Research article

Public art tourism: Atmospheric stories in city margins

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Cities play a pivotal role in progressing cultural tourism, embracing everyday life, where particular cityscapes afford a diversity of cultural practices. The ethnographic storying of two city public artworks presents a backcloth of historical, cultural and religio-political outlooks. Public art and idiosyncratic atmospherics provide conflicting narratives of how pubic art attends wider religion-tourism concerns. Both public artworks observe 'together-apart' imaginings of a past-present legacy. This study traces their effect, through researcher short vignettes, visual culture and poetic reflection. This study contributes to the religion-tourism nexus, drawing on political, cultural, religious and social perspectives, which underpin these urban tourism sites. Public art has to make sense, have cultural competence and resonate with citizens.
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Introduction

Studying tourism and religion today should transcend disciplinary boundaries and should involve an interpretative methodology …and…tell "stories" from cultural, political, religious and social perspectives (Collins-Kreiner, 2020, p. 19).

What about the religion-tourism nexus?

Collins-Kreiner (2020) advocates an interpretivist approach to capture wider experiences of the religion-tourism nexus. Cities are found to play a pivotal role in progressing cultural tourism where focus has shifted from more elitist forms, to embrace everyday life beyond scripted and bounded offerings (Richards, 2022, p. 30). This has fuelled change in urban spaces, with particular cityscapes affording a diversity of cultural practices. This shift has fashioned 'monocultural' scapes within city boundaries and led to growing visitor incursion in community settings. The ethnographic storying of two cityscapes, Belfast and Derry, afforded wider catching of historical, cultural and religio-political outlooks, beyond 'disciplinary boundaries' (Collins-Kreiner, 2020). The authors explore the concept of "idiosyncratic atmospherics," defined as unscripted, distinctive and unexpected experiences. Our study explores idiosyncratic atmospherics from a position of momentarity, where researcher-visitors acknowledge the presence that attends unscripted forms of atmospherics, afforded by public art at city margins. "Momentarity is a point in time experienced in its full multisensory presence and associated layers of meaning… or re-experienced in recollection elicited by the researcher,"

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(Sherry, 2021). Representing momentarity is a challenge for any genre, and disciplinary alternatives, hybrids and experiential experiments are arising in response to this provocation. Stylistically, our account merges conventional and emergent modes of representation. We attempt to create a hybrid format that accurately portrays stakeholder experience of aspects of the tourism scene. The melding of wider tourism and religious viewpoints deliberated in urban contexts, recalling idiosyncratic atmospheric moments unfolding within temporal spaces (Bristow & Jenkins, 2020) those city destinations rouse. Research at the religious tourism nexus tends to ground understanding as one of only contestation and conflict, orchestrated by religious, political and tourist mediations (Heydari Chianeh et al., 2018; Mora-Torres et al., 2016).

The stories travelled here present a permanent and transient staying of monocultural-scapes. From the margins of Belfast city (North and West) in Idiosyncratic Atmospherics 1, where public art (i.e. political murals) reflects dark tourism themes (i.e. conflict, violence, paramilitarism) in community settings, to progress Nationalist and Unionist ideologies (Martini & Buda, 2020). Idiosyncratic Atmospherics 2, duly attends the storying of a public art installation, the Temple, where occasion for religious conflict and potential for religious change is tendered through the shared building and burning of a transient artwork in Derry city (Northern Ireland). Kong's study (2010, p. 763) argues for, "contribut[ions] to an understanding of larger social and political events… including religious conflict and religious change." Derry, a highly divided community, where religious-political division endures and citizenry labour under a legacy of conflict (Nyaupane & Timothy, 2010), yet seek reconciliation to recognize trauma as one community. Collins-Kreiner (2020), pp.19, 20) observes that "… [Religious tourism] enhances personal and societal transformation by providing experiences that cause people to reflect on their lives" and calls for research that will help us "… understand how concepts such as scale, space, location, place attachment, place identity, sense of community, identity, and image alter the perception of and further refine the field of religion and tourism. What insights can religious sites provide us about a governing regime? Majority-minority relations? Inter-group tensions and minority conflicts? Local politics? Perceptions of landscape dominance? The politicization of religion? The rise of identity politics through tourism?" The installations that prompt our reflections attuned to these issues. Transformative tourism, "aims at triggering a disorienting dilemma by pushing tourists out of their comfort zone, encouraging them to self-reflect about the discomfort felt, leading them to value other cultures more …" (Soulard et al., 2021). Novelli et al. (2012), p. 1464) consider that "inter-community collaborative tourism developments have the potential to offer innovative business opportunities and accelerate the healing process."

Kirillova and Wassler (2020) note the general neglect of aesthetics in tourism research, and call for deeper attention to the built environment, such as architecture and landscape, multisensory cues that induce pleasure and connote authenticity, and the role of local residents in the co-creation of atmosphere. Every item in the artscape "does reconciliation as a material discursive object made through multiple stories;" such items "engage particular ethics and invite transformative encounters" (Stinson et al., 2022). We tack between the material, the sensuous and the interpersonal in our interpretation of complex artscapes. Our field sites are the occasion of pilgrimage, anchored by material sacra (Higgins & Hamilton, 2020) that are in one case enduring and the other evanescent. Sensitively interpreted (given that one promotes *alienatio* the other *communitas*), they can be seen to encourage a "hopeful" view of tourism centered on human dignity, the universality of human rights, the public good, peace and social justice, integration, aesthetics and beauty, and co-transformative learning (Pritchard et al., 2011, pp. 947–954). Collectively, the sites are an example of "theoplacity," in which visitants' authentic experience emerges at the intersection of place, belief and action (Belhassen et al., 2008, p. 669).

Substantively, our account emerges at the intersection of three of the most compelling dimensions that shape the nature of atmospherics, whether from an experiential or design perspective: *genius loci*, religion and aesthetics. *Genius loci* is the distinctive character or spirit of a place. Volgger (2019) believes that a successful tourist scene enacts *genius loci* as a contextual storyline through its attractions. The felt experience of dark tourism sites have been neglected by researchers (Boyd, 2019); we need to understand how "tourists in dark places make sense of difficult and often contested places through … emotions, affects, thoughts, social, cultural, and spatial interactions," (Martini & Buda, 2020, pp. 680, 685). The socio-religious tension of ethno-nationalism inform the visceral narrative of our field sites. We lament the high cost of ethno cultural identity maintenance in an antagonistic key, and recognize the challenge of discovering and promoting a synergistic one. We introduce the reader to these cities through the artwork of their traumatic heritage, but strive to emphasize the hopeful vision of a cross-community solidarity that recent aesthetic interventions portend: the post-conflict prospect of a consociational or shared future that traumaturgy promises to usher in.

Method

Atmospherics and public art

Arts-based research approaches have been employed in consumer research (Sherry, 2021). Our rendering joins a nascent project in ethnography seeking to merge humanistic and social scientific modes of inquiry (Causey, 2017; Culhane & Elliott, 2016; Howes, 2019; McGranahan, 2020; Taussig, 2011) in a way that deepens engagement with complex artscapes and challenges representation to move beyond "descriptive fidelity" to "poetic invention" (McLean, 2017, pp. 152–153). We evoke our immersion in the artscape to provoke both a cognitive and visceral response in the reader, along the lines of the "scholartistry" (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2018, p. 5) produced by consumer researchers such as, Downey (2019), Sherry (2021, 2022), Sherry and Kozinets (2022), and Rojas-Gaviria and Canniford (2022). Our data draws from field notes, interviews, layered with videography, photography and poetry, to catch immersion from an inimitable positionality as researchers, in a two-city context, over the period 2012–2019. Poetry streamed from field notes, interviews and fleeting conversations, calling out emotions and veiled vulnerabilities at each public art offering (Downey, 2019; Sherry & Schouten, 2002).

Fig. 1. Falls Road mural (Nationalist).

Poetic reflection (Downey, 2022) catches challenging moments and musings, offering catharsis for fractured times, which linger unobserved and undeclared (Preece et al., 2022). The authors responded in the language of emotion and vulnerability, catching moments for researchers and researched, through weaving traditional academic text with unexpected styles, creating a harmonizing meld of idiosyncratic atmospherics in momentarity. Poetic inquiry (Prendergast, 2020; Vincent, 2018) as an arts-based methodology provokes musings across the data collection process. As Prendergast (2015), p. 683) contends, poetry adapts, "to 'crystallize' and present findings in both aesthetic and accessible forms." Attuned to the different nuances haunting each public art offering, opportunities for hybridity afforded (Downey, 2022). The agility to tack emotional, cultural, religio-political and social paths, of cities impregnated with conflicting histories (Steadman et al., 2020) to, "shed[ding] light on the invisible, ... structural histories which orient or disorient subjects," (Preece et al., 2022, p. 360), caught here. Public art, performed in discrete ways arrest atmospheres, the authors re-awaken idiosyncratic atmospheres with, "synchronously crafted poems, that sprout and fly in the same moment," (Borhani, 2022, p. 501) to catch, "itself-ness," (Wolff, 1972, p. 453).

The mural journey (2012) overlapped in 2015 with the Temple in Derry. This was an acute time for murals, with overtly politicized offerings reinforcing community division. Government Initiatives were promoting more enlightened, as opposed to divisive imagery. It was an optimal time for observation, through guided and solo walking tours, and black taxi tours by key community members, offering bespoke storying and opportunities for idiosyncratic atmospherics to arise. Photography and interviews undertaken with key players (muralists, community leaders, political tour guides, and government bodies) across divided city communities during attendance at commemoration parades and other public artscapes, rich with citizen narratives. Our journeys unpack some of the cultural storying of each city.

Cultural context: Belfast

Atmospheres are understood as contingent on individual relational engagement (Drinkwater et al., 2022) assisted by scaffolding of place, people and objects. Atmosphere pulsates through storying, engendering a powerful effect on emotions. The murals premised on century-old traditions, deliver naïve street artworks, laced with political and religious iconography, mark out urbanity and cultural identity, reflective of religious affiliation (Downey & Sherry, 2014; Visconti et al., 2010; Warner, 2002). Murals act as communicators of self to self, and to others (Cody, 2011), exuding agency (Rolston, 2003) in changing artwork (Latour, 2005). The two communities draw on storying to progress political ideologies. Unionists commemorate battles (i.e. Battle of the Boyne, 1690) denoting affiliation to the union and pronounced pageantry (i.e. 12th July Orange Festival). Nationalist murals emerging in the Troubles (1968–1998) serve to immortalize key Irish Republican figures (e.g. Bobby Sands, Hunger Striker, 1981). Murals essentially story paramilitarism and progress political desires, inclusive of global affiliations (Fig. 1, Falls Road mural, (Rolston, 2003; Vannais, 2001). Government and cultural initiatives try to move communities from aggressive paramilitary depictions; however, these persist, 'hanging' in sectarian communities, commanding presence (Fig. 2).

Idiosyncratic atmospherics 1: political tourism (murals) in Belfast (2012–2015)

The researchers recall individual stories of mono-community mural visitations, unexpected and particular in arrival. The stories capture moments of idiosyncratic atmospherics, bound in religious-tourism tradition. The storying expressed in vignettes, comprises narrative, autophoto and autopoetic styles, where layering is tendered in, *Shankill Road 2012*, *Tea for two at Twadell*, *Memorial Gardening* and *Out for a pint with the Muralists*.

Fig. 2. Divisive Mural (Unionist).

Shankill Road 2012
We came to watch the big parade
Cameras aloft to catch the leaving,
Kerbsides teeming with supporters
Draped in red, blue, white and orange,
Cheered and sang; our festival cut short
When a stranger's hand appeared, to halt
All visual capture of the moment. Images
Surrendered. Anonymity preserved of
Those identities who march this community

For the researchers this moment ignited a sense of fear as to what had otherwise been a convivial setting. The unexpectedness of expression, the making reference to symbols entrenched in conflict times, idiosyncratic and disturbing (Bettelheim, 1976). The realisation that we were caught for a moment in the past, recalling atrocities carried out on the Shankill Road, and the faces of paramilitaries holding currency, still palpable. In terms of Derrida's enigma of 'absent presence', these shadows of a dark past ooze a formidable force. The same senses, recalled travelling ghost trains or riding big dippers, now eclipsed, by what seemed as pretty innocent, the taking of photographs, heralded in a dark atmosphere, marking out researchers as outsiders. Cameras were put away and unease stayed our travelling companion, as we tried to get back into the 'vestaval spirit' (Bradford & Sherry, 2015) despite draining of pallor and conversation. Marked as outsiders, this had potential to rouse wider community interest in our presence, as we stayed for the passing of community bands and leaders, to commemorate the 'mini twelfth.' Key identities (paramilitary) forming the first line of the parade, symbolic in terms of myth and folklore, understood by the community as past-presence. Active in the city margins (Shields, 2013); such personalities attract surveillance, security and safety from their respective communities. For the researchers, we sensed our presence 'alien,' yet we remained to cheer the band parade. A short reflection penned, captures the scene, as no images survived the wash.

We remained as robotic insiders
Making appropriate noises, as we
Cheered the flanks of music-makers,
Drumming and fluting, into town. The
Endless chorus of dancing and merry
-making bounced around, as we continued
To covertly watch, for the face who happened
Our space, stealing the ingenuousness of the day

Tea for two at Twadell

Idiosyncratic atmospherics play heavily in ethnographic gazing of these religio-political cityscapes. Its relativeness in personal responses experienced when negotiating different ethnonationalities highly reliant on happenings along the way

(Drinkwater et al., 2022). These happenings co-produced by researchers, citizens and others, offer opportunities for storying at sites of trauma. Imagine the scene, a short Black Taxi ride (the preferred vehicles of travel over the 'Troubles') holds an air of mystery about who is driving them, who travels in them and the locale they service. Even in post conflict times, there is hesitancy by some taxi drivers to accommodate particular travel destinations. Booking a taxi for pick-up, to attend an interview with key citizens at an interface site (where nationalist and unionist communities reside side by side), illustrates this. When the researchers gave details of where they wanted to go, the taxi driver kept insisting that we should not, it was dangerous and he would have to let us out before our drop-off point. We weighed up the situation, continued on, disembarking at a spot where the taxi driver felt safe. He bid us farewell and told us to be careful. Excerpt from, 'let them home,' captures the moment:

> our catholic cabbie barks an ardent warning.
> as he probes the barricades,
> 'd'hose are bahd bahnds,
> d'hose are bahd bahnds'
> staccato mantra sputtered like a curse,
> and mutterings about a dangerous uda,
> chicago accent marks me for a culchie.
> he might spare with his conductor's finger,
> convulsive vehemence, good heart,
> and daggers shot my clearly clueless partner,
> her patience and her warrant as good shepherd.
> tried on that drive beyond the psni line.
> triangulating data and shared space.

This unexpected turn of events, did halt our steps, yet we carried on to the caravan situated on a corner site, at the junction of the interface. Trees surrounded it and gates manned by what one would term, 'security'. We signalled to the 'guard' who we were and why here (to speak with Billy). Gates opened and we were escorted into the caravan to chat about the standoff that was taking place. We had tea and buns, with three community leaders and conversation flowed. Outside the boundaries of the caravan site, large rocks and bottles flew from the other community across the road. It was quite a surreal experience, but conversation continued unabated and we felt comfortable in the space.

> cozy in a caravan in camp twaddell,
> not hunkered, blockhouse rip-rapped.
> with extinguishers to smother.
> arcing firebombs from the ardoyne bluffs,
> the mordant banter of quis.
> separabit is abandoned,
> the host refills the teacups all around,
> and the interview resumes.

We were invited outside to see a band (unionist) gathered at the gates, ready to play and march out its boundaries (in receipt of new uniforms for the upcoming 12th July parade). We watched with the community now assembled on the street. The talk turned to bonfires and the making of them. It was pre-12th July and bonfires were still intact. The main person we had come to interview, overhearing the conversation, waved over a couple of people and before we knew it, we were off on a mystery tour, in a car, which just happened by, to view a large sectarian bonfire. Travelling with two complete strangers in the back of a car was daunting, as we tried to keep calm and relaxed.

> beyond the camp stockade,
> sympathetic signs and flags.
> snap sharp support from.
> boosters far and near,
> collar the crowd in.
> orangefest wrapping,
> massed banners and.
> brash sashes,
> bands tuning up tomorrow's.
> staid parades,
> and riot vans ring arteries against.
> hurled shouts of Faugh a Ballagh1,
> while we bounce back to bonfire-building boys.

Fig. 3. Memorials to comrades (Nationalists).

A brief capturing of real-surreal, now ringing in our ears, we travelled back to Belfast city centre lights and to welcoming anonymity. No photos taken at the interface site; lessons learned from previous encounters.

Memorial Gardening

Idiosyncratic Atmospherics revealed through unexpected moments of bodily stillness (i.e. silencing conversation, robotic movement), comingled with emotional intuitiveness (Bennett, 2001) lends much to the halting of time (past in present/present in past) and momentarity. In keeping, we recall similar Black taxi journeys to visit many galleries of nationalist and unionist murals, speckled across Belfast city. Under the guidance and tutelage of a particular tour guide (Ruairi), hired by the authors on numerous occasions, we had the opportunity to visit a memorial garden in the heart of West Belfast, situated in a quiet enclave. We listened to stories of comrades commemorated on the walls and read eulogies in their names (Fig. 3). Just as we were leaving, Ruairi produced 'magician-like', three differently coloured rubber shapes (black, brown, and cream) of varying lengths and widths (Fig. 4). Uncertainty hung when we asked, 'what are these and where did they come from?' The response, one such moment of bodily stillness, Bennett (2001) refers to, 'They are rubber bullets, used by the army and if I told you where I got them, I would have to kill you,' uttered Ruairi, in a deadpan voice, up close and personal. Nervous laughter eventually returned, and we all went on to the next idiosyncratic atmospheric moment. The researchers caught off guard were intrigued by the presence of real-unreal motifs of conflict, as much part of present-past as past-present (Fig. 4). As Cloke and Pawson (2008), p. 110) explain, "spaces of heritage are often characterized by devices … to implant memory… so as to prompt imagination of historical times, events, and values." In this moment, rubber bullets served as memory devices, igniting thoughts of historical conflict (Pastor & Kent, 2020) and preserving messy histories. In keeping with Kant's notion of negative pleasure, mesmerisation that haunts 'stepping into' and 'landing' in a moment can impel us, not to an "absent thing, but to its absence as a presence," (Blanchot, 1981, p. 88). Poetic reflection and imagery marching imagining in 'now time.'

> We stood in your enclave
> As if caught in webs of bygone
> Wiles and myths. The past
> Kept us company, walking our
> Shadows, as we gazed upon the
> Memorial gallery, as our guide
> Personalized the names, offering
> Breath in the now, still frames in
> Which they hang, tapestry to past-
> Present, in the particles you carry.
> A reminder the past is not far away

Fig. 4. Rubber Bullets.

Out for a pint with the Muralists

Seeking to build on the mural experiences, the authors, through contacts, were able to locate a key muralist (Odhran) mentioned frequently on our travels. An old refurbished cotton mill on the Falls Road, our destination, where a community of craftspeople settled. We made a spur of the moment visit, but disappointed when our muralist was not 'at home'. Upon walking back into town, we happened on Odhran making his way up to the mill. Having never met him, our intuition (and his paint-spattered clothes) played a role in presuming his identity. We made our introductions and he and co-muralists were eager to chat (especially as one co-author was international). Invited to join them in Kelly's Cellars, the oldest drinking establishment (1720) in Belfast and the past meeting place for Henry Joy McCracken and the United Irishmen when planning the 1798 Rising.

Large peat fires burned in the grate, yet we sat outdoors in the mist, co-conspirators of the past, reminiscing on murals, and of the anecdotes they proffer, shared cabal-like. The afternoon passed in collaborative storying, with muralists from the 'other' side, to realize key murals (on the political tourist trail). The challenges of night painting with the light of a few torchbearers made for interesting mannerisms in the characters they sought to capture. The naivety and hurriedness of murals borne of keeping abreast of evolving political times. The transmutation effected by 'knowing' storytellers, existing in the shadows, are extraordinary; stories skilled in personifying past-present moments of idiosyncratic atmospherics, peppered with the allure of dark times, tangled and mutating in the growing darkness of Guinness quaffed, and dying embers of burning peat and mouths, floating the air. The 'unfamiliar light' (Lovell & Griffin, 2022, p. 15) resonating with the unfolding storying of myth and lore, by those, "intertwined as Celtic knot{s}," offer unguarded expressions of the legacy of conflict, fuelled afresh. The muralists' stories as creators of compelling atmospheres infuse murals with a presence reserved for performance. The untangling of narratives, real-surreal, past-present, offer a cornucopia of unsettling first-hand imaginings, unscripted, unexpected experiences, which "can be anarchic, free-flowing and surreal" (Lovell & Griffin, 2022).

It was early afternoon
We happened on the trio
Wending their way to the mill
The flagrant gait and rolling
Laughter, marked out artist
Now we are five, bound for
Kelly's cellars, spurred on by
Infamy of muralists and murals
Of tales old and new, where mist
Clung voices of past conspirators

> Now cleave those in the present,
> Float the air. A remarkable
> Afternoon of wonder and storying
> Kept the cabal alive, until the
> Dying embers and dying pints
> Called time, on a moment
> Atmospheric in its arrival

Authenticity (Belhassen et al., 2008) and momentary of cultural storying offer opportunities to untie 'Celtic knots' anew, steeped in arresting myths and interlaced with religious, political and spiritual 'frostings' to haunt the present. The timelessness of storytelling plays to elements of the unexpected, creating illusions, both disruptive and conflicting, where mystical lends much to the visionary re-telling of the muralist imagination and the researchers' hesitancy to exit the moment.

Ethnographic studies concerning public art are remiss in following up "longer-term traces that the artworks left in viewer-participants minds" (Radice, 2018, p. 63). The Temple traces such artwork, the authors' gaze continuing with follow-up interviews over the period 2015–2019, covering initial immersion onsite with key stakeholders (Artichoke UK and David Best), pre public-opening. The study interviews and fleeting citizen conversations supplemented with participant observation, videography, photography and poetry. Authors, through a series of field notes, penned autoethnographic poetic reflections (Downey, 2022; Furman, 2006) to arrest the momentary of idiosyncratic atmospherics, filtering through materiality of lived experiences. The authors' immersion covered production, consumption and disposition of the Temple installation. Additional work undertaken off-site with wider community stakeholders (cross-community partnerships, youth organizations, citizens, Temple crew, Temple guardians, local council members) and on-site the day following the burn with citizens gathering remnants. The fleeting nature of the Temple made constancy of presence critical, to ensure idiosyncratic atmospherics were garnered. We employed affordance theory which speaks to participation and to object possibilities for action, to, "stimulate new affective and practice repertoires," (Borghini et al., 2021, p. 890) and to catch, "… affordances of the environment… what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill," (Gibson, 1979, p. 127).

Cultural context: Derry

The momentary of offerings at the religious-tourism boundary, offers potential to voice unexpected expressions, across space and place, where a unique one-time offering, 'Idiosyncratic Atmospherics 2, unfolds. Concepts of contested space, place identity, community and cultural competence encountered, which enrich the religious tourism field. Enrichment captured by the researchers' ethnographic immersion in the field with citizens of Derry and wider stakeholders (e.g., Artichoke UK, David Best, community groups) across the Temple build and burn, witnessing cross-community openly sharing politics of religion, expressed by symbolic emotional inscriptions within the Temple. In terms of Derry City, the Temple's exact landing was considered highly contentious (belonging to one religious community), discernible in terms of particular religious iconography (i.e. murals and graffiti) marking out permanence of religious affiliation. In lexes of the divided citizenry of Derry, this site is understood, 'as the reflection [s] and reproduction of religious and social desires and anxieties" (Brace et al., 2006). Atmospherics 2, in relation to place, incorporates subtleties of pilgrimage (Eade & Albera, 2017; Higgins & Hamilton, 2020) and dark tourism (Brown, 2013; Collins-Kreiner, 2020; Fonseca et al., 2016), yet operates from a shared imaginary to embrace wider religious-tourism positions. This journey offers temporality, where post-conflict citizens storying (Reddy et al., 2020) is founded on historical division, trauma and conflict, witnessed and expressed as a legacy to the past, in 'now time' (Benjamin, 1968). Gell (1992) in reference to art and the creative process, suggests people can be captivated by, 'metamorphosis of raw materials,' translating into unexpected displays of liberation by a community, cognizant of its transience. The occasion for cross-community collaboration to transmute feelings of uplifting change and sense making (Mick et al., 2012) at a highly contested political site (see Edensor, 2012, 2015; Rickly & McCabe, 2017) considered transformative (Soulard et al., 2021) for this citizenry. Wald (1987), pp. 29–30, posits, 'human beings will make enormous sacrifices if they believe themselves to be driven by a divine force.' The Temple holds an atmosphere of the religious in its curation, iconography and idiosyncratic atmospherics driving a poetic pulse from field notes.

> March 15, 2015
> A bright spring day, at the 'top of the hill'
> A heady mix of mysticism and expectancy clung the air.
> David Best, lifting his arms aloft, cried out to the citizens.
> Of Derry, 'This is your Temple, I gift to you. '.
> His figure clad in white, captured an instant
> Of biblical illumination and the crowds followed
> The new disciple into the safety of the Temple sanctum

Idiosyncratic atmospherics 2: The Temple, Derry

The authors stories of idiosyncratic atmospherics in cross-community public art at the Temple, captures momentary bound up in wider religious-tourism conversations; unexpected and particular in their landing. The storying of the Temple delivered

through hybrid styles, utilizes narrative, photography and poetic reflection, to layer up and amplify the senses occasioned. The stories, unfolding in Atmospherics 2, *Tapestry to Trauma, A Mass Medicated Society, Pilgrims Progress* and *Written in the Stars,* offered to catch rich moments created by a public art tourist destination.

The scene then, as now, remains imprinted in the memory of the citizens who made that journey, seeking release from thirty-years of trauma, known as 'The Troubles.' A six-month relational engagement (Ozanne et al., 2017) by David Best (California artist of Burning Man infamy and Artichoke UK) conceived as cultivators of hope (Beruchashvili et al., 2015, p. 307; Pritchard et al., 2011) by a community, enslaved in social division, political contestation and religious boundary-making. The context, in which this public art takes shape, is nothing short of a miracle, given former government measures to stem hatred and conflict, inflicted by citizens on each other. Despite the Good Friday Agreement 1998, discord continues; a citizenry retaining emotional trauma unresolved in peace times. Having nowhere to land such emotions, citizens harbour memoirs of a dark past, unable to progress.

The importance of space and place, sensitive to an 'us and them' mentality played out in everyday cultural identities (Novelli et al., 2012). It is the absence of a shared roadmap that continues to haunt this community and sustains Artichoke UK's attention, having previous relations with its citizens, when awarded the City of Culture (2013). A lightshow, Lumiere, created by Artichoke UK, shone light on dark spaces and buildings, opening up areas to "the possibility of new imaginative thresholds," untraveled by 'others' (Lovell & Griffin, 2022). Shifting mindsets of two ethno-nationalist communities to progress a reconciliatory narrative, quite radical. Artichoke UK wanted to give something back to the community and initiated a Kickstarter Fund in 2015, enlisting David Best to cultivate cross-community sharing and hope, "when individuals seek to achieve an outcome as a group, hope is inevitably involved," (Braithwaite, 2004, p. 128). Beruchashvili et al. (2015), p. 324) argue, "…resources such as religious vernacular alter appraisals that evoke the feeling of hope. Religious notions also underlie a body of reinforcing feeling and framing rules that preserve hope over time."

The temporality and transience of a one-off happening, in a contested and atypical tourism setting makes for unique idiosyncratic atmospherics. The ethnographic gaze by researchers, offered citizens' opportunities for recall, affording occasions to explore absent 'diacritical' affiliations, especially where performances of the past-present runs riot with ideological sensitivities (Kilroy-Marac, 2014). Derry's citizens, susceptible to conflicting images and iconography engendered to comingle and share other's 'ghosts' (Tan et al., 2022). A poetic excerpt extols the atmosphere generated by the occasion, curated at the hands of its citizens, awaiting cleansing of ritualistic burning (Fig. 5).

> Temple drawn done best
> I too am drawn by the pulse of loss
> Shared, snared, skin-seared by the.

Fig. 5. Burning of the Temple.

Temple form, letting go to the pyre
The travellers trek, the steep incline,
Weighed down by bulky baggage of
Sonorous scars, shortly to free-fall
Amidst the sheltered sanctum. To rest
Stack upon stack, awaiting the cleansing
By flame; the appointed hour, when
Shadows come forth to light. Co-mingling,
Co-sharing, the community heaps high its rupture

Tapestry to Trauma

As Curtin and Bird (2022), p. 2) express, a role exists within the tourism remit to attend "reconciliation in the present" through a sharing out of culture and accommodation by those whose presence is sought. In this study, sharing out grapples with the tensions of memorializing and historicizing of material objects, which radiate out from a tapestry of powerful imagery that voice trauma still haunting citizens (Derrida, 1974). Moments of idiosyncratic atmospherics imagined and garnered through activities with others, stage a visitor locale (Walsh & Tucker, 2009). The importance of witnessing others burgeoning assemblages of religio-political objects and inscriptions, have potential to incite discordant action (i.e. burning the Temple before opening to the public, cross-community rioting, non-attendance) and myth-making (Ren, 2011; van der Duim et al., 2013). Yet fears allayed. The Temple's purpose to draw together divided communities was afforded through presence of shared space to land traumatic pasts. The hope that in opening up decades of trauma across its citizenship would lead to expressions and possibilities of a shared future, imbued with promises, desires, and positive stories (Braithwaite, 2004; Nordstrom, 2013).

> May your pain burn away in these flames. And may the ashes of hope land on you and your home. Be safe loved and happy. I love you all x
> My design represents hope and peace shown through the dove, its landing on a daisy as that is my name, and when it is burnt, I will find peace and let go of the past.

The begetting of objects (crafted letters, photos and poems) proclaim the interaction and engagement by Derry's citizens and wider visitors, over the public opening (14–21 March 2015), tangible in conversations and soaring numbers of inscriptions, as researchers and citizens communed the Temple space. A surreal and extraordinary atmosphere created around the sanctity of the Temple (Pastor & Kent, 2020) by flows of 'pilgrims' intermingling with living tapestries of others crafted objects of pain and suffering and messages of hope for a 'brighter future for all' (Nordstrom, 2013) (see Fig. 6). As Cameron (2012), p. 578) posits, it is the conflict in presenting "material practices and relations through which 'things' come to matter," which underprops the Temple (Chronis, 2015). Signalling to traumaturgy and a future cultivated by hope (Beruchashvili et al., 2015) espouses possibility for

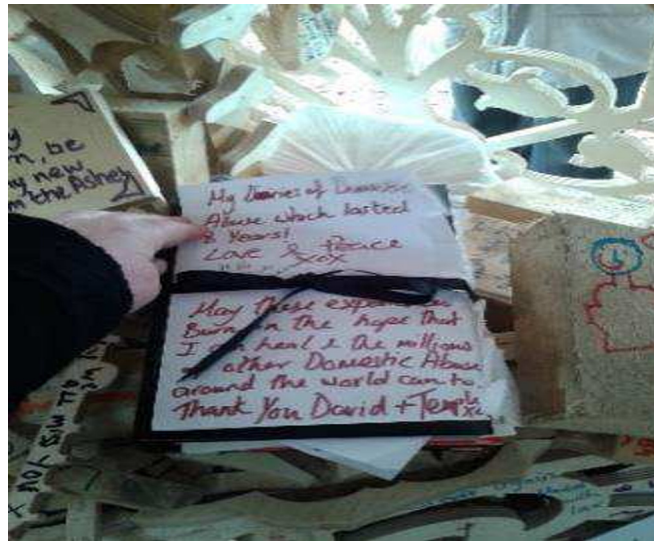**Fig. 6.** Crafted objects of pain & suffering.

Fig. 7. Domestic violence journal.

transformative action (Soulard et al., 2021) and new beginnings, appreciative of a past-presence (Caputo, 2002). Citizens outpourings marking out a "radical inclusivity" (Harvey, 2002). Objects and inscriptions bathed in the complexity of the Temple's aesthetics, illustrates idiosyncratic atmospherics created by communities, validating Northern Irish grief.

A mass-medicated society

Derry has continued to evidence a worrying picture of societal malaise, which draws from high levels of unemployment, rising rates of alcoholism and mental illness, and remains a significant burden to the wellbeing of the community. Derry still suffering suicides of young males, a worrying legacy, signals continued hurt (Tomlinson, 2007, 2012). The city has witnessed peace initiatives to heal community division, yet these have largely been ineffective in bridging the division and trauma in nationalist and unionist communities (Downey & Sherry, 2014).

Fig. 8. Objects, transcriptions in the Temple.

This public art site represents a one-object, transient destination, dissimilar to the permanent public art of the murals, where stories from a solitary tourism space speaks to reconciliation, offering citizens "tourism otherwise" (Everingham et al., 2021). Reconciliation, usually the preserve of state-sponsored initiatives, has fallen short of placating citizen's needs (Coulthard, 2014). The stirring of a community to progress towards reconciliation through efforts of Artichoke UK and David Best, venerated; muffled voices and stories of past suffering afforded breathing space (Stinson et al., 2022). The art installation sanctioned by a community who recognizes, "reconciliation isn't dead unless [we] choose to let it die" (Campbell, 2020). In terms of the sensitivities enclosing the Temple, Derry's citizens show great willingness to embrace cross-community activities, to "promote meaningful interactions," (Hurst et al., 2021; Viken et al., 2021). This public art affords liminal spaces for voluntary interaction through felt storying across time (Nordstrom, 2013). The contested landscape converted to a shared destination. The Temple arose and effaced; imbued with the power of citizen-materiality, people and objects, working together (Ren, 2011) to perform temporal atmospheres and past-present storying (Walsh & Tucker, 2009). Poetic reflection, *Temple Gifting Space*, affords ambience and imagery of its mystery (see Figs. 7 & 8).

> I came to the safe space
> Hung-heavy with war-weary
> Whispers. A created Centre
> Of community coddled
> Cares; hands, hearts,
> Hopes falling traumatically
> Down freshly-cut fretwork,
> Carefully crafted, carved concerns
> You cradled in your arms
> Fifteen years of domestic abuse,
> Documented, detailed discourse
> Ribboned-recounts, now reeling
> In your gifting limbs; seeking out
> A secret site, in which to flame-
> Cleanse burdens long-fashioned,
> An inaudible shame, now sharing
> Voice with others garnered-gifts

Pilgrim's Progress

> 'Their' city, resplendent in the darkening-down
> Of night. Flames stretch high into the blue-black,

Fig. 9. Journeying uphill to the Temple site.

Infolding dreams of 60,000 pilgrims' plights. Spiralling,
Soaring they spread to greet the evening-sky,
20,000 bodies mark its burn, hope mounting with each.
Fire-life, freedom from fettered, foggier rhetoric.

Religious tourism drives strong visitor numbers. Pilgrimage is representative of such mobility, with many studies materializing beyond traditional frontiers (Hitchner et al., 2019). The Temple 'pilgrimage' crosses boundaries, both sacred and secular (Gatrell & Collins-Kreiner, 2006, p. 765) to create a particular atmosphere, the notion of a 'third space,' where citizen-pilgrims reside. However, the relationship between tourist and pilgrim remains ambiguous (Kong, 2010; Tomljenović & Dukić, 2017). For others (Timothy & Olsen, 2006, p. 272) this is clearer, "… a solution …not as important as understanding the roots of contention." Emerging trends recognize community-based tourism as crossing boundaries, suggestive, "…of seeking spiritual wellbeing, enlightenment, knowledge, and social bonds," (Collins-Kreiner, 2020, p. 18; Travesi, 2017). The Temple appreciated as a transient and liminal form (Turner & Turner, 1978), defies convention in terms of religious or spiritual offering, but becomes so, when imbued with mounting 'pilgrims' footfall, journeying to the 'Top of the Hill' in Derry (Fig. 9). Citizens captured wending up a steep incline, to locate the site and deposit in the 'sanctum', inscriptions, objects, photographs, poems and tribulations, over the week of public opening, pulsating in the now of political division, suffusing the community. Offloading emotional baggage, through insurmountable piles of tangible and intangible offerings, mark it out as non-traditional. The mix of Pagan-Christianity and spirituality within/without the Temple fuelled by an emerging need to transition away from traditional religious trappings (Eade & Albera, 2017). The momentarity of the Temple's landing, feeds present-past suffering, experienced by both communities, to restore synergies of soul understanding (Coles et al., 2006) which blur dark pasts (Martini & Buda, 2020) that bleed into present ruptures (Collins-Kreiner, 2020, p. 21). The force for collective traumaturgy (Minarova-Banjac, 2018) contained in the Temple build, draws on a one community storying, not two, and is the premise for this public art.

Written in the stars

The Temple draws on cultural, political, social and religious knowledge (Coles et al., 2006) to explore beyond traditional tourism settings, where expected and scripted performances hold sway. The unscripted, the particular unexpected and idiosyncratic expressions bring new forces into play. Layering of absence and presence that hold past-present narratives in place alludes to Benjamin's (1968) 'aura' in terms of artistic and aesthetic creatives at the Temple. People, the physicality of place and the material presence of objects, can create atmospheres yet it can arrive. Atmospheres can play up perceptions and stories of past encounters, through the intercessions of presence and absence (Goulding et al., 2018). In keeping, the timeline in which the Temple arrives and takes shape, signals to the citizens of Derry, its arrival is special, in terms of the atmosphere that walks its setting. To illustrate, cross-community voices:
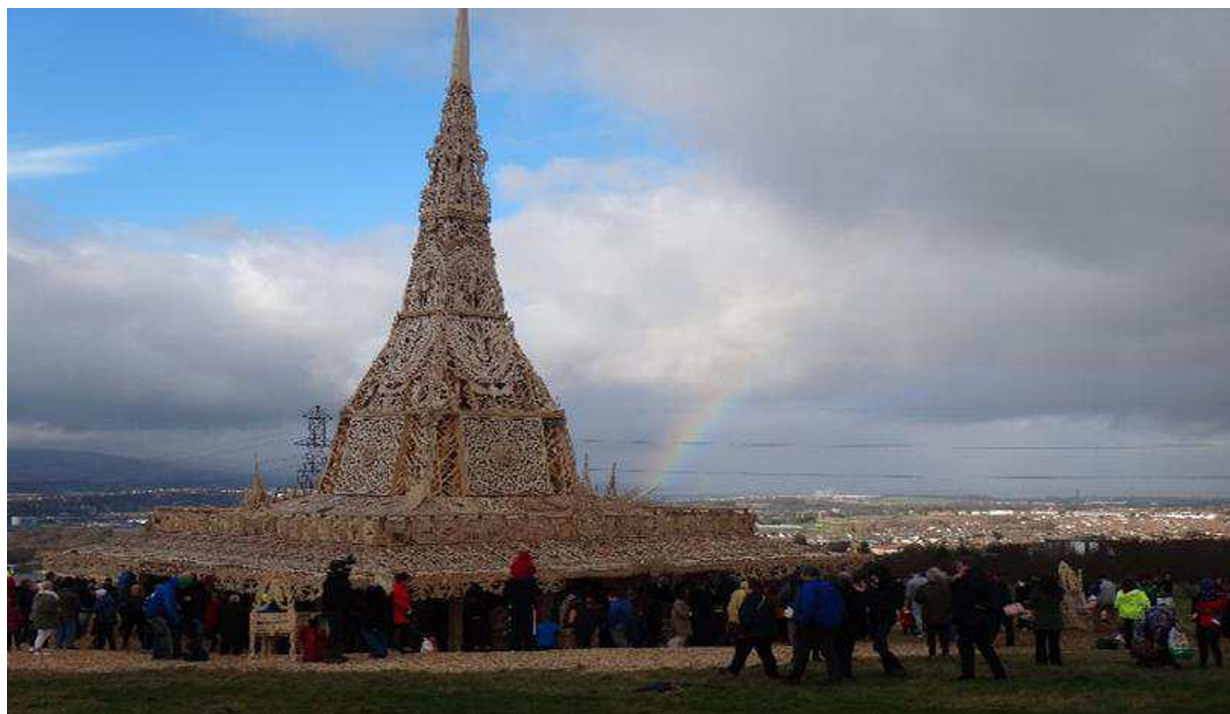

Fig. 10. Temple rainbow.

> So much pain carried in this community, this (Temple) is an opportunity to put something down…if one in a thousand people that come here take that opportunity, then it is going to be something worth doing. It's not about forgetting, it's about remembering and it's about letting go (male resident of Derry, witness to Bloody Sunday events).

For another:

> It was special, special because it came to Derry; a place that is full of division and hardships. I feel Derry needed it more than Belfast, who get everything.

The arrival of mystical cosmological happenings (i.e. rainbow making an arc over the Temple skyline, the vernal equinox, legitimizing for this community the Temple's alignment in the stars (Fig. 10).

Other dates - St Patrick's Day, Mother's Day, confirmation of young people, start of Lent - synchronized in the opening week of public memorializing, where shared religio-political affiliations reflective of its ethos, impacted place atmospherics. Sites 'of destabilization… co-constitution, improvisation and interaction' (Wilson, 2017, p. 457) important to those seeking solace, recognizing, "participatory peace is what makes peace work in a sustainable way', and it starts with ordinary citizens," (Moufakkir & Kelly, 2010, p. xviii). Derry's citizens immersed in a rarely travelled location, are progressing openness and attunement with a mythological imaginary.

Conclusion

Substantively, we have provided a cognitive and visceral understanding of the relationship between atmospherics and aesthetic intervention in a politically fraught context where vulnerability and trauma are rampant. We believe that authentic understanding presupposes not only interpretation, but also evocation and provocation. Methodologically, we have shown that exploration of researchers' reflexivity – their lived experience of being on the ground and assimilating that experience into ongoing data collection and analysis – enhances authentic understanding and provides some much-needed insight into the researcher as instrument. We hope our multi-modal inquiry invites further experimentation by researchers. Tourism objects engage particular ethics (McCormack, 2003) and invite transformative encounters Smith et al., 2021); they also make and tell stories. The two public art offerings story dark-light tourism episodes, holding currency in 'now time' (Benjamin, 1968), firmly birthed in the religious-tourist nexus. Atmospherics 1 and 2 present very different public art tourism offerings, one sustaining community division through exhibitions of conflicted and opposing ideologies, juxtaposed with a transient exhibition, constructed and shared by a divided community to effect reconciliation (Anderson et al., 2016; Vlahos et al., 2022).

Atmospherics 1, holds to a troubled past, painting political rhetoric on gable walls and supporting dark pathos in its streets. The murals adopt religious patois and myth-making understood as community mobilizers, threaded with religiosity (Luedicke et al., 2010). Public art in the cities provide conflicting dark tourism offerings (Fonseca et al., 2016) and moments of idiosyncratic atmospherics. As Biran and Hyde (2013), p. 191) argue, "We move beyond a discussion of classifications of dark tourism to recognize dark tourism as both an individual experience and a complex socio-cultural phenomenon." In Atmospherics 2, it is the *how* of a divided community awakening to the need for reconciliation, which is mused. The Temple enacts reconciliation as an agentic, aesthetic object (Ren, 2011). It works with citizens, prompting uncomfortable emotions and conversations with community 'others.' Robson (2000) argues such encounters should not, "become an end in itself: it must move us to act." The Temple mobilized Derry's citizens to imagine reconciliation, as a citizen-driven aesthetic and cultural competent offering (Vlahos et al., 2022). A culture of hope (Beruchashvili et al., 2015) transfused citizen narratives, imbuing the Temple with intergenerational inscriptions (Simone-Charteris et al., 2018) to action a shared imaginary (Gao et al., 2012). In terms of public art and baggage of past sonorous scars, this transient public art works on many levels (individual and community) to perform.

The term public, in public art refers to community contribution in major or minor ways. Murals create evolving naïve art galleries of aggressive and divisive forms, realized by community individuals, despite calls to recommission 'frightening' imagery (Downey & Sherry, 2014). Such murals espouse myth-making (Allport, 1954) supporting 'us and them' mentalities (Kuper, 1990). Political murals retain a strong visitor presence especially in Belfast and Derry. The Temple exhibits individual inscriptions and cross-community labour in its artistry, appreciated by citizens co-sharing trauma. The Temple concept affirms community division, yet recognizes the community as activists of reconciliation, witnessed by relational engagement of 60, 000 citizen-pilgrims with cross-community activities and emotional inscription (Ozanne et al., 2017). Transient and purposeful, the Temple artwork, although highly contested, understood as doable. A fitting inference by Eagleton (2018), p. 125), "requires you to actively confront and relive the past, not least to avoid being enslaved by it." States of being through inscription mediate and represent sensorial, imaginative and idiosyncratic atmospherics, where, "interpretation is central to the objective of reconciliation," (Kelly & Nkabahona, 2010, p. 237). The words of a cross-community member shifting the narrative from *the Temple*, to *Our Temple*, expressive of one community:

> O*ur* Temple was fantastic because it brought this event from the mainstream to the margins. David Best came into our community and talked to all the residents about the site and the Temple and everybody listened to him and got behind him and were fully engaged

Both public art offerings engage citizen-visitors to observe 'together-apart' (individually, collectively) past-present perspectives. The two-city storying stems from a wider religious tourism nexus, underpinned by volatile political-cultural, social

prospects, to serve individual purposes: (1) divided religious-political identities and oppositional ideologies; 2) sharing trauma, seeking reconciliation as one community. The storying of *public* art, in Atmospherics 1, is crafted by individual muralists' aesthetics of culture positioning (Vlahos et al., 2022) whereas Atmospherics 2, evidences collaborative efforts of cross-community with communal values as, "symbols of community, territory, history and destiny," (Smith, 2001, p. 119) orchestrated by citizens (Kelleher et al., 2019). The willingness of divided citizenry affording a community roadmap for well-being through harnessing of hope (Sweeney et al., 2015).

This study contributes to the religion-tourism nexus, drawing on political, cultural, religious and social perspectives underpinning urban public art. Public Art and atmospherics not explored together. This study catches the momentarity of idiosyncratic atmospherics. Public Art, as service intimated, offering potential to move from *alienatio* to *communitas, if* aspirations for transformation sought. Public art should institute from a community consensus and have purpose. Public art in cities has to be about more than its aesthetics, it has to make sense for citizens. The notion of a peaceful society In relation to the Temple, sought, to progress reconciliatory praxis (Robinson, 2016). Public art offers a stage for imagineering and social change; therefore, it commands attention (Boluk et al., 2019).

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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