



Australasian
Association
of Writing
Programs

TEXT SPECIAL ISSUE

Number 69 December 2022

ISSN: 1327-9556 | textjournal.scholasticahq.com

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“A story with many rooms”: Twine as a tool to expand life writing practice about place and space

Abstract:

This article will explore how hypertext technology in Twine might be used by writers to expand and augment creative nonfiction life writing about place and space. Twine is a digital storytelling platform for creating interactive, nonlinear choose-your-own-adventure type narratives. Using a case study of a personal essay on homesickness written by the author of this article using Twine, this paper argues that Twine’s functionalities can be employed to represent and explore associative networks of memories and multi-directional thought pathways. Drawing on place theory by Gaston Bachelard and Edward Casey, it responds to the questions: how might writers represent living and moving through the multi-directional and multi-temporal nature of place? And what new mediums could be employed to reflect the exploratory creative research process of life writing about place?

Biographical note:

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Keywords:

Twine, life writing, creative nonfiction, place, space

Introduction

Writers of life narrative are faced with several problems when attempting to represent nonlinear experiences, and the networks of memories that contain these experiences. As Smith and Watson (2010) state: "we are subjects in time: the time of our bodies, its rhythms and cycles; the time of our everyday lives ... when we tell autobiographical narratives we engage these multiple temporalities" (p. 92). The challenge of engaging these "multiple temporalities" is particularly potent when writing about place, as place, like memory, is inherently temporal, divergent and multi-sequential.

Author of *How to Write an Autobiographical Novel*, Alexander Chee, uses an anecdote to illustrate this phenomenon faced by writers of memoir. Chee describes an event that occurred after his father's funeral when his aunt came over to dispute life insurance money. During the visit, Chee carries a rug out to his aunt's car. Much later, Chee's mother tells him that while he was carrying the rug to the car, his brother went into the backyard, climbed up a tree and stayed there until his aunt was gone. Chee says:

...for a long time, that was all I really knew about that day, how I participated in it, how I felt about it... But once I had that detail, suddenly that becomes larger than an anecdote. And suddenly that becomes a story that has more rooms in it. (WMFA, 2020)

The idea of a story with many rooms is a fitting analogy for writing life narratives about place, as memory can be compartmentalised, contained to, and activated by different spaces. After Chee discovers this extra detail, his memory of the event expands and diverges – inviting and activating memories of his brother, the tree, the garden, and other rooms in the house, which will all influence the way he tells the story in the future. Leading philosopher of place theory, Casey (2000) claims that "as much as body or brain, mind or language, place is a keeper of memories" (p. 213). Smith and Watson (2010) recognise that "memory, experience, identity, spatial location, embodiment, and agency are not separable constituents of autobiographical subjectivity. They are all implicated in one another" (p. 63). They state that "situatedness" is especially crucial in life narrative, as life narratives are "always symbolic interactions in the world" (Smith & Watson, 2010, p. 63). Evidently, there is a strong link between place, memory and life narrative due to their situatedness, and multi-temporal and multi-directional nature. This link has been illuminated while researching and exploring the topic of homesickness in my own life writing. While confined to the four walls of my home for 111 days in 2020, I crafted a creative nonfiction essay titled *Somehow North* to explore the origin of my own homesickness by revisiting memories of place within the many homes I had lived in.

The underexplored phenomenon of homesickness is the key theme in my life writing practice. The home is the first reference point of the world, and we live the rest of our lives in relation to it – made up of these "symbolic interactions with the world" (Smith & Watson, 2010, p. 63). Bachelard (2015) writes that our house is our "first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the world" (p. 26), and that "thanks to the house, a great many of our memories are contained" (p. 30). Casey reinforces Bachelard's (2015) theories of the house as a retainer of memory,

especially the childhood house – “our first ‘home’ itself [is] often the subject of the most profound nostalgia” (Casey, 2000, p. 189). Casey (2000) notes that “nostalgia” and “homesickness” are considered synonyms in current English dictionaries: “we are in pain (*algos*) about a return home (*nostos*) that is not presently possible” (p. 201). Within this essay, I wanted to attempt to “return home” to discern a link between my childhood homesickness and my adult experience of solastalgia – that is, “the homesickness you have while still at home” (Albrecht, 2006, p. 48). Solastalgia is a term conceived of by Albrecht (2006) to describe grief experienced in reaction to changing environments, often prescribed to feelings of eco-anxiety. Albrecht (2006) claims that any context where place identity is challenged by change to the existing order of life has potential to cause solastalgia.

While exploring the concept of solastalgia caused by changing environments, I was challenged by the fact that place – like memory and the self – has its own plurality. I encountered the problem: how can writers represent living, moving through, and remembering the multi-directional and multi-temporal nature of place? And what new digital mediums could be employed to reflect the exploratory creative process of writing memories about place?

Using Twine to explore place and memory

The book has long been the default medium for life writing, however, “new digital subjects no longer rely on the written inscription that has dominated life writing thus far” (Smith & Watson, 2010, p. 190). The legacy of using hypertext to create narratives stems from the 1980-90s, when creative writers such as Michael Joyce, Judy Malloy, Stuart Moulthrop, Judd Morrissey, and Shelley Jackson employed its use to craft multi-directional non-linear narratives, predominantly in the Storyspace authoring software. Emerging media technologies continue to offer writers new ways of augmenting narratives. Ciccoricco offers the term “network fiction” to describe the evolving genre of writing produced “in digitally networked environments that make use of hypertext technology in order to create emergent and recombinant narratives” (Ciccoricco, 2007, p. 4). In hypertext technology “electronic links connect lexias ‘external’ to a work as well as within it and thereby create text that is nonlinear, or more properly, as multilinear and multisequential” (Landow, 2006, p. 4). When readers click on these links, they “activate a connection” established by the author (Landow, 2006, p. 22). Hypertext, according to Landow, has the ability to blur the boundary between writer and reader, and allows the writer to make explicit the links within and between pieces of text, or – “their intra and intertextuality” (Landow, 2006, p. 4).

Twine is an open-source digital storytelling platform created by Chris Klimas for crafting nonlinear narratives using hypertext. According to Salter and Moulthrop, the kind of storytelling most commonly created with the Twine platform has three main ancestors: choose-your-own-adventure stories, interactive fictions, and hypertext fictions (2021, p. 147). While Twine functions best to create playable, text-based “games”, Klimas claims that he built the program in “an attempt to make something that would be friendly to people who were writers more than coders” (as cited in Boyd, 2019, p. 6). The tool particularly lends itself to writers of

non-linear – or multi-linear – works. Twine employs hypertext technology to link different lexias (passages of writing) to one another, with the opportunity to create multiple choice options so that stories can be read in a number of different sequences. Salter and Moulthrop state that “most Twine creators call their works games, not fictions, essays, or plays” (2021, p. 136), and quote Twine writer and game critic Darius Kazemi:

Twine games bend the concept of game so much that it makes traditional game designers cranky that the authors have the audacity to use the word ‘game’... This also works in the other direction: please think about whether your Twine game should be an essay instead. (as cited in Salter & Moulthrop, 2021, p.136)

I wondered – why couldn't my essay about homesickness be a Twine? Could I not employ the game functionalities of multiple choice, nonlinearity, user agency and exploratory navigation in the creation of an essay on place and space? Smith and Watson offer this definition of the personal essay: “A mode of writing that is literally a self-trying-out... a testing (‘essay’) of one’s own intellectual, emotional, and physiological responses to a given topic” and a form of “self-exploration” (2010, p. 276). My use of Twine reflects this definition of the personal essay – using the tool to explore my own emotions, memories and responses to place through the technical affordability of hypertext technology that allows for multi-linear, multi-directional and multi-temporal narratives. Landow claims that “in print technology, the referenced or linked materials lie spatially distant from the references to them: electronic hypertext in contrast, makes individual references easy to follow and the entire field of interconnections obvious and easy to navigate” (2006, p. 4). As the essay’s intention was to explore associative memories of place and space, Twine presented the opportunity for me to explore the interconnectedness of these memories via hyperlink – making it easier to clearly connect and delineate between these disparate threads. Landow writes: “print is a fixed, unchangeable linear format” (2006, p. 33) – however, pioneer of hypertext narratives and creator of the Storyspace software, Michael Joyce has famously stated: “electronic text replaces itself” (Joyce, 1997).

The idea of a changing and evolving medium aligned with my intention to represent the multi-directional and multi-temporal memories of place, as well as the exploratory creative process of reactivating these memories. Memories, over time, often replace themselves, each time we revisit them, new details emerge, or fade, and are replaced by a new version – like Chee’s memory of his aunt’s visit. As hyperlinks function to separate narrative – or in the case of my personal essay, memory fragments – creating this essay in Twine offered the “added opportunity to represent breaks (or leaps) of consciousness” (Ciccoricco, 2007, p. 261). Landow argues that we must “abandon conceptual systems founded on ideas of centre, margin, hierarchy, and linearity and replace them by ones of multilinearity, nodes, links and networks”, and to see electronic writing “as a direct response to the strengths and weaknesses of the printed book” (2006, p. 4). The purpose of this experimental essay was not to demonstrate that the printed book is redundant or superior for life writing, but that electronic writing tools like Twine might offer writers of life narrative new ways of augmenting and representing memories of place and space which share the qualities of a network – multi-directional, multi-temporal and multi-sequential.

In their research on life narrative, Smith and Watson (2010) reference Rotman's work, who argues that the digitalisation of code and network "will radically transform our notions of the 'self' itself, shifting us from the 'alphabetic self' of written inscription with its technologies of disembodiedness, interiority and authority of the singular to the self that is distributed, networked and plural" (p. 190). It is this notion of the distributed and plural self that I wished to explore in *Somehow North*. I have lived in countless houses in my lifetime, and do not have a single home to return to, rather a series of disparate memories that collectively make up my perception of home and what feeling home means. These memories exist in different houses across different cities and countries, some in single rooms and others contained to entire buildings. In order to delineate between and represent the multi-directional selves, places and memories that make up "home" for me, I employed a practice-led approach to the research question of how a writer might represent living, moving through and remembering the multi-directional and multi-temporal nature of place. According to Skains (2015), practice-led connotes "a creative experiment designed to answer questions about the process and results of the practice itself ... in an attempt to understand the artefacts but also the cognitive and communication processes behind them" (p. 184). A practice-led approach allowed me to reflect on my memories of place within the Twine network in a way that felt truer to the psychological experience of "returning home" – that is, a place made up of many different places, or a story with many rooms – and provided insight into the process of remembering place through following associations.

The use of digital tools to represent place and space is not new – the interactive fiction work *Figurski at Findhorn on Acid* by Richard Holeton (2000) is considered by hypertext critics (such as Dene, Mariusz Pisarski, Astrid Ensslin, Alice Bell) an important work in the hypertext canon, and is intensely place-based – characters travel from Findhorn to Scotland to a South Florida trailer park. A navigation screen allows users to jump, via hyperlink, to different real-world places and events within the narrative. It has been established that electronic writing lends itself to spatial narrative – Skains (2019) argues that the navigational possibilities in digital media are expanded to a significant degree, whereas unicursal (Western) narratives employ one method of navigation: left to right, up, down. "Exploration navigation" in electronic mediums permits the reader or user to explore a text "with no clear goal", rather, readers move through a text "questing to reveal all lexias" (Skains, 2019, p. 139). Exploration navigation in interactive fiction allows readers to visit spaces and examine objects "that contribute to the storyworld but not necessarily narrative" (Skains, 2019, p. 139). Skains (2019) argues that these augmentations don't necessarily add to foundational structures of a narrative, rather, they offer the reader new ways to seek out and collect the fragments of a narrative structure. This kind of exploration navigation seemed fitting for an essay on place and space built on a collection of memories pertaining to different homes. Additionally, key to the creation of *Somehow North* was the multiplicative quality of electronic texts that demands "a level of attention from the composer, an awareness of how each component contributes to and affects the meaning of the whole" (Skains, 2006, p. 137). The nature of crafting this essay in Twine meant I was positioned to make choices myself as the author – which memory fragments

were included, which word within these fragments would become a hyperlink, which word would become a text anchor, which location each memory belonged to and how they were connected to one another. This kind of decision-making activated a deeper level of self-reflection or a “self-trying-out ... a testing ... of one’s own intellectual, emotional, and physiological responses to a given topic” (Smith & Watson, 2010, p. 276). Through this kind of self-exploration while organising memories, I created a network of rooms that began to resemble my own version of home.

This idea of using Twine lexias to represent rooms is also not novel. Porpentine Charity Heartscape created Twine narrative *Howling Dogs* (2012) while living in a friend’s barn. They have stated that the game represents dealing with trauma similar to “being in a dark room” (Hudson, 2014). Heartscape similarly uses lexias to represent different “rooms”, enabling the author to arrange a story world that represents the dark spaces of trauma. Game critic Alexander (2013) called the game an “abstract, often surreal experience centralised on the concept of confinement”, and that Heartscape knits “delicate and elaborate node maps together to convey an actual sense of physical space for the player”. To represent this concept of confinement and claustrophobia, Heartscape creates rooms within the passages by using hyperlinks as a sort of digital architecture – doors that open to different spaces.

Starting in “your room”, the hyperlinks – or doors – in *Howling Dogs* are highlighted in bold below:

A room of dark metal. Fluorescent lights embedded in the ceiling.

The **activity room** is in the north wall. The **lavatory** entrance, west, next to the **trash disposal** and the **nutrient dispensers**. The **sanity room** is in the east wall. (Heartscape, 2012)

In the activity room is “a reclining chair in a dark room with a visor hanging from the ceiling”, the sanity room is “immersed in a room where every surface is a glowing screen”, the shower room a “tiny metal toilet and shallow bowl of sink jutting from pipes” (Heartscape, 2012). The descriptions of each of these rooms create a sense of confinement, darkness and oppression. All rooms eventually lead back to the original space, or text anchor – “**my room**” – from which the story can progress. Like trauma, there is no way out, the narrative always winds back to where it started, similar to wandering the halls of a dark house. Heartscape’s work is an example of how Twine passages can be used to represent different physical spaces and recreate the experience of opening doors while moving through the work. Readers engage in the text by peeking behind these different doors, and then returning to the “main room” or overarching narrative before progressing.

Another example of spatial narrative is Short’s *Bronze* (2006). An adaptation of the *Beauty and the Beast* fable, *Bronze* offers spatial navigation through the Beast’s palace. About *Bronze*, Skains writes

these exploratory nonlinear forms of navigation afford narrative pathways unique to each read-through of the work, with repeated readings offering an additive effect as different perspectives and event orders congeal to reveal multiple layers of action and causation in the narrative structure. (Skains, 2019, p. 139)

Somehow North was crafted through free writing memories of place and space, and then selecting a term within each lexia to act as a doorway to another memory. Once I followed that doorway, I found that new memories were activated. The final piece can be read via exploration navigation, where the main goal is to collect the disparate fragments of narrative, moving through the text as though moving through physical space.

An extract from *Somehow North* is exhibited below. The opening paragraph of the essay is the main narrative thread of the work – a personal essay exploring solastalgia. Each of the emboldened blue words within the main narrative are pathways (via hyperlink) to another passage. These three different pathways all eventually lead back to the main text box. The reader can choose to either explore some or each of these pathways, or simply progress to the next page of the main narrative. This gives the reader agency and the text variability.

On the mountain in the village of **Kuranda**, the sound of the curlew calls me home. The day I fly in from Montreal, it is sunrise, and the sky cracks open like an egg. The farmers are burning back the sugar cane, and I smell smoke from the **fireplace** as I crawl up the red ladder to the **bungalow**.

Figure 1: extract from Twine narrative *Somehow North*, by Mia-Francesca Jones.

Clicking “Kuranda” leads to this passage:

The name Kuranda is derived from the Yindinji word kuran, referring to the acorn-leafed plant. Here, I am reminded that all things have more than one name. The canopy and the forest floor, the flightless birds with their scarlet wattles, the woody vines, the milky silkpods, myrtle, quondongs and the buttonwoods; the native hibiscus, the she-oaks and the cotton trees. Collectively – the flora surrounding my mother’s house, that is slowly being swallowed by the forest.

In its own act of devotion, the house submits. As does my mother, who after years of living with the snakes and the bush turkeys, is **moving** away.

Figure 2: extract from Twine narrative *Somehow North*, by Mia-Francesca Jones.

Selecting “bungalow” leads to:

Somewhere it hurts – the liminal space between my mother and I, her in the main house and me in the bungalow. The foliage between us is growing thicker and at the same time bringing us closer, closing in on the empty space. In the bungalow are things from our past life: animal skins, a rabbit fur, artworks, my teenage diaries where emergent sexuality flowed into words like a waterfall. My first guitar, and a rare relic of my early girlhood: a cardboard suitcase housing a bunk bed for a stuffed bear and rabbit. There is a fungus growing on it now. Somehow the forest has gotten inside their portable home that travelled from London with me back to Australia at age ten. Their **home** is portable, like much of my life, like my memories.

Figure 3: extract from Twine narrative *Somehow North*, by Mia-Francesca Jones.

Fireplace (no further pathways, must return to main passage):

Citrus peels dry on top of the stovetop fireplace in the gold miner’s cottage in central Victoria. In winter, the tree overflows with fruit. Last year, the oranges were ripe early. This year, they are late. The frost came too soon. The peels we have collected are thick and take too long to dry, and I worry that there will be no ripe fruit by mid-July, and what it will mean for my symbolic tracking of the seasons.

Figure 4: extract from Twine narrative *Somehow North*, by Mia-Francesca Jones.

Moving:

Once, I looked inside the underbelly of an uprooted tree. The underworld was dark and wet, brimming with life – small bugs, mud, sap. A portal to another world of systems, where communication and roots make up a language I will never speak. I stood where the tree once stood. It was so old that I felt ancient too. Briefly, I borrowed its energy. This is how I felt walking down the back of the [property](#) in the NSW bush, stepping outside of the red shed my father erected as temporary shelter while he built the main house. The five of us slept on bunk beds in the shed while the house frame went up. Even after it was built, I will always recall the guts of the unfinished thing – the dirty boot tracks and the cold wind passing through the naked frame. Once it was up, I didn’t want to leave the comfort of the tin shed, where things felt contained.

Figure 5: extract from Twine narrative *Somehow North*, by Mia-Francesca Jones.

Skains (2016) writes that while the hyperlink as a narrative device affords multiple reading paths to the reader, it also affords multiple writing paths to the writer (p. 188). Using the hyperlink as a springboard to another place to consider the emotion attached to that place encouraged an investigative process around my memories across different times and geographical locations, and to consider how they might be connected to one another. Each selected hyperlink becomes the title of the proceeding lexia. The examples above demonstrate how the story might deviate into different times and places – the main narrative being set in Far North Queensland in 2016, the “bungalow” of the same time containing old memories, “moving” associated with an early childhood memory in the New South Wales bush, and the “fireplace” moving forward to the future, or present day, in the Victorian goldfields. This is one way a writer might represent the creative process of following associative networks of memories, or pathways, that link to one another. In the same way a place can have many different pathways, a thought or a memory can too. When using the medium of the book, a writer is constrained to the static page – it is the reach to external references that extends the spatial boundaries of the digital text.

In Twine, a writer can experiment with following these multi-directional memories via hyperlink to reflect mobility and extend spatial boundaries. Casey (2000) summarises: “The unplumbable nature of memory has everything to do with what characterises place as well: an openness to traversal by multiple pathways” (p. 205). He explains that memories trigger and lead to other memories, and “such networks exhibit ramifying pathways even in the case of a seemingly straightforward memory” (p. 204). He uses the example of his pet dog Peggy, and how remembering Peggy is to enter a microcosm of his life, a mini-world in which “Peggy” links to memories of other family dogs, the way they interacted with his siblings, and the way they warmed the home. Peggy represented a “pathway” of his past – and “from each pathway, still others diverge” (Casey, 2000, p. 204). In Landow’s comprehensive analysis of hypertext, he references mechanical engineer Vannevar Bush’s 1945 article “As We May Think”, in

which Bush envisions a device that was capable of storing an individual's books, records, information and communications – a personal filing system, or “memex”, that acted as an “enlarged intimate supplement to memory” (Bush, 1945). Bush's memex influenced the development of early hypertext systems that eventually led to the creation of the internet. Landow writes, “the essential feature of the ‘memex’ lies not only in its capacities for retrieval and annotation but also in those involving ‘associative indexing’ – what present hypertext systems term a *link*” (2006, p. 4). Bush observes that the human mind works by association – “with one fact or idea ‘in its grasp’, the mind ‘snaps instantly to the next that is suggested by the association of thoughts, in accordance with some intricate web of trails carried by the cells of the brain’ (Bush, 1945). These trails of links, Landow (2006) argues, constitute a new form of textuality and a new form of writing – for life writers, they might offer a new way of representing memories of place and space.

While crafting my Twine essay, I employed this practice of following associative memories, or pathways, further than I would have if writing an essay in a Word document or a piece of paper, where doing so might convolute the main thread. This allowed me to more naturally capture the process of remembering. Throughout this practice, each passage began to represent spaces in different houses that I had lived in and allowed me to generate new connections between the past and present using the flexibility of the form. It also encouraged deviation from the main overarching narrative in order to explore disparate associative memories of home. Through the flexibility and expansiveness of this practice, I was able to consider links between my feelings of homesickness and solastalgia. For example, by following memories associated with fireplaces, I was able to forge a link between feelings of ecological distress: one in the far north Queensland rainforest, where the trees are falling in higher numbers due to extreme weather events, and one in the Victorian goldfields, where orange peels used as fire starters are thicker than usual, demonstrating a shift in seasonal weather patterns that have affected the condition of the fruit. By linking these associated memories, I was able to deepen my understanding of the root of my own experience of solastalgia, or environmental grief, and how the disruption to place order underpins my feelings of homesickness. Using hyperlink technology in twine, the connection between two seemingly disparate ideas becomes explicit.

I wanted to experiment beyond the basic function of using passages to recreate different rooms or physical spaces, instead employing Twine's multi-directional functionality to reflect the *process* of remembering place and space. Skains (2016) argues that the digital writer, through the process of engaging with the many possibilities of narrative, is encouraged to transgress narrative boundaries and authorities as well (p. 189). *Somehow North* attempts to do more than describe the physical attributes of space, but to form a network of reflections on the memories, emotions, embodiment and situatedness associated with place. Skains (2019) writes that the “expansion of narrative space in both temporal and spatial dimensions calls for a requisite expansion of composition strategies in a writer's cognitive spaces” (p. 134), and through the process of digital writing, the writer creates a collage of “images, sounds, interactions and associations” to create a “mosaic” of prose (p. 134). It is the collage of subjective experience and the connection of place to individual lived experience, memory and reflections that

constitute life narrative and creative nonfiction. Smith and Watson (2010) refer to this kind of recollection as “active remembering” – they claim that remembering is not a passive act, rather, “active remembering creates meaning by reinterpreting the past”, through which we “inevitably organise or form fragments of memory into complex constructions that become the changing stories of our lives” (p. 22). Using Twine to create this essay on homesickness often felt like this – organising fragments of memory into different passages through the act of both retrieving them from, and placing them into, different rooms to tell the story of my own life. The Twine itself becomes a complex construction – or network – made up of these fragments of lived experience.

Accessing different spaces through hyperlink technology in Twine helped me to reactivate and reinterpret memories to understand the link between my childhood homesickness and adult solastalgia. This resonates with Bachelard’s theory of the home as a container of memory: he argues that “memories are motionless, and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are” (Bachelard, 2015, p. 30). Casey (2000) reinforces this theory, stating that “place is the primary scene in which we hold (onto) memories” (p. 213). Fixing these memories in space employs this “holding power” that Casey (2000) attributes to place. Furthermore, Bush claims that the trails forged by a researcher using the memex “do not fade”, unlike those of the mind (Bush, 1945). Securing these memories in digital space via Twine recreated physical space. In the same way an object or place might reactivate a memory, I used words within my main text to trigger memories of different spaces. Twine’s functionalities allow the writer to delineate between main narrative thread and deviation in thoughts, through which I was able to follow these prompts without restraint or concern for convoluting the main narrative thread, expanding my own understanding of my emotions and feelings about homesickness. The result is that the main narrative thread can still be read as a stand-alone piece, or the reader can take the agency to deviate from the main story, exploring and collecting lexias. The final read-through allows both writer and reader to interrogate, analyse and follow multi-directional thoughts and associative pathways that represent the plurality of human experience. This functioned also as a generative tool, with a wealth of content contained within the Twine construction to expand on or use to layer or integrate into the main thread if I were to transfer the work from Twine to a word processor. In this way, the Twine rooms I created function as places that hold memories. Twine therefore might offer the opportunity for writers of life narrative to explore and capture memories in a way that does not fade, and to enrich, augment and layer narratives about place and space. Through this, the writer can showcase the plurality of the self. This is just an example of how the fluidity of the form might offer opportunities for writers of life narrative to further interrogate, braid and connect ideas about a particular topic or shed light on an emotion.

Casey and Bachelard’s theory of place as a keeper of memory gestures towards cognitive literary theory, particularly Clark and Chalmers’ (1998) analysis of the “extended mind”. Not dissimilar to Bush’s concept of the memex, “extended mind” theory suggests that consciousness can occur beyond skin and skull – in a notebook for example – and be contained there. They argue that the notebook can play the same role that memory plays – “the

information in the notebook functions just like the information constituting an ordinary non-occurrent belief; it just happens that this information lies beyond the skin” (Clark & Chalmers, 1998, p. 10). This notion of “active externalism” is based on “the active role of the environment in driving cognitive processes” (Clark & Chalmers, 1998, p. 10). Bachelard (2015) writes, “the unconscious is housed” (p. 32) – the home then, might function in the same way that a notebook does as a form of extended cognition: it contains information that can be reactivated and reinterpreted to tell us something about our own consciousness. Similarly, artefacts of electronic writing contain information. This is what I wanted to explore in *Somehow North*: what memories exist within spaces that might be able to tell me something about my own feelings of homesickness? How might I revisit them beyond returning to physical sites? At the time of developing *Somehow North*, I was unable to travel to the physical sites due to border closures and stay-at-home orders. Twine offered a solution to this – I could recreate these spaces within my narrative through Twine rooms (or lexias). These “rooms” granted me the organisation of space to dissect memories and follow associations with words and places in order to gain a deeper understanding of current thoughts and feelings of environmental grief. What about my environment is so important to me? Within Twine’s many “rooms” and through the practice of electronic writing, I had the opportunity, and the space, to explore these questions.

Mapping home with Twine

Evidently, Twine’s functions can be employed to compartmentalise and organise memories associated with different places in a way that augments, expands and enriches narrative for both the writer and the reader. However, the “narrative map” attached to a Twine story is also accessible by both creator and reader – a visual bird’s eye view generated automatically that presents the multitude of directions possible within the narrative. Each passage is represented by a text box, and each pathway (hyperlink) is represented by a line. Skains writes that

spatial, semantic, narrative and occasionally social navigation can be used to mimic actions of exploration, to provide associated links of meaning and to influence the reader to construct a path through a potential narrative, its metaphor structured in part through these navigational clicks and choices. (2019, p. 143)

Observing the Twine map will reveal the multitude of story options within a work. This is an additional element that the tool offers to writers of creative nonfiction about place and space – a literal map of the creative product that mirrors certain aspects of the creative process by visually outlining the role that choice plays in the narrative. Mikkonen (2007) states that a map in travel narratives indicates both “the route followed” and the trace that is “reinterpreted as a story” (p. 294). He writes that “the map, in its graphic form, also outlines possibilities of choice, possible lines of travel that are not chosen” (Mikkonen, 2007, p. 294). The map of a Twine therefore can be used as a representation of multi-directional thought within a narrative, outlining all the possible associations between memories, and the alternative experiences of the narrative. There is something about this that feels resonant of the way that we might think about

life experience as a writer, and all the possible routes that a life narrative can take – stories that have many rooms.

The link between travel metaphors and home seems somewhat contradictory in the context of this essay: in most travel narratives, home is the starting point, and travel is the anti-home. However, when writing about homesickness, the link is clear. It is the deviation from the home that causes homesickness, and homesickness is always about the tension between places. Travelling away from and then returning to the home illuminates the feelings one has about the home, and the ways our experience of home influences how we respond to and interact with external spaces. The choice-based structure of Twine allowed me to create a contained narrative thread (or a linear journey) with smaller cosmos that diverged below the overarching roof of the story – nooks and crannies that contain associated memories that expand and enrich the main narrative of my present-day experience of solastalgia. Twine’s structural benefit here is to facilitate the inclusion of these nooks and crannies in a way that augments the main narrative while delineating between them. The narrative map of the Twine displays the multitude of thought pathways that emerged during the creative process. It reflects both the nature of multi-directional thought and also the plurality of the story, which contains the plurality of the self. I was able to review the narrative map and discern which places and spaces triggered which associations, helping me to interrogate my feelings of solastalgia and homesickness, and make these connections. This afforded me a deeper understanding of my topic and helped generate a narrative that was more layered. The narrative map traced and reflected the journey of my life experience through the associative networks in my mind.

Mikkonen (2007) writes that with mapping, the reader “can be witness to the mental process by which the writer forms the representation of a world (a place, a destination, home)” (p. 298). Twine narrative maps can be accessed by readers. The inclusion of a narrative map with Twine might encourage both writers and readers to consider an alternative understanding of non-linear narrative – both in its form and in its production – as the narrative map provides a visual guide to where the writer has chosen to deviate from the main thread, and the reader can also trace where they have chosen to deviate from the main story. Skains (2019) claims that these choices presented to the reader in the navigation of text activate the same “cognitive processes in the reader to construct the text as the writer engaged in creating it” (p. 144), and Mikkonen (2007) writes, “the traveller’s movement and mental processing ... realise the potential of space as a practised place” (p. 298). Analysing the narrative map and the choices made by both writer and reader provide an added layer to the interpretation of life narratives constructed in Twine by demonstrating how agency and choice influence individual experience. This idea of “practised place” resonates with Casey’s (1997) theory of place as an event. Casey (1997) writes that with place, “things happen in it, but it happens too – it has its own historicity, its own eventmentality” (p. xxv) and “it is always in flux, not ‘entitative’ but ‘eventmental’, not ‘a thing’ but something ‘in process’” (p. 337). And, as Joyce claims, electronic text replaces itself (1997): hypertext is eventmental in the same way that place is. The Twine narrative map might be a way for a writer to reflect on how writing place is similar to how we experience place – eventmental, and something that is always in process. Life, too, is eventmental. The narrative

map provides a clear visualisation of the different pathways a narrative about place might take. Given this is generated automatically, it is a feature of the tool that can only be achieved through digitisation. This feature might help to reflect that version of the self that is "distributed, networked and plural" (Smith & Watson, p. 190). The narrative map in Twine therefore encourages a new way of thinking about life narrative structure, less as a linear experience, but more as an event, or something to participate in and influence. Something to relive, or reinterpret, and to approach from different angles. This provides an alternative way to generate, consume and analyse life narrative about place and space that is more reflective of the temporal and plural nature of place.

Travel metaphors for writing non-linear space

In this way, the travel metaphor seems fitting for writing about home. For a child, the home is an entire universe, and can be explored with a map. And in our memories, if we have lived in multiple homes, or have memories of a home with many different spaces that contain different core memories – we can revisit these rooms by exploring the different spaces in our mind. Mikkonen (2007) writes: "Travel is always to some extent threatening to be multi-directional and even 'non-narrative' because too much can be recounted, even the boring and uninteresting" (p. 297). While travelling between these different home spaces in my mind, Twine's hyperlink functionality allowed me to recount all that can be recounted about a place, even "the boring and uninteresting", which may not serve the main narrative thread, but provide insight into certain emotions. In this way, Twine offers life writers a way to organise and compartmentalise these mundane details. In a traditional piece of life writing about home or space, the writer is confined to the spatial limits of a page. Structural techniques generally used by writers of creative nonfiction to deviate from the main narrative include flashbacks, vignettes or braided narratives. However, one of the offerings of digital platforms like Twine is the ability to deviate from the main narrative thread and return to it seamlessly. The benefit of this for a creative writer is that it provides flexibility of thought, and to arrange and include these mundane details on which the narrative is built. Clicking a hyperlink is like opening a door to a separate space a writer might wish to put some clutter that may or may not be useful later. When opening these links, I felt as though I was travelling – physically, mentally and virtually – from room to room. Mikkonen claims that the travel metaphor in writing "helps to raise the question of the process-versus-product aspect of narrative in a palpable way: how to represent freedom and contingency in a structure?" (2007, p. 301-2). And in Bachelard's (2015) *Poetics of Space* he writes, "A lock is a psychological threshold" (p. 81). By virtually and mentally "travelling" between different spaces of Twine passages, I found this granted me a freedom that allowed me to "unlock" and reinterpret memories that were attached to different physical spaces, facilitating a temporally and spatially multi-layered narrative.

Using the functionality of Twine that includes passages connected via hyperlink allowed me to explore psychological spaces in houses, and resonates with Bachelard's (2015) claim that the house allows us to more clearly delineate between our memories. He writes: "if the house is a bit elaborate, if it has a cellar and a garret and nooks and corridors, our memories have refuges

that are all the more clearly delineated" (Bachelard, 2015, p. 30). This led me to consider that the creative capabilities of Twine – including a "choice-based" structure – might allow writers to explore space in a non-linear and variable mode that feels more like moving through space. In this way, Twine's structure and generative function might reflect the practice of crafting nonfiction writing about place and space. During the research process, a writer will often follow different tangents and rabbit holes that spawn from one idea during the research process before returning to the initial thread: "Writing is thinking, writing is analysis," note Richardson and Adams St. Pierre (2005), and "writing is indeed a seductive and tangled method of discovery" (p. 827). This tangled method of discovery can be reflected in the generative functions of the Twine platform, and the writer's own movement between passages. Twine takes the reader on a short journey off the main path, with several different outcomes, meaning readers can have variable experiences of the same story, in the same way travellers might have variable experiences of the same place based on their choices. Mikkonen (2007) writes: "In some cases, travel narratives can make it difficult to discern chronology or causal order at all, by emphasising the traveller's uncertainty, wandering or openness to multiple stories and memories" (p. 297). Twine then presents the opportunity for writers to recreate the creative process for a reader. Mikkonen (2007) claims that "the traveller's viewpoint introduces a sense of consequence to the sequence of places and events" (p. 302). In this context, the traveller is both the writer, travelling through their own memories, and the reader experiencing the text and navigating the map with their own sense of agency. The multi-directional and non-linear experience of Twine provides an augmented experience of a narrative about place, that is inherently eventmental and plural, and can reflect the process of narrative production, including the "boring and uninteresting" (Mikkonen, 2007, p. 297) – it invites the reader to wander into the writer's attic.

Conclusion

The process of creating a personal essay on homesickness through Twine is just an example of how digital tools might facilitate expanded creative life writing practice about place and space. By considering place as a container of memory, Twine can be a vehicle to activate, categorise, delineate and reinterpret these memories of place. In my essay, Twine served most beneficially as a generative tool to explore the topic of homesickness and solastalgia, to create a more layered narrative, and to forge unexpected links between emotions and ideas. The main functionalities of Twine – that is hypertext technology that permits the creation of non-linear narratives – can offer writers flexibility to explore associated ideas beyond the main narrative thread in a way that reflects the process of remembering. The freedom of writing in this digital space is that the writer has many rooms where they might store ideas or associations to enrich their narrative. The Twine narrative map is an additional element of the tool that can offer both writers and readers deeper insight into the work through the ability to visually examine the multi-directional pathways of life experience. Twine can support multi-directional thoughts and represent the plurality of the self, memory, place and events, and can be harnessed by life writers of creative nonfiction to more dynamically explore and represent the experience of moving and living through place and space.

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