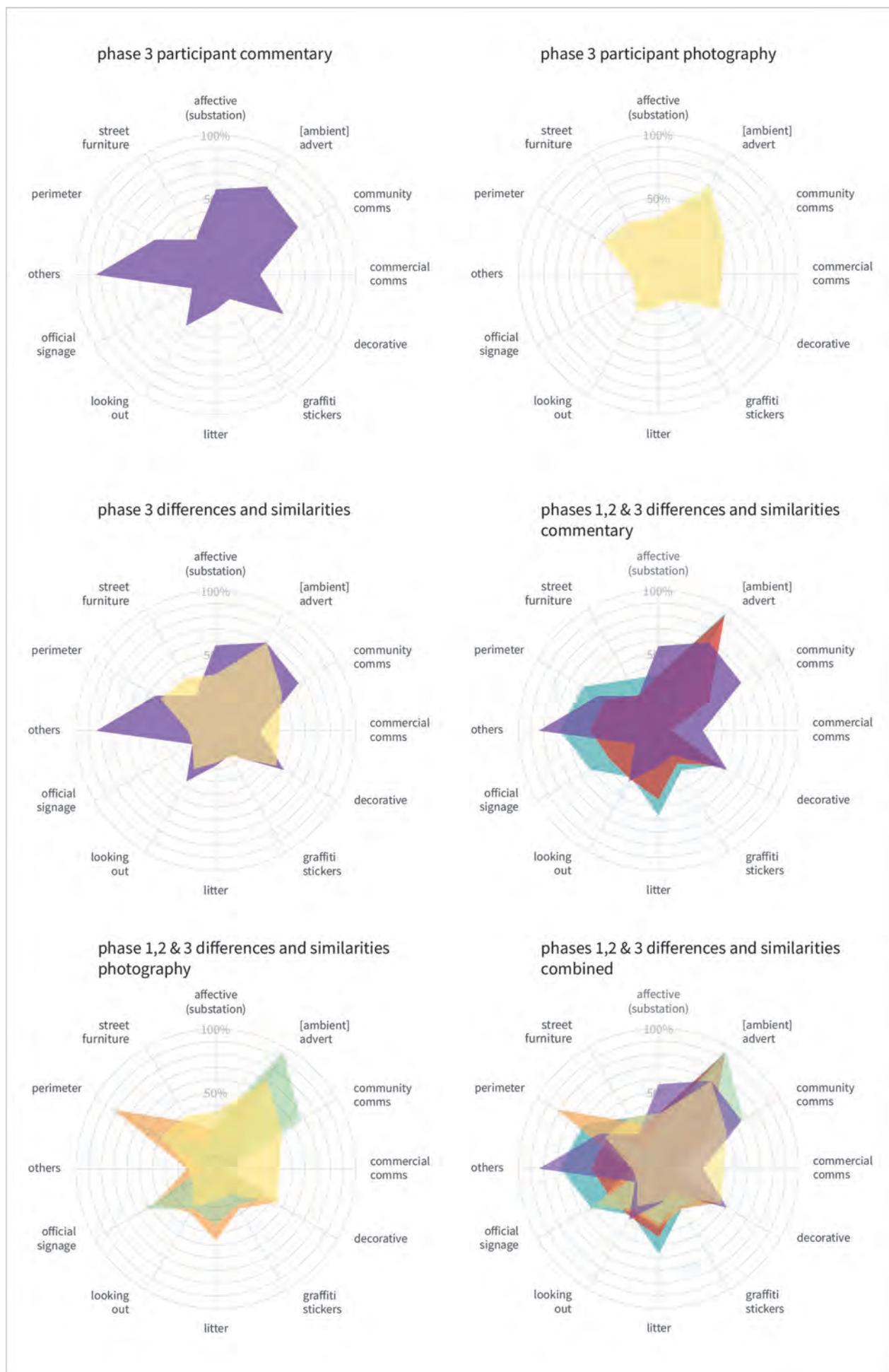


Fig. 133: Data visualisation summarising participants' most common topics of commentary and photography in phase 3, summarising findings across the four experiments, and finally comparing to the summary findings in phases 1 and 2 (2025)

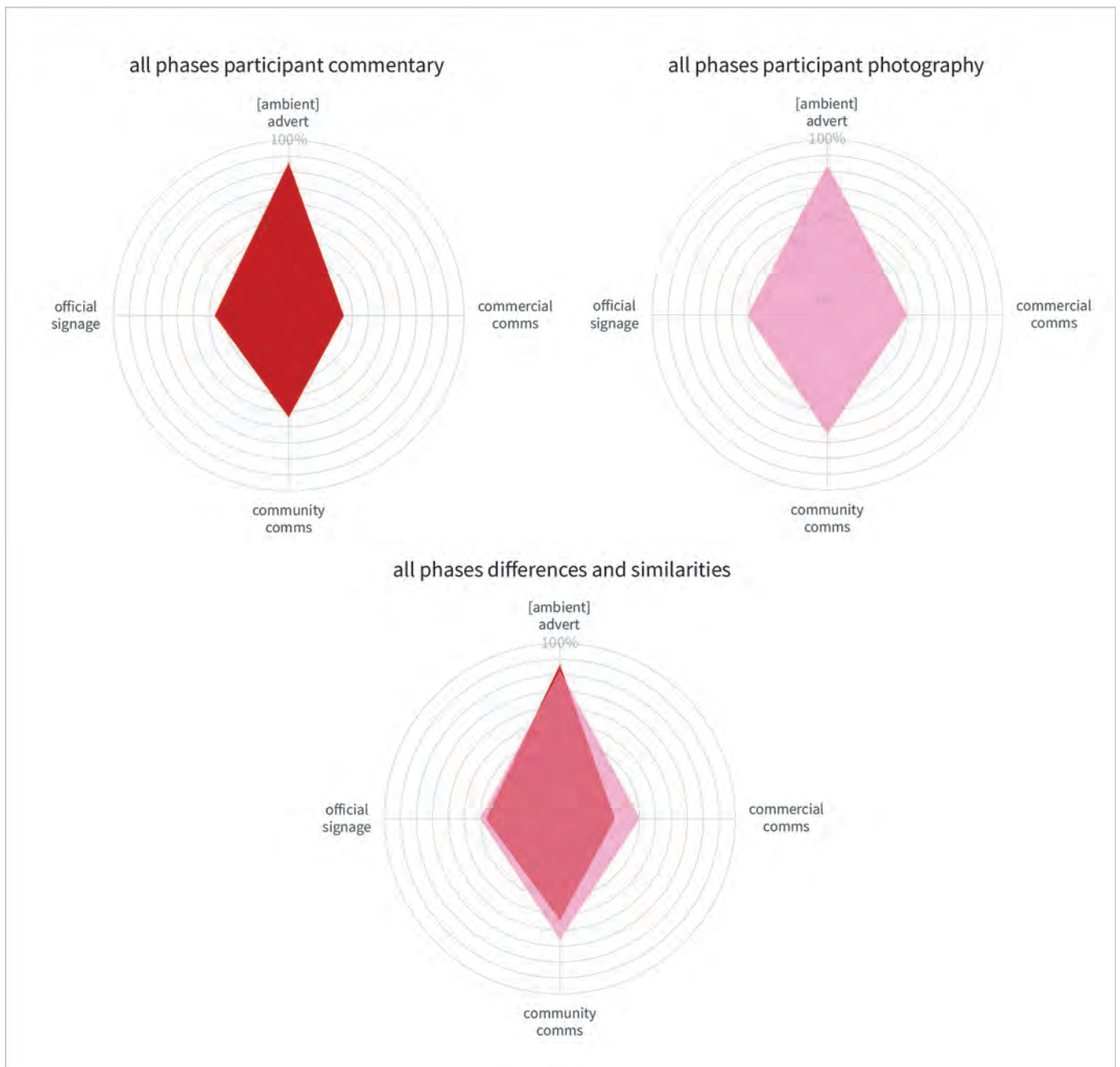


Fig. 134: Data visualisation summary of participants' attention given to different types of communicative encounters across the three phases, community comms refers to both resident interventions and the community group interventions and commercial comms to all commercial signage and advertising (2025).

In all phases people were interested in the activities of others, and this was one of the unexpected things that stood out. In phases 1 and 2, though there were often no others present, there were symbolic things that represented poor behaviour that drew comments, such as poorly maintained fences or litter, or good behaviour such as a new fence. In the street the behaviour of others was often witnessed in action. However, it is worth noting that people are not things and would not provide competition in terms of advertising format.



Fig. 135: Lapel camera footage of participant M5 as she waits for others to go by during experiment 5 (2022)

A woman turns the corner and stops to look at the ambient advert, she notices the participant walking her way and possibly becoming self-conscious she immediately turns away from the advert and continues down the alleyway. Participant T5, lapel camera footage.

A black van drives by and the driver honks their horn at a young woman crossing the street in shorts ‘Ooh misogynistic man driving past, so that’s good.’ He exclaims sarcastically. Participant M8a, lapel camera footage.



Fig. 136: Participant G9 takes a photograph looking inside the nail bar during experiment 9 (2022)



Fig. 137: Participant A10 takes a photograph of three workmen walking past with a scaffold pole balanced on a shoulder during experiment 10 (2023)

Three men in orange high viz work gear and hard hats walk past, one carrying a scaffold pole on his shoulder, *‘that’s where you are on the bridge and when you have lorries going over it...’* he tells the others, slightly swinging the pole round to look at his companion. *‘Oh my God,’* participant A10 exclaims, *‘that looks really dangerous!’* She turns round to take a photograph. Participant A10, lapel camera footage.

Qualities

The relational qualities identified through the literature and practitioner interviews, qualities that resonated with me as an ex-advertising creative which is no doubt why they attracted me in the first place, appeared to play out. Even the humble ribbon and tag was an embodied advert, showed lived relevance, had contextual fit, aestheticized elements, was conspicuous, and was encountered.

Embodied

Merleau-Ponty’s reading of the body as channel, instrument and context of relations between the subject and the objects we perceive (2014, p. 209-213/245-249) continued to play out in how participants behaved in the alleyway and on the street and their perceptions of things. Their bodies and their orientation towards the world were the channel through which they encountered anything. How people are in the world affects what they notice.



Fig. 138: Lapel camera footage of participant S7a looked down a lot during experiment 7 focussing mainly on rubbish in her commentary (2022)

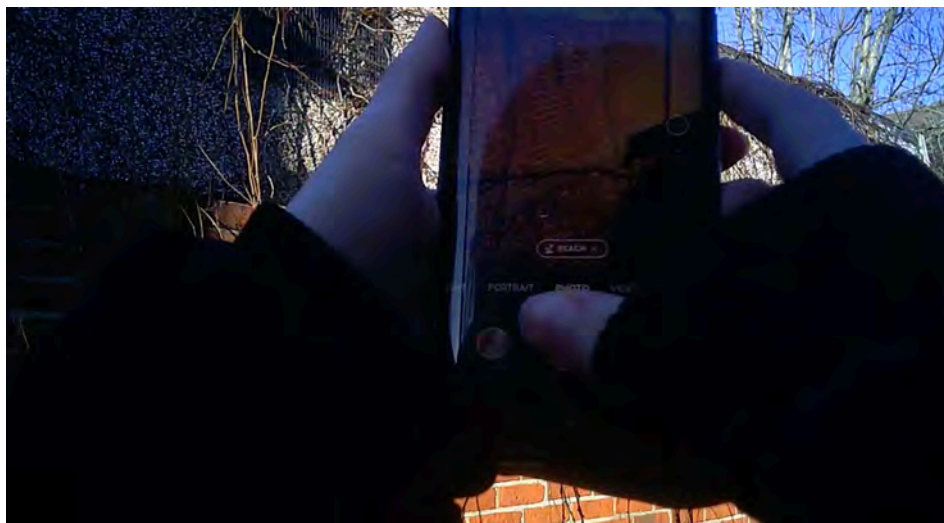


Fig. 139: Lapel camera footage of participant E6a looked up a lot during experiment 6 and saw things like graffiti and overhanging branches (2022)

The embodied nature of [ambient] advertising could be seen across all the phases. Participants walked up to it, stopped in front of it, moved their heads closer to get a better look or brought it towards them. Sometimes they flipped the tag over out of curiosity and sometimes they touched the ribbon for its sensory qualities. It encouraged a physical relationship. Participant C2a noticed the [ambient] advert once she rounded the corner and decided to jog towards it, *‘let’s go closer to that thing’* she says. This suggests that [ambient] adverts do not in themselves need to be interactive or indeed digital in order to elicit embodied responses. The wrapping paper elicited the embodied response to unwrap.

‘I don’t know if I’m supposed to unwrap this, no, I daren’t...’ He hesitates. ‘I should probably look on the back of the tag...’ He turns the tag over. ‘Yep, nothing on the back,’ he turns the tag back over and takes a photograph. ‘Yeah, that is really cool.’ Participant M4c, lapel camera footage.

In all the phases the sensory context of the environment had no noticeable effect on perception of, or interaction with the [ambient] advert. However, as might be expected as it got colder participants were marginally less inclined to pay as much attention to the sensory aspect of their walk.

In Phase 3 there was significantly less commentary on a sensual and embodied connection with the world than in phases 1 and 2. In phase 1 30% of participants mentioned the weather or temperature specifically, overall, there were sensory details in 80% of accounts. The experiments in Phase 2 all took place from late November to early January, around Christmas time. The days were shorter, colder, and at times darker than many of the experiments in Phase 1. Cold breath hung in the air as the participants stopped to comment on ‘stuff’ and their relation to it.

‘It’s a little bit icy on the floor here because it’s a bit cold,’ She takes a photograph of ice and leaves on the floor. ‘Ice cracking under my feet,’ Participant J6b, lapel camera footage.

The films revealed participants’ own bodies becoming things within the sensible world through a level of reflexive photography and commentary. They become interlaced and connected with my research and their environment.

He walks into the alleyway. ‘There’s a light spot on the ground.’ He takes a photograph of the vent. ‘There’s my shadow.’ He takes a photograph of his own shadow. Participant E6b, lapel camera footage.

Lived Relevance

Once the participants had engaged with the advert, they all quickly grasped what it was. They understood that it was an advertising communication as soon as they saw the logo. This had a threefold effect; they knew who was communicating to them, they could decide on its relevance quickly, and the logo brought with it pre-existing attitudes to the brand. It also meant that they knew the brand intended to cast themselves in a good light – so while the brand was thanking the audience they were also asking for recognition of this fact.

‘Ok, what is this?’ He walks up to the lamppost advert. ‘It’s not usually here, I’ll take a picture of that bad boy.’ He takes a photo and then starts reading the gift tag. ‘Thank you for your tax contribution which pays for all the lamp posts that light up your streets...you’re welcome.’ Participant G4, lapel camera footage.

The relevance of advertising communication by the local council was not questioned as it formed part of the context in which the alleyway is situated, Moor noted that even organisations such as local councils increased their branding and branded communications. Indeed, for younger participants communication in an everyday context that they could relate to helped to establish it as a brand. For example, experiment 4 contained an 18-year-old that commented:

'I didn't know Bromley could be thought of as a 'thing' until I saw it on the ad'. Participant W4, micro-interview notes.

The [ambient] advert had lived relevance for many of the participants, but not all, even though it was a brand they all had some sort of relationship with (the local council) and discussed a utility they all made use of (light). The lived relevance was strongest for women throughout the year when the messaging around Christmas was not dialled up. This is because women felt more of a sense of personal danger in unlit and partially hidden environments – it was more relevant in the alleyway than on the street. That said many women in phase 3 on the street also mentioned their concerns around safety at night, and the need for light, I will return to this in the concluding chapter.

She pauses to look at the lamppost. 'Ok, interesting, I've just seen a lamppost which is been paid for by the council which is a very good thing being as there's very little light here at night and it's quite frightening.'
Participant S2, lapel camera footage.

'Funnily enough, it's actually usually quite scary down here at night.' He takes a photograph of the back alley. *Participant B7, lapel camera footage.*

The lived relevance of Christmas was dialled up for all at Christmas time, so much so that for participant B5, who could only take part in the walk a few days after Christmas, felt that it had lost lived relevance. *'That's very odd,'* he comments, *'it's not even Christmas and there's Christmas paper around a lamppost.'* This is in contrast to participants that took the walk a few days before Christmas that evidenced much more 'Christmas spirit' in social activities and appreciation of the semiotic content of the advert.

'I was drinking last night so I can't speak properly,' she says with a laugh as she stumbles over her words. *'Your tax contribution helps to pay for the lights that light up the street...'* She looks more closely at the wrapping paper. *'Where does one get Bromley Christmas paper?'* She takes another photograph. *Participant A10, lapel camera footage.*

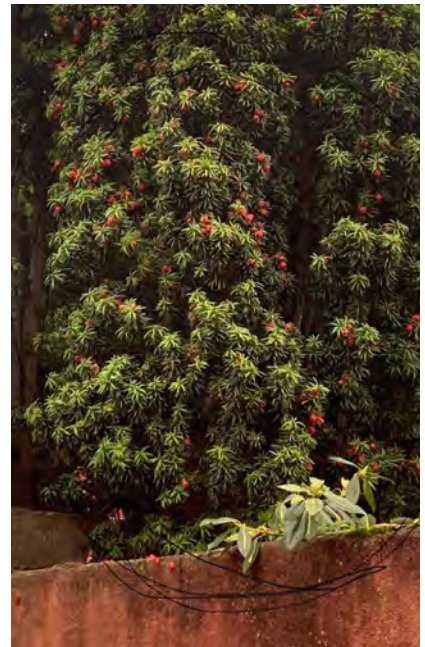
A number of participants showed an interest in foliage early on as it reminded them of the context of Christmas, and they looked for more examples of it.



Fig. 140: Lapel camera footage of participant K7 taking a photograph of foliage (2022)

‘Beautiful conifer, feels Christmassy, I’m definitely in the Christmas mode, getting the house all cosy for family and friends.’ Participant K7, lapel camera footage.

The advert did not cause them think about Christmas out of the blue, but they instantly recognised the signifiers of Christmas – wrapping paper, Christmas tree and bauble symbols, ribbons, tags, a wrapped object.



Figs. 141-143: Different participants from experiment 7 take photographs of things that feel Christmassy, participant S7b takes a photograph of the low winter sun, participant S7c takes a photograph of a Christmas bauble on Christmas wrapping paper on the second [ambient] advert, participant K7 takes a photograph of conifers poking over a wall covered with red berries

The foliage in the alleyway added to a Christmas assemblage formed through the crisp cold temperature, the low sunlight, participant habits and rituals around Christmas, the decorations in their homes, the wrapping paper around the lamppost, memories of family, anticipation of festivities to come.

He pauses in front of the [ambient] advert. 'There are some Christmas trees there, so I imagine that it's a message for this period.' Participant A9, lapel camera footage.

Even though the street, unlike the alleyway, is generally fairly well lit, in phase 3 49% of participants commented about the need for light, and a fear for themselves, or others, of walking around at night in the interviews, a similar number to phases 1 and 2 (please see conclusion).

... 'that is it, thank you for paying your tax contribution...helped pay for the lampposts that light up the street.' He takes a photo of the [ambient] advert. 'Well thank God they use the money for something!' he exclaims as walks on. Participant A9 continues, lapel camera footage.

Contextual Fit

The use of medium from the environment to help create the message is contextual fit, please see chapter 1. Participants recognised the Christmas [ambient] advert as a present immediately as the wrapping paper more clearly turned the lamppost into a gift.

He walks down the alley, 'Coming up is a lamppost wrapped up as a Christmas present...' Participant 06 lapel camera footage.

'I can see a present ahead, something interesting...' She walks briskly towards the advert looking around her. 'Lots of rubbish down here, we should come litter picking.' She pauses in front of the advert and takes a photo. 'Christmas messages from Bromley...' She walks on. 'Maybe they'd like to save the library too...' Participant J4b, lapel camera footage.

The participants understood the lamppost as a gift with the combination of the gift tag and ribbon. The contextual fit of medium to the idea was extremely tight. The combination of elements allowed something as everyday, large and unwieldy as a lamppost to be framed as a present. Not one person commented that did not look like a present, though they may have felt that the local authority was in no position to gift them anything. *'There is another stupid Bromley present thing,' comments participant D7.*

Aestheticized Elements

The alleyway was not the easiest place to find things that could be playfully aestheticized, though the overhanging plants straggling

over a red wall hinted at advertising for a local hairdresser. This could have been aestheticized through the wall painting style of Brazilian street artist Fábio Gomes Trindade, an artist that paints portraits underneath trees and bushes, allowing the foliage to become a hairstyle. My feeling was that it would have less lived relevance for the majority of people, even if it would have been more fun to create. Aestheticizing a lamppost simply with the addition of a tag and ribbon, and in some instances, some wrapping paper, shows how minimal these interventions can be.

'I feel that my eye has been drawn to this wrapped lamppost,' He stops and takes a photo of the lamppost advert.' Participant J5, lapel camera footage.

'Ahh,' She stops in front of the lamppost advert and takes a photograph. 'A wrapped-up lamppost.' She laughs and takes another photo. Participant X7, lapel camera footage.

A large number of participants were excited to see what this unexpected and playful thing was. Over the course of all three phases 84% of participants took a photograph of the advert. It turned the whole environment into something a bit more playful, if only for a moment.

Conspicuous

The brightly coloured bow and gift tag were noticeable, and in colour distinct from the background. In Phase 1 85% of participants took photographs of the ambient advert and 97% spoke about it. The majority of the participants commented that the advert was new to the alleyway with, on average, half first noticing the colour, and a handful making noises of surprise.

'...but at the end today we have got this lovely pink ribbon on this lamp-post,' She takes out the camera and tries to frame a photo, though doesn't take one, '...it says thank you to us for our tax contribution for another lamp post...' she walks on, '...it's a good thing...' Participant F3, lapel camera footage.

The interventions with wrapping paper were even more attention grabbing, significantly so in the dull alleyway where in phase 2 96% of participants photographed the adverts. These small interventions were decidedly conspicuous. This is as Pieters and Wedel note, a bottom-up trigger (2004), or as Seamon frames a similar idea, though very much from within human experience, bottom-up noticing (1979).

Wrapping something around the lamppost in this playful way rendered both the lamppost and the intervention visible – they both became conspicuous. The flash of a ribbon moving in the breeze, the contrast of the pink with the background, the unexpectedness of the placement all attracted attention. Even the smaller ribbon adverts on the street were still noticeable.

‘A bright coloured ribbon,’ participant J11 exclaims, taking a photograph of the [ambient] advert. Participant J11, lapel camera footage.

Encountered

The [ambient] advert was encountered within the participants’ everyday social spaces, installed before they arrived so they would not be aware that anything had been placed. It was encountered in the ordinary flow of a walk. One of the many benefits of the lapel camera was that it recorded not only the participant encounters but other people’s encounters.

As she walks down the alleyway, a man has stopped to look at the [ambient] advert. Her eyes are drawn to the man. ‘I used to bring my grandchildren down here.’ She states. The man walks away from the [ambient] advert, and she moves closer. ‘What have we got to look at here?’ She takes a photograph of the [ambient] advert and mumbles something indistinctly about doctors. Participant E5, lapel camera footage.

Even an intervention as small as this can form an encounter. Encounters are written about more broadly in chapter 2.

Context

While some of the context can be considered by the advertising creative in terms of the quality of lived relevance there will be many more contexts, or to put it another way relations, that only appear within an assemblage.

Broader societal, political and economic context emerged from participant commentary and from the micro interviews.

‘Oh, a thank you from Bromley,’ He pauses in front of the ambient advert and takes a photograph. ‘What’s this then? Helped pay for all the lamp posts that light up the streets...’ He turns away and walks around corner ‘...thanks for paying your extortionate council tax, my pleasure.’ ... ‘Oh look, another ‘Thank You.’ Are these new lamp posts? Can’t say I’ve ever noticed them before.’ He takes another photograph.’ Participant A6, lapel camera footage.

She pauses 'I'm not sure I'm not supposed to take a lamppost for granted, that's a funny thing to be celebrating,' She starts to walk away, adding in a pessimistic tone, 'that makes me feel there's going to be more cuts.' Participant C2b, lapel camera footage.

'What's a bit of a shame is this shop here used to be the Alexandra store, and it closed...' he says sadly and takes a photograph of the shutters, '... which kinda sucks, so yeah.' Participant R9, lapel camera footage.

She notices the [ambient] advert and takes a photograph. 'That is completely different, I don't know what that is.' She stops to have a closer look. 'That is so weird, it makes it look like the community actually cares for once...' She takes a photograph of a cracked bit of pavement '... trying to decorate this really old looking alleyway.' Participant M6 (aged between 18-20), lapel camera footage.

He walks on with his son and looks in the dog groomer's window. He takes a photograph 'That's a Nigel Farage dog toy, probably the best thing, him getting chewed up by a dog!' he says with humour in his voice. Participant M8a, lapel camera footage.

Participants memories of the alleyway came up in the commentaries. This psychological context tended to frame whether they found the alleyway scary or not, and whether the issue of lamppost light resonated with them. Again, the majority of women and a handful of men spoke about how scary it could be at night. Young discusses women's experiences in public spaces and how they are different than men's, this is particularly evident around the sense of safety. It can inhibit how we use a space (2005).

'I don't use alleyways, I'm a woman' She walks on down the alleyway. 'I think I saw people doing a drug deal down there once' Participant M5, lapel camera footage.

Though they all had a very different relationship with the alleyway in the day and at other times in the year.

'...and in the summer this alleyway is beautiful because right at the end of this alleyway there is a huge tree...' She takes a photograph of the bare tree at the end of the alley, '...and all the leaves have fallen off now but at just the right time in autumn it's a really beautiful sight to look at, it frames the alleyway really beautifully.' Participant S6, lapel camera footage.

In phase 3 27% of participants also took photographs that revealed memories and 49% shared comments that reveal memories.

'Italian restaurants...' he pauses to take a photograph of the Italian restaurant façade '...like that always remind me of Lady and the Tramp,' Participant D9b, lapel camera footage.

Participants were more self-aware and reflexive as part of the participatory experience. This at times was functional,

She stops in front of a tree to take a photograph, but something stalls in the phone camera app and she has to go out of the app and back into it. 'Camera's being a bit shit.' Participant A8, lapel camera footage.

At times it was reflective,

She takes a second photo of the block of flats opposite, this time in landscape format. 'I think this area looks nicer in the pictures then actually when you see it with your eyes' Participant L8, lapel camera footage.



Fig. 144: Lapel camera footage of participant L8 as she takes a photograph of the block of flats during experiment 8 (2022)

At times they explained the relationship they have to the places in the site.

She pauses to take a photo of the coffee shop. 'And that is Shotsmiths where I go every day to use their toilet,' she says with a smile and carries on down the street humming to herself. Participant S8, lapel camera footage.



Fig. 145: Lapel camera footage of participant S8 as she takes a photograph of the coffee bar that she visits every shift to use their bathroom (2022)

In phase 3 the context of being in a public space may have played into their responses. Self-consciousness may have stepped in for some participants, for example D9a did not say a word on film and E11 only spoke at the start and then stopped. In all 84% of participants showed some self-awareness and reflection in their comments, this was a much higher proportion than in phases 1 and 2, where it was 68% and 43% respectively, though phase 1 would show 61% if I only included the experiments involving the lapel camera. My notetaking made people more self-aware. At other times self-consciousness indicated an awareness of the spectacle that one is creating by taking part.

She crosses the street from the train station, it is a cold drizzly grey day. 'I'm walking down the street talking to myself' she states matter-of-factly' Participant A10, lapel camera footage.

I described awareness of others earlier in this section, but this also extended to the behaviours one may not be able to do in consideration of others, laws and regulations and social mores.

He looks at the vinyl on the art shop window. 'I won't take a picture because there's children in the background' he states. Participant M8b, lapel camera footage.

A toddler comes running down the pavement towards him. 'Evan!' his mum shouts as she speeds up along the pavement trying to catch him. 'Hey!' his dad shouts as marches briskly up the pavement trying to catch the little boy. The little boy cheekily runs off, a smile on his face. 'Trying to avoid taking a photo of that child' states participant L9. Participant L9, lapel camera footage.

Contexts of work, and train times, shopping, the weather, films and products, social lives and school, jogging and clubbing, bin men and nail bars, the world-wide economy and over consumption all came up. Contexts are a multitude, personal and relational.

A post man rummages in his trolley for a parcel in front of her. 'Lots of things being delivered for Christmas.' She walks past a woman shivering in her coat at the bus stop. A man walks past her in a winter hat. 'Probably a lot of over consumption and waste going on there,' she continues as she looks at the post man. Participant V10, lapel camera footage.

Conclusion

The development of a methodological framework with a set of methods that could allow me to overcome a barrier in data collection - the capture of contextually-rich participant encounters in-situ was the purpose of Objectives 2 and 3. Action research and live tools gave me access to participant encounters with [ambient] adverts

providing new facts in the form of empirical data, something many researchers had called for. I was able to use my knowledge as a practitioner to make interventions and to test them out in the everyday spaces that [ambient] advertising should be encountered. Working with participants gave me multiple perspectives, surprising viewpoints, and rich visual material.

For me these situated, contextual and very lived experiences are the point of researching in this way. Every reaction was different, every encounter different. It is impossible to reduce the multiplicity. The more I tried to do it with the data tables and data visualisations the more of that moment of encounter that I lost. A multiplicity of participants does what it wants, responds in all sorts of unexpected ways and makes a variety of connections, and while they do so produce a superb social commentary which is easier to understand with all the constituent parts present gathered through the variety of methods. An unexpected bonus from the audio-diaries was that the participants were surprisingly funny, sharing observations on the world that were rich in detail and humour.

My methods gave me a lot of quantitative data, and this was very productive in helping me identify areas of interest and connection. Braun and Clarke advise that one should not focus overly on relationships between numbers in order to generalise (2022). Rather than giving me a supra-human view from which I can describe the world in generalisations (in reference to Heidegger, 1977), I used quantitative data to allow me to access encounters at a granular level. I was able to look at what people were looking at and talking about, and it gave me a way to remember the information without storing it inside my head. From this I was able to generate initial insights, explore the qualities that the literature suggested, draw my attention to similarities, and find new themes. I renamed the categories many times as I noticed better ways to describe things. The data visualisations a representation of the things participants paid attention to, with the caveat that I chose the categories, so they are inherently subjective. The data visualisations show the shape of participant attention across the most consistent categories. Visualising in this way helped me see what people talk about, but would not photograph, and vice-versa. It also helped me understand what was consistent across phases.

The first pass of analysis also revealed the length of time people paid some level of attention to the advert, fully engaged or not. This was first evidenced in physical time code. With a total time of four hours, forty-four minutes and fifteen seconds spent by participants on these walks, thirty-two minutes and twenty-eight seconds was spent paying attention to the [ambient] adverts. That means that nearly eleven

and half percent of all the walks was spent attending to the advert. This was greater in the alleyway at nearly thirteen percent, when participants felt a little less self-conscious and were more inclined to linger over things of interest. On the street participants walked faster, were more self-consciousness but saw more things of interest such as cafes where they buy lunch. Here nearly nine percent of the walk time was focussed on the [ambient] advert. Even the small ribbon ad (intervention 1) was noticed on the street. Participants gave the bigger Christmas [ambient] adverts in both environments (interventions 2 and 3) slightly longer and more focussed attention. As discussed in chapter 4, repetition of the advert did not mean a longer time period was spent attending to the advert, but it did ensure that more participants noticed it and there was more awareness of the brand the advert was made for.

When I started to take note about the length of time people were engaged with the advert, I knew there was something interesting there, however it was the ebb and flow of their interest that was, in fact, more interesting. A participant would notice the advert, become distracted by something else, but still return to the advert as though the interruption had not occurred. Participants scanned quickly for information amongst the things they knew and paid slower more deliberate attention to things that required further investigation (Broadbent, 1958; Jurca and Madlberger, 2015; Kahneman, 1973; Mandler and Parker, 1976; Nelson-field, 2020; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986; Yarus, 1967). In Phases 1 and 2 participants attended to the advert on average for 26 seconds and in phase 3 on average for 18 seconds. This was a significant amount of time, but it was not constant attention in the way that someone might sit and watch a cinema advert from beginning to end. More time was spent with the Christmas adverts, and the focus was earlier and longer. Something interesting was going on below the surface of the time code, something that needed a deeper level of analysis.

The repetition of an advert, either as a direct repetition or as a variation ensured that everyone saw the advert with most participants photographing at least one of the adverts. Experiment 8, that repeated the ribbon [ambient] advert, may well have done better if it were the Christmas ad that was repeated as it is larger. However, similar to the alleyway once a participant saw one of the adverts, even if they did not take a photograph, they would notice another one and overall paid more attention to the adverts. In the alleyway where there was less distraction and the lampposts were physically

closer to each other participants would look for more, '*there's another one there as well*,' participant M6 stops to have a closer look, '*mmm, it says the same thing*'. In experiments where there was only one advert, they would sometimes comment that the next lamppost did not have an advert. The findings show that more participants recall the brand if the advert is repeated, even more so if it is varied. However, as Nelson-Field notes advertising can raise brand awareness but it will not necessarily persuade or change opinion (2020). Participant I3 demonstrates this perfectly when she encounters the [ambient] advert stating, '*with a ribbon saying this lamppost was paid for with your tax contribution by the horrible Bromley Borough*.'

The photographs, films, commentary and interviews invited many different readings. I discovered through the action research cycle and the first pass of analysis that the qualities were very porous – relevance slipped into context, as did contextual fit, conspicuousness crossed into playful aestheticization, encountering brought the [ambient] advert towards the participant in an assemblage. [Ambient] adverts are constructed through heterogeneous components. These relational qualities that I drew out of the literature and participant interviews that I felt created a very definitely situated and *contextually-rich* form of advertising also started to reveal lines of flight. As each quality situated the [ambient] advert participants would use that very quality to slip out of the moment or situation to think about something else. I started to think about [ambient] advertising as a format that is *in-and-out-of-place*. Participants moved between the present moment in that place to other times and places revealing a *thickness of the present*, as they encountered things, and this could be seen in the encounters with the [ambient] advert. There are small shifts in attention as participants enter eddies of time, *a pause* which they create to pay some attention to the thing that has interested them such as the [ambient] advert. In this pause they reach some understanding, before shifting back into the ordinary temporal rhythm. The various contexts and elements that are in the participants' thoughts as they pay attention to the [ambient] advert *assemble* in this pause. These are the deeper themes that will be explored in chapter 5. Even though the tables and first pass analysis from this stage was limited and quite superficial it gave me a way to forge paths through this complex terrain.

Between now and then and later,

between the sensory world and context,

between ourselves and things.



CHAPTER 5

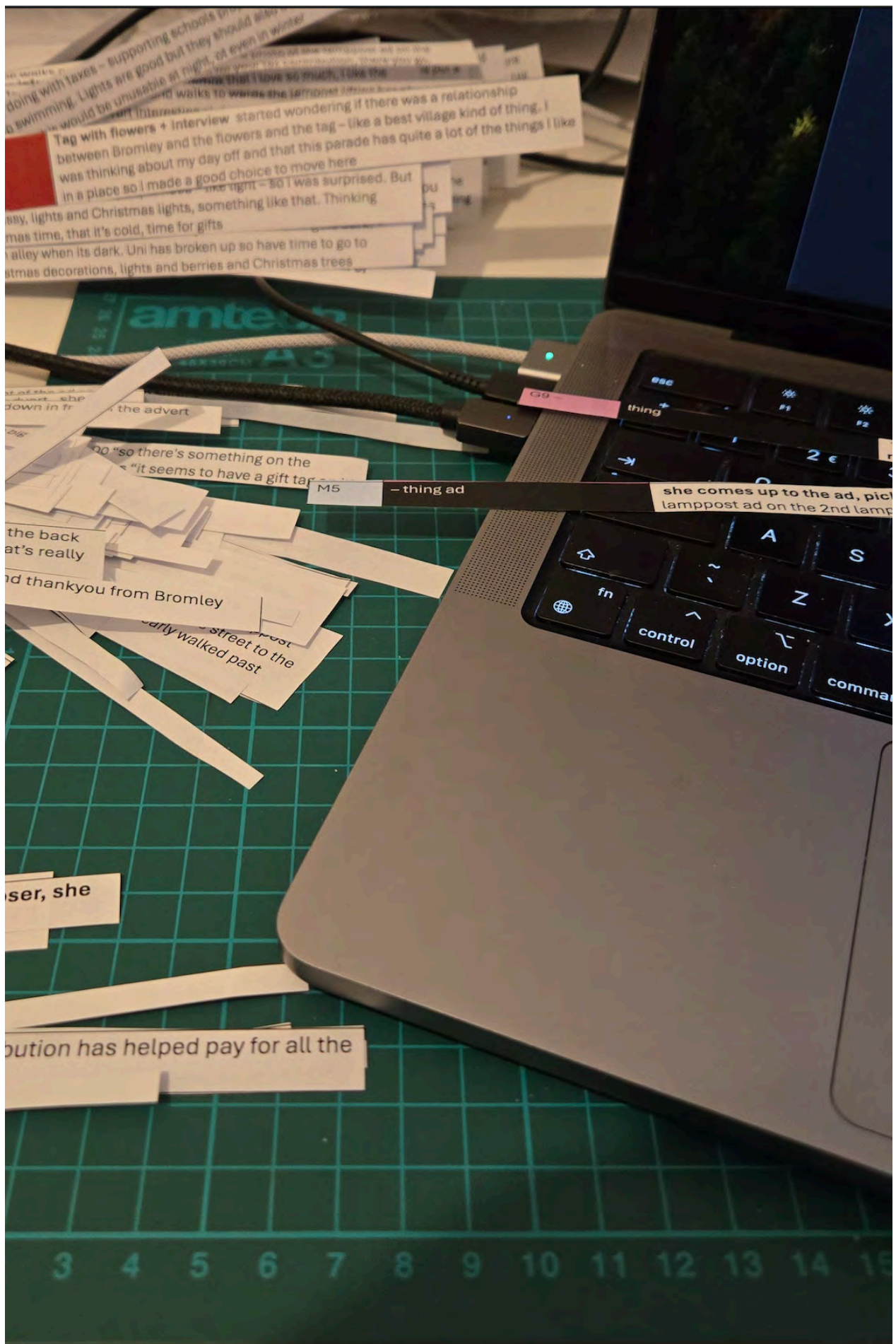


Fig. 146: Comparing participant experiences
with reflective thematic analysis

Directing my Gaze

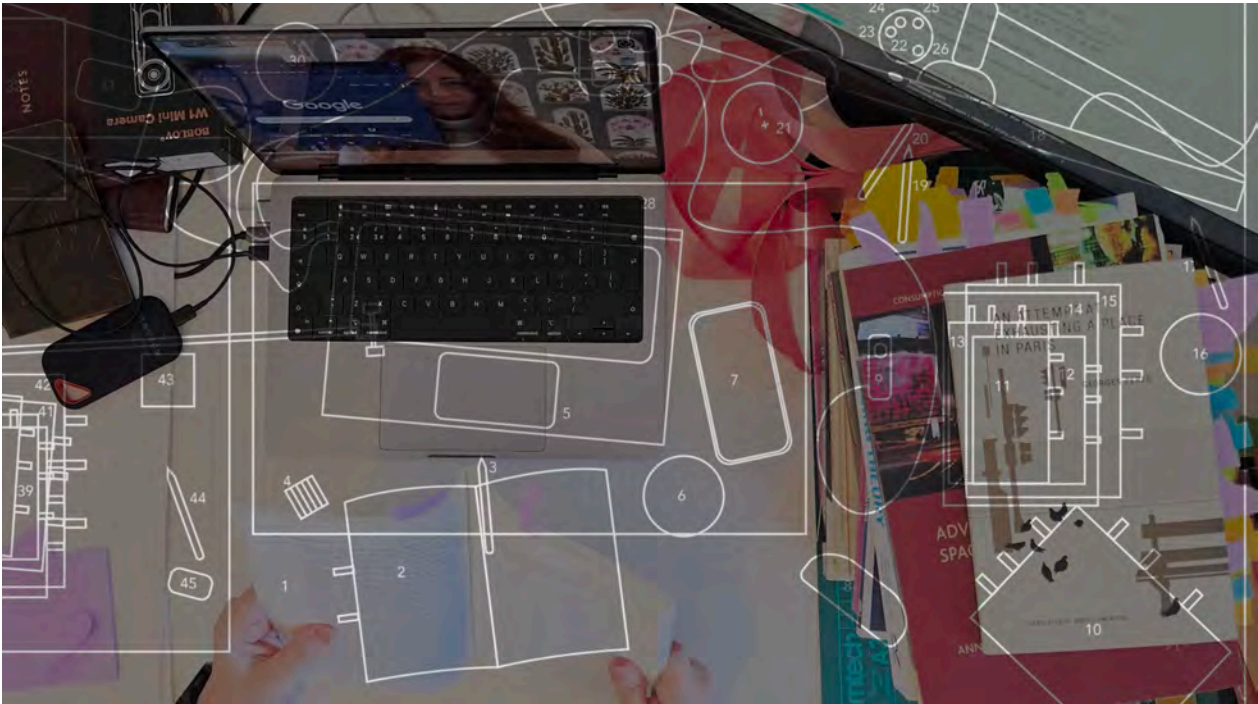


Fig. 147: Still from the opening sequence of *Desktop ∞ Thinkering* (2024)

As each experiment finished, I moved away from the tactile and sensory world, and the actions on site with participants, into a quieter thinking space. I spent a lot of time surrounded by books and participant materials, with online journal articles and a variety of websites, with drawing pads and the Adobe suite. This was a reflexive and reflective place, but it was also an analytical and makerly space. It was a place full of opinion, insights and wrong turns. It is where the theme *In-and-Out-of-Place* surfaced from all the qualities [ambient] advertising possesses, and where I was able to articulate the theme *Assembled*. It was where I found a way to understand how we encounter this form advertising in space and time through the themes of *The Pause* and *The Thickness of the Present*, the latter in reference to Merleau-Ponty. I drew out these themes not simply from reflexive thematic analysis but also from thinking (please see chapter 3). Professor Elizabeth St. Pierre points to the inherent problem in assuming one is able to simply describe the world ‘in careful word-for-word transcriptions of interviews,’ negating the act of interpretation ‘and refus[ing] to theorize in analysis’ (2016, p. 115). Reflexive thematic analysis is clear that we develop ideas and themes, they do not emerge as though we were not the ones in control of it (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

Sarah Pink suggests that places like this, where we come to think and analyse and develop theories are ‘ethnographic places’ (2015, p. 48), she continues,

‘They are the places that we as ethnographers make when communicating about our research to others. Whatever medium is involved, ethnographic representation involves the combining, connecting and interweaving of theory, experience, reflection, discourse, memory and imagination.’ (ibid 2015, p. 48)

Developing Ideas and Themes

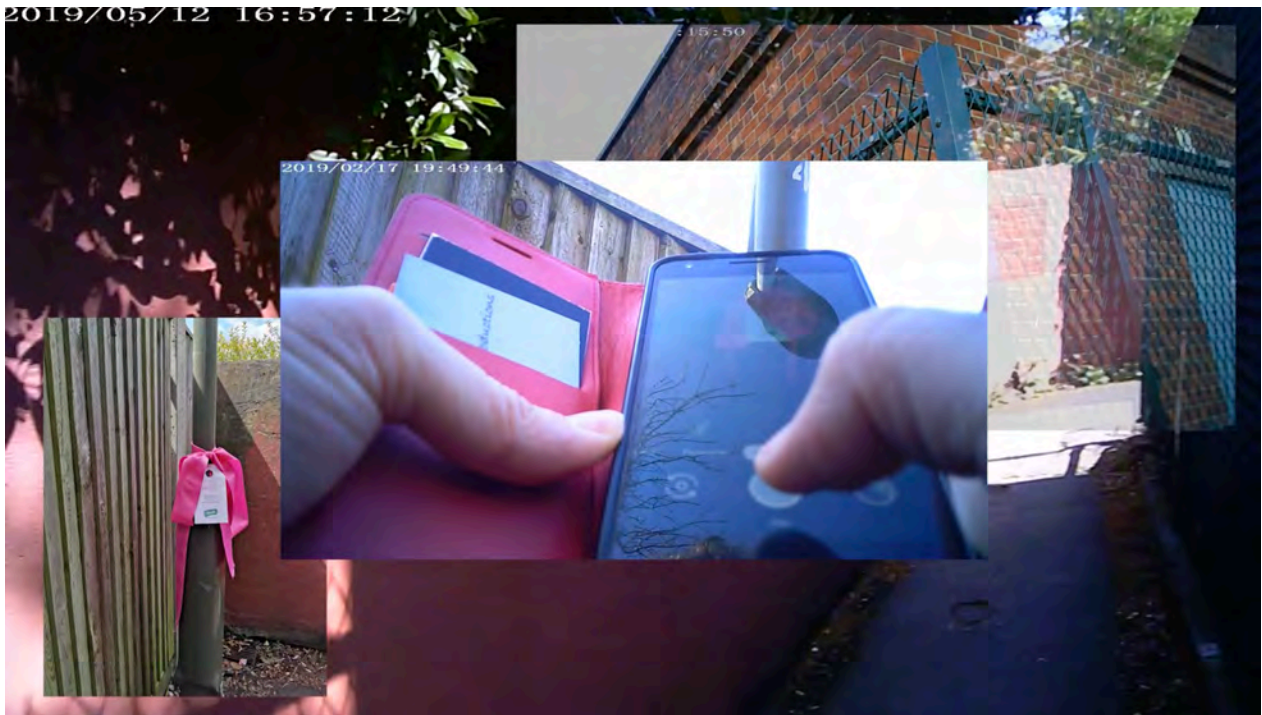


Fig. 148: Still from Curiosity showing various participants noticing and engaging with the big ribbon [ambient] advert (2022)

Pink discusses the openness of place, and picking up on Doreen Massey she notes that they are continually made, ‘always under construction’ (2005, p. 9). Massey characterises place as a discrete entity in its own right, but one that is always linked to other places, ‘it is always in the process of being made. It is never finished, never closed’(ibid, p. 9). This is my desktop, a site that is always in the process of becoming, linked to not only my many interests but also locations, systems, spaces and ideologies far removed from me.

Fig. 148 is a still from my early film *Curiosity*, a bit of tinkering from when I was trying to get to grips with participant reactions to the [ambient] adverts in the alleyway. I had been playing various

participant films together on my desktop while presenting my research to audiences at conferences and I knew something was articulated within the films that did not emerge from more formal academic presentations, and my audiences could see it. In making the films I was very surprised at the consistency of participant reactions when I put the sheer volume of clips together in Premiere Pro, but more than that I started to notice time as an essential factor/actor in the encounter. Without working in this way - through action research, reflexive thematic analysis, tinkering and looping round again - I would not have made these connections. I simply would not have experienced it. It is this early film, and the film *Everyday Encounters* that made me think more deeply about *The Thickness of the Present* and *The Pause*. tinkering from the place of my desktop.

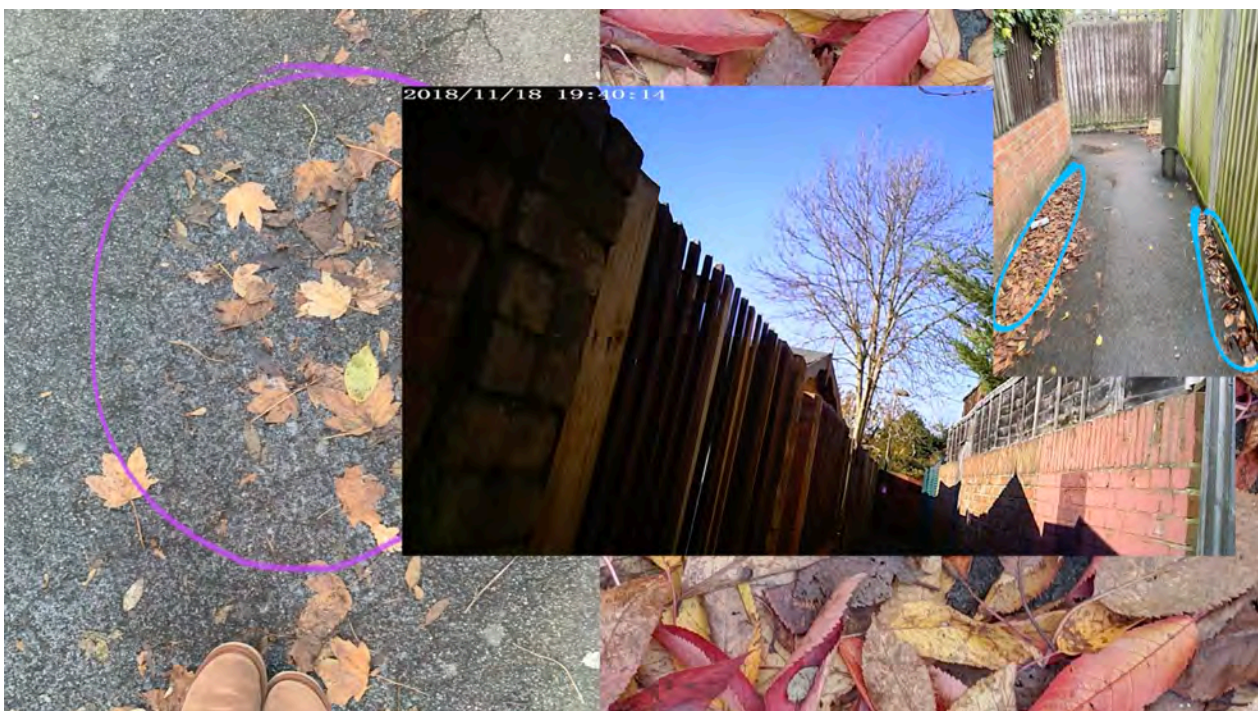


Fig. 149: Still from *Everyday Encounters as participants engage with leaves* (2023)

Pink refers to Tim Ingold's statement that place is 'a zone of entanglement' (2008, p. 1797) and movement. The concept of entanglement was one that significantly influenced the visual and auditory approach I took with my films, films in which many things happen all at the same time, in which many voices are heard entangled with my own, in which concepts wind round each other. These early films directly shaped the later films as I, to paraphrase Pink, experimented with ways to communicate my research to others. Research that was inherently about context and the 'interweaving' of participant experiences, theories, reflective and reflexive practice, and time and place.



Fig. 150: Still from *Theories from the Alleyway* as I walk through the alleyway before each set of experiments with participants (2022)



Fig. 151: Still from *In-and-Out-of-Place* (2024) at different times of the year in different weather conditions heavily influenced by the film techniques I learnt while making *Theories from the Alleyway* (2022)

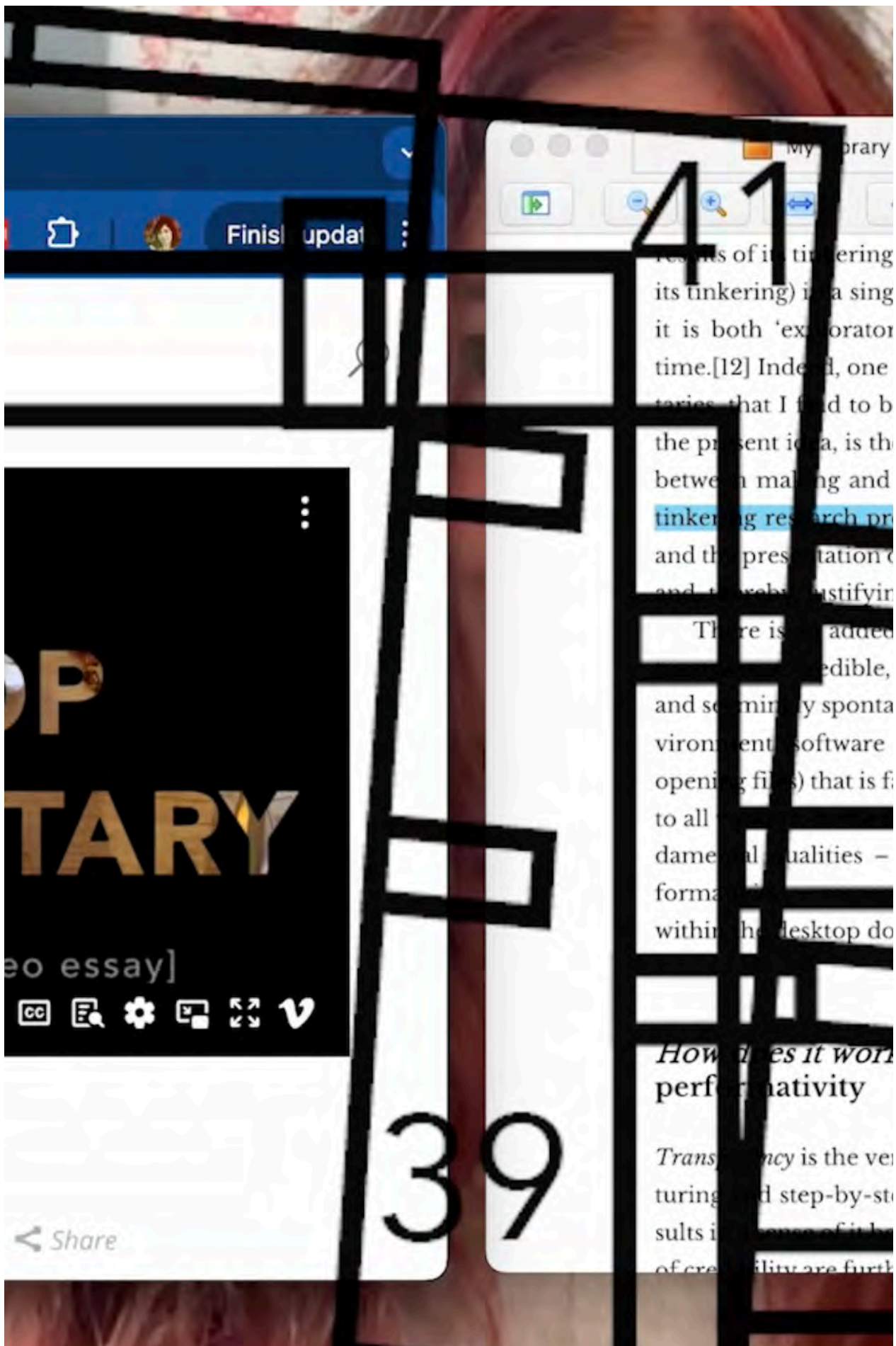


Fig. 152: Still from *Desktop ∞ Thinkering*, layering a diagram with internet searches and Zotero (2024)

Desktops

My research at the desktops gave me opportunity to engage with other people's experiences of things. When I entered this place of analysis, I encountered things that are different from my encounters in the sensory world. I could orient myself to these new things. 'Orientations are about how we begin,' Ahmed writes, 'how we proceed from "here," which affects how what is "there" appears, how it presents itself' (2006, p. 8). For Pink the action of analysis and the consideration of that place of analysis, reflection and reflexivity is,

'the process of bringing together or entangling a series of things in ways that make them mutually meaningful. We can understand ethnographic places and events that bring together combinations and interweaving of memory, imagination, experience, sociality, the sensory, power relations and more' (2015, p. 142).

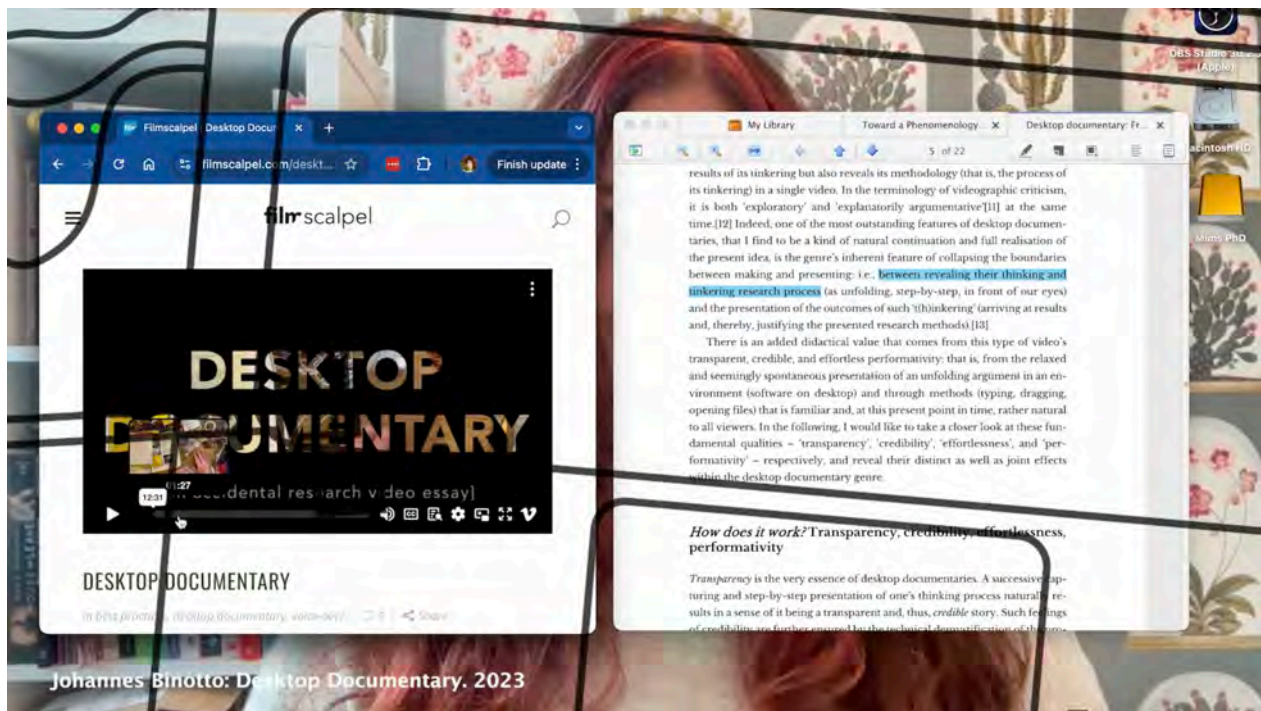


Fig. 153: Still from *Desktop ∞ Thinkering*, engaging with a desktop critique by Johannes Binotto (2024)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2lGkSuIplg>

It is worth remembering that the early films were not something that I did after all the experiments were all completed, the process itself was woven together. It is something that I did in between phases, and often in between experiments, as reflection is a normal part of action research (see chapter 3). My ethnographic place was the films I created on my desktops.

The desktops gave me a quiet space to step away from the noise of the sites, which in turn allowed me to be reflexive and to see the me in the research. They allowed me to work with time as well as place. They allowed for the entangling of philosophers, geographers, ethnographers, artists and filmmakers, for film and sound to combine with photographs and diagrams. They allowed me to pull out themes and think through them with participant films. The film *Desktop ∞ thinking* (2024) itself navigates this terrain. Layers upon layers of materials and experiments, landmarks and maps provided by generous people I met on my journey, and fragments from places and other times. Researcher and film-maker Johannes Binotto points out that for Freud what is interesting about a desktop is the unexpected mixing of things collected at different times when they become available at the same time (2023).

Ahmed depicts Philosopher Edmund Husserl's relationship to his desk in his first volume of *Ideas* and the time dedicated to describing that 'place' of philosophy. 'It is not surprising that philosophy is full of tables,' she notes 'tables are, after all, "what" philosophy is written upon: they are in front of the philosopher' (2006, p. 3). Later in her introduction she describes the many desks that she has written her own book on. We orient ourselves to our desks, intending certain actions.

My physical desk is home to a number of objects each one unique but with the potential to relate to the other objects around it (Ahmed, 2006; Binotto, 2023; Husserl, 1969). My books forming towering city blocks in a landscape filled with sketchbooks, pens and pencils, materials from [ambient] adverts, cups of coffee, doodles and diagrams, essential tools like my lapel cameras and external hard drives filled with participant materials describing the outside world, and a laptop and additional screen. To one side is a camera arm and sometimes by the side of the desk, on sometimes on the desk, is a Sennheiser MKH416 mike.

My laptop is itself a place within a place. As a location my digital desktop is home to my screensaver – an image that previously alternated between images of my family, but more recently with images relevant to my films, providing an ever-present context. On top of this, like a messy bedroom, my most recent finds sprawl across the surface, creating folders for themselves in what feels like computer generated exasperation. These folders provide a diary of sorts of my last few days, weeks and months. Binotto (in reference to Spankie, 2017, an investigation of Sigmund Freud's physical desktop) characterises the desktop as an externalisation of psychic processes. It is a site and

yet also a representation of a mind in action, in Freud's language the psyche and an archaeological site (2023). In a similar vein Ahmed wishes Husserl wrote in more detail about his writing environment, she had 'a desire to read about the particularity of the objects that gather around the writer' (2006, p. 29) as they reveal other things about the philosophers thought processes and interests, other relationships. My desktop has a number of open programmes that have taken up temporary residence, things that I am permanently in the middle of doing. And, of course, many, many, open internet tabs.

My Films

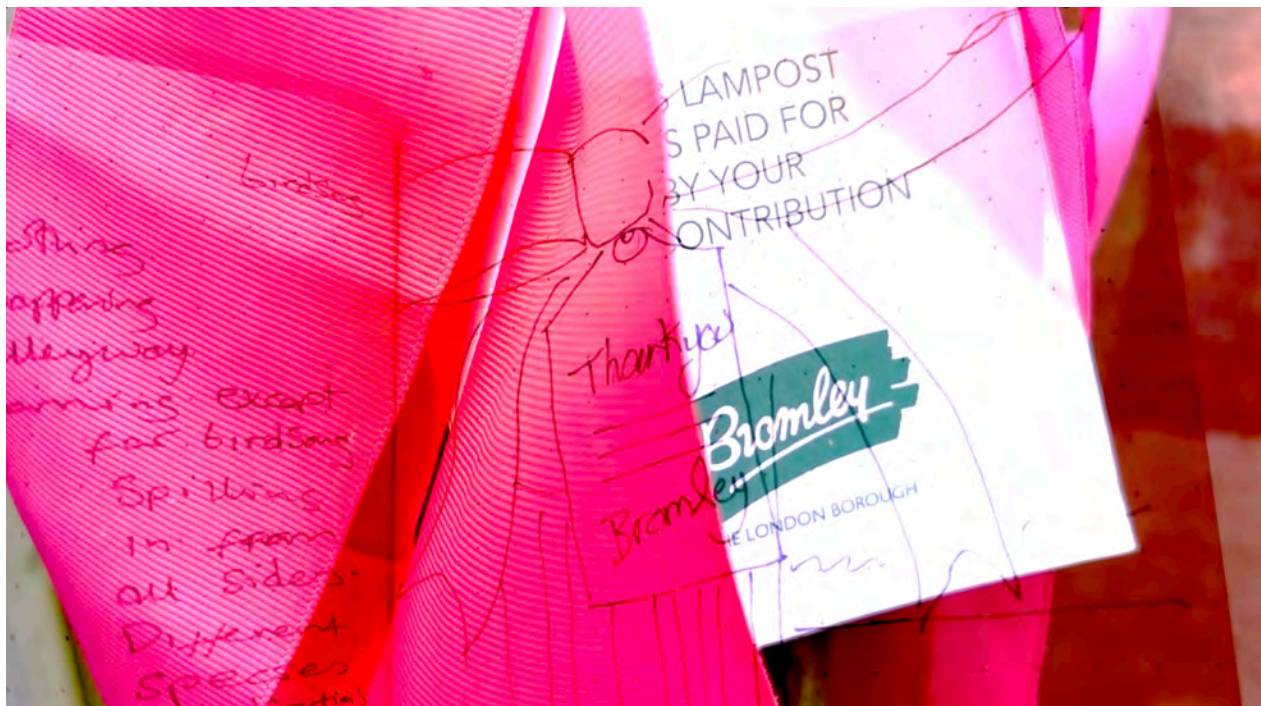


Fig. 154: Still from Making Ambient, layering sketchbook drawings of the ribbon [ambient] advert and the big ribbon [ambient] advert from the alleyway (2021)

Merleau-Ponty depicts place as 'the homeland of our thoughts,' this location, my two desktops, are the place where I reflect through film, where I make my connections, mixing things together that might never have come into contact with each other in another environment (2014, p. 49). My references, thoughts and artistic practice mix together in unexpected ways, as the sticker on new media artist Nick Briz's Mac laptop states 'everything is a remix' (2013, 1:18-1:21). This is my place for a tinkering form of filmmaking. Here there was an intellectual response and engagement with the materials and also an artistic response. The place for 'making the research encounter present in the analysis' (Pink, 2021, p. 147). The films a way to represent the thought at work. I treat my films as digital material, a fabric,

interconnected with real moments, digital moments, representations of things, in which I weave in theories, with an aesthetic that feels relevant to how we live today, something which feels appropriate for [ambient] advertising.

A very early film, *Making Ambient* (Fig. 154, Sorrentino, 2021), started to explore the things that come together to make an ambient advert, creative processes, materials, contexts, using montage editing and blending techniques. Other early films, *Everyday Encounters* (2023a) and *Curiosity* (2022), developed from a more immediate and visceral sense of place and of the encounters my participants had with things. A couple of other early films, *The Alleyway* (2021) and *Theories from the Alleyway* (2022), start to include the processes through which I make use of philosophy to understand what I saw during the phases of experiments. And other even earlier performative presentations of research and participant films presented as live desktop, though nameless, developed into the reflective reflexive narrative practice that situated my voice within the research. All the films from the start made use of a tradition of collage from early film-making and experimental art practices. The context as ongoing and everchanging was provided by the source materials for my bricolage.

My film pieces are a desktop documentary practice of sorts, certainly a thinking. I seem to have to a greater or lesser extent involved all the ‘modes’ of documentary practice listed by Bill Nichols and recounted by researchers and academic filmmakers Libertad Gills, Catherine Grant and Alan O’Leary in the introduction to Volume 28 of the 2024 Academic Quarter Journal as they explore how different video essayists conduct research through film. Nichols is interested in how ‘poetic, expository, participatory, observational, reflexive, and performative’ forms of documentary practice construct meaning and provide ways to critique film-makers relationships to participants within the film and the subsequent audience (Gills, Grant and O’Leary, 2024, p. 7, in reference to Nichols, 2017).

Expository: I aim for clear communication of my research using the desktop genre, as Kiss describes,

‘a clear and transparent representation of any carried-out methodology in the result piece – regardless of whether such result is the confirmation of a predetermined hypothesis or the outcome of an unexpected revelation’ (2024).

Observational: It is not observational in the sense that the clips I use are short rather than long however I have largely made use of participant footage shot with a lapel camera and participant photographs.

There was no involvement from me in the participants' films once I had given instructions of where to walk to and attached the lapel camera.

Participatory: The participant voices are heard clearly. My presence is acknowledged throughout, as is the participants' presence - multiple and subjective perspectives are essential.

Reflexive: Desktop filmmaking as a genre draws attention to the processes involved in the film-making process as part of this reflexivity.

Performative: My own journey of knowledge and discovery is performed throughout the films particularly evident in my voice over, however I do not foreground emotional storytelling and impact.

Poetic: I had not expected my films to become engaged with poetics, but as a long-time art director I cannot pretend that aesthetics did not play a part of my bricolages. I enhanced visual and auditory relationships through rhythm, tone, text and sensory affects (Faden, 2008). As Werner Herzog put it in his 1999 Minnesota Declaration, at times truth can only be reached 'through fabrication and imagination and stylization' (Herzog, n.d., point 5).

My source materials are abundant: Participant films that provide audio and video which can be used separately. Participant photographs. My own films from the site. My own observations. Recorded audio from the site. Google Earth. Film of visual metaphors that describe the way an idea feels to me. Film as diagram. Actual diagrams. Screen recordings of searches. Screen recordings of others' work. Screen recordings of Zotero. Screen recordings of Notes. Stop motion animations of elements from the site or from my desktop sites. Sound from sites and libraries. Sound as metaphor. Words as long rambling streams of thought. Typing text.

I narrate my own research journey throughout each film. Film lecturer Ian Garwood (2016) points out legitimate critiques of using voice over as a technique. The first argument he references was made by Christian Keathley, Jason Mittell and Catherine Grant (2019) stating that it can have the feel of a lecture presentation. The second argument was outlined by Connor Bateman (2016) describing that video essays can simply sound like a written essay read out loud. By using a voiceover, I am trying to achieve three things:

- Reflexivity - acknowledging my place in the research
- Thinkering – thinking through my thoughts out loud
- Female presence - to have a female voice within the sea of male voices in the space of filmed critique

When researching 300 videos on Audiovisualcy Garwood discovered that only 54 were female. Female voiceovers in criticism are by far the minority. That is not to say that I am a natural performer, I am not as my own family are happy to point out, and I can sound like the lecturer that I am. However, as Grant argues, audiovisual scholarship is 'performative' and my films require the performance (2016, p. 272).

My early films started a tinkering practice of playing with materials and thinking out loud, to-ing and fro-ing between the script, participant footage and my readings. Across all the later tinkering theme films there is a time-consuming back and forth between materials, script and editing that gives me time to think through material thinking, tinkering, by making use of fragments from the world and from my research. Heterogenous things assembled together. In these ways the films become a reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983) and a representation of place, time and encounter with an [ambient] advert that is rich and undefined and full of context. In my later films I sought to understand the themes I had pulled out from my literary research, reflexive thematic analysis, and action research with participants. I tried to position the viewer within the place of research and in multiple moments in time rather than standing outside the encounter as though viewing it from above. I did not want the illusion of watching the encounters unfold in chronological time, Heidegger showed us that we cannot take this position outside our own situatedness, please see chapter 2 (1977). As Grant suggests, I aim for my films to 'perform...what they say they do' (2016, p. 261).

In *Desktop ∞ tinkering* participant materials came to life on my desktop. The desktops, physical and digital, became filmed locations where I sat with important material and digital artefacts to hand. It was a film/place where books came to life through stop motion, marching across the table in time. I created a diagram of my desk and the objects on it and started moving it around the screen to create a sense investigation, and physical journey, experimenting with scale and speed and opacity. I wanted to give the physical desk its own map as site, that had an effect on the work I did there. It was created to be a film with physical and temporal dimensions, through multiple layers and portals to other places.

The corporeal world outside my room is brought to the viewer through sound, birds, sirens, an orchestra and layered participant clips. A grandfather clock, lifted from my imagination as Ahmed muses on Husserl's room, ticks rhythmically in the background. This reassuring traditional sound interspersed by a small bird chirping in a garden just outside the frame - an illusion of a window within

the illusion of a room. Various filmmaking methods working orchestrally, ‘in concert with one another,’ each doing what it does best, cross-validating, supporting and ultimately creating something that could not have been made singularly (Brewer and Hunter, 2005, p. xiii, please see chapter 3). Layer on layer. These are the poetics.

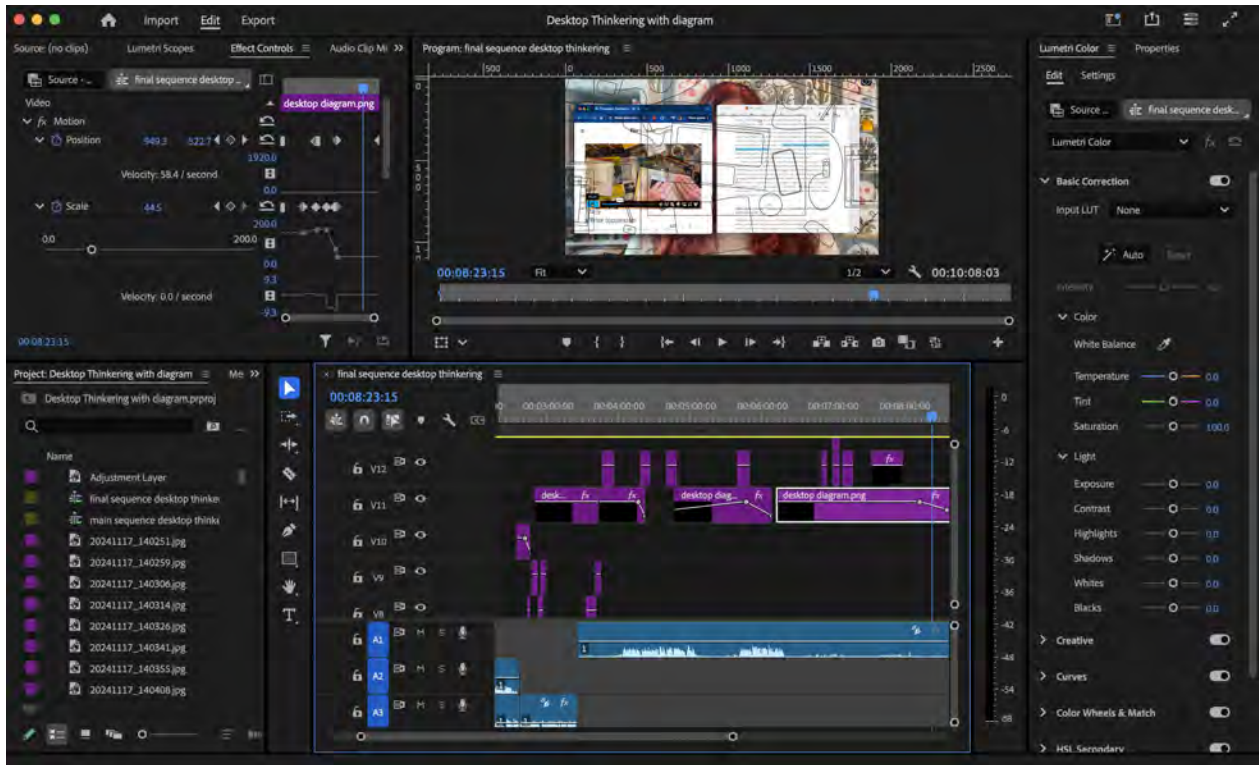


Fig. 155: A screenshot of my process of layering sound and image for *Desktop ∞ Thinkering* in Premiere Pro (2024)

This thinking desktop process which seeks to reveal ‘a clear and transparent representation of any carried-out methodology’ as Kiss describes also has these undisclosed artistic moments, for example the inclusion of the sound of the grandfather clock. Moments in a process when, as filmmaker and lecturer Ariel Avissar note, there can be no ‘presumptions of objectivity or reproducibility’ (2024, p. 18). This is not a scientific practice; it is an academic and artistic one. Poetics can sometimes make the point more clearly than observation and documentary. However, this form of filmmaking wears its processes and context proudly, it is ‘an integral part of the video, which is why I have deliberately emphasized it,’ Avissar continues (ibid 2024, p. 18). That is true for the film he was describing in his article, but it also holds true for desktop documentary practices.

Each of the later films *Desktop ∞ thinking*, *The Thickness of the Present* (Sorrentino, 2024), *In-and-Out-of-Place* (Sorrentino, 2024), *The Pause* (Sorrentino, 2025), and *Assembled* (Sorrentino, 2025) are made to the constraint of 10 minutes – a thought at work that is

somehow contained. Avissar points out that constraints are often used to promote creativity. Constraints and parameters are common practice in advertising. A blank page can be daunting but parameters to a brief can often be liberating. The 10-minute rule is one that I imposed on myself to try and help me hone my own argument and be brutal with the material that does not help me achieve it. Moving forwards, it provides a way to share my research with others. I am exploring an attentive encounter in multiple sensory and perceptual ways. My films place a great deal of emphasis on sensory details to convey experience, lingering on sounds, textures and movement in space, striving to show how participants, and I, perceive things. The importance of sensory perception is detailed in chapter 2. There is a narrative, but it is not a story. They have similarities with phenomenological filmmaking.

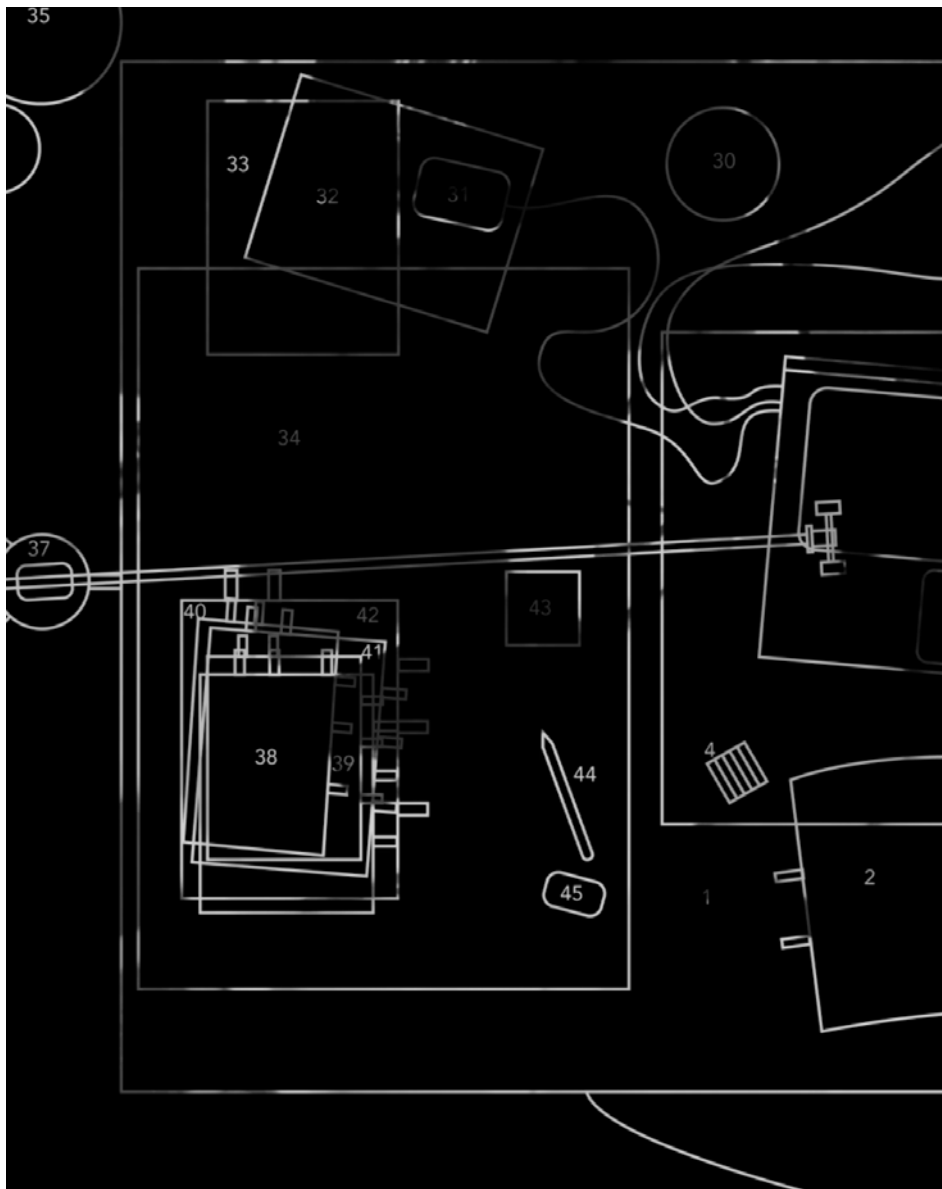


Fig. 156: Screenshot from the closing sequence of *Desktop ∞ Thinkering* with a focus on the desktop as site (2024)

Themes

During the course of my research, I set up small camps around a number of themes, each burning brightly for a while. I would change my tables from my reflexive thematic analysis sheets. I watched the participant films over and over again and went through the participant photographs and changed the themes. I read more books and articles searching for ways into the material and changed the themes. Over time four main interrelated themes took up more permanent residence in this place of analysis. I combed through many handfuls of coloured strands from participant transcripts; each one a strand in time, in movement. These themes offered insights into how my participants engaged with all manner of things in their environments, and in particular to [ambient] advertising.



Fig. 157: Still from *The Thickness of the Present* layering the swirling of leaves with reflexive thematic analysis strands (2024)

To pause for a moment...

It is a warm Monday morning. The street is busy, people spill out of a local coffee shop laughing, takeaway coffee in hand. A man walking down the street wonders what happened to the people that ran the flower shop that had recently closed, his wife used to buy flowers there though he never did. He wonders if he should have done. A pink ribbon flutters across the surface of a tag in a soft breeze, the tag lightly taps the lamppost it is attached to, his eye attracted. He

pauses. Unsure what it is he moves towards it and reads the tag. He looks up at the lamppost light and back at the tag and looks at the council logo. He murmurs something to himself about the council and with a small laugh walks away. In the distance a dog barks.

- As beings-in-the-world we experience the complexity of the things of the world, such as an [ambient] advert, through *the thickness of the present* (in reference to Merleau-Ponty, see later in the chapter)
- [Ambient] advertising is a situated form of advertising that is somehow both *in and out of place*, so it is unsettling (in reference to Cresswell, 1996, please see later in the chapter)
- We *pause* when we encounter it to make sense of it
- The pause allows the [ambient] advert to be *assembled*

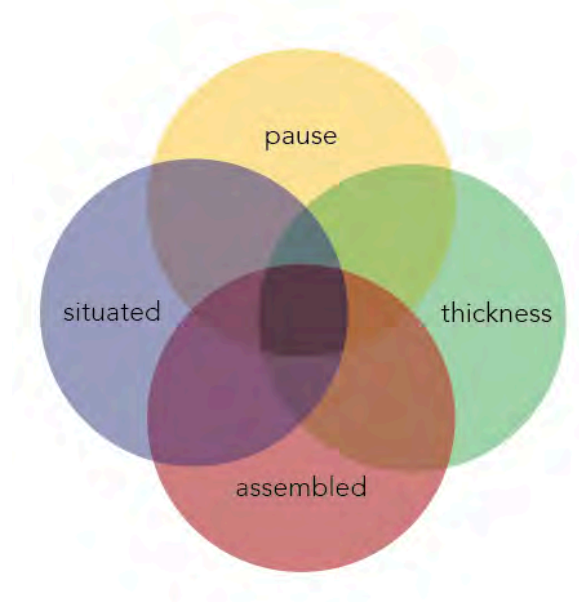
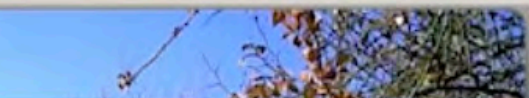


Fig. 158: The intersection of themes that allows the [ambient] advert to form (2024)

Overleaf Fig. 159: Still from *The Thickness of the Present* layering participant films (2024)



The Thickness of The Present



Fig. 160: Still from Everyday Encounters as participant C2b takes photographs and comments on rust leaching into a concrete post (2023a)

It had not been my intention to discuss time as a theme, but it became more and more pressing as I saw how participants behaved in their films which led to my understanding of time and formed part of the theoretical framework in chapter 2. The importance of time to participant encounters first became evident to me in an early film *Everyday Encounters* (Fig. 160). I was editing together participant clips as a film for inclusion in a round table discussion and reflecting on how participants are not always in the moment, they are often in multiple moments, elsewhere but also here (Sorrentino, 2023). I went through the participant transcriptions and films and noticed that it was a common occurrence in the materials thus far. It was also a trigger for finding a more useful way to thematically analyse participant materials which in turn led me to Reflective thematic analysis.

I was reading and re-reading Merleau-Ponty and Tuan and trying to position my thinking in relation to theirs. The pause was an important idea that I was mulling over to explain how we encounter [ambient] advertising and, in order for us to pause, there must be an articulation of time in which we can pause (The Pause is detailed later in the chapter). I needed to establish what I considered important to my argument. I read Husserl's *Ideas on phenomenology* in Ideas i and ii during the lockdowns in phase 2, and the texts introduced me to the

temporal horizon and our internal awareness of time (Husserl, 1969, 2000). For Husserl we focus on something in the present moment, but that moment is connected through the temporal horizon to fading memories ‘retentions’ and potential and anticipated futures that surround us. The present is always in a flow, and we are always situated in time. Husserl’s writing on consciousness led me to philosopher and psychologist William James. Though it appears that Husserl was not influenced by James, as he is not mentioned, for me there were some similarities in their descriptions of the flow of time and James’s description of a stream of consciousness.

‘Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as ‘chain’ or ‘train’ do not describe it fitly as it presents itself in the first instance. It is nothing jointed; it flows. A ‘river’ or a ‘stream’ are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described’ (1981, p. 159).

While James’ metaphor of a river of time is perhaps no longer considered to be the most appropriate metaphor for consciousness it did start philosophers thinking productively of consciousness as something fluid and dynamic, with eddies and turbulence, slow time and fast time. For Merleau-Ponty the flow of time is within us, we are a flow of consciousness. I have witnessed how breaks in the flow of consciousness, illnesses like dementia and psychotic breaks, have affected family members, and have crumbled their sense of their own identity and sense of personhood in time and space. They could not be sure they were even present. ‘There is at the core of time a gaze’ Merleau-Ponty writes, not that time only ‘exists for someone’ more ‘that time is someone’ (2014, p. 445/484). Our subjectivity is what allows us into moments, to see past, present and future. Participants flowed back and forth between past, to present, to the future, or to imagined spaces.

Behavioural scientist Dr Adam Bulley referred to professors of psychology Thomas Suddendorf, Donna Rose Addis, Michael C Corballis’ idea of mental time travel (2009) as an evolutionary adaptation allowing us to plan, and remember, and communicate (guest on Carroll, n.d.). Suddendorf and Corballis coined the term mental time travel to explain how we come to understand what a thing is by revisiting memories to see if we have come across it, or something like it, before (1997). This lyrical turn of phrase was inspired by the work of Endel Tulving whose interests lay in ‘episodic memory’ and the very human trait to think about past experiences to inform our understanding of current experiences (1972). We relive personal memories in our present. We can draw on information from that

memory to imagine a future that is tied to our aims and wishes. '[M]an is not a psyche joined to an organism, but rather this back-and-forth of existence that sometimes allows itself to exist as a body and sometimes carries itself into personal acts' (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p. 90/117). Philosophy became entangled with cognitive psychology for a while for me.

In *Everyday Encounters* the participant I largely focussed on, though others were present in the film, was enjoying crunching through leaves on the ground. At the same moment she was remembering walking through leaves as a youngster, and yet also in a different past walking through leaves with her own child. She was also imagining doing it again in a potential future. She held all these things, past, present and future together a kind of cloud. She drew the past towards her, not to explain the leaves, but to bring traces of warmth and love and laughter, to project these feelings into the future. 'I am present to my present, to the entire past that has preceded it, and to a future' (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p. 346/387). And yet my participants are separated from their actual objective past by 'the whole thickness of [their] present' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 122).

'She catches herself mid-thought, her voice trailing off as she stops to contemplate a concrete door post, studded with old iron filaments and bars. Brown rust stains are captured mid-flow, their form the memory of a stream of water running in and out of the pebbles and concrete. 'I do like where the iron almost runs onto the stone,' She steps closer and takes a photograph and then walks on, deliberately crunching through the leaves in her path.' Description of *Everyday Encounters* for the *Uncertain Relations* round table - footage from Participant film C2b.(Sorrentino, 2023b)

Unlike a number of the other participants who took photographs of leaves strewn across the floor she did not, instead she chose to take a photograph of the iron staining the door post - some 'thing' she has always liked. Another memory that stretches out into her past. The two things exist for her at the same moment, in the narrative we tell ourselves about our lives and in visual form. The participant was both in her past but was separated from it from the thickness of that present moment. The rust and the leaves.

For Bergson time was a continuous flow that had creative potential inherent in the interplay and relations between past, present and future in the moment (Bergson, 2001). He was not interested in the psychological aspects of our understanding of time, his was a

metaphysical and philosophical enquiry, but, like James, he also felt a certain thickness to the present. There is duration inherent in time experienced by humans that touches past to present to future, these are not isolated moments, they are interpenetrating (please see chapter 2). These moments are tied to consciousness for us. Deleuze picks up Bergson's argument, which Bergson developed further in *Matter and Memory* (1994) and questions how novelty can arise when we have an unchanging past so firmly attached to us, one which does not continually change with the new. He claims, 'it is preserved as past only by being constantly *reconfigured* by the present' (1991, p. 58). Differences between moments in a world that is constantly changing allow us to reconfigure past understandings and memories, to access different useful parts of the past that will allow for a new action in the moment

In *The Thickness of the Present*, I was in both the alleyway and the street, thinking through multiple participants' experiences. I was in constantly changing present moments with each new participant clip, reconfiguring my own past understandings. The film was an attempt to explain to myself the 'linear dimension [to time]' as well as 'the experiential dimension' (Nishida, 2012, p. 64–65) as articulated by Merleau-Ponty, Bergson and Nishida but also from my own recent past with Husserl and James. Nishida's concept of place (*basho*) is a dynamic becoming space in which we and the world flow through each other, and we and the world unfold through time. It is a fluid interplay which brought me to the metaphor of marbling. Indeed, I had a lot of footage of marbling inks in a slow dance of resistance, movement and interpenetration, amorphous blobs with agency of their own, from my many hours of thinking about time and encounter and attention during this PhD.

Participants not only moved through time in the alleyway, which as a liminal space may on itself be more conducive to mentally wandering through time, they also did this when walking down a busy street, remembering breakfasts in cafes, visiting the coffee shop, all the reasons they hate a new build, the world a dynamic becoming space, the instantaneous and finite present rejected.

He walks past the café. 'And then this was my favourite restaurant in the whole of Beckenham,' he reminisces, going back in time in his thoughts, 'which is now a pizzeria,' he says in the present, taking a photo of the Italian restaurant façade. 'But it was at one point the Viceroy, I used to love it in there.' He goes back to a past filled with nostalgia and he takes a photo of the Italian restaurant door – however he is not really taking a photograph of the Italian restaurant door, he is taking a photograph of the Viceroy front door which is only there in his memory. Participant V10, lapel camera footage.



Fig. 161: Still from *The Thickness of the Present*
in which participant C9 shares his thoughts on the restaurant
seeing it through the lens of different time periods (2024)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XK0ik5MAdRc>

In *The Thickness of the Present* Bergson's critique of time as process required 'a mutual penetration, an interconnexion,' of moments. Participant clips were layered using collage techniques, the leaves from a leafy encounter penetrated the film as stop motion animation, swirling over my sketchbook, blending above and below and through the moment. As with James and Bergson by changing opacities and blending styles I could partially obscure participant experiences, as we never fully experience them, but fragments would still be visible.

Grant describes how her 'uncanny' experience of editing sequences of film for her 2009 film *Unsentimental Education* 'produce[d] new affective knowledge' about 'the film's explorations of temporality and temporal experience' as she experienced the process of editing (2014, p. 54). Time revealed itself as she handled the material. Time revealed itself to me in the process of working with the materials, as I changed duration and speed, and as I worked with stop motion. It revealed itself through an artistic process of working with materials. I wanted to recreate the act of encounter in time, the various participants' present moments unfolding and looping, drawing past and future to the present. 'Within the world as a becoming, there is the

movement around vortices of significances' notes lifelong scholar of Merleau-Ponty, Professor Glen Mazis, these are moments that have importance (1992, p. 65). Much of the film-making practice revolved around the poetics of evoking this sense of swirling around vortices of significance. Stop-motion animation created with leaves from the alleyway and paper bookmarks from my desktop allowed me to create a disjointed swirling, something that somewhat obviously has errors of memory, gaps and a forward and backwards in time within their own flow.

For Merleau-Ponty time does not flow in an orderly fashion, rather it has the ability to jump, and reverse and slow down. Participant clips play forwards and backwards and restart, and echoes of the leaves fill the entire film. The clips are layered upon each other and played over the top of a sketchbook as a place on my desktop and a metaphor. Time is collapsed through these bricolage techniques and repetitions and folds. Material from different people from different times is played together, a multiplicity of encounters. Mazis recounts that for Merleau-Ponty,

'[t]he sense of the present is that there are cycles, circularities turning towards themselves in their elongations: This is the rhythm of perception and it is the movement of time. My body is in things at their depths' (1992, p. 64).

Layered film of marbling and waves as metaphor, swirling leaves and paper bookmarks mix to create an experience of a cyclical, rhymical, even chaotic, time. Circularities that swirl around themselves drawing in memories, and experiences, and imaginings, around points of significance. Each moment overlaps, and winds both future and past into it.

While poetics did indeed play a large role, so too did the need to draw attention to the processes I was using, a feature in common with desktop documentary. The typeface chosen for the title sequence and supers is Lucida Grande, a humanist sans serif typeface that is common on the macOS system. It has the benefits of being a typeface that is easy to read in large or small point sizes while being recognisable as a mac typeface. I also made use of the default neo-grotesque typeface in the Notes app, San Francisco, another Apple design that has been available to users from 2014. These were simple ways that I could make evident the processes and context of my desktop filmmaking.

Though I had been thinking about how sound helps to establish place and time in my early films, these later films *Desktop ∞ tinkering* and *The Thickness of Time* prompted the more substantial layering of sound that emerged in *In-and-Out-of-Place* and *The Pause*. Participant

voices are a key element in the research, they were in themselves entangled with sound from their environment, their moment in place. At times I had to foreground their voice backgrounding the sound from the context they were in – an act I found conceptually challenging.

Throughout all my thinking films is my narration, a reflection which becomes through the process of making. I gave voice to my questions in *The Thickness of the Present*, ‘How should I begin to understand my participants everyday encounters with things? Perceptions grounded within the body yet stretching into the world and the past and the future’ (Sorrentino, 2025). How was I to understand participants encounters with [ambient] advertising? With this narration I tried to repeat phrases to imply the repetitions, twists and folds of time and memory that I was alluding to. As with Chloé Galibert-Lainé’s 2019 film *Watching the Pain of Others* (2019), I play clips of participant films, comment on those clips and the thoughts and feelings of the people in the clips as well as my own thoughts. She describes her film as a videographic diary. My films are similar in that they sketch out a research journey as I discover things over time, the thinking process.

Bulley describes memory as a flexible system that allows us to flexible imaginings of the future, he continues, we ‘combine and recombine the elements that we have accrued in memory’ (Carroll, n.d., time 24:52). This is a view of memory that he shares with many cognitive psychologists (see for example Suddendorf and Corballis, 1997) and is not dissimilar to Deleuze’s view of memory as described in *Bergsonism* (1991). We draw in new perceptions as memories from the past are reconfigured and new possibilities swirl around us. I collected my participants swirling interactions with past and present in the reflexive thematic analysis transcriptions, incorporating them into the theme (initially called the Thickness of Time) and filmed a stop motion sequence of all these participants moments piling up in my hand. I encounter a thing in the world; my sensory perception in the moment folds the world outside myself into myself, and I draw towards this moment various other moments that feel important to me. Perhaps this is a recent past, a past long gone, a memory of something similar, a memory of something related. Swirling around this are potential future actions, speculations and imaginings, elements that we do not understand and cannot describe in written language. I hope that I can step past some of those limitations with the poetics of film. This is how we interact with things in the world, moments penetrating each other from a past, present and a future. The present has more depth than a single instance, it has thickness.

Oh there's a nice
the crotchet
live as well
thing, I don't

I was just about to take a photo of some
box She walks on to get a better picture
pauses to take a better picture
have any skills in that at all 18 seconds
display (2) I wish some
its a nice display but
to account



In-and-Out of-Place

Initially I titled this theme *Situated*, weaving the six qualities I had identified from the literature and practitioner interviews through the reflexive thematic analysis process. However, when I started to explore this idea through the participant materials in a desktop film I changed the theme name. The film allowed me to explore the complexity of being situated, and to think about the wider context of place, something I started to think about in an early film *The Alleyway* (Fig. 164) - a film with a more embodied and sensory encounter with the present very much influenced by Merleau-Ponty. The theme *In-and-Out-of-Place* emerged during the thinking process. I had been thinking about a quote from a book by Tim Cresswell,

‘An object is in place when it conforms to the socially produced expectations of that place. a book is in place in a library. A loud, disruptive boombox is out of place,’ (1996, p. 23).



Fig. 164: Still from *The Alleyway* documenting things in the alleyway that attracted my attention such as this smile sticker on a lamppost (2021)

The lamppost was in place, at home on the street or alleyway, yet the ribbon and wrapping paper, like the sticker in Fig. 164, were certainly out of place – a boombox. However, turning the lamppost into a gift in the [ambient] advert made both in and out of place. But it was in and out of place in more than this surface way. The more I worked with the participant commentaries the more I realised how many followed a line of flight out of place. They were there looking

at the [ambient] advert, but often thinking about something else, or reminded of something from their past, or were triggered to think about something else, or felt something else, stepping in and out of the place in the thickness of the present. The moment of encounter with the [ambient] advert opened lines of escape away from it. The dynamic potential of each of the qualities provided lines of flight. Each assemblage formed with parts that seek to move away.

Over the course of this research, I have investigated the ways in which the qualities drawn out of the literature and advertising practice related to a deeper understanding of our engagement with the things of the world through the philosophical materials that I was reading (please see chapter 2). I then applied these qualities to my own interventions (please see chapter 3) and searched for any evidence of these qualities in the commentary and photographs coming from the participants (please see chapter 4). [Ambient] adverts are situated things, and like other ‘objects’ they become ‘imbued with meaning through their use and placement within particular settings,’ (Pink, 2012, p. 47). We, ourselves, are situated beings, though free in our minds to wander to other times and places (see *The Thickness of the Present*). Each of the qualities that situate the [ambient] advert has a slippery edge.

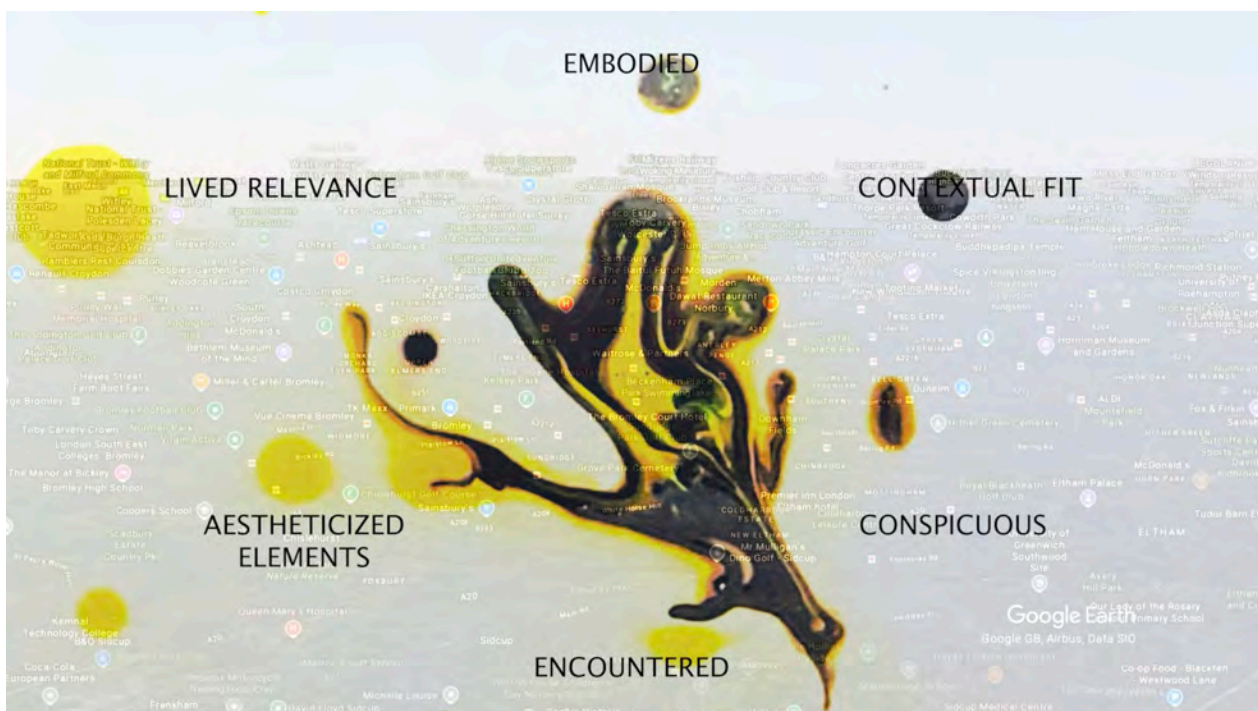


Fig. 165: Still from *In-and-Out-of-Place* describing interactions with the [ambient] advert through marbling (2024)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H6IynztvG54>

Being situated is an idea explored in the writing of three philosophers.

Heidegger who reasoned that we are thrown into a specific place and time as a being-in-the-world, Merleau-Ponty who revealed how our understanding of the world is entangled with our sensory perception, and Donna Haraway who outlined how our unique situations (social class, gender race, etc) create situated knowledges (see chapter 2). We are situated beings that come into contact with these situated things. This situatedness of the [ambient] advert plays out in the participant materials as demonstrated through qualities. However, while the qualities are indeed situated, they each have a line of flight away from that moment in time and place.

Embodied - The participants experience the [ambient] advert in an embodied way. ‘When we stretch our limbs’ writes Tuan ‘we experience space and time simultaneously’ (2007, p. 118). Participants experience the world through their bodies and the sensory connection situates them. They move to the lamppost where the materials have been installed. They can touch the [ambient] advert, and some do, holding the tag or touching the ribbon, or they may feel the urge to unwrap it. In the summer more participants linger, after all bodies are warm or cold and this affects pace. How the materials feel and move become part of their lived experience. Participants wondered can I touch that, can I flip the tag over (Heft, 1989; Merleau-Ponty, 2014).

She steps up to the tag which has been flipped over by the wind. She stretches out her hand and holding the tag she flips it back around in order to read it. Participant S10, lapel camera footage.

∞

These feelings and sensations tie the participants in the moment to being in-place, the body facing the world, yet those same sensations let the participants escape from the world and into themselves, an encounter more about the wetness of rain than a brand, the feel of the ribbon rather than any meaning. In this embodied way they are both in and out of place, allowing us to escape from any messaging, into an internal world, an unpredictable and sensory encounter.

‘I had a shiny pink ribbon like this when I was a bridesmaid, when I was eight’ she says as she strokes the ribbon between her thumb and forefinger feeling the texture ‘why is it here?’ she asks. Participant E1c, notes from sketchbook.

Lived relevance - The meaning of the [ambient] advert is felt in the lived world. As Haraway, Ahmed, and Young note, everything that makes up our identities - such as gender, race, and background, influences how we perceive the things we encounter (Ahmed, 2006; Haraway, 1988a; Young, 2005; please see chapter 2) . Nearly all the female participants that encountered the [ambient] advert in the alleyway, and a few of the men, felt it relevant to bring light to the

alleyway at night, with many commenting on how scary it can be after dark. As Young's essay indicated, simply having light emanating from the lamppost changed the atmosphere of the alleyway for my female participants, lending a feeling of security (2005).

She sends a look down the back alley. 'This is horrifying at night, I hate it, I always look back at it.' Participant A7,, lapel camera footage.

When the Christmas [ambient] advert was installed in December the relevance of the light was dialled down as the temporal relevance of Christmas was dialled up, this temporal situated relevance was important to both female and male participants.

'It's nearly Christmas so everything looks nice and Christmassy with all the lights,' she says as she walks into the alleyway. Participant T7b, lapel camera footage.

∞

While the participants feel the relevance in the moment, in-place, the amplification of that relevance also offers them a path away from that moment and out-of-place. They escape to memories and speculations, other times when it was dark, times they were followed down the alleyway, to lists of present they have yet to buy, to Christmas morning and wondering if they should buy their dog a Christmas present...mental time travel indeed.

She looks at the advert but abruptly turns to face the shop. 'Ah I need to pop in here and get Peppa a present, Peppa my dog, not sure what to get her really.' Participant G9, lapel camera footage.

Contextual fit - There is a conceptual fit between the intended message and the choice of medium the [ambient] advert is made from (see chapter 1). The Christmas wrapping paper leverages the symbolic potential of gifting as does a ribbon and tag, particularly in combination. The participants recognised the meaning and shared this understanding either in the film or in the micro-interview, they did not need to read the gift tag in detail though many did.

'A thank you from Bromley for Christmas was a surprise, with Christmas wrapping paper too. Are they giving me light, or am I sharing in giving the gift of light? Actually, that's probably too philosophical for Bromley.' Participant T10, notes from micro-interview.

The participants read the message as sign delivered through familiar choices in materials. They are not familiar materials choices for advertising communications so are read for their symbolic potential, rather than existing as a transparent medium, such as the paper substrate for a poster. Elements of an [ambient] advert come from the site so are in-place already and the other elements installed elements are out-of-place. Bins can become toy aliens simply with

the addition of large googly eyes and the bin could then become a medium that carries a message.

∞

Materials used as media channel offer further lines of escape into a reflective place, a conceptual movement away from existing meanings or an implied lack of meaning. Participants could follow the wrapping of gifts to engage with concepts more critically, wondering about the commercial purpose of gifting, questioning whether the council supply lightbulbs and they often did. The medium brings the message, and with it offers many lines of flight away from it.

'And look it's even got a light bulb in, not only do they give you a lamppost they give you a light bulb, quite often that's not the case,'
Participant S7c, lapel camera footage.

Aestheticized elements - Elements from the site were aestheticized using a co-opted technique of *détournement* to give them new meanings. However, while *détournement* may have initially been a method for critiquing the commodification of art (see chapter 1), the technique can itself be hi-jacked to turn elements of an urban landscape into something else. These elements do not need to become more beautiful; they simply must be artistically re-presented. They are necessarily worked objects in-place or special builds to replace an object in place. I playfully re-presented an ordinary lamppost as a gift simply by wrapping it up. Wrapping it up with Christmas wrapping paper turned it into a Christmas present in participants minds.

'I can see a present ahead, something interesting...' Participant J4b, lapel camera footage.

The trick in the *détournement* relies on the meaning of the things in place and it is one of the more obvious lines of flight from traditional messaging as it wants to set itself apart from established and traditional thinking.

∞

Yet [ambient] advertising is still advertising and so is not a break in itself from dominant power structures. The slippery spiky edge, the route of escape is that the message is open, implicit rather than explicit, it may be misunderstood or misrepresented, it can be co-opted once again by social activists as it is not in a protected space, it can be targeted specifically because it invades public spaces, it can also be made in the viewer's mind into an altogether different meaning.

'Is it the lamppost's birthday?' asks a passer-by to Participant A2 in film footage. Participant A2 lapel camera footage.

Conspicuous - The [ambient] advert drew attention to itself and became noticeable by being in an unexpected place and by deliberately making use of colour, scale, and texture. The tag was large enough to fit with a 'present' of this size, as was the ribbon and wrapping paper. Increasing scale and ensuring contrast in the colour to distinguish it from the background ensured the [ambient] advert emerged as a figure from the background (Merleau-Ponty, 2014), however it should be noted that even something as simple as a bright pink ribbon in an otherwise dull alleyway is conspicuous.

'Ok I'm looking at the pink ribbon on the end of the walk there, clearly draws your attention.' Participant S2b, lapel camera footage.

There is always something not quite expected and unsettling in the presentation of an [ambient] advert. The conspicuousness of an [ambient] advertising offers a line of flight away from habits and routines. It disrupts whatever someone was doing or thinking. Unlike détournement and street art, conspicuousness lays no claims to changing thinking, it simply wants attention.

∞

In that moment of attraction and attention it presents a line of flight away from itself. There needs to be something conspicuous in order for people to notice it, but not so much that it overly foregrounds itself and disassociates itself from the surroundings. In this way much of the meaning can be lost. It can also easily be mistaken for something else for someone else if it simply attracts attention but does not offer a way in.

'That bright pink, I thought it was for Breast Cancer at first.' Participant F3, notes from micro-interview.

Encountered - The [ambient] advert was encountered in an everyday place as part of a routine habit - walking. We are a species that moves through space and time. We are always on the move and that is how we come across the stuff of the world (see chapter 2).

He turns to look at the lamppost, 'Oh look,' he says in surprise' Participant C9, lapel camera footage.

[Ambient] advertising has to be encountered in our everyday routines. This is how it picks up much of its meaning. It is not presented to us in a demarcated advertising site, such as an adshell or a magazine press advert. There is inherent risk in this in that a passer-by may not encounter it at all, but if they do it is unexpected, and a break from the routine. Encountering an [ambient] advert provides a literal line of flight from everyday life by providing a distraction, an intrigue.

Encountering also offers the possibility of a line of flight away from the [ambient] advert as one can completely ignore it, not encounter it, walk straight past it without even seeing it, as some participants did (see chapter 4), or be distracted from it, it may be folded into the general milieu.

He walks towards the advert, curiosity in his voice ‘what’s...?’ He begins, just then he notices a young man in a tracksuit top walk past him down the alleyway. ‘Hey, alright?’ the young man says to him, ‘long time.’ ‘All right,’ E3 answers in response. They shake hands. ‘Going today? You’re not into football anymore, are you?’ he asks the young man. ‘Still watch it,’ the young man responds as he walks past ‘probably watch it a bit later...’ his voice fades as he walks away. The participant rounds the corner, the advert completely forgotten. Participant E3 lapel camera footage.

Making visible - The visual concept of the film developed through my analytical and reflective thinking process that takes me between film and script and back again. I was in and out of the place of film. The tools within Google Earth studio gave me access to a fake god-like position which I could evidence with the watermark, an animated pseudo drone. The layering on top of, and disruption of, the false external observer position was deliberate and provided ways to explore ideas of place. However, while it creates a position a human could never occupy it also gave me the opportunity to step back to look at the complexity of site as a map, revealing locations of multiple things of interest. That said it made me philosophically uncomfortable and the I wanted the continual movement to lend the film a sense of disorientation.

At the very core of all of this were many participant films and photographs creating layers of observations, sounds and imagery from the site, and of the ambient advert. *In-and-Out-of-Place* generated a productive relationship between materials and editing techniques to help me visualise and analyse the connections between participant, site and [ambient] advert. Layering gives me access to multiple voices while collapsing the encounter. Blending allows the Google Earth studio footage to be cut through by people’s lived experiences. Initially I layered a static representation of my diagram of the six qualities of ambient advertising. However, in a moving medium this static image made me uncomfortable which made me rethink the diagram for the film and that is because it did not communicate to

me the activity inherent in the lines of flight. The stretching into and out of place. The diagram needed to be animated, to move in and out in waves and ripples. This consideration of the movement in and out of place and time brought me back to the marbling metaphor and I filmed another marbling sequence that functioned as a diagram. I also re-introduced the marbling footage layered above and below elements throughout the film to purposefully link back to the understanding that this plays through *The Thickness of the Present* as described by my previous theme and film. The site itself and [ambient] advert constructed for the viewer through the act of tinkering.

[Ambient] adverts briefed in industry are unlikely to have this level of specific site detail unless the site is of particular significance. However, my intention was not to imply that every [ambient] advert is briefed with extensive details about a site but rather to explore how [ambient] adverts are situated in a number of different ways. However, these ways are slippery and allow [ambient] adverts to be both in place and out of place at the same moment, In-and-Out-of-Place. The strengths demonstrated in the qualities provide lines of flight, so they are a risk for advertising creatives and brand managers. However, it is the richness of these qualities that keeps the format so live and exciting. A contextually-rich situated format that exists on the edge of being *in-place* and *out-of-place*.



$= 33 =$

$= 19$

$24 = 34$

$: 15 : 36$

Previous page Fig. 167: Still from *The Pause* in which participant time code is layered with a Google Earth animation and the lapping of water (2025)

The Pause

The Pause first came to my attention as I started to notice the 'what's that' of everyday encounters with something unexpected when I was putting together the early film *Curiosity* (2022). This was a film I assembled in order to make sense of the multiplicity of encounters with the [ambient] advert as a way of presenting them back to myself in quick succession. The participants' eyes were drawn to a ribbon glinting in the sun, dancing in the breeze, conspicuous against the alleyway background. Sensory data passed through their bodies, interpreted by their brains. They did not know why there was a ribbon tied to a lamppost, so they got closer to understand if it was relevant to them. They became curious, unsure what this thing was. The act of curiosity from the participants triggered an engagement with the messaging (Turk, Ewing and Newton, 2006). The film *Curiosity* provided a sketch for me of participant encounters through pace, a break in action, a way through observation of participant actions that showed their everyday attention towards the things of the alley. It was also a film sketched out in poetics (please see earlier section - My Films).



Fig. 168: Still from *Curiosity* showing various participants noticing and engaging with the Christmas [ambient] advert (2022)

For Grant researching through the audiovisual essay is performative which 'generate[s] effects' in the viewer (2016, p. 256). Together the audience and I will share the experience that is created by watching/listening to so many participants interacting in the moment with the [ambient] advert.

While I was editing *Curiosity*, working with the participant materials, lapel camera footage, photographs, micro-interviews I was reading Merleau-Ponty and Yi-Fu Tuan and they heavily influenced my reading of my findings. I had time code that showed the length of time participants were first intrigued by the ambient advert, other things they paid attention to, the return of their attention to the advert, the time they spent physically stopped in front of the advert, their continuing commentary after they moved away. The length of time participants were involved in an encounter with an [ambient] advert was, on average, 23 seconds across all phases (see chapter 4), though in reality these pauses were all of different duration. This was longer than with traditional advertising formats which express themselves as advertising within a frame (please see introduction, chapter 1 and chapter 4). Lefebvre's portrayal of the perceived - conceived - lived triad describes environments built for speed and efficiency. These built environments can support traditional framed OOH as they have been installed with efficiencies as part of their format (2007, p. 57). However, [Ambient] adverts also occupy these abstract spaces. They require a slower encounter than traditional adverts because people are unsure what they are. This seemed to be supported by the length of time people engaged with the advert. Kahneman's system 1 and system 2 description of a mind at work hints at how time might unfold in such an encounter during decision making processes (2011). System 1 thinks fast and quickly works out whether we need to allocate attention to something, and system 2 works out if we need to give more considered attention to a thing. Those things that need more attention or thought require a slowing down. While breaking thinking down into different thinking types has become a convenient description for cognitive psychologists (please see Broadbent, 1958; Kahneman, 1973; Nelson-field, 2020; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986; Yarbus, 1967) similar descriptions have emerged with schema incongruity theory (Jurca and Madlberger, 2015; Mandler and Parker, 1976). Please see chapter 1 and 4 for further detail. The ribbon and tag interventions in the alleyway created a disruption in the participants schema, a disruption in the flow of the city. Participants needed a system that allowed for a slowing down in order to work out what it was.

It was clear from making *Curiosity* that participants did engage with the [ambient] advert. In much of the existing academic research there was an assumption that passersby would stop to engage with [ambient] advertising, though there was little on the ground research to substantiate this claim. The numbers of participants that stopped in my study, admittedly small in comparison to quantitative surveys, did clearly show that participants pay attention to an [ambient] advert.

However, I felt that the time code was telling me to look deeper. I was reading Merleau-Ponty, so I started thinking about act intentionality. In phenomenology an act is not simply an action, it is also perceiving or thinking about something, and intentionality is simply that we direct our consciousness towards something (physical or mental). For Heidegger our act intentionality is integral to our relations with the things of the world. For Merleau-Ponty our act intentionality is embodied, we have embodied encounters. The participants encounters were prolonged, in an embodied way, in *The Thickness of the Present* so that they could make something of the [ambient] advert. They had 'attentive contact' with the things of the 'world at hand' (Seamon, 1979, p. 99). The embodied encounter revealed itself in a pause, even if,

'...the pauses may be of such short duration and the interest so fleeting we may not be fully aware of having focused on any particular object: we believe we have simply been looking at the general scene. Nonetheless these pauses have occurred' (Tuan, 2007, p. 161).

While making *The Pause* I was very aware that although the majority of participants stopped at the [ambient] advert (97% in phase 1, 93% in phase 2, 70% in phase 3), others barely gave it a glance. For some participants, if we were to measure the pause on a timeline (against Bergson's caution), we may not notice their pause at all. The act may not disclose itself in the time code. Sometimes participants took photographs and shared them with me yet did not appear to slow down in their lapel camera footage. More had things to say in the micro-interview after the walk though they had not broken their stride. The advert was considered, even if their lapel cameras did not pick it up as a pause, theirs was a receptive, passive attention rather than an active attention. Still, the [ambient] advert had been attended to in this pause. *The Pause*, however long, had more depth than the code indicated, an intentionality and attention more than the observable action.

Tuan's influence on the PhD is evident in the 'discovery' of the pause, I cannot claim it as an idea purely of my own agency. Braun and Clarke are clear that reflexive thematic analysis only helps us deliver the themes that interest us, nothing emerges without our own desires. Tuan saw place as something sensory and meaningful and spatial and the pause was something that marked out a place within space. While Tuan was interested in the objects that make a place I was simply interested in the encounter with the things in that place. For both of us it was a meaningful physical expression of attention and reflection through movement and time. *The pause* was such

a profoundly compelling idea that it sat with me throughout my research though I did not realise it was a theme until I started the reflexive thematic analysis and thinking process.

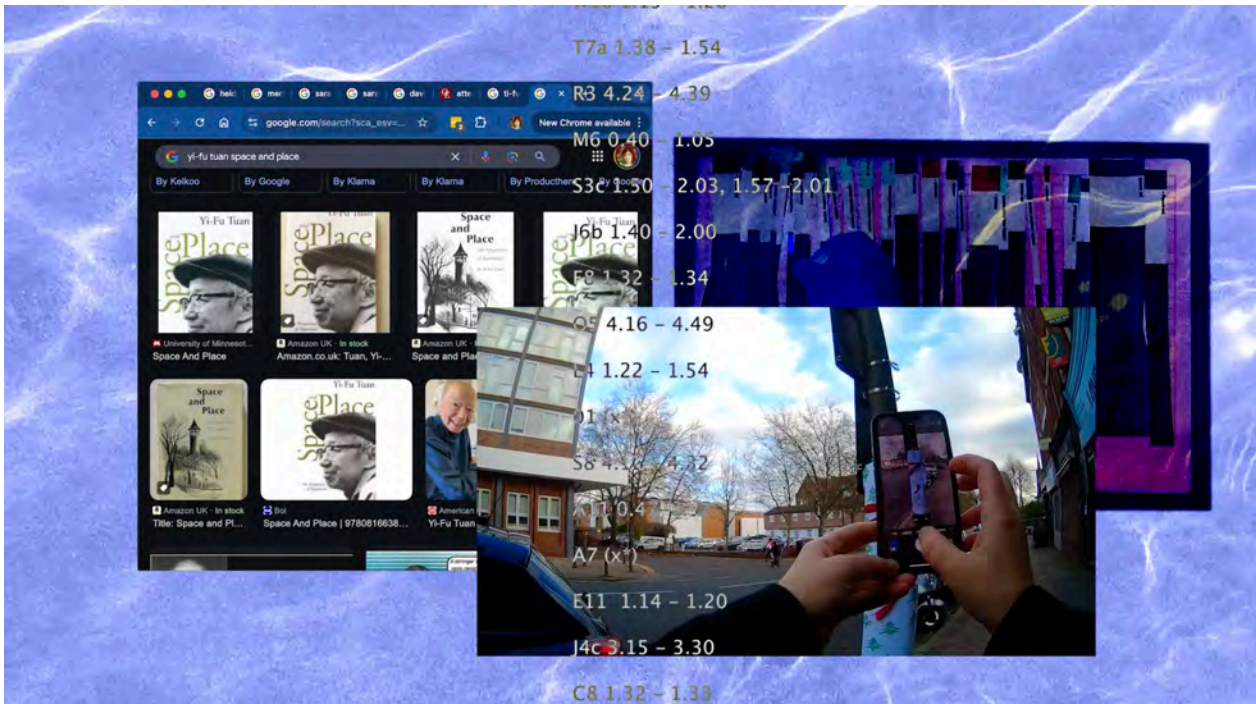


Fig. 169: Still from *The Pause* layering participant time code, participant film and internet searches (2025)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XXmwQSM57Qc>

The collaging of participant clips was a technique that I used to make *Curiosity*, and I used it extensively in *The Pause*. I felt the powerful impact of the sheer volume of participant interactions with the [ambient] advert created through layering image and sound when I watched *Curiosity*. Professor of audio-visual communications Donald G. Perrin took a scientific and academic approach in the late 1960s to investigate the characteristics that make multi-image communications effective. He described how ‘simultaneous images interact upon each other at the same time, and this is of significant value in making comparisons and relationships’ (1969, p. 369). I wanted to recreate this sensory impact in *The Pause*, participants commentary interacting with each other at the same time, while also introducing wider philosophies and ideas that provided my theoretical context. I worked less with the desktop Notes app and tried to leave more of the story to the participants. But I was very aware that I did not want to create a false position of a God-like observer so ensured my hand was evident through collaging and typing rather than through a more accepted observational documentary stance.

Bergson showed us that we cannot be outside the flow of time in

order to measure it. Time, for Bergson, had depth, an idea I started to explore in *The Thickness of the Present*. I looked at the participants time codes, which sat outside of what they were experiencing in themselves, and I wondered what is this clock time obscuring? How much depth does this moment have?

She stops and looks at the [ambient] advert and turns to me. 'There are lots of things Bromley should be doing with taxes – supporting schools properly would be one, and the library, and giving us access to swimming. Lights are good but they should also do these other things as well, though without the lights this would be unusable at night, or even in winter'. Participant B1, notes from sketchbook.

Heidegger showed us that we cannot step outside of our own situatedness, and Merleau-Ponty showed us that our consciousness is always in connection to the world through our bodies, that we experience time as a flow through our bodies. The pause created a mental space in which they could make meaningful connections and create new thinking. I brought back the marbling motif from *The Thickness of the Present*, that I layered in *In-and-Out-of-Place* to continue to construct a vision of time that swirls and loops in which we stretch towards and fold things in.

She turns away and walks towards the lamppost, lifting her phone to take a photo of the [ambient] advert. 'Interesting Christmas decorations,' she comments as she takes a photo of the [ambient] advert. She flips over the tag which has been moved by the wind 'Thank you from Bromley,' she continues as takes a photo of the advert in close-up. 'Oh gosh, I read your tax contributions helped pay for all the lampposts that light up the streets. Well, sometimes I could do without light just to be able to see the sky and the stars,' she takes a photo of the top of the lamppost capturing the sky during the daytime but perhaps thinking of it at night. 'It's not quite what one would like living in London, but still, interesting again,' she says as she walks away. {6.07-6.55} Participant S10, lapel camera footage.

The reflexive thematic analysis transcriptions allowed me to look at each of the participant films through themes and to separate the transcript out into themed strands (see chapter 3). For both *The Thickness of the Present* and *The Pause* I wanted to make these strands visible. I filmed myself placing strands from *The Pause* theme on my cutting mat, each one representing swirling thoughts in time. Additionally, I layered screenshots of a handful of the strands, looking at what was happening below the surface of the time code. The commentary revealed multiple layers of thinking, a deep understanding of the messaging, wider contextual and political opinions, emotional connection, a mixing of memory, present and potential future - what

one might think of as a past continuous and a future continuous (they paid, and I pay, and will pay).

He walks up to the lamp post ad and takes a photo of the advert, having spotted it earlier ‘Seriously?’ he comments as he stops to read the tag, ‘they are fucking joking!’ He walks away ‘Bromley council paid for my lamp post. I think I pay for my lamp post!’ He continues in annoyance. {3.48- 4.01} Participant R3, lapel camera footage.

I started to work with the participant time code, in long anonymised lists that I could layer taken from my reflexive thematic analysis documents. Stripped away from the wider context of the walk the list felt artificial and almost like computer code. While the first lapel camera embedded time code, it was set to the wrong date and time and my operating instructions arrived in a language I could not even begin to translate. This was remarkably apt as I began to understand how little the time code itself revealed. The second lapel camera did not embed time code in the video, but the time itself was displayed in the player once I watched it in my second place – my desktop.

I edited together clips of the code, lists of code, and participant footage, giving the layers hierarchy of meaning and blending between layers to add visual texture and to suggest the relationships between the elements. As can be seen from the still from *The Pause* (Fig. 169) the abstracted numbers seem to have little to do with the participants embodied encounter. However, they undeniably regularly evidenced a pause. Watching and re-watching the participant films while editing together *The Pause* altered my creative process, my thinking *became* with the participant voices playing over and over, every time they paused at the advert, reshaping the making. Theirs was now a shared experience, as was mine in relation to their sharing. This was a becoming. Bergson believed that scientific enquiry needed to make room for a more intuitive understanding of the world, and this is how we get to the richness of those moments. He did not mean intuition in the everyday sense of the word which evokes a vague almost mystical sixth sense, rather it is a more instinctual, responsive and immediate way of knowing or connecting with some *thing*. This is what I stretch towards with my films, something more intuitive and less scientific.

In *Time and Free Will* Bergson outlined how all things in life, including time, are dynamic and always changing - they are not finished completed things, they are becoming. Within the pause we draw in the sensory present, the past, imaginings and potentials, we are able to mentally time travel through a space which we make up and of which we are a part. Very influenced by Bergson, Deleuze’s descrip-

tion of time is one in the present moment is constantly becoming. This present is framed by the past, which is always present in the virtual realm, it is never not there. This is like the continuous past and continuous future I was seeing in my participants commentary the more that I played them. Deleuze describes a world with a virtual and actual realm. For me the actual is in many ways Merleau-Ponty's sensory present in which we encounter things that have stopped being their other possibilities, they have become thing, even if that thing is still becoming and assembling. As with Bergson and Merleau-Ponty, there is a thickness to the present which Deleuze describes in *Difference and Repetition* which has both the past and future in it. However, For Deleuze we do not need to stop and recall a past or imagine a potential - it is all always already there, it is continuous and dynamic (1994).

Thinking through these visions of the present provided by Merleau-Ponty, Bergson and Deleuze led to the creation of the foundational layer in *The Pause*. A constant tempo that is not clock time was provided by a repeat cycle that acts as the substrate for the film, footage of a gently lapping moving body of water. From time to time, I would blend in the Google Earth 'drone' footage from *In-and-Out-of-Place*. I would leave some 'white space' temporally and compositionally in order to feel and see the lapping water. To allow the moments to exist separately but connected to each other.

For Deleuze the virtual realm contains all potentials. The [ambient] advert, a splash of pink that could have been anything, until it was not. This was demonstrated in the participant films. The unknowing, the need to break the schema, the curiosity, the 2nd system or better yet deeper thinking – *the pause*, physical and mental.

He notices something on the lamppost from further down the alleyway. 'It looks like somebody's left a cardigan there...' he comments as he walks towards it 'I'm going to Palace this afternoon...' he starts to say and then is distracted by the Electricity Substation 'Ooh, what's this?' he asks. He notices the signage 'Oh some utility thing. I haven't been down here in ages,' then, without breaking the flow of his sentence 'it's not a cardigan,' the continuation of his thought processing in the background of his other comments. He stops in front of the advert. 'This lamppost was paid for by your tax contribution,' he says incredulously and takes a photograph of the [ambient] advert. He sighs and turns away, 'I don't know who else would've paid for it...' {1.08 - 1.57} Participant S3b, lapel camera footage.

Perceiving the [ambient] advert he starts *a pause*, he displays a

speculation, he imagines the future, he is in the sensory present, he instigates system 1 thinking or as Nelson-Field would describe it a faster scan, he recalls memories, he resolves a puzzle with system 2 thinking, a slower more attentive thinking, he enters a past continuous, he shares political and economic context, he is affected, he speculates, he returns to the everyday. *The pause* allows us to know a thing better.

To draw attention to *the pause* graphically I re-introduced the marbling motif from *The Thickness of the Present* in close-up, blended with the background to reveal, contrast or absorb other layers to reflect the complexity of the moment within my own thinking. In combination with the waves as substrate it became a representation of ideas and times swirling around a vortex of signification in the thickness of the present. I also created a lot more 'white space' within the composition, places for the eye to pause and reflect before the time code comes buzzing back into the frame. It is a slower paced film than the others, with more repetitions and less visual chaos, by doing this I am trying to provide an opportunity for the viewer to pause and reflect.

Of course, in focusing so much on the [ambient] advert in the films the pauses can appear to lend things more value than they would have in the ordinary run of one's day, as Tuan notes 'the pause makes it possible for a locality to become a center of felt value' (Tuan, 2007, p. 138, original spelling). Pausing lends value to a place or thing. That said the [ambient] advert was the most commonly observed thing on either site, though I collected a lot of data on all other interactions at the sites (please see chapter 4).

The pause rose in my attention through the thematic analysis process though it had been part of the research from the start. I really started to understand the significance of the pause to my understanding of [ambient] advertising once I started to make the film.

The [ambient] advert becomes during the pause.

Overleaf Fig. 170: Still from *The Pause* in which participant time code is layered with participant film of the Christmas [ambient] advert in the street

V10 1.21 - 2.57

M4c 2.30 - 2.58

V2 1.30 - 1.40

S6 1.26 - 1.29

T5 1.53 - 2.12

J4b 2.40 - 3.10

O6 3.54 - 4.08

P2 1.17 - 1.34

W4 1.10 - 1.26

S7c 1.46 - 2.06

A9 1.13 - 1.44

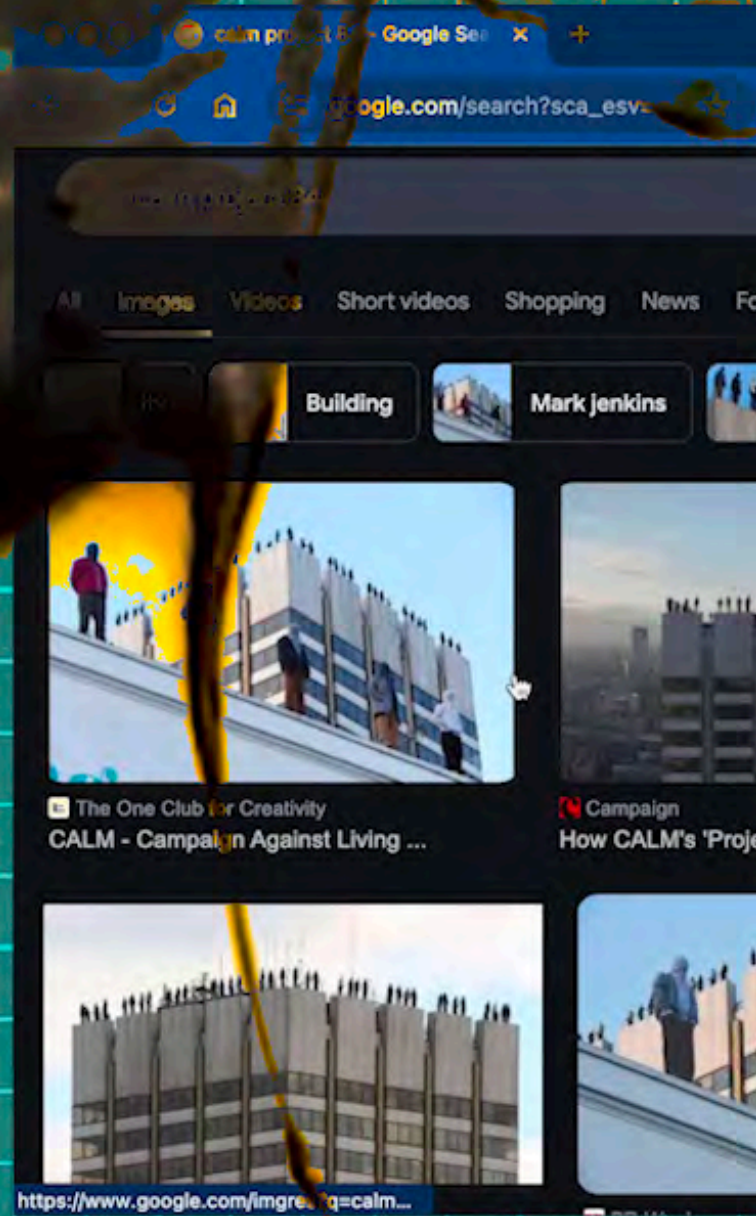
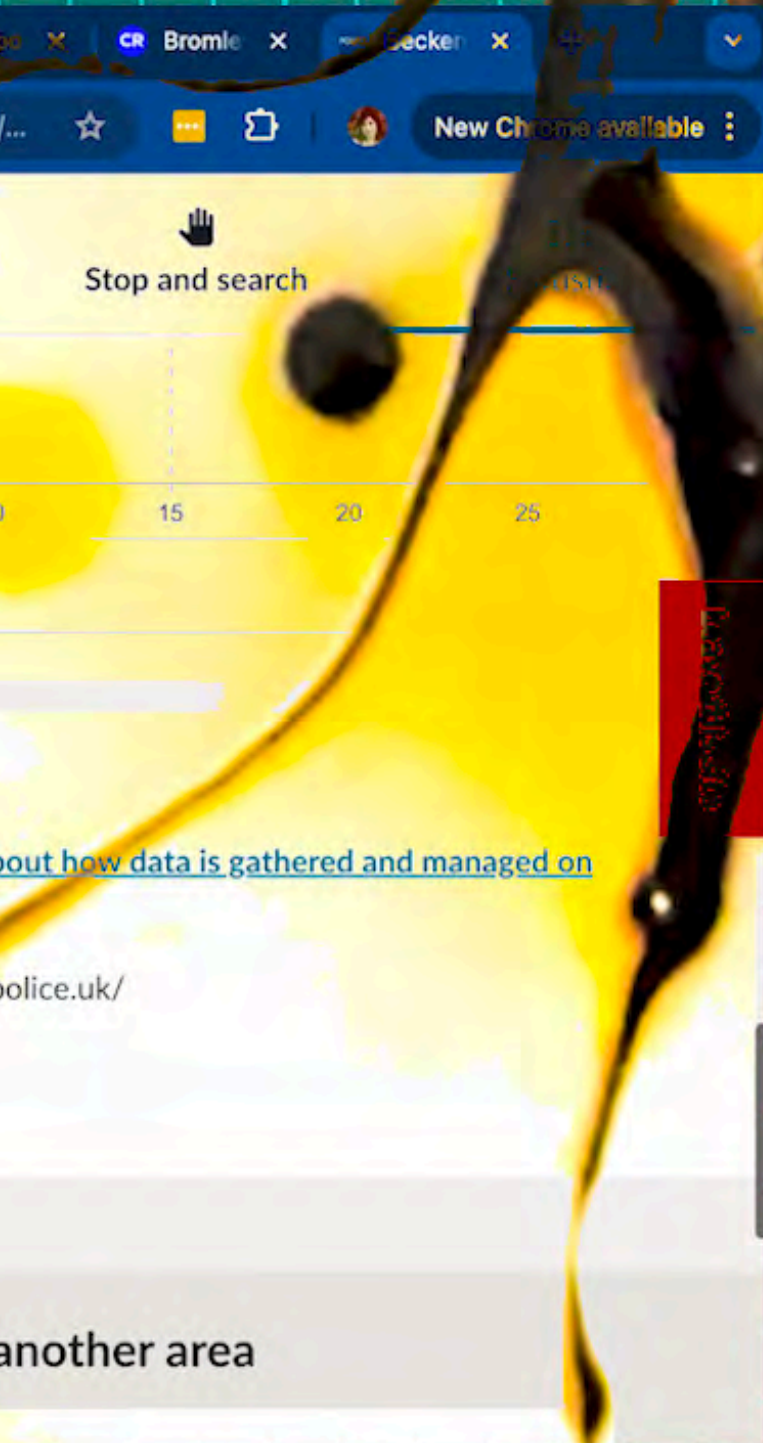
X7 1.53 - 2.03

I3 1.45 - 2.10

A2a - 2.00 - 2.37

W10 1.15 - 1.26

T7a 1.38 - 1.54



Assembled

When I worked as an advertising creative in advertising agencies I knew that the pieces of any [ambient] advert were just materials on a desk until they were installed. I knew that the [ambient] advert was assembled together with elements from the ‘real’ world, always in front of an audience. I drew them as part of a scene in my sketches for meetings. I knew that [ambient] adverts came to life in situ, that is where they became adverts, the physical context gave them meaning. Though I had an unspoken and innate understanding of all of this, my understanding was incomplete. At that time the word *assembled*, or me, meant a sensible planned construction with things we had created, pieces from a site, followed by an installation - this bit attaches to that, or we stick this on that. Context was key, key to how I framed the idea to pitch it internally within the creative department, and key to pitching it to clients. I gave a lot of thought to the complexity of context, as do most creatives. But really I imagined various contexts (for example physical, social, behavioural) as though they were sheets of puff pastry upon which my [ambient] advert would nestle like a ball of cream, affected but somewhat separate. The early film *Making Ambient* (2021) included a lot of detail about the contexts in which I had situated my [ambient] advert in order to test my methods and was created when I was still thinking about context in this way.

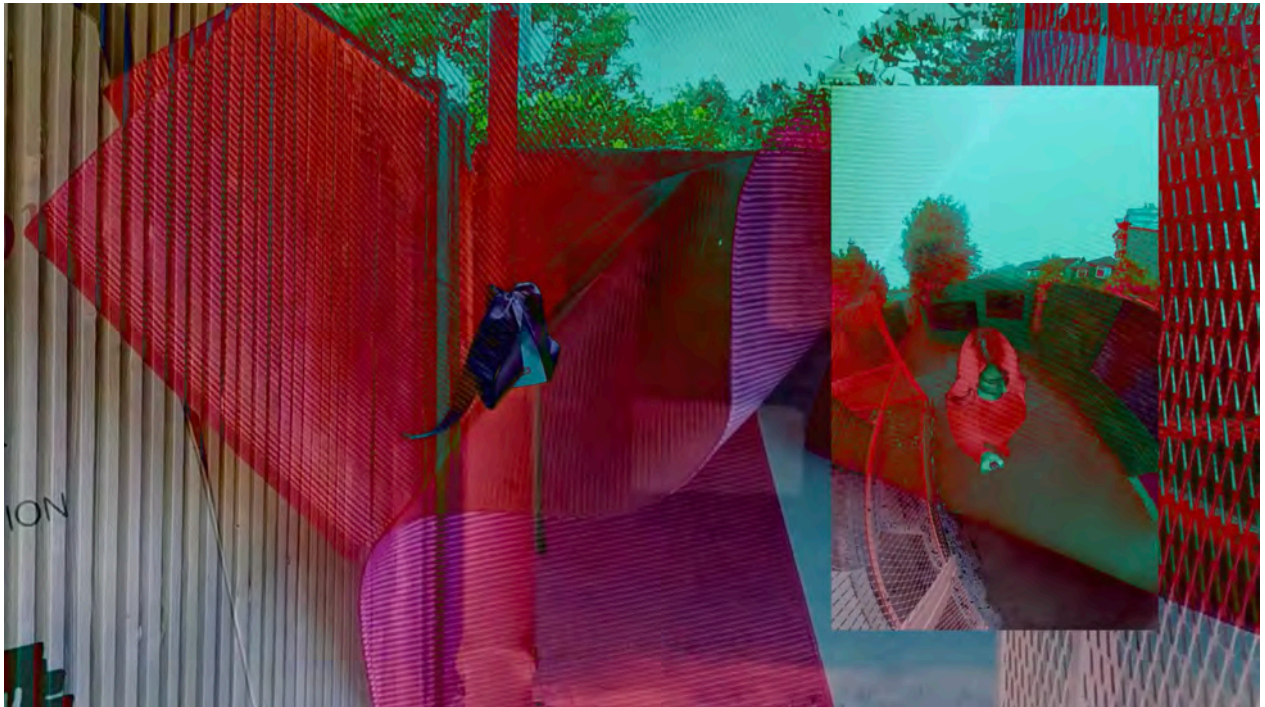


Fig. 172: Still from *Making Ambient*, in which clips of the [ambient] advert in the alleyway and 360 film are overlaid with colour (2021)

It was because I was thinking about context during my pilot phase that I decided to make the particular [ambient] execution about light. I had already been thinking about showing the positives of paying taxes as a campaignable idea prior to deciding on a site. In *Making Ambient* I used my own footage of walking through the alleyway, which I had decided would make a good site for the pilot phase auto-ethnography as it had a clear start and end point. I montaged and layered film clips from looking closely at the [ambient] advert that I made for use in my phase 1 experiments that would follow, close-ups of my sketchbook observations as I walked through the alleyway at various times of the day and night, and sketchbook drawings of potential [ambient] advertising - potentials in a virtual realm. I tried to collapse the time between these things through layering techniques, one thing affecting another and another. At that stage I was not working with participants but my own feeling of fear and trepidation of being in that alley at night. However, I had not imagined the complexity of *context*, or how it is in fact part of the fabric of the [ambient] advert, until I started reading *One Thousand Plateaus*. Indeed both films *Making Ambient* and the later theme film, *Assembled*, are an attempt to think through the concept of context, with *Assembled* questioning how an [ambient] advert functions.

I wanted *Assembled* to reference *Desktop ∞ thinking* so I once again made use of the desktop as site but this time with a cutting mat as a metaphor for a makerly/thinking space rather than a sketchbook. The cutting mat references cutting, gluing, assembling, deconstructing, art direction and photography techniques from the past, as well as DIY techniques from alternative culture. Where *Desktop ∞ thinking* allowed me to look at my research process, *Assembled* allowed me to analyse participant materials through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari's assemblages (2020).

Over the course of the research I came to see the [ambient] advert as the visible part of an assemblage of heterogeneous things, things that in themselves may be contexts. It is not an easy concept to apply to [ambient] advertising as in an assemblage these are not predetermined parts, nor are they random. In a quote attributed to Heraclitus 'the unlike is joined together, and from differences results the most beautiful harmony' – though perhaps I would not use the word harmony. Any [ambient] advert is made up of many different things, joined together in a complex concrete assemblage of things that are unlike, rather than one discrete thing. Some of the things are pre-determined, which makes them unlike Deleuze and Guattari's assemblages, but the vast majority cannot be predetermined, nor

are they random – even though there will be random unexpected elements that join the assemblage. As I highlighted in *Assembled* even a special build or stunt, such as adam&eveDDB's work 'Project84 for Calm' (see chapter 1, Fig. 20), is more than just its construction, it requires the site, amongst other components, to be aestheticized and enable a contextual fit. Though parts of any construction may be repeatable and have a singular, mass producible identity, many parts are not. This will be explained more fully later in this section.

I came to this understanding of [ambient] advertising as assemblage through the action research, reflexive thematic analysis and tinkering process, but it put me in a philosophically difficult place, between situated perspectives with a sense of personhood, and personae created through assemblages and wider forces in the world.

Deleuze and Guattari's assemblages rely on three things – multiplicities, the abstract machine and personae.

To start with multiplicities. The concept of multiplicity was at the core of Bergson's view of time, in that one cannot cut up time into units of identical time, time is not reducible like that, many things are not reducible like that (please see chapter 2). [Ambient] adverts are not reducible like that. The ambient advert is a multiplicity of relations formed through our attentive contact within a complex assemblage. The concept of multiplicity was at the core of Bergson's view of time and Deleuze picked up his concept of multiplicities from Bergson. James Williams highlights that for Deleuze multiplicities evidence a world that is in constant change. In 'One Thousand Plateaus' Deleuze and Guattari describe a world where everything is a multiplicity, there is no unifying single thing. Williams describes emphasising how each of these relations can be explored. Each aspect is a variable made of intensities rather than units of sameness (2006). Of course I can order a variety of ribbons for my [ambient] advert, so in that sense they can be quantified rather than the pure potentiality of Deleuze and Guattari's meaning of variable. However, before that final stage, the ribbon choices can be infinite. In *Assembled* I explored the concept of infinite variety through screen recordings scrolling through Google Images, and in stop motion of my own ribbon choices, layering this with the marbling metaphor I have found so productive in my tinkering – a marbling metaphor turned diagram in *In-and-Out-of-Place*, a plane of immanence and intensities, a becoming [ambient] advert.

The second requirement is the abstract machine (please see chapter 2). This is a map of relationships that can be drawn between the constit-

uent parts, such as the relationship between darkness and danger, the relationship between bows and ribbons and gifting, the relationship between the power grid and lampposts, between a local council and taxes, and how these things interact with each other. The relations themselves are fluid and changeable, a becoming map, but the relations are what allow such vastly different elements to reach towards each other. During one of my desktop safaris I came across engineer and designer Amanda Aghassaei's website and her *Physarum Transport Network app* (2022). This app is a mathematical model based on 'the behaviour of a multicellular slime mold'. For me her app visualised the concept of a becoming and fluid network of relations between component parts perfectly. I was able to incorporate this model as a layer within *Assembled* to describe the fluid becoming map, layering it with some of the variables that contribute to the assemblage that is my [ambient] advert (Fig. 173).

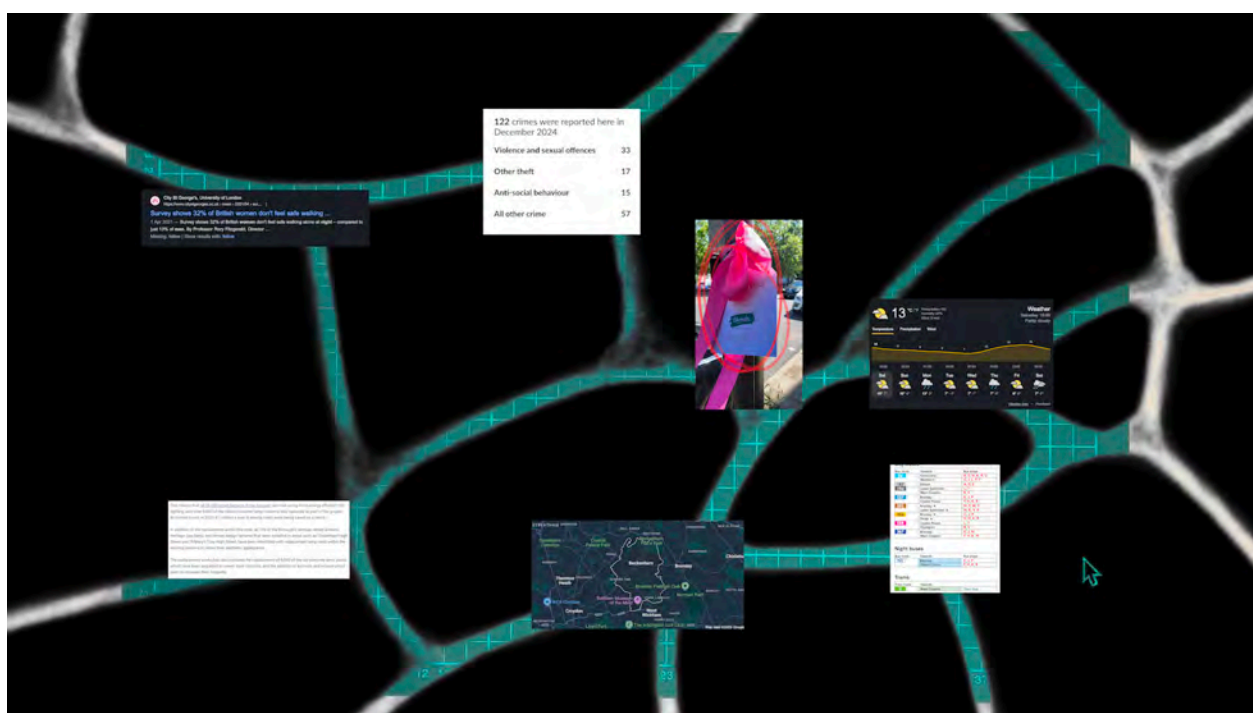


Fig. 173: Amanda Aghassaei's *Physarum Transport Network* is layered with various heterogeneous components of the [ambient] advert (2025)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0mJY5nJssps>

All of these variables within the [ambient] advert did not need to have a specific actualisation, a specific lamppost, a specific street, a certain unit of darkness, a specific ribbon, consequently there was no fixed form. In the Christmas executions the wrapping paper could have had any Christmas pattern, the tag could say something different, the tag could be a different colour, the location could change. While an advertising agency may control elements such as

ribbons, other variables such as train or bus timetables would differ between locations and have an effect on the time of night one might walk past the lamppost, the time when the light has lived relevance – or what has happened in terms of criminal offences near the lampposts selected, the place of lived relevance. The important thing here is that the variables form an abstract machine. A map of potentialities. All these elements do something rather than simply are something. This could be seen in the participant films when elements of the assemblage were changed yet the [ambient] advert still attracted attention and communicated meaning – it still functioned.

Assemblages need a personae or many personae to realise them. My [ambient] adverts need the participants that walk by. For Deleuze and Guattari these personae are not subjectivities with a level of freedom, as are more commonly understood in phenomenological accounts of experience, they are personae who bring about the assemblage. The personae create the map and activate the assemblage as concrete, they are an integral part of the machine. Nail notes ‘one cannot have an assemblage without agents that bring it about’ (2017, p. 27).

The way that this assemblage was activated by the personae revealed itself was through the variety of methods that I employed during the action research cycle. The participant films and commentaries, and the use of photovoice, provided some indication of the assemblage, however interesting detail came through the micro interviews, a couple of questions regarding what participants had been thinking about when they started the walk and when they finished revealed interesting connections.

She takes a photograph of a small frosted mini-Christmas tree in a small pot in front of the Flower shop. A man and woman exit the shop wearing bobble hats walking their dog. The air is cold. She notices the adshell and the estate agents. She walks directly towards the [ambient] advert on the lamppost in a straight line. She pauses and takes a photograph of the [ambient] advert. In the micro interview following she said ‘I was thinking about Christmas trees, and I wanted a hot chocolate from Shotsmith, something warm and cozy. I saw the fairy lights in the shop window and the wrapping paper around the lamppost, so I started to think about Christmas presents.’

Participant W10, lapel camera footage and micro-interview notes.

For participant W10 the [ambient] advert assemblage has variables of temperature, Christmas tree iconography, feelings of cozyness, bobble hats, hot chocolate, fairy lights, wrapping paper, presents as well as the unmentioned variables of the lighting grid, road systems

and council planning, police statistics and council tax policies and so on.

In *Assembled* I was able to put together aspects of K7s assemblage as she encountered the [ambient] advert in the alleyway. For her the wintry greenery and berries in the alleyway added to a Christmas assemblage that drew in the crisp cold, low sunlight, household decorations, wrapping paper around the lamppost, memories of family, imagining family and friends arriving in the coming days, a past continuous of going to work (in itself linked to the capitalist system in which we live), catching the bus and listening to music.

For Deleuze and Guattari these personae are also created through the assemblage, they exist in the third person as an entity that is itself a set of relations, ideologically, culturally, societally (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994). The personae have experiences, but these experiences are part of a dynamic process of relations between external factors, they are not a self. And this is perhaps the place I have some difficulty with Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage - the lack of interiority and continuity of consciousness that is so vivid in Merleau-Ponty, and present in cognitive psychology, which is absent in the personae. Aghassaei had another useful app on her website, a mathematical model of fluid simulation (2017). Within *Assembled* I was able to layer what appeared to be an invisible force travelling through a virtual plane, activating the space around it. This invisible force, evidenced only by an intentional cursor arrow and the resulting effects on everything around the movement, described Deleuze and Guattari's personae very well for me. I juxtaposed this with participant clips in which they articulate what they encountered, but also the continuous expression of their lives. The description of personae is not how I experienced the footage from the participants' short walks in which the assemblage is assembled. Participants are certainly themselves assembled by habits, societal rules, desires, ideologies, but they express a past continuous, a sensory present, and future continuous. For example, they decide what they can do with things while evidencing unspoken rules, they develop a sense of what is 'cool', or not, over time, and they decide whether to pause and engage.

'I don't know if I'm supposed to unwrap this, no, I daren't...' he hesitates. 'I should probably look on the back of the tag...' He turns the tag over. Participant M4c, lapel camera footage

On the other hand, assemblages are made of human and non-human elements. Intrinsic to any assemblage is the agency of these non-human forces and things. The material world is active and

effects other things within it. Over time water shapes rock, clocks in a mobile phone update as they move through time zones, lampposts become the corner of a spider's webs. Bergson, then Whitehead, then Deleuze picture a world in which everything is becoming (please see chapter 2). All components in an assemblage interact including the non-human components. The strength and intensity of the light bulb in the lamppost interacts with the darkness of the alley or street, with the time of day, with the weather, the power grid interacts with the train and bus timetables, the design of the lamppost interacts with the local authority's budget, the paint interacts with humidity, a bee interacts with the ribbon, an eye interacts with the tag. This is the great strength of assemblages for me.

She walks up to the [ambient] advert, the red ribbon glints in the sunlight, individual creases in the white of the wrapping paper reflect light into the dull corner. She lifts up the tag to read it and takes a photograph. 'Lovely' she says and then turns to walk away. Participant M5, lapel camera footage

She walks up to the [ambient] advert, the pink ribbon flicks in the breeze catching the summer sun, even against the noisy chaos of colours in the cars that drive past. 'A bright coloured ribbon,' she says excitedly with a smile in her voice. Participant A11, lapel camera footage

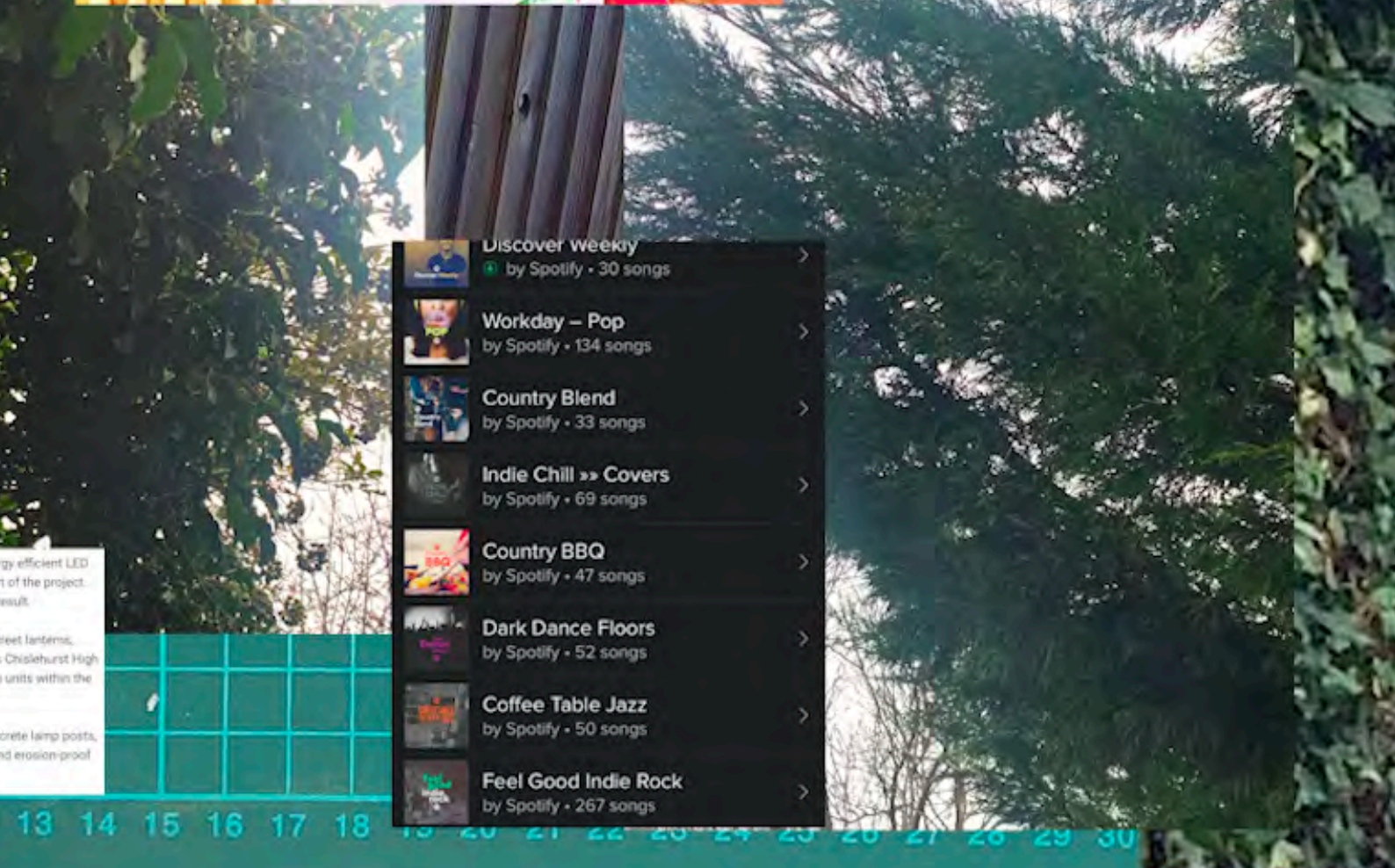
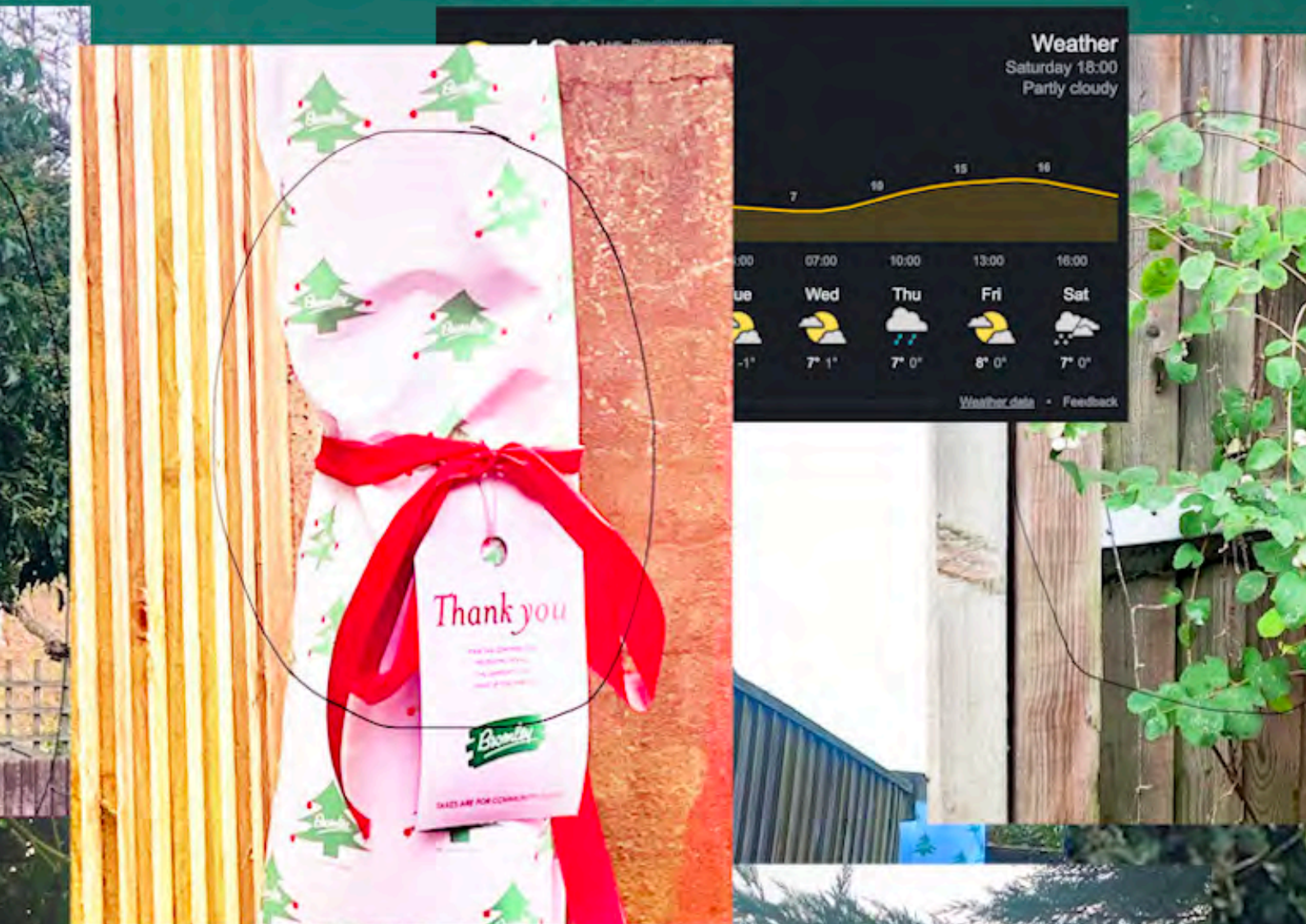
Within an assemblage matter is equally active. Nishida points out that everything in the material world is active, 'what is acted upon must also be that which acts' (2012, p. 36). Matter is lively (Bennett, 2010). The [ambient] advert was not static and inert, there were material forces at play. Over the many participant's walks ribbons danced about in the wind flicking this way and that, unexpectedly one blustery day the wrapping paper tore in a strong gust of wind leaving just a strip, other days the tag flipped over in the gentlest of breezes. Matter is lively, though not alive. Agency is distributed in the assemblage and has affect. I created the [ambient] advert that I placed in the world. I bought the ribbon, I designed the tag and wrapping paper, these things are subject to my intentions. However, these things then act upon other things (including humans) and intra-act in the world in ways beyond my control. The participants noticed the tag that flipped over, they touched the tags themselves, flipping it over. Things act, as do humans, this is the act of Nishida's mutual interaction. Participants encountered a different thing than the one I had put up. The component changed but was still part of the dynamic network of things that is the assemblage (see chapter 2).

'Ahh interesting, another sign,' she comments. The tag has flipped over so only the red back is visible. She pauses to take a photograph. 'Not sure that this one says anything.' Participant R8, lapel camera footage

Moor notes that brands create stable territories for themselves within branded spaces, such as retail environments, with regular and predictable patterns of behaviour (2007). Assemblages always have one part that ‘stabilize[s],’ the assemblage write Deleuze and Guattari, that allows for a stable and consistent interaction so that the assemblage can make sense or function (2020, p. 103). This is equally the case for an [ambient] advert. In order to fulfil its function as communication for the local council the wrapping paper remains attached to the lamppost, the ribbon plays in the breeze attracting attention, the tag communicates a thank you from the council through typography, the light comes on when it is dark. However, as I saw when making *In-and-Out-of-Place*, all the *qualities* of an [ambient] advert that provide stability for the assemblage also provide an element of change or disruption. Likewise, the agency of things within the assemblage creates a disruption. These are lines of flight, a deterritorialization, it allows for the possibility that it will not function at all.

Of course, an [ambient] advert is not a productive assemblage in the way that Deleuze and Guattari intended in their explanations, seeing assemblages as much more complex and integral to shaping the world. They give the example of an archer on horseback, though it can as easily be a roundabout on a busy urban road. Nevertheless, [ambient] adverts still function in the same way as they only come into existence once all the components are assembled and a personae activates it. The [ambient] advert does not exist until all things come together in the eye of a passer-by, it is simply a diagram of potential relations, some of them imagined in the mind of a creative, the vast majority not.

Elements are active in *Assembled*, more than they are in any of the other films. Clips roam around the cutting matt, the staging place of my film. They interact with each other not simply through layering but through proximity and movement. Assemblages are dynamic and I wanted the construction of the film to enact this idea, with an element of stability provided by the cutting matt and narration, and lines of flight provided by movement of clips, and even the desk itself.



Reflections

The process of action research, Reflexive thematic analysis and thinking led me to the final themes of this research. Themes which connect and weave together theories from a variety of disciplines, and from participant experiences, and from my own thinking in the material form of desktop film. Pink cautions that we cannot fool ourselves into thinking that we experience our participants' experiences as they have experienced them, I did not experience their experiences rather I experienced the experience of experience. Working through the themes in film allowed me to have a deeper connection with, and understanding of, the participants' encounters and to bring them in relationship with various philosophical ideas. Place, time, encounters, attention and [ambient] adverts were explored through bricolage, layering, sound, film, photography, screen recordings, online apps, visual metaphors, diagrams, animation, reflexive and reflective narration, and of course participant voices.

The four themes are core concepts drawn from my data and together they form a proposition of how people encounter and pay attention to [ambient] advertising, pausing in the flow of their everyday lives. They are the first step towards the development of a new conceptual framework, something I will return to in the concluding chapter.

The Thickness of the Present described how people react to the things they come into contact with, drawing in memories and speculations. It is a broad theme that frames [ambient] advertising within how we experience everyday encounters in the world. Our ability and propensity to mentally time travel is an important consideration for advertising that relies on a time and a place for meaning.

In-and-Out-of-Place sketched out how [ambient] advertising is a situated form of advertising co-constructed with place for meaning. As such it is in-place yet somehow is always out-of-place. I explored the six qualities that I pulled from the literature in chapter 1 and drew out of the participant experiences in chapter 4. However, each of these qualities revealed lines of flight out-of-place, [ambient] adverts are not simply what they appear on the surface, they are slippery.

The Pause depicts the extended moments of connection with an [ambient] advert and pauses of different duration. As we intend towards this unknown thing there is a slowing down. Time code and

other scientific methods keep us on the outside of this moment, but more personal methods of capture and analysis allow us access to this moment from the inside to slow down with passers-by. This is how the [ambient] advert is encountered, and it is within *the pause* that the [ambient] advert is assembled.

Assembled pictures the variety of heterogenous things that come together in the concrete assemblage of an [ambient] advert. On the surface the advert arrives on site to be constructed, in reality the advert *becomes* with each installation. This theme illustrates why [ambient] adverts are different, more than any other advertising form they are constructed through heterogenous elements, they are a diagram, they cannot be pre-tested, they cannot be researched in academic environments.

The desktop films are in themselves a tinkering assemblage, one in relation to the other to the other. I cannot think without making, that much was described in the first of the films for this chapter - *Desktop ∞ Thinking*. The meanings within the film are co-created through encounter with the participants and research and makerly practices. Much of the films are abstract, even though there is a clear narrative. My voice is consistent, one of the few women critics in the film media space (Garwood, 2016). I make connections which are my unfolding research journey as described my Mikloss Kiss, but I also ask the viewer to make the connections at that same moment, between the various contexts I bring to the screen as the film as a desktop film.

The philosophical texts in chapter 2 underpin much of the thinking in chapter 5. The tension and relationship between phenomenology and new materialism is something that I was working through in the themes. When I read the work of Merleau-Ponty I saw something more akin to the work of Deleuze and Guattari than in the formal routes of phenomenology. The way Merleau-Ponty talks about things, though he doesn't use the same words, is that he sees ourselves extending out into the world and the world extending into us and it is that interconnectedness is what creates. His reading of time and attention and memory gave me access to experiential time, Bergson and Nishida, and from psychology into cognitive psychology – a time in which things are created. Merleau-Ponty exceeds the boundaries of phenomenology and enters into this immanent world of the object. From this more open reading of the human in place and time I was able to reach Tuan and Seamon, come back to the situated body in Haraway, Ahmed and Young and to reach out to

Deleuze and Guattari. While this was detailed in chapter 2, it really helped me develop the embodied and situated nature of the themes and films of this chapter.

Deleuze and Guattari theories of multiplicities and assemblages allowed me to address objective 4, to analyse the contextual elements from the everyday world that co-assemble an ambient advert as something to pay attention to. While the human is not as powerful in Merleau-Ponty as in Heidegger, for me phenomenology stopped at the encounter and did not deal with the [ambient] advert in its complexity. Indeed, McGregor points out the test for phenomenology will be to find a way to describe how ‘human subjectivity, material phenomena, and discursive practices,’ assemble in the encounter ‘to produce a world that is always becoming, without granting causality or primacy to one or the other’ (2020, p. 510). Feminist phenomenology touches on new materialism and in so doing challenges the subject/object binary so prevalent in phenomenology. Feminist phenomenologist Elizabeth Grosz draws on the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari and Merleau-Ponty to explore the embodied. I was able to think through the work of feminist phenomenologist McGregor as she describes a world in which matter in many forms demonstrates agency not unlike the position that Nishida took, though from a different angle. It allowed me to reach Deleuze and Guattari’s assemblages while Bergson’s view of time allowed me to reach Deleuze’s multiplicities. Deleuze and Guattari provided a way to conceptualise the [ambient] advert as multiple, always in construction, active, and contextually-rich.

All of that said, working through the themes developed in these films in this chapter put me in a philosophically difficult place. While this is not a philosophy PhD the complex philosophical tools that I have been using to help me understand participant encounters kept bringing me back to the gap between the phenomenological self and the empty personae.

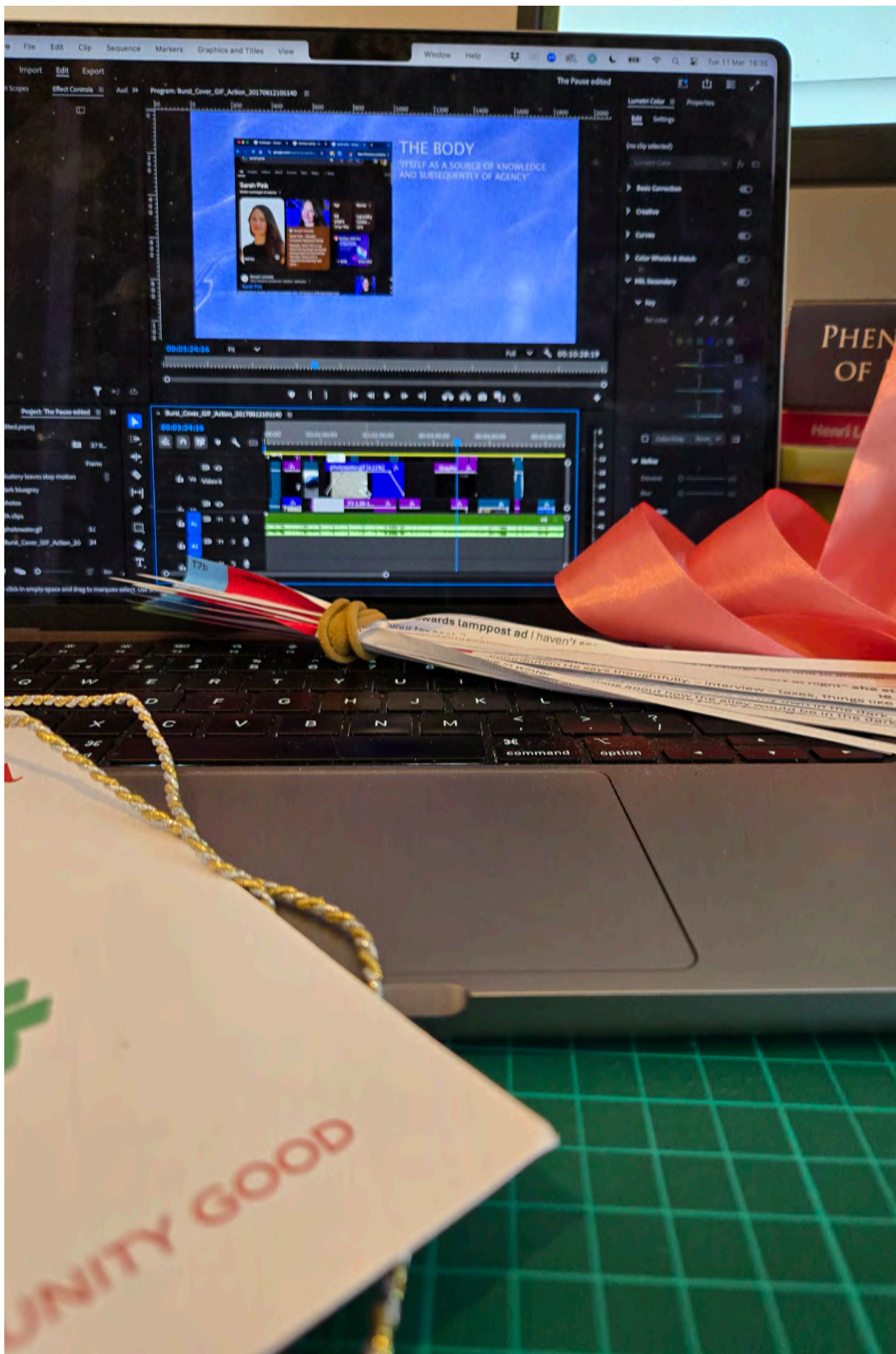
I found Deleuze’s conclusion that there is no internal consciousness or continuity of consciousness deeply problematic and in contradiction to my experience of my participants’ experiences on their short walks (see chapter 2 for further discussion). Everything in this Deleuzian world is about the external connection and the relations between those things. Any concept of interiority comes about through the fold and folding the external world into the internal. This is not dissimilar to Merleau-Ponty, whose internal world is not a closed space but folds the external within it continuously. The difference

between the two positions, for me, was any sense of continuous and personal consciousness through duration, and the sensory, embodied and situated connection with the world. I saw my participants interacting with the things of the world in *The Thickness of the Present* and in *The Pause* and making sense of them in the context of their own opinions, memories and imaginings. Any subjectivity, for Deleuze, is produced through these relations as assemblages are formed and as they fold into the personae. A person in Deleuze's world is in fact only a mask and thoughts about anything are merely intensities within the assemblage. Their experiences are created by the assemblage of which they themselves are part.

That said, I have no doubt that people are not stable unified singular consciousnesses, unchanging from birth. I believe that we are a continually becoming multiplicity of consciousnesses, but for me this does not negate what I hear in my participant clips – they have a continuity of consciousness which does not make them potentials roaming from one assemblage to another, re-expressing/re-actualising themselves in every encounter. For me the situated perspective of late phenomenology and feminist phenomenology acknowledges how experiences shape us, how we draw memories that come from a continuous lived past to imagine and speculate and lean into our futures. Time in Merleau-Ponty swirls around itself and in this way we understand the world and ourselves.

Thinkering with these philosophical positions, with the participant films and data, reflexively and reflectively is what allowed me to understand the material I had gathered. This understanding gave me the themes, and the themes were in themselves core concepts that formed the starting point for a theory of attention in encounter, a way forward for further research. Through the generosity of participants, the research offers a new way to think about the ways in which a passersby can encounter and give attention to [ambient] advertising in everyday places. It addresses my aim to advance the field's understanding. Instead of seeing the adverts as separate from the audience, it uses a situated, phenomenological and feminist framework to look at how [ambient] adverts are actually experienced by people in their daily lives in everyday places. It is an approach informed by assemblages and multiplicities, treating the [ambient] advert as a multiplicity of active components, where its physical, social, cultural and psychological parts all have a role to play.

.



175: Working on participant films with reflexive thematic analysis strands for *The Pause* in Premiere Pro (2024)



CONCLUSION

Conclusion

This concluding chapter articulates the findings from my research, acknowledges its limitations, details the contributions to knowledge, and proposes new areas for further research.

I started this research journey wanting to answer the question, how and in what ways do participants encounter and give attention to [ambient] advertising in everyday places.

[Ambient] advertising is a sub-field of advertising, and it is a creative and contextual practice. It crosses a number of different disciplines such as media and communications studies, creative arts, cultural studies, and social sciences in a very interdisciplinary way. Research that seeks to understand participant attention and engagement with [ambient] advertising out in the public sphere was likely to be both interdisciplinary and to touch on many fields. In doing so I believe I have made contributions across disciplines (subsequently detailed).

My aim was to enhance understanding of how participants encounter and give attention to ambient advertising, by developing and testing a holistic methodological approach capable of capturing the complexities of attention in everyday places.

The objectives to achieve this were,

- 1 To conduct a review of existing literature and methodological approaches used by theorists and researchers to investigate understandings of perception, attention and encounter in relation to ambient advertising in everyday spaces
- 2 To design a multi-methodological framework that blends principles from phenomenology, sensory ethnography, action research with practice to capture the ways in which people perceive and pay attention to ambient advertising
- 3 To apply this new methodological framework (in three phases) in public spaces, to explore the various ways participants encounter and pay attention to ambient advertising in everyday places
- 4 To analyse the contextual elements from the everyday world that co-assemble an ambient advert as something to pay attention to

I had developed an understanding through my years as a practitioner that context was integral to every [ambient] execution, and that people experience [ambient] advertising differently to other types of advertising. I brought both of these ideas with me from my work in the advertising industry, but also from my life before that, working as an installation artist and set designer. I had a feeling, but no clear way to articulate it. My position as an ex-industry creative, an academic, and a researcher was very much part of the research. This research was situated because I have a situated perspective. It was reflexive research and as such acknowledged that the types of questions I ask and my choices of methods might affect the results.



Fig. 176: I appear in participant M4c lapel camera footage describing the activity (2022)

Reflexivity and Reflectivity

My reflexive practice came early on via the writings of Sarah Pink and phenomenologist Iris Marion Young. Reflexivity and reflectivity first conspicuously embedded themselves in my research methodology when I injured my back and was not even able to walk the alleyway for a good many months. At that time the writings of Pink and Shanti Sumartojo really made an impact on my thinking.

There are various ways in which who I am has influenced the research, so as a reflexive researcher I must acknowledge this. The research sites were near to my home so people may have felt more inclined to participate as they had seen me in the neighbourhood before, I was not a stranger with a clipboard, my demeanour was of someone at home in the environment. My background as an advertising creative and art director led me to favour creative and visual methodologies which may have limited deeper dives into the data

quantitatively. I chose methods based on what yielded the types of information I was looking for, clear visual and audio records of attention and this, in itself, may have prevented me from looking more favourably at other methods. Working as a solo researcher had its own limitations (detailed subsequently). My own beliefs that advertising does not, by itself, persuade people to do anything influenced my decision not to consider calls to action as a useful way to help me understand attention. This simple decision meant that I do not have any data on longer term effects. The philosophy that I was reading drew me towards themes of bodily existence in time and space, towards contextuality and the importance of context within the [ambient] advert as part of its make up. My research journey changed the way that I looked at context and led me towards a much more philosophical and theory based conceptual framework than I had imagined at the start of this process. This focus on the human-thing encounter meant that I looked for themes that engaged but meant I overlooked other potential themes. All of these factors encouraged me to make my own involvement clear in the films, which is why there is no God-like position or disembodied AI voice. I brought to the themes and films my worldview: how this positions my question, and my own research process. I reiterate throughout the thesis and the films that we cannot see the world without ourselves in it. My aim to advance the field is in itself a reflexive act as I am building my understanding in response to where I stand in relation to existing theories and traditions. It is also reflexive in recognition of how I might contribute to current understandings.

My reflective practice was first brought to me as a practitioner and the academic by the writings of John Dewey and Donald Schön, scholars in art, creative practice and education. Dewey describes reflection as a practice that is active and requires constantly questioning one's own position (1910). The process of how I arrived at my conclusions and contributions, as research methodology, is as important as the contributions themselves. Reflection is key to action research, reflexive thematic analysis and tinkering, and so was inevitably to become part of the themes and the films. This much is to say that my situated, reflexive and reflective voice as narrator can be heard throughout. The claims I make come from this position.

Limitations of the research

Creative Media Practice research draws from many different disciplines, and this makes it an exciting place to research from. Media has the great benefit of being able to bring all of these disciplines into one place. I have learnt from traditional philosophy and media

philosophy, from marketing in business disciplines, from creative advertising, fine art practice and film practice from the arts, and from cognitive psychologists, ethnographers and human geographers from the social sciences. I am very aware that I am exploring these disciplines and finding legitimate methods and approaches to understand encounters with an [ambient] advert in a place, but I am not a resident in these disciplines and as such researchers from those fields may not feel I have explored their particular territory in sufficient depth. Creative Media Practice research will always be in this position precisely because it straddles so many disciplines, and this issue of depth may be one of its limitations.

My position as a solo researcher, at some remove from the culture of established brands with budget had its own limitations. I needed a site, or sites, that I could access on my own, safely and quickly over a period of time. I needed a brand that I could create work for that would be believable in the local context. A limitation was also the numbers of participants I could deal with as a solo researcher. The numbers in my research are smaller than one would ideally consider in quantitative analysis. While I initially used data tables and quantitative analysis as a form of familiarisation for reflexive thematic analysis it provided a shape of attention in the data visualisations that I could look at in greater detail and helped me understand what was happening. Consequently chapter 4 heavily relies on numbers to describe patterns, even though these numbers were relatively small. Another limitation of working as a solo researcher working with numbers of participants was time. Contacting participants, meeting them, conducting walks, collecting the participant materials, transcribing and then analysing takes time and I was consistently subject to various time constraints. Sometimes these constraints were due to university requirements to show progression and at other times global factors such as the Covid lockdowns that curtailed more extensive experimentation and participation. Beyond that, analysing data as a solo researcher was time consuming and in part that limited the numbers of participants that I could work with.

A further limitation is the creative experimentation within the [ambient] advertising interventions. Once I had realised that in order to understand attention within the encounter and how context affects the advert, I knew I would need to keep the same basic advert. I was then limited in terms of creativity. Changing the advert would mean I was analysing the success of an idea or my skills in crafting rather than my research objectives. This limited creative expression which itself may be seen as a limitation in creativity.

Contributions to knowledge

This was an interdisciplinary study so my aim to advance the ‘field’ did in fact touch on a few fields. The approach to the research was experimental throughout in order to find out new things. Deleuze and Guattari suggest experimentation ‘without aim or end’ (1983, P. 371) and McNiff asks us to start with an idea and follow where it leads’ (McNiff, 2017, p. 46) and this is what I did. While I had an overall aim the objectives were sufficiently open for constant experimentation. I did not go in with a hypothesis, I was led by the research from the ground up. Throughout the research process I tried new methods, combinations and new directions and consequently have many starting points for further research. The contributions from this study are varied and multifaceted like the research itself, generating,

- A critique of the nomenclature, noting the misnomers detrimental effects
- A pilot study for a new innovative methodological bricolage for in-situ researchers
- Empirical data describing participant attention to [ambient] advertising in-situ
- A pilot study for a diagnostic and analytical tool mapping qualities of [ambient] advertising for industry
- Initial development for a new conceptual framework that theorises how and what ways people pay attention to contextually-rich non-traditional OOH

OOH advertising research: A critique of the [ambient] category name

My first contribution to knowledge is within the OOH sub-field’s language and concepts. I started to delve into the problem inherent in the category name early on in my research. I believed these problems had caused the term *ambient* to slip away from advertising briefs even though work was still being made, that to my mind shared all its qualities. While the search for a more useful and contemporary term can appear frivolous, as much of the literature has accepted the term and concentrated on the definition, a look through the awards bodies, client briefs and conversations with practitioners indicate it is non-functioning and is misleading. It does not represent the core reason to make an [ambient] advert from the perspective of a practitioner. This is that it represents an execution of the core advertising idea that is so contextually-rich and relevant that it should be situated and experienced as part of

the everyday world rather than framed in an advertising space. Unfortunately, the word *ambient* has come to mean a part of the background (see chapter 1) and I have argued the case throughout this research for a conceptual re-evaluation of this format, through the literature in chapter 1, and the qualities in chapter 1, 3 and 4 and in the theme *In-and-out-of-Place* in chapter 5. This is not a background format, it is connected and dynamic.

Chapter 1 detailed my research on the category name, both in industry practice, in the awarding bodies and in the academic texts, investigating the naming conventions in this field. The slipperiness and perhaps inappropriateness of the term, has led to fewer [ambient] adverts being made and awarded while at the same time work that appears to be [ambient] is being awarded across a number of different categories. In other words, the effect of the misnomer is causing problems. Even this year a new category of ‘Most Creative Use of Non-Traditional Media’ was created by the *Creative Circle* awards in the UK in order to address what appears to be a missing category. This is all happening at a time when people are prepared to share interesting ambient/non-traditional OOH on social media (The Harris Poll, 2022), when CGI fake ambient adverts are being created for social media (Maybelline NY, 2023), and the likelihood of better integrated virtual and corporeal world technologies are being developed (Google glasses and Meta being early instances of this). And while a natural reaction might be to assume that it could just be rolled into digital advertising, the reaction of some viewers on TikTok and X suggests that they enjoy experiencing this type of advertising in the corporeal world. This is why the critique is necessary at this time, and there is a clear need for change.

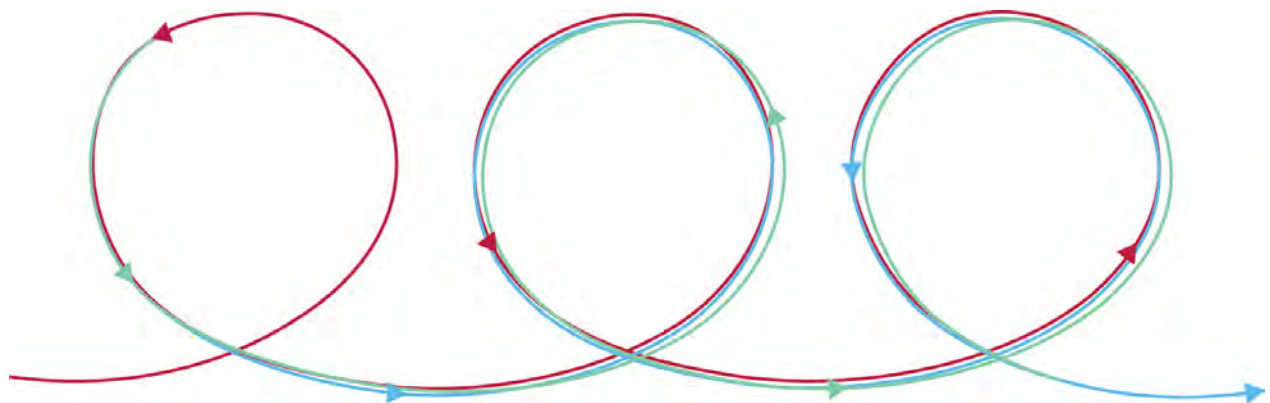
Biraghi et al make a valid suggestion that we consider ambient as a ‘relational’ object or ‘hub’ (Biraghi, Gambetti and Graffigna, 2015), which I would broadly agree with, and indeed my research has found that [ambient] advertising is an assemblage of relations. Unfortunately, ‘relational’ is not a category name that industry would be likely to adopt. Creatives generally felt *‘it might be how you communicate this type of work to a client or suit’* (Iliesiu, 2019), *‘but it perhaps misses some of the more practical things about medium and placement’* (Nelson from Nelson and Sutherland, 2019). It also felt *‘way too deep and philosophical and intellectual, it doesn’t feel like it’s real life, of the kind of time that people give to advertising things, so it feels like an overclaim’* (Millborrow, 2021). However, it did resonate as an aspiration or definition of a category *‘if you do it well you start to create a bond and that allows you to do more exciting things, and they look to you to create a conversation,’* (Daltrey, 2019). The search for a new category term, building from the ideas in this research would be beneficial to academia and to

industry, and industry publications such as *Campaign* and Industry awards bodies such as *D&AD* and *Creative Circle* may be interested in the results. However, to be actionable this research should be co-researched with awards bodies and creatives.

Advances in Methodology

My second contribution to knowledge is within the methodological domain. Chapter 3 began with a methodological review to build a foundational understanding of existing methodologies. Three of my objectives focused on the development and application of a methodological approach, and set of methods, that could capture the complexities of attention. I have advanced the use of action research and reflexive thematic analysis for advertising research, and while the combination of these methodologies is not unprecedented, I have proposed the addition of a fresh method from Film Studies, *thinkering* to combine into an innovative bricolage.

Methodological novelty and originality



Repeat of Fig. 11: Bricolage methodology

This research demonstrates a detailed, tested and proven multi-method framework for studying attention in everyday places. It illustrates how winding action research, reflexive thematic analysis and thinkering around each other provides a more holistic understanding of attention than the use of any one method on its own.

I chose action research because it gave me the opportunity to experiment in-situ and to work with participants. It allowed the whole approach to be experimental as I could test ideas and make changes. I chose reflexive thematic analysis as, much like action research, it is not rigid or prescriptive. My own role, my background beliefs and knowledge, were an acknowledged part and strength of the research.

Thinkering brought a new lens, one that embraced the reflexivity of the research and was at home with the visual and temporal nature of the research materials. It offered what the other two methods could not by themselves and provided a way to share the research findings true to the contextual qualities of [ambient] advertising.

This research provides an example of this methodology in action and in doing so can provide practical guidance for other researchers that wish to conduct research in contextually-rich everyday environments to deal with the analytical challenges of multi-modal data. It demonstrates how one can use action research to iteratively test interventions with participants in-situ. It traces the various stages of reflexive thematic analysis around the action research cycle, and in particular shows how the familiarisation stage can allow for some first pass quantitative analysis as a way of dealing with the quantities of data that action research generates. It also demonstrates how a researcher can deepen their understanding of participants' engagement with a phenomenon through tinkering with the participants' visual material to reveal hidden patterns. It then depicts how a researcher is able to narrate their own research journey through the act of thinkering and then share it in a way that is open about the various contexts in which it was created. There appear to be no studies that use this bricolage methodology in the context of advertising or adjacent fields.

Thinkering as a method beyond Film Studies

Thinkering created a number of films as I sought to understand the themes in chapter 5. These final films are evidentiary in part, providing research from the field. They carry participant voices as they encounter [ambient] advertising, something missing from previous research. They add to the quantitative and qualitative body of knowledge gathered in chapter 1 and add to the first pass of analysis from chapter 4. As for the films themselves, I would suggest that they can be viewed independently, in a range of contexts, and indeed one was displayed in the *Reflecting Change* exhibition earlier this year (The Stephen Lawrence Gallery, 2025), some would make video essays, some can provide evidence for more theoretical research outputs. However, rather more interestingly, they can be put together as a set of 10-minute short films, contained and woven, a comprehensive study in [ambient] advertising – an academic series, as a contextually appropriate way to share this research. A thinkering desktop film *A Situated Encounter with Ambient Advertising* was made for and played at the *London Conference in Critical Thinking* in July (2025). Other experimental journals such as *Necsus* would also be a place

to share research that makes use of thinking to be consumed in its native format.



Fig. 177: The Thickness of the Present in exhibition at The Stephen Lawrence Gallery [film on right] (2025)

Thinkering is a method that discusses the medium in which it is made. Researchers working in media, particularly those looking to investigate media within the public sphere and already making use of visual methods to record their research, could make logical use of thinking to investigate and explain their journey.

New insights

Using this methodological framework allows for research to be conducted on site with participants. It challenges research conducted in abstract and detached academic spaces that presuppose focal interest (Wilson, Baack and Till, 2015). With this methodology and these methods, it is clear to see what participants paid attention to and what they did not, how they paid attention to it, what they made of it – if anything. Each moment of attention is given by the participant; it is not given by the researcher through a photograph.

The lived and social experience of each participant is the research data. It is not something that can be bracketed away as if it had no bearing on perception, attention and understanding. Uncovering these subjective experiences in encounters not just with the [ambient] advert but with many things in the environment brought new understandings, surfacing previously unseen connections and relationships: some more theoretical, such as the application of assemblage theory and some with much more practical application, such as the qualities of [ambient] advertising (both detailed subsequently).

Future application

The methodology and methods have been tested and validated and show it to be a methodology that is transferable to researchers across the social sciences. Others can apply it in comparable projects to look at the context of audience reception of advertising and media communications in general and contextually-rich non-traditional media more specifically. Furthermore, this is a methodology that can more broadly be applied to an appreciation of community-living in place. The complex entanglements and ‘phenomenological context’ (Pink, 2015, p. 143) that exist in the corporeal world that create a sense of place, can be researched and moments of attentive contact with things participants find meaningful shared. It provides a way to research and communicate the things we notice when we are not paying attention that goes beyond this study. Of course, as Krajina points out, in capturing participant data we have to go nearer to the encounters we wish to capture, and in doing so the encounters cease to be ordinary and become “‘contaminated’ with the unordinary, the research practice’ (2014, P. 204). In addition, as discussed previously, the sample of participants was small so one cannot assume it is transferable to large scale studies or populations. So, while this does not claim perfection it answers my aim to create a methodological approach capable of capturing the complexities of attention in everyday places and as such it can also become a powerful tool for other researchers. This is something that a journal with a methodological focus may find of interest such as *Qualitative Research*, it may also be of interest to the *Journal of Communication*, or *Media, Culture & Society* or *New Media & Society*.

The Discipline of Advertising Research

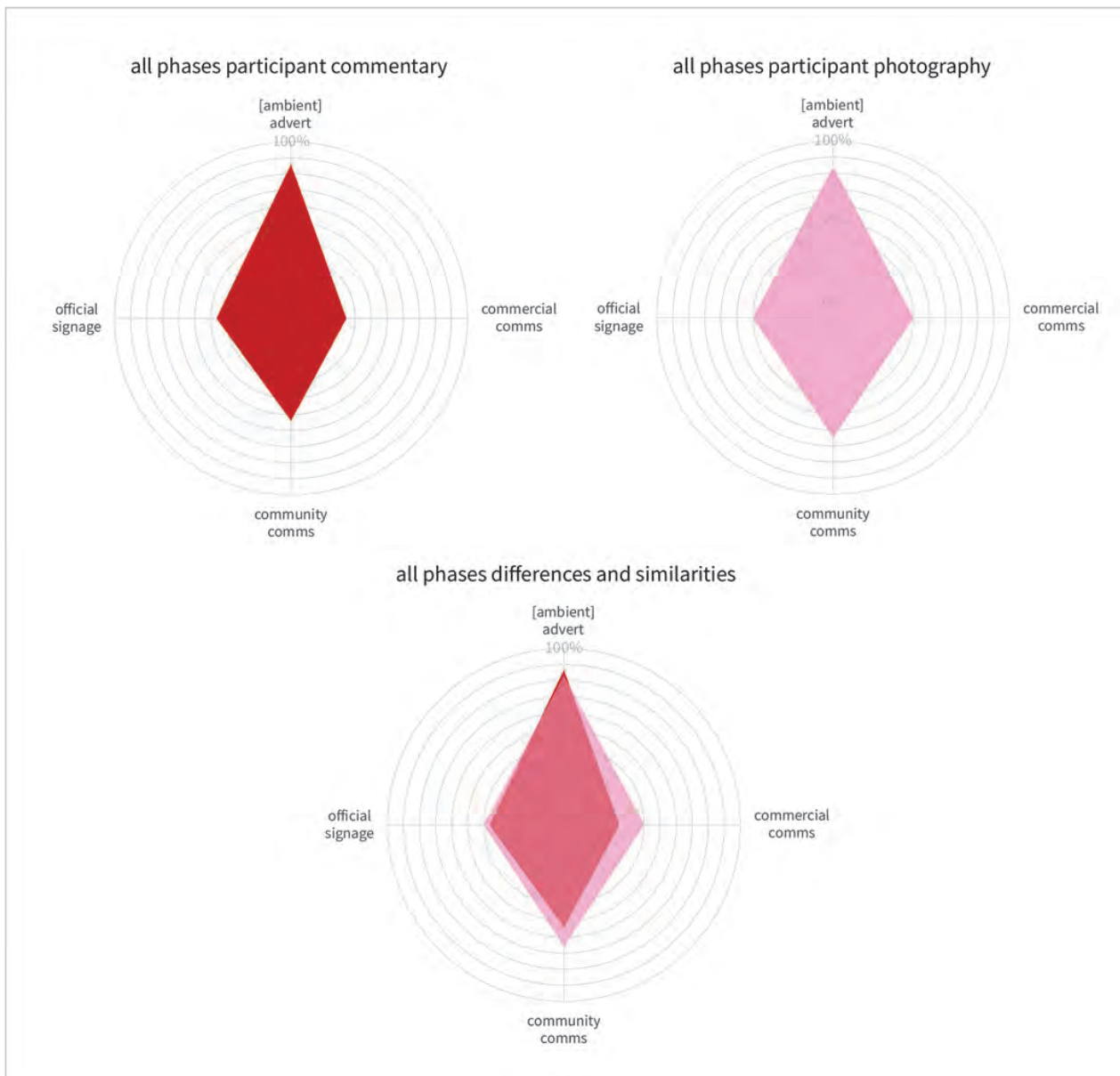
As Wilson noted in his review of OOH advertising (2023) there is little research in OOH in general and in [ambient] advertising in particular. My review of the literature in chapters 1 and 3 noted some

gaps in knowledge. Whilst this methodology is emergent, it provided me with findings to address this particular gap in knowledge and a practical tool that is in development.

Addressing a gap in existing research

My third contribution to knowledge is the discovery of new facts through empirical investigation. Many researchers of [ambient] advertising have called for on the ground research over the years (see Abdul-Razzaq, Ozanne and Fortin, 2009; Bennett, Kottasz and Koudelova, 2000; Gambetti and Schultz, 2015; Karimova, 2014; Rosengren, Modig and Dahlén, 2015; Yuen, 2017), though few have done it. Indeed, Professor of Marketing Charles Taylor called for more research into levels and types of attention, and the need for attention in advertising as recently as 2024 (2024). The discovery of new knowledge on the ground adds to the body of research on attention (See for example, Haley, 2019; Kahneman, 1973; Nelson-field, 2020; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986; Wilson, Baack and Till, 2015), dwell time (a term brought to public attention by digital strategist Duane Forrester from Bing) and attention-based advertising metrics in general, from research companies such as Lumen and Amplified Intelligence. By finding a methodological framework and set of methods that allowed me to capture contextually-rich participant encounters in the complexity of everyday places I was able to overcome a barrier in data collection

The data from the ad-free environment of the alleyway provides a clear baseline for the attention participants are prepared to give to an [ambient] advert where there are no competitive advertising communications (the sum of participant attention to the [ambient] advert noted in photography and/or commentary across the two phases averaged at 93%). This can be compared to findings from the more visually and commercially cluttered environment of the street (participant attention to the [ambient] advert noted in photography and/or commentary averaged at 70%). Even while this is just top-line numbers with no nuance it is clear that there is a difference which warrants further investigation. The rates of engagement and time spent in encounter with the [ambient] advert was high. The majority of participants stopped, took photographs and commented on the [ambient] advert. Chapter 4 details these interactions thoroughly through each of the phases, the data visualisations expressing the shape of participant attention, and the consistency and inconsistencies of attention, in general.



Repeat of Fig. 134: Data visualisation summary of participants' attention given to different types of communicative encounters across the three phases. Please note community comms refers to any resident or community group intervention, commercial comms to branding and advertising, and official signage to council and transport signage.

The in-situ fieldwork challenges the two dominant theories of attention in OOH: that it is bottom-up processing triggered by something within the advert itself, or top-down processing that is entirely dependent on the audiences' openness to new stimuli. The findings demonstrate that it is a combination of the two positions supporting Seamon's proposition that world-grounded noticing and person-grounded noticing work simultaneously in conversation with each other (1979). It aligns with Wilson, Baack and Till's, concept that pre-supposing focal attention on an OOH advert in research studies,

often in laboratory conditions, has under-valued qualities that are subject to its situatedness in the everyday world (2015). This also adds to Krajina's non-media -centric approach to media research that acknowledges that media forms exist with people's everyday lives and everyday places (2013). The influence of context on OOH is a theme that runs throughout Wilson's research (Wilson and Till, 2011; Wilson, Baack and Till, 2015; Wilson and Till, 2019; Amirshahi, Jafari Dizicheh and Wilson, 2019). OOH media is part of a wider context, and it is in this context that the audience may pay attention. Chapter 4 describes participant attention in detail. There is opportunity here to further interrogate the data to explore the pre-attentive processing and fleeting momentary glances that came to light in the theme, *The Pause* described in chapter 5.

As Wilson et al. and Krajina suggest, the data revealed interesting behaviours around attention, behaviours that would be hidden or not displayed in laboratory conditions, brought to light by live methods in-situ. It is not possible in a lab situation to see how people are distracted by other people or start looking at a thing only to look away and talk about something else, or come back to the [ambient] advert after the distraction is over still thinking about the advert - this is attention in the flow of the everyday. The findings challenge us to rethink how people pay attention and the amount of time they will engage with contextually-rich media formats such as [ambient] advertising, certainly in comparison to more everyday forms of communication (see Fig. 134). The abstract concepts of attention and memory and time are made concrete in the participants films and commentaries. I have sought to show context and patterns through the material provided by the participants themselves in the thinking films, alongside themes and new empirical data in order to make these theories of attention and encounter more understandable.

These findings could be disseminated in journals such as *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies* or a special issue focussed on non-traditional media formats within an advertising journal such as the *Journal of Advertising* and the *International Journal of Advertising*.

Developing a new analytical and practical diagnostic tool

My own background as an advertising creative and art director led me to practical solutions, to ask creatives for their opinions, and to favour characteristics in [ambient] advertising that could be applied practically yet also as a bridge to theory.

The fourth contribution to knowledge is as a pilot study for a new practical and analytical tool. The research in chapter 1 drew out qualities from a number of academic texts, and from industry to create a holistic explanation of [ambient] advertising that works across media, scale and interactivity. These qualities describe this form of advertising as a thing that,

- we experience an *embodied* reaction to
- has *lived relevance* to the time and place where it is experienced
- has a *contextual fit* with the medium used on site
- has *aestheticized elements* from the site turning them into something else
- has something that makes it *conspicuous* from the background
- we can *encounter* in the flow of our everyday lives



Section of Fig. 48: Map of Qualities with initial exploration of how it was applied to my own [ambient] advert (2025)

This research presents a new tool to map the qualities in an [ambient] advert. This was explored firstly as a tool to help myself analyse and then create an [ambient] advert in this first experimental case. It revealed how all of these qualities work together to describe a format not limited to medium. One might argue that these qualities could be found in other forms of advertising, and that would be true, but they would not all be found in the same piece of work.

This research has illustrated the potential for this tool both in the creation of my own advert and in the analysis of a range of adverts that were discussed in chapter 1, but it is at an early stage. It is a proof of concept. To be fully valid as a tool, both practically and analytically, it needs to be developed in workshops with industry professionals from awards bodies to creatives. This would check the qualities themselves and crucially the description of each level of the Likert scale. This tool can provide a jumping off point for further analytical research; a comparison of the qualities applied to other contextually-rich non-traditional media in the most recent round of industry awards. This is something that industry magazines such as *Campaign*, and industry awards bodies such as *D&AD* and *Creative Circle* and agencies themselves may have an interest in.

The discipline of Media and Communications

Although Chapter 2 was my second chapter, it really outlines the position I reached at the end of my research, pulling together the various philosophers, ethnographers, media theorists, human geographers and cognitive psychologists that influenced my thinking. It is a thought review and the closest thing I have to a traditional literature review in this thesis, and it works in tandem with the themes I developed in chapter 5. Together they point the way for a new contribution to theory to be made in the discipline of Media and Communications within the field of Audience Studies supported by the initial evidence of my findings. This really gets to the heart of the central question for my research – how and in what ways do participants encounter and give attention to ambient advertising in everyday places.

Initial development of a new conceptual framework

The fifth contribution to knowledge (e) is as a pilot study for a new conceptual framework. Over the course of the 3 phases I was continuously immersed in participant experiences, their transcriptions and films, their data and my tables. I was led by this on the ground research to explore various theoretical positions that emerged through this process. I observed how existing frameworks for theorising interactions with [ambient] advertising (please see chapter 1) were not sufficient to explain the complexities of the material my participants shared with me (please see chapter 4). Klingmann (2010) Lury, (2009), Moor (2003), Oliveira and Pinto (2023) all bring assemblage theory into a relationship with branding and advertising theories. I saw that the concepts that they brought from assemblage theory may go some way to explaining what was emerging from the participant data, indeed Objective 4 directed me towards analysis of

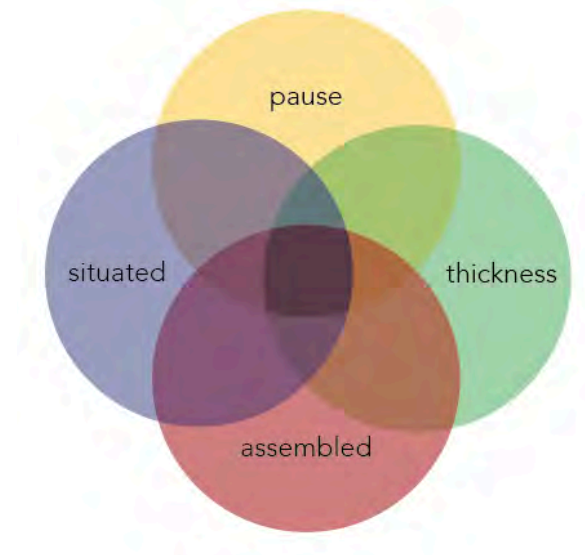
contextual elements from the everyday world that co-assemble as an ambient advert.

At this stage I do not have all the answers but perhaps some new questions and a new theoretical lens through a phenomenological, situated and feminist framework that leans into assemblages, multiplicities, the agency of matter and assemblage theory. The participant reactions detailed in chapter 4 and expanded upon in chapter 5 reveal how our embodied experiences with, and situated perspectives on, [ambient] advertising bring new insights to attention and encounter and is under-theorised. This points the way towards further research to create a fully fleshed out and researched theory of encounter and attention to contextually-rich non-traditional media formats.

The new framework can provide valuable insights into the moment of attention and encounter expressed through the themes that I explored in chapter 5 and the theories I delved into more deeply in chapter 2.

- *The Thickness of the Present* expresses the way in which we encounter things in the everyday. It establishes attention through time and explores the ways in which we can be engaged in a sensory present, while swirling in memories and speculations, to-ing and fro-ing in time and space.
- *In-and-Out-of-Place* acknowledges [ambient] advertising as a situated, in-place, in time, contextually-rich media format made from six qualities. However, each of these qualities have a line of flight out-of-place which means the [ambient] advert and the audience is never fully in the present moment
- *The Pause* recounts encounters with this interesting contextually-rich media format in which we create a physical and mental pause in the ordinary flow of our lives to understand what it is that we are encountering and our relationship to it. It is in this pause that attention is given, drawing in the world, the past and the future
- *Assembled* sketches out how our attention forms an assemblage of heterogenous elements that are sensory, material, social, cultural, and psychological into an [ambient] advert that has meaning for us.

These four themes work together towards this initial framework: *It is in the everyday flow of life that we enact pauses and mental-time-travel to assemble encountered media things (such as an [ambient] advert)*. This is an exploratory and initial first step towards a theory. This research can be taken as a case study and the empirical data, the participant photographs, films, transcripts and micro-interviews illustrate how participants pay attention within encounters and make connections. In this way the empirical data has a dual function; it can fill an existing gap in in-situ knowledge, and it can also add to theory to make more abstract concepts concrete. Future work to explore the potential for this theoretical framework would need to systematically explore participant encounters with different [ambient] adverts and contextually-rich non-traditional OOH in a variety of locations for a variety of brands, building a framework through grounded theory.



Repeat of Fig. 158: The intersection of themes that allows the [ambient] advert to form (2024)

This case study that introduces this new theoretical lens may be appropriate for journals such as *Media, Culture & Society*, the *Journal of Communication*, the *Journal of Visual Culture*, and the *Journal of Theory, Culture & Society* that have an interest in how philosophical theory relates to culture, visual culture and media.

Looking ahead

When I first started thinking about this PhD I had wanted to look at the rise of social media and its use to share examples of OOH advertising. What stopped me was the realisation that there was little in-situ research about how people pay attention to [ambient] advertising. My feeling was that this needed to be done first before studies that look at how this OOH work is then

shared, particularly as the relationship to context is severed. Certainly, there is a lot of research that can be pursued within this field looking at attention, engagement, dwell time, understanding of context, even what aspects of context transcend the medium, new assemblages with [ambient] and the social platform. This is a rich vein for new research.

There is transformative potential in advertising messaging, which is the preferred outcome of all branded communications, the potential for the audience to change their mind, their feelings or behaviours. Certainly, with my limited [ambient] intervention there is little chance of a total shift in any of these factors. However, even with this small intervention, some of the participants that were predisposed to think at least not unfavourably about taxation revealed some level of positivity, or new perspective. The moment of contact with the [ambient] advert triggering a small effect. These fundamental principles of persuasion are a jumping off point for further research. In this way persuasion can be explored for a community 'brand' through a contextually-rich non traditional media format like [ambient] advertising, where one does not need to sell but perhaps donate time, or come together to support a group within the community that needs help. There is scope for research in this much more practical and creative way.

The numbers in this study may have been limited but they were quite compelling. This indicates that academic and industry knowledge would benefit if further research was conducted with greater numbers encountering a wider variety of [ambient] adverts. This is research that should be conducted with industry, with a cooperative knowledge exchange. An advertising agency could then let the research team know where and when an ambient advert will be installed, and a small team could use the bricolage methodology to capture live encounters in the field. First pass analysis would pull out data, create tables and data visualisations, thematic analysis would pull out the deeper patterns and desktop film-making techniques can share the experiences without researchers necessarily burdening themselves to investigate encounters more philosophically.

There is limited research into how [ambient] advertising can be used by smaller brands and organisations, brands with less globalising ambitions, and perhaps with a more local or greener focus (Sorrentino, 2020b). It is a format that can be readily

applied to charitable organisations and activism. It is hard to argue with the benefits the six qualities for these organisations might provide, particularly in terms of embodiment, lived relevance, and contextual fit. The fact that, as described in the introduction, this is a cheap and highly PR-able format that would very much be boosted by contextual fit, aestheticised elements and by being encountered, all three are gifts for social sharing. This is research that would benefit those categories that struggle to compete with the louder voices and bigger reach of the large global brands. Research can build from this empirical base that demonstrates participant attention and engagement to establish how organisations with less financial clout can benefit. This is research that could be conducted in partnership with a charitable organisation in the form of Knowledge Exchange.

Far away from the sensory world of Merleau-Ponty there is a new digital world that has opened up for advertising. A digital world that has potential for better creative executions than pop-ups that cover one's field of vision, or pre-roll adverts. There has been limited research into how charitable organisations might make use of this form in the Metaverse (Vangelov, 2023). Recently brands have been using visual effects work on platforms like TikTok to create CGI [ambient] adverts (Fig. 21 Maybelline NY, 2023). This thesis suggests that people's embodied encounters with [ambient] advertising generally attract attention and consideration. There is an opportunity here for research to look closely at whether people encounter digital adverts in the same way in digital 3D spaces, if they give them as much attention, if they are as interested. This can be experimental forward thinking exploratory and creative media research that investigates new embodied forms in digital spaces.

Perhaps more intriguingly for me in the immediate future is a consideration of feminist phenomenology, assemblage theory, everyday urbanism and place-based theory in relation to the perceived safety of the research sites for women in particular. It provides an opportunity to weave together theory and a particular contextual aspect that surfaced during this research, described in chapter 4. Issues of light and safety came to the fore in an embodied way, sometimes through the films, sometimes through the micro-interviews. The [ambient] advert brought these thoughts to the surface and nearly all the female participants that encountered the [ambient] advert, and a few of the men (in phase 1 60% of participants, in phase 2 46% of partic-

ipants, in phase 3 49% of participants), felt it relevant to bring light to the alleyway or street at night, with many commenting on how scary it can be after dark. This feels like an area that would be very productive for further research.

A last look back

This research sought to address the question how and in what ways do participants encounter and give attention to [ambient] advertising in everyday places. It demonstrates an interdisciplinary and creative approach that offers new ways to engage with people as they go about their daily lives in mediated environments. The experimental approach that I undertook yielded many new things. I have evidenced the need for a new category name by re-evaluating the existing theoretical framework that underpins an unfortunate misnomer. I formed a new bricolage, with action research and reflexive thematic analysis and tinkering, combining them into an innovative and original relation. I discovered new facts about attention to [ambient] advertising from in-situ participant research. I have a starting point for a unique analytical and diagnostic tool that would be of benefit to industry. I have taken the first step towards an initial theory for attention in encounter with contextually-rich things, one that brings the human and the [ambient] advert together in a more dynamic relationship. All together the research provides a shift in thinking about this slippery contextually-rich non-traditional media format that is [ambient] advertising and suggests some exciting new routes for further investigation.

He walks up to the lamppost ad pauses to take a photo 'What's this, what is this?' He stops to read the tag 'Ohh, never seen one of these before...the council saying thank you, hmm, that's cool' comments participant M8b as he walks up the street. Participant M8b, lapel camera footage

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