



Australasian  
Association  
of Writing  
Programs

# TEXT

Journal of writing and writing courses

ISSN: 1327-9556 | <https://textjournal.scholasticahq.com/>

*University of the Sunshine Coast and Independent Scholar*

## **Ginna Brock and Malcolm Holz**

### *Introduction: The Writer's Place*

Spatial psychology, a multidisciplinary field combining psychology, neuroscience, and environmental studies, investigates the relationship between individuals and their spatial surroundings (Montello 1998, pg. 143). Grounded in the fundamental notion that cognition is not solely confined to the mind but is intricately intertwined with the spatial environments in which individuals operate, spatial psychology and the psychology of place seek to unravel the cognitive processes, behavioural patterns, and emotional responses that unfold within specific spatial contexts (Poshansky, Fabian, Kaminoff 1983, pg.57). Spatial psychology addresses questions related to how humans perceive, process, and navigate space, encompassing both physical and virtual realms.

The fusion of spatial psychology and creativity unravels a captivating narrative of how the psychology of place shapes and informs the intricacies of human imagination, artistic expression, and innovative thinking. There is a dynamic interplay between the psychology of place and creativity, providing insight into the nuanced ways in which the spaces we inhabit become catalysts for inspiration, imagination, and innovation. The psychology of place, which draws on environmental psychology, cognitive science, and urban studies, examines the connections between individuals and their physical surroundings (Relph 1976; Liu & Freestone, 2016). Beyond the functionalities of spaces, the psychological dimensions of place consider how the built environment, natural landscapes, and cultural contexts evoke emotional responses, shape perceptions, and modulate cognitive processes (Finke, Ward, & Smith, 1992; Canter, 2024). The arrangement of physical environments, the ambiance of a workspace, and the cultural significance of a place become integral elements in the creative process. The psychology of place influences the cognitive mechanisms underpinning creativity, including divergent thinking, associative processes, and the synthesis of disparate ideas (Thoring et al., 2020). Considering the intersection between spatial psychology and creativity reveals a symbiotic relationship between the mind and the places it encounters. This academic inquiry not only seeks to deepen the theoretical understanding of how the psychology of place informs creativity but also holds practical implications for the design of spaces that nurture and amplify human imagination and artistic expression.

There has long been a fascination about the location in which authors write. In fact, many go on literary pilgrimages to visit the sites of their most beloved authors. These treks could be

seen as an attempt to glimpse into the author's creative space; to see the physical location where they brought their stories into existence. The fascination with authors' writing rooms also stems from a desire to understand the creative process and gain insights into the environment that fosters literary vision. It is almost as though some people believe that if they could replicate the creative space of a successful author, then they, too, would be successful in their creative pursuits. However, no matter how exact the replication, a true emulation of place cannot fully be achieved. 'Place' encapsulates both the physical space and the individual person – the two entities work in tandem to create a specific and highly personalised place. There is a clear difference between concepts of space versus concepts of place. Space is usually concerned with the abstract and geometric dimensions – the physical or conceptual expanse without its own inherent qualities – almost like a canvas waiting to be filled (Nisha 2022, pg.9). Place, on the other hand, is more specific and usually imbued with a sense of the locale, identity, and human experience – in other words place provides context for the space (Butler and Sinclair 2020, pg.1). Yi-Fu Tuan balances the two concepts of space and place in this manner, 'place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other' (1977, p.6). This fully encapsulates the idea that place is space imbued with meaning.

With this thought in mind, this special issue of *TEXT* allowed authors the chance to reflect on places of production and to consider (either critically or creatively) the impact of place on their creative ponderings, creative process, and creative products. We asked contributors to consider the following questions:

- What are the characteristics of the writer's (preferred or limited) place of writing, and how important is the articulation/decoration/function of that place in the creative process e.g., the writer's chair, desk, bookcase, pictures, music, temperature?
- What is the writer's experience – how does the writer 'feel' when writing – and how does the place of writing influence that experience, the creative process, and creative outputs; can the place be imagined/ virtual; how does technology affect the planning or design of the writing space; what does the writing in that place smell or taste like?
- Does the writer (or their editor?) feel that the work created in a place of the writer's own making is of a higher quality than if produced in a place they would prefer not to be?
- Is the writer's place only/solely the mind/body, and if so, what goes on in writing in that place?

The contributions did not disappoint. The range could be distilled in a myriad of ways, but for the purposes of this issue, three key concepts emerged: creative ponderings on the importance of place, the impact of specific places on the creative process, and creative products that reflect place in practice.

The articles and contributions presented in this collection offer a compelling look into the diverse facets of the writer's place, encompassing creative ponderings, intricate processes, and the tangible products that emerge from these contemplative spaces. The interplay between the psychology of place and the author's creative output becomes a central theme, revealing the nuanced relationships between the physical environment, the mind's inner workings, and the timeless pursuit of creative excellence.

### **Creative Ponderings on the Importance of Place**

The first contribution comes from Nike Sulway, Maria Arena, and Tara East, three academics who reflect on Virginia Woolf's essay, "A Room of One's Own," and discuss the limitations of Woolf's utopian vision for women writers. The article analyses contemporary challenges

faced by writers, emphasising economic disparities and the impact of such disparities. The section titled "A quiet room" examines the historical context of writers, particularly women, attempting to find solitude for writing. It addresses the challenges of balancing writing with caregiving responsibilities and the historical lack of writing spaces for women. The article draws parallels between Woolf's utopian vision and Ursula K Le Guin's short story, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," discussing the moral dilemmas and disappointments inherent in utopian ideals. The authors creatively weave in their own ideal writing utopias, while simultaneously expressing concerns about utopias and the potential cost of hopeful visions. The authors discuss hope as a critical methodology and the need for collective action to envision a more inclusive utopia for writers. They emphasise the importance of valuing artists' contributions to society and call for a post-work utopia.

The next contribution to the creative ponderings section comes from Angeliki Ypsilanti who explores the relationship between thinking and writing, accentuating the importance of defamiliarisation and refamiliarisation in the creative process. The author reflects on personal experience and draws on literary and linguistic theories to delve into the dynamics of thought maturation into writing. The article touches on the interplay between familiar harmony and disharmony, raising questions about habituation and the writer's responsibility in rendering everything familiar. It explores the challenge of making everything strange, encouraging the reader to refamiliarise the unfamiliar. The author shares a personal poem, "No Writing Voice to the Thinking Noise," expressing the dilemma of conveying thoughts through writing. The article also explores the role of memory in defamiliarisation, emphasising the importance of safeguarding memory as a functional link between artfulness and everyday thought. The author reflects on personal experiences related to the displacement and replacement of objects in their living space. The article concludes by pondering the possibility of re-placement in relation to defamiliarised and refamiliarised objects and ideas.

The final article in the creative ponderings section comes from Paul Magee who explores the relationship between poetry and place, using CD Wright's work "One Big Self" as a starting point. Magee discusses the unconventional structure of the text, which combines prose and verse, and the absence of physical descriptions of the prison environment. The article then presents a broader discussion about the nature of poetry and its relation to place. The author draws on interviews conducted with 75 celebrated Anglophone poets as part of a research project. Contrary to the author's initial expectations, many poets, especially those from the United States, expressed a strong connection to their national identity when asked about their work. The article suggests that, despite poetry's tendency to question and unsettle spatial boundaries, poets often embrace national labels, potentially due to societal expectations and the influence of cultural and political contexts. The article further explores poets' perspectives on national identification. Some poets resist the idea of national labels, associating it with an inferiority complex. However, there is a recognition that international exchanges can shape national identity through language use and habits. The author analyses the peculiarities of poets' language use, emphasising the "strangeness" of their linguistic practices. Despite claiming national provenance, poets use phrases that are not typical of their geographical location. The question arises of how poets can be simultaneously "odd" to and "defined" by the local tongue. Ultimately, the author suggests that poets operate at the border between the restricted, conventional use of language constructions and the vast field of all possible uses. Poets find an innate foreignness in the linguistic culture, which simultaneously draws them back to the local despite its constraints.

## **Impact of Specific Places on the Creative Process**

In the first contribution to analysis of specific creative places, Malcom Holz discusses the allure of having a personal space, specifically a rustic and remote “hut,” for creative writing. Drawing inspiration from Virginia Woolf’s essay “A Room of One’s Own,” the article explores the reasons why writers, assuming financial independence, are drawn to such spaces. The concept of the “hut” is explored poetically, emphasising its potential as a profound and symbolic dwelling place for writers. Holz reflects on his personal experiences and a passion for small places, citing Christopher Alexander’s ideas on pattern languages and the potential for creating “poetic dwelling places.” The article examines the significance of the hut in various writers’ lives. These writers chose small, simple, and often rustic spaces for their creative endeavours. The exploration extends to the broader concept of hermitages, with a focus on the purposeful solitude sought by hermits throughout history. The article categorises hermits into groups based on their motivations, such as protestors, pilgrims, and pursuers of solitude. The author discusses the contemporary fascination with “tiny houses” and writer’s retreats, accentuating the affordability and symbolic appeal of the hut. The article also touches on the benefits of being in nature, particularly in mountainous locations, and how such environments can positively influence physical and mental well-being.

In the second article of this section, Anna Cairney discusses the relationship between natural light and the genre of writing in a university writing centre, drawing from an ethnographic study. The author explores how students’ physical orientation toward or away from natural light is influenced by the type of writing they are engaged in, whether it’s formative or summative. Formative writing, which involves feedback and learning during the writing process, is associated with facing natural light, while summative writing, which evaluates overall performance, is associated with facing away from the light. The study raises questions about the design of writing centres and the implications of space for creative and intellectual pursuits. The findings suggest that the purpose of writing is a key factor in determining the writer’s physical position in relation to natural light, with potential implications for writing productivity and creativity. The article emphasises the importance of considering physical spaces for intellectual activity and suggests that further research is needed in this area.

The final article analysing impact of specific places on creative process, Ilka Tampke depicts an experience of walking in a forest and the profound impact it has on the author’s thinking and creative process as a novelist. The author vividly depicts the transformation that occurs during forest walks, emphasising the sensory and biological connections between the forest environment and the author’s own body. The passage explores the porous boundaries between the author and the forest, both biologically and creatively. Ilka reflects on how the forest influences not only physical well-being, as supported by scientific studies on the positive effects of nature on health, but also cognitive processes and creativity. The forest becomes a source of inspiration, with the author noting that walking in the forest consistently leads to the generation of ideas, images, and narrative events for writing. The text delves into various theoretical frameworks, from psychological concepts like spontaneous attention to philosophical perspectives on the interconnectedness of nature and human thinking. The author challenges the traditional view of the singular human author, suggesting that the forest itself may hold a legitimate claim to authorial acknowledgement for works developed within its realm. The author acknowledges the complexity of the forest, highlighting its regrowth after logging and its layered significance, including ecological, historical, political, and spiritual dimensions. The forest is portrayed as both a material entity and a metaphor, evoking a sense of entanglement, diversity, and interconnectedness. The article encourages a rethinking of the traditional boundaries between human creativity and the natural world, raising questions about

the origins of thought, language, and authorship in the context of a deep and immersive relationship with the forest.

### **Creative Products that Reflect Place in Practice**

In “Broken Bodies, Fractured Places,” Carly-Jay Metcalfe delves into personal experience with Cystic Fibrosis and how it has shaped the author’s relationship with hospitals. The narrative explores the author’s life from childhood, through hospitalisations and medical procedures, to a double lung transplant. The hospital bed serves as a symbolic anchor, representing the intersection of birth and death, and becomes a space where the author finds agency and creativity despite the confinement. Metcalfe reflects on the dehumanising aspects of medical care in the late 20th century, where the author was often seen as a set of symptoms rather than a person. Hospital time is described as existing in a liminal space, and the author shares experiences of writing in hospital beds, using creative expression as a means of resisting confinement. The narrative highlights the hospital as a complex environment, ranging from a playground for the sick to a *memento mori*, where the author confronts death and the loss of friends. Metcalfe describes the hospital bed as a place of both vulnerability and control, where writing can be seen as a reclamation of body. Ultimately, the narrative contemplates the nature of healing, asserting that while medicine may save lives, it does not necessarily bring healing. The act of writing is portrayed as a powerful tool for the author to resist silencing, find agency, and navigate the complexities of illness, survival, and rebirth.

In the second article on creative products influenced by place, George Haddad explores the relationship between the writer’s place and creative output. The research involves three experiments focused on the writer’s desk. Haddad argues that the desk’s physical location is not instrumental to creative output and uses queer phenomenology to analyse perception and orientation. The first experiment involves writing while seated at the desk. The data suggests a turning away from the desk, emphasising a queer phenomenology that shifts focus from the desk to the surrounding environment. Experiment two involves writing about the desk from a beach, and surprisingly, the writing becomes more English, romantic, and narrative-like, departing from the expected queer perspective associated with the beach. Experiment three explores writing about the desk while blindfolded and seated at it. The blindfold disrupts familiarity, making the desk an object of sensory experience, yet the writing remains self-conscious and reflective, emphasising personal vulnerability. Collectively, the experiments indicate that the writer’s creative output is not tied to a specific desk or location. Instead, it is influenced by individual consciousness, unique sensibilities, and the impulse to draw from personal experiences and memories. The symbolic significance of the desk as a productive writing place is challenged, suggesting that perception, orientation, and memory play crucial roles in creative output, untethered to a physical space.

In the final contribution to the creative products section, Georgia Rose Phillips presents a collection of poems exploring the relationship between a writer’s place and the phenomenological aspects of literary composition. Each poem reflects different writing places and their impact on the creative process. The poem “Logos” captures the essence of arrival and exploration, blending anticipation with modernity. The language is rich and evocative, creating vivid images that invite the reader to experience the location. “Franklin Street” paints a picture of a room in the city, employing vivid and imaginative descriptions. The optical illusion of the room, with clear glass folded into black ceramic and paintings hung sideways, creates a sense of disorientation. In “St. Peters,” the poet presents a secluded and Edenic space, offering a contrast to the urban settings explored in the previous poems. The imagery of a hermit hut

shaped like a chapel and the vibrancy of the surroundings evoke a sense of renewal and connection with nature. “Marion” explores the suburban landscape, employing a telephoto lens-like perspective to depict the wide landscape and broad houses. The contrast between the ordinary and the profound is palpable, with the poem delving into the themes of birth, aging, and death. “The Dreamhouse” investigates the recesses of the mind, exploring the concept of an idealised place beyond pleasure. The imagery of a tranquil house, surrounded by nature and warmth, creates a sense of longing and escape. Overall, these poems showcase a keen attention to detail, vivid imagery, and a specific use of language to evoke complex emotions and atmospheres. Each poem explores different facets of human and creative experiences, from the modern and surreal to the natural and dreamlike, creating a diverse and engaging collection.

The exploration of the psychology of place undertaken by the contributors delineates a sophisticated understanding of the intricate relationship between physical environments and the nuanced processes of creative ideation. Far beyond its ontological status as a mere spatial backdrop, place embodies a fusion of physical locale, individual identity, and the profound semiotic significations ascribed to both. The Tuanian dichotomy distinguishing between space as freedom and place as security reverberates, underscoring the fundamental import of the psychology of place as a canvas where creativity unfolds. This special issue of *TEXT* stands as a scholarly and practical vantage point, offering authors the opportunity to deliberate upon sites of production and ruminate upon the consequential influence of place on the cognitive, procedural, and productive dimensions of creativity. This collection serves as an invitation – an invitation to ponder the characteristics of our own creative spaces, to reflect on the impact of our environments on our creative processes, and to recognise the profound connection between place and the narratives we bring into existence.

## References

- Butler, A. & Sinclair, K.A. (2020). Place matters: A critical review of place inquiry and spatial methods in education research. *Review of Research in Education* 44(1), 64–96. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X20903303>.
- Canter, D. (2024). *Readings on the Psychology of Place*. Routledge.
- Finke, R.A., Ward, T.B., Smith, S.M. (1992). *Creative cognition: Theory, research, and applications*. MIT Press.
- Liu, E & Freestone, R. (2016). Revisiting place and placelessness. In R. Freestone & E. Liu (Eds.), *Place and placelessness revisited*. Routledge.
- Montello, D.R. (1998). A New Framework for Understanding the Acquisition of Spatial Knowledge in Large-Scale Environments. In M.J. Egenhofer & R.G. Golledge (Eds.), *Spatial and temporal reasoning in geographic information systems*, pp. 143–154. Oxford University Press.
- Nisha, B. (2022). Lost in imagined space: A psychoanalysis of participatory design. *Design Studies*. Volume 81, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.destud.2022.101108>.
- Proshansky, H.M., Fabian, A.K., Kaminoff, R. (1983). Place-identity: Physical world socialization of the self. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 3(1), 57–83. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-4944\(83\)80021-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-4944(83)80021-8)
- Relph, E.C. (1976). *Place and placelessness*. Pion.
- Thoring, K., Gonçalves, M., Mueller, R., Desmet, P., & Badke-Schaub, P. (2021). The architecture of creativity: Toward a causal theory of creative workspace design. *International Journal of Design* [Online] 15:2. <https://www.ijdesign.org/index.php/IJDesign/article/view/4061/947>
- Tuan, Y. (1977). *Space and place: The perspective of experience*. University of Minnesota Press.

**Acknowledgements:**

We send our thanks to the generous authors for their contributions and willingness to ponder the significance of place in their creative process and products. We also offer our thanks to the phenomenal peer reviewers who helped to shape these contributions. We also thank the *TEXT* Special Issues editorial team – Ben Stubbs and Ella Jeffery – for their support and insights.

Ginna Brock is a lecturer in Creative Writing and English Literature at the University of the Sunshine Coast. Her research focuses on philosophical concepts of belonging, along with representations of connectivity within artistic expressions. Ginna has published in scriptwriting and poetry. In 2017, Ginna became a fellow with the Higher Education Academy. Ginna is part of the editorial collective for *Social Alternatives* and recently edited the 2nd edition of the 2023 prose offerings for *Meniscus*.

Malcolm Holz is a veteran urban and regional planner, seasoned building and urban designer, independent scholar, conceptual, minimalist sketch artist, and practising musician. Malcolm's personal, professional, and philosophical passions are planning, designing, building, and dwelling in small places which inspire creativity and reflectivity.