

Unearthing Urban Narratives

Towards a Repository of Methods

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WORKING GROUP 3

Unearthing Narratives

Dealing with urban narratives sometimes requires a certain degree of imagination, as many are not directly available in a clear written form, or even linked to a specific text. It requires tools and approaches to discover and render them legible, an approach almost similar to forensics or archaeology. Indeed, while history is built upon the text, archaeological interpretation begins as the material is being excavated, working directly with debris. Naturally, one could ask if unwritten stories can be considered a form of narrative. But the interaction between urban space and people always implies a certain degree of narrativity – either explicit or implicit – one strongly related to the meanings and knowledge of a given place and the spatial experiences of that same place. Knowing that many of these narratives and stories provide opportunities to decipher the complex system of relationships between urban spaces and its users, it is also true that finding these narratives and attaching a written interpretation to them might sometimes require considerable creativity, especially when addressing materials or places that are not present anymore to be read and interpreted.

This is where the discovery of certain urban places by means of constructing narratives seems to share ground with the processes of archaeology. Learning directly from objects and places, from instruments of transmission of knowledge that may have been lost, from materials often not available at every moment and every place, certainly not in the pervasive manner that digital tools now offer us. Doing this kind of research implies looking at the methods – including the means, instruments and techniques, alongside their limitations – to understand how the transmission of knowledge operates. And how, unlike history, it sometimes requires looking in different directions, realizing things that have changed or disappeared. The methods used to find existing narratives, to read them and to construct new ones, are crucial to overcome the distances imposed by different times, disparate places, distinct cultures and ideas, rendering necessary a certain level of openness and, sometimes, performativity.

On the Quest for Methods

To unearth urban narratives, our working group has aimed to locate, collect, organize and share the methods that help read, understand and construct narratives in the first place. A quest for methods has required an intense engagement with the members of the network across all working groups brought together by means of different tools, activities and projects. In time, all of these actions and components merged and morphed into an iterative space we call the Repository of Methods: a project that has no specific form – it takes many forms – and is ‘in permanent expansion, discussion and auto-generation’.¹

One of the first tangible projects in the process of co-constructing this Repository of Methods took the form of an issue of *Writingplace*, *Journal for Architecture and Literature*, entitled ‘Narrative Methods for Writing Urban Places’ (Fig. 1). The issue gathered six articles that ‘relate to urban and architectural narratives, understood as the spoken or written accounts of connected events that take place in . . . buildings and cities’.² A second

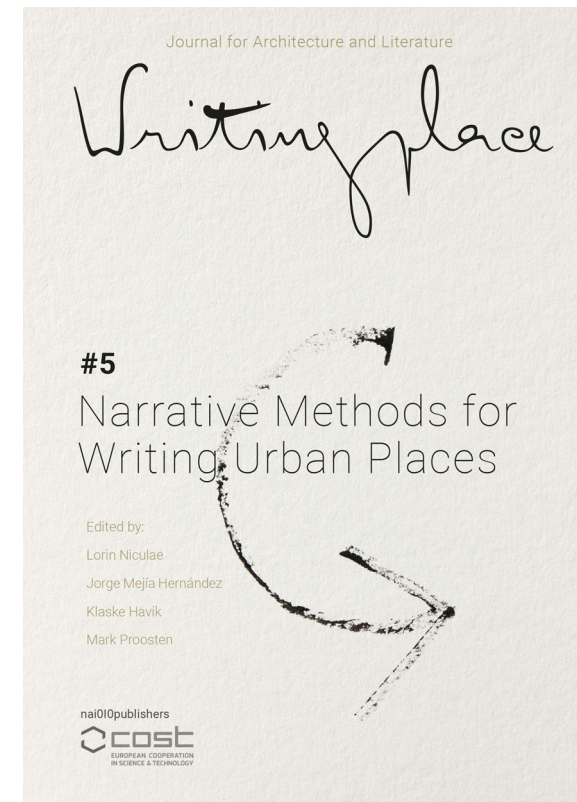


Fig. 1. Cover of *Writingplace* 5: *Narrative Methods for Writing Urban Places* (2021). Design: Studio Sanne Dijkstra

Padlet
 Repository of Methods
 Fast and wild brainstorming of terms, ideas, and references

Collaborative mapping



CityDroptools is a collaborative mapping platform (SaaS) for digital storytelling projects by locating multimedia contents and adding an interactive map. The platform organizes the drawing, reuse and personalization of the experience and plays on the possibility of integrating additional services of proximity marketing and AI-based analysis tools. It also allows the import and export of data and their re-use in a platform, thus presenting itself as Data (Data as a Service) of digital contents and open data.

https://www.citydroptools.com/

Stream of consciousness technique as a narrative device

For the narratives of the city, my proposal is to use the stream of consciousness technique as a narrative device for exploring, analyzing and revealing the inner / subjective / personal /

It is through thoughts, words, associations, questions and actions that characterizes project themselves unto the place they belong to inhabit. Spontaneous and flowing by nature, the technique conveys a sense of authenticity and immediacy while addressing such notions as substance, self, vision or originality.

Moreover, the above mentioned device can relate to the literary type of flâneur/flâneuse, an observer and a participant who, developing relationship with the surrounding structures and landscapes. It may also involve elements of street photography and psychogeography.

For the time being, my ideas draw on the work of Romanian postmodern writer Mircea Eliade.

An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris (Georg Simmel)

PDF
 An Attempt at Exhausting a Place
 Georg Simmel

https://www.librarything.com/item/151588

Thick Description

This description was developed by anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1972) who argued that descriptions are inevitably interpretations, thus outlining the necessity to additionally provide readers with detailed accounts about the context, to go beyond scientific facts, surface appearances and symbolic gestures and insert details, events and history into explanations and experiences. This description is a method that works towards revealing the intricate and layered quality of situations, where Geertz argues that in order to know what was really going on, one has to look beyond the subject – or site – of study, and understand how it is a part of its circumstances and surroundings. However, it is to the arranging of abstracted writings into unified patterns that makes a description thick. It is not a search for a singular and encompassing truth. Instead, thick description is intended to be a creative act of interpretation that brings together and shares the multiplicity of aspects, elements, perspectives and experiences that manifest themselves within the subjective of analysis.

This description is a hermeneutical practice which produces knowledge from the act of clarifying and mediating the world by grasping

Site-writing

Site-writing is a critical and ethical spatial practice that explores what happens when discussions concerning boundaries and site-specificity enter the writing of architectural and urban critics, history and theory, and writers reflect on their own subject positions in relation to their particular objects and fields of study, and on how site-writing can engage materially with their sites of inquiry and analysis. Drawing out the spatial qualities as a sequence of interactions between writers and readers on the one hand, places, artifacts, and texts on the other, includes site-material, political and conceptual – as well as those remembered, dreamed and imagined.

Whose whose work is engaged with the concepts and processes of site-writing suggest a wide variety of ways for city art, architectural and urban history, theory and criticism, and art and architectural practices. Works combine image and text to produce variations in spatial relations, exploring the architectural and spatial qualities of site-writing, leading personal and academic writing styles to create different subject positions, investigating the interaction between material and psychic states, articulating the interactive relationships between writing and individuals / core city as well as the voices of the city.

For a range of projects, see <https://site-writing.co.uk/>

See also Jane Rendell, Site-Writing: The Architecture of an Criticism (London: Bloomsbury, 2019) and for an introduction to the methodology

Architecture and Narrativity (Paul Ricoeur)

PDF
 Architecture and Narrativity Paul Ricoeur

Through the concepts of Prefiguration, Configuration and Refiguration, Paul Ricoeur sets a triple device in order to grasp the complexity and multiplicity of the memory of places.

Delphi Method

The Delphi method is a process for generating information from a group of specialists (Lifton, 1979) to reach consensus of opinion about a certain subject (Fisher and Jones-Evans, 1994). That method is used for formalization during a decision-making process in order that all the experts (beneficiaries) receive identical opinions (Barnardette, 1982) so that the final result is a consequence of the participation of several experts and not just a personal opinion (Santos et al., 1987). With Delphi, communications between geographically dispersed groups of experts are improved (Lisbon and Tardif, 1975).

In the Delphi process a group of specialists, which represents a population of experts, answers several rounds of questionnaires about a certain subject in order to reach a consensus approach about it (Lifton, 1979). These rounds are repeated until the panel (group of experts) identifies a consensus on that subject (Fisher and Jones-Evans, 1994). Before beginning the rounds of questionnaires, a pilot questionnaire should be conducted so that issues like the number of panels and number of rounds can be determined (Lifton, 1979). The Delphi technique is based on

Scoring



Scores are symbolizations of processes, which extend over time. They provide a narrative tool for both analysis and design, using the urban landscape as a sequence of events, understood from the narrative, spatiotemporal perspective view of the experiencing subject moving through the city. Communicating processes over time and space to others in other places and other moments, such scores can objectively represent non-visual qualities of space.

In the 1960s and 1970s architects, urban designers and landscape architects such as Kevin Lynch, Edmund Bacon and many others, experimented with alternative notation techniques for analysis and design. In order to approach the city from the perspective of the subject in a narrative way, serial views, interviews, sketches, mappings, made by inhabitants, "urban event", each in different styles. In each, the narrator goes on the "St" (from the no. 84), addresses an association between a name (a Zettel) with a long neck and funny hat and another passage, and then sees the same person two hours later at the Gare St-Lazare getting advice on adding a button to his overcoat.

Hajiri called the type of score that gets written on a Zettel "The primary purpose was to create a notation for any movement to space. Whence the score Hajiri created took the actor as the subject – unlike the scores used in music, dance and theatre – they can be pushed further by taking the physical urban landscape as the subject, a transition from how people act and experience, to how space and action, and such representations of movement, representing not the movements themselves, but the qualities of the surroundings that change as we move through them, can communicate the experiential aspects of the design, exposing not what we perceive, but what is there to be perceived.

Documenting real life events in AV form

Magna Zsien set out to salvage Maltese memories that by neglected and deteriorating on their original analogue carrier, freeing them from cassette playback formats by converting them to digital files. By offering a free digitisation service to the public, we give individuals and communities access to previously lost images, sounds and narratives. This content is shared on our platform and through our activities, preserving it for future generations, while being careful to credit and respect the wishes of the donor. We believe video art to be a tool that we gather in our archive is part of our shared heritage, and that this heritage must be properly cared for. <http://www.magnazsien.com>

Queer Scavenging

The queer methodology attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, and it refuses the academic compulsion towards elucidating coherence. Halberstam, J. (1988). Foucault's Archaeology. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

The accompanying image is a (collaborative) fragment of an essay in which I discuss this notion in

Repeat Photography



Urbanarrative
 Urbanarrative is a term not only urban but also narrative or not only narrative but also urban. It describes a methodological procedure and sets the tools (Discourse analysis-DC, rhetorical analysis-RA, Corpus Linguistic-CL) to create methods for constructing, interpreting, and expediting textual documents for urban places.

Exercises in Style (Raymond Queuneu)



Exercises in Style (French): Exercices en Style Raymond Queuneu
 A collection of 27 exercises, written by Raymond Queuneu, is a collection of simple and ordinary "urban event", each in different styles. In each, the narrator goes on the "St" (from the no. 84), addresses an association between a name (a Zettel) with a long neck and funny hat and another passage, and then sees the same person two hours later at the Gare St-Lazare getting advice on adding a button to his overcoat.

The Manhattan Transcripts (Bernard Tschumi)



PDF
 The Manhattan Transcripts Bernard Tschumi
 Already a classic, but always a useful device to narrate architecture understood as the conjunction between the built object and the events that affect it, through the use (and suspension) of multiple media and supports: texts, photos, drawings and diagrams.

Images of the City in music videos

Music videos constitute a very particular and specific format to illustrate and describe the city – or cities – of the 1960s. This device allowed us to think, in the same geography, a rock city, a pop city, a queer city, or a hip-hop city. The city represented through the music videos of the 1960s reflects and debunks the limits of its own (post-)modern contemporaneity: subjective, fragmented, plural and diffuse. The analysis of this device allows us to understand the postmodern subjectivity, and to notice a whole paradigm shift in the way the city is represented, and also in the way this city is experienced, narrated, interpreted, (re)acted) from now on.

The Image of the City and its Represented-Space in music videos from the North American Interferences in the Western Contemporary Architectural Culture

The present research will analyze the western city of the origins of the twentieth century and its Represented-Space in the music videos of the same period. It aims at understanding how the city conveys and enforces a new image of itself through the music videos, as well as the impact of this audiovisual device on architecture and the city. Postmodernism and the post-industrial city's evolution are

Urban exploration through graffiti



Music recommendation – Exit through the gift shop.
 Pichado – "It consists of taking down a distinctive, cryptic style, mainly on walls and vacant buildings. Many pichadores (pichador painters) compete to paint in high and inaccessible places, using such techniques as free climbing and abseiling to reach the locations."

Methods and approaches to analyze, explore, capture and narrate the city



1. Narrating the city: memory construction/restoration and destruction of memory.
 Reading the city through its buildings, stories, myths, hoaxes, environment and history, literature, people.
 Case study: Tsarna - memory destruction
 Comparison: Shkoda - memory construction
 Tsarna - Shkoda

2. City and the construction: narrating the city by the history of constructors
 Constructors are simple people, businessmen, architects, government...
 3. City writing: Narrating the city through their writers...
 4. Multicultural city: narrating the city by their different cultural buildings.
 Shkoda, Tsarna, Durban...
 5. City symbols: semantic of the city (sent by Irina Kisej)

Ritual Theory

I suggest to address the CITY with a method that would depart from RITUAL THEORY, also considering other related interdisciplinary approaches.
 MAIN BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES:
 VAN GENEP, Arnold
 Les Rites de Passage. École Supérieure des Études de la Sorbonne et de la Sorbonne, de l'Académie de la Naisance, de l'Étude, de la Puberté, de l'Initiation, de l'Ordre, du Couronnement, des Funérailles, des Saisons
 Paris: Émile Noury, 1909
 "Les procédés sont à été partiellement appliqués, non seulement quand il s'agit d'un pays ou d'un territoire, mais aussi d'un village, d'une ville, d'un quartier et d'un temple, d'une maison. Mais aussi à ceux que nous ne relect progressivement, jusqu'à n'être (au-delà) que le plaisir, le mariage, le vestibule, etc.) qu'une simple partie, ou une partie, qu'un seul. Le portique tabou-de-passage devient la porte des montagnes, la porte des murs de quartier, la porte de la maison. Associé avec un caractère

Map-Elicitation

Map-Elicitation is a method of urban analysis and design to describe the contemporary identity of the place and identify appropriate project interventions. PlaceMaker comprises eight phases – five of analysis and three of design (Spat, 2013). The five analysis phases are useful to describe and interpret space and will be illustrated in the following. Different type of database have to be created to contain the different type of data collected: there are data from cartographic analysis (satellites, photos, collages, etc.); the geographic and perspective (through words), the graphical (signs and symbols), the photographic (street images), video (moving images) surveys; the elements listed in subsequent periods of the study of traditional pantheistics (graphic signs, symbols, etc.). The questionnaire administered to visitors to the places in question (satellites, words, etc.) It is necessary to decide the categories of elements to analyze, which are particularly connected to the urban events identified above, and the corresponding measurement parameters. Moreover, it is necessary to decide which days are the most significant for the most appropriate time slices for narrative.

Full text in PDF below (sent by Marilena Sepe)

undertaking assumed the shape of a digital environment where anyone in the network could, in a fast, dynamic – and almost wild – way, contribute to mapping the diverse range of methods that our multidisciplinary community was employing to capture, experience, engage with, analyse and even transform the material and immaterial dimensions of urban places. This mapping unfolded on Padlet – a digital online instrument where participants could easily add a method followed by a short description.³ (Fig. 2). The methods gathered in the Padlet became the basis for a PechaKucha-style webinar held in April 2021, titled 'Reading, Writing and Activating Urban Places: Methods and Assignments'.⁴ (Fig. 3). The 21 participants in the webinar were invited to rapidly present a method, describe it, explain how it had been mobilized in practice and propose an assignment.

Two essential issues were raised in this webinar. First and foremost, the preparation of this event triggered a process of grouping and categorizing the different types of methods gathered thus far under the categories of *reading*, *writing* and *activating*. Secondly, it introduced assignments to accompany the methods. While not featuring prominently in the presentations, assignments were instrumental in rendering straightforward that part of our task that consists of rendering this Repository of Methods into an open space that can be entered and searched, and its contents put into action outside its delimiting but permeable boundaries. Thus, the function of the assignments is to help 'interpret, complete and continue the methods... but also encourage constant dialogue between (methods), contributors and users, through a series of easy-making and immediate experiments and practices within the urban space'.⁵ All of these outputs – *Writingplace* 5, the Padlet, the webinar and the booklet collecting the presentations, along with all the discussions that surrounded them – became the foundation of *Repository: 49 Methods and Assignments for Writing Urban Places*: a momentary manifestation of a constantly morphing space that took the form of a book.⁶ (Figs. 4-5).

Fig. 2. A digital platform on Padlet for a fast and wild brainstorming of terms, ideas, and references. Available at writingurbanplaces.eu/library/links/

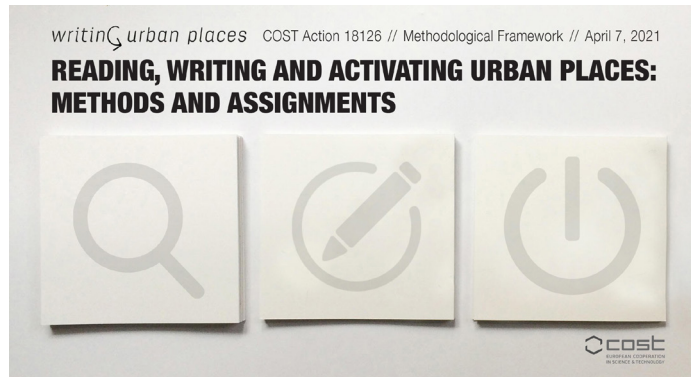


Fig. 3. PechaKucha-style webinar *Reading, Writing and Activating Urban Places*, April 7 2021. Design: Carlos Machado e Moura.



Fig. 4. A multitude of different methods rendered recognizable, comparable, and exportable to other contexts.



Fig. 5. *Repository: 49 Methods and Assignments for Writing Urban Places* (nai010 publishers, 2023), a momentary manifestation of a constantly morphing space that took the form of a book. Photo: Arto Ilkka Jalonen.



Fig. 6. Esteban Restrepo Restrepo reading an assignment at the *Repository* (2023) book launch in Tampere, April 2023. Photo: Arto Ilkka Jalonen.

The architecture of that book was such that it made it possible to render each of the different methods – the title with a verb, a short description and an assignment in the form of clear sequential steps – easily recognizable and comparable. Intended to be taken into the field and used by anyone interested in urban places, including students, scholars and professionals from all sorts of disciplines and the broader urban community, it even includes blank spaces for the users to fill with their own notes and a post-card to share experiences with others across cities and beyond the lifecycle of this network (Fig. 4).

As this project continues to expand and generate new outputs, and starts to be used in different disciplinary arenas, a critical task we must confront is defining the terms we utilize. Only after many iterations has it become clear that our mission has not been to locate or develop ‘narrative methods’ for Writing Urban Places, a term utilized in the network’s general statement.⁷ Instead, as noted above, it is to find, gather and share ‘methods’ to unearth, understand and construct those urban ‘narratives’. Thus, the methods contained in the different formats of the Repository of Methods are not intrinsically narrative. But *what* could we then try to unearth (and *why?*) and *how* do we intend to do so?

On Narratives and Methods

Defining ‘narrative’ in a multidisciplinary context, like this network, requires a certain degree of ambiguity (and open-mindedness). Etymologically, it derives from the Latin *narrat-* (‘related’, ‘told’), *narrare* (‘to tell’) or the late Latin *narrativus* (‘telling a story’).⁸ However, depending on the discipline in which it is employed, narratives may be understood and used differently. Literary urban scholar Lieven Ameel defines ‘narrative’, following James Phelan, as a ‘rhetorical act: somebody telling somebody else on some occasion and for some purpose(s) that something happened’.⁹ In their practical field guide for narratives in urban design, Ameel, Jens Martin Gurr and Barbara Buchenau define ‘narrative’ as being ‘when somebody at a particular

occasion tells somebody else a real or fictional story’.¹⁰ In a similar vein of thought, sociologist Catherine Riessman defines ‘narrative’ as ‘everyday oral storytelling (in which) a speaker connects events into a sequence that is consequential for later action and for the meanings that the speaker wants listeners to take away from the story. Events perceived by the speaker as important are selected, organized, connected and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience’.¹¹ Geographers, like Marie-Laure Ryan, Kenneth Foote and Maoz Azaryahu define ‘narrative’ as ‘a temporal art involving the sequencing of events’.¹² Narrative scholars, such as Jo Woodwiss, Kate Smith and Kelly Lockwood argue that ‘narratives are a communicative event, not a thing’ and scrutinize the idea that narratives are solely an *oral* form of storytelling.¹³ In their view, narrative ‘tellings’ are (oral, visual, written . . .) texts that involve ‘writerly’ (authorial) and ‘readerly’ (co-participant, audience) dynamics.¹⁴ These notions resonate productively with multiple discussions about the role of the author and text involving various authors, from Roland Barthes to Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida.¹⁵ Also, with the contrasting understandings of the narrative in architecture, ranging from its acknowledgment as a representational system that communicates – and even that this is its primary mode of operation, imbued with symbolic or political discourses – to the attempts to replace this capacity with a focus on the fundamental conditions of its physical nature.

Often, the terms ‘narrative’ and ‘story’ are used interchangeably and their distinctions are not always made explicit, thus complicating the task of defining ‘narrative’. Ameel, Gurr and Buchenau argue that defining ‘narrative’ also requires determining what a story is.¹⁶ They define a story as having, ‘first, human or human-like characters doing something; secondly, a change of situation; thirdly, an association with mental states’.¹⁷ A story, Kim argues, ‘is a detailed organization of narrative events arranged in a structure based on time although the events are not necessarily in chronological order’.¹⁸ Story structures usually have a beginning, a middle and an end. However, narratives may include, but are not reducible to, stories.¹⁹

For example, Jeremy Allan Hawkins's contribution to *Repository*, 'Collaging Community Narratives', problematizes definitions of 'narrative' that consider it a 'temporal art' and argues that the polyphony of a textual collage is 'seemingly ill-suited to immersive storytelling' but can be accommodated under broader understandings of 'narrative'.²⁰

But are these 'tellings' and 'communicative events' solely human? What can non-human others, like trees or inert material, buildings or visual matters, 'tell', or can they be part of such communicative acts and events? As Mark Wigley put it: 'Architecture is nothing but discourse about building, but something about building supposedly precedes discourse . . . a kind of quasi-philosophical claim about the status of objects that is built into our endless conversation about buildings.'²¹ Indeed, while almost philosophical in nature, these questions were latent throughout the process of editing the *Repository*, which included nearly as many varied voices from different disciplines as its methods. For example, in a Latourian approach, Saskia de Wit, a landscape architect, invites readers of the *Repository* to engage in a sort of communicative event or act with the 'innumerable other-than-human beings' that also inhabit our cities.²²

Like that of De Wit, several other contributions to the Repository of Methods problematize the argument that non-human others or the built environment 'cannot literally tell a story'.²³ Ameel et al. argue that they 'can have narrativity', which they define as 'the ability to evoke stories'.²⁴ The built environment is an intrinsic element of inquiry that brings together scholars and practitioners from a multiplicity of disciplines in *Writing Urban Places*. Few would deny that architecture communicates and, in that sense, is a language or like a language with its own signs – classifiable according to Ferdinand de Saussure's semiology or Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics, as Umberto Eco clearly synthesized.²⁵ Still, digital technologies and alternative approaches to the built environment presently introduce new dimensions and emphasize the communicational ability, either by the use of

digital devices in our current 'smart cities', able to read and respond to our online footprint, or through 'forensic architecture', an emergent academic field that refers to the production and presentation of architectural evidence in legal forums, including courts, and for advocacy purposes.²⁶

Besides providing a definition of the term 'narrative', this chapter aims to illustrate the complexity of the Repository of Methods and the way its multiple manifestations problematized and broadened the existing definitions of 'narrative'. Besides searching definitions of 'narrative', is it equally relevant to ponder what exactly narratives do, particularly in the context of *Writing Urban Places*? *Narrat-*, *narrare*, *narrativus*, Kim notes, 'are akin to Latin *gnārus* ('knowing'), derived from the ancient Sanskrit *gnā* 'to know'.²⁷ Thus, it is a 'form of knowledge that catches the two sides of narrative: telling as well as knowing'.²⁸ In this spirit, anthropologist Clifford Geertz coined the famous definition of culture as the sum of 'the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves'.²⁹ Thus, as theorist and philosopher Benedetto Croce stated: 'Where there is no narrative, there is no history.'³⁰ In the context of *Writing Urban Places*, we believe that narratives offer a situated, experiential and subjective way of *telling* and *knowing* urban places. The question that follows is: *How* can we unearth such narratives to construct (new) knowledge about urban places?

Methods

We thus enter the realm of methods, and query what exactly can be considered *legitimate* methods to find, understand and construct urban narratives. Etymologically speaking, the word 'method' derives from the Latin *methodus*, 'way of teaching or going', from the Greek *methodos*, 'pursuit or following after', from *meta*, 'in pursuit or quest of' + *hodos*, 'a way or manner' and also 'a travelling, journey'.³¹ Any dictionary includes several definitions of 'method' and depending on our disciplinary alignments, the word may evoke different emotions and judgements of what a method legitimately is and how it is to be employed. For the Repository of Methods, we decided

to embrace one of the broadest definitions: method is ‘a (particular) way of doing something’.³² So, a method works primarily as a roadmap for what it is to follow.

In the introduction to the *Repository*, we argue that ‘the ways we choose to inquire about the world around us are strongly influenced by who we are and where we stand’.³³ Therefore, adopting a broad definition of ‘method’ has been an intentional move because the *Repository of Methods*, in its many forms, is a project built by a multiplicity of ontological, epistemological and theoretical perspectives and positions. Nonetheless, these multiple perspectives cohabit in a realm that recognizes narratives as a form of knowledge and that knowledge can be constructed from a situated, experiential and subjective position.³⁴ Thus, while not (entirely) narrative in nature nor even deriving (wholly) from literary studies and regardless of their theoretical underpinnings – either ontologically or epistemologically speaking – all of the methods we collected throughout this journey function as a roadmap to unearth narrative knowledge about urban places. A process that, as noted by the editors of *Writingplace 5*, is ‘seemingly unattainable by other means’; a view that is echoed in several chapters of this book.³⁵ See, for instance, the chapters on Tampere and Çanakkale.

The *Repository of Methods* contains ways and roadmaps that employ a far larger degree of experimentation and creativity than commonly established methods. Some ‘tailor’ academically conventional approaches, such as ethnography or interviewing (‘Tailoring Ethnography and Weaving Stories’).³⁶ Others capture (mini-)narratives in unexpected or idling moments – when sitting on a bus or waiting in a line, for instance (see ‘Eavesdropping’).³⁷ Others find inspiration in creative literary works to invent methods that invite other engagements – sometimes playful or seemingly absurd – with urban places (see ‘Uncanny the Ordinary . . . with Cortazar’).³⁸ In other words, the *Repository of Methods*, in its diverse forms, offers a rich palette of methods to draw from to approach urban places. Furthermore, it recog-

nizes that those places are experienced in multiple ways all the time, and that taking the everyday and the ordinary seriously as sources of knowledge is perhaps one of the major advantages that narratives can provide.

The question that follows is where, then, can we find such narratives? Throughout our quest for methods, we stumbled upon expected and unexpected venues where narrative knowledge can be found. ‘Graffiti and street art,’ Clara Sarmiento tells us, ‘are produced to be discodified.’³⁹ She argues that ‘there are two possible layers of meaning in graffiti and street artwork: the internal narrative (the story told) and the external narrative, i.e. the social context that produces the image and sustains the framework of its interpretation when visualized.’ Hers is just an example of where one might unexpectedly find narratives.⁴⁰ What is more, in her contribution, she explains what kind of knowledge they may render and puts forth a method to engage with graffiti by mapping digital routes of graffiti and street art. In ‘Reading the City,’ Onorina Botezat locates narratives in literature and urban texts. She argues that ‘urban narration can play different roles, from a simple description to a central part of the plot’.⁴¹

Other contributions, instead of looking for narratives, aim to produce them. For example, one of Luc Pauwel’s contributions, ‘Re-Acting with Images’, ‘involves asking respondents to produce visual output (such as photographs, videos, drawings and installations) in connection with a specific research question’.⁴² In ‘Scaling Stories’, Klaske Havik proposes a method that ‘explores urban places by means of storytelling’ operating at different scales.⁴³ For each scale, ‘participants first identify a local protagonist’ they will either interview or walk with and document this process ‘by means of a map, a series of photographs and a text’ collated to produce a triptych ‘in which the three scales are represented side by side’.⁴⁴ The production of narratives (in diverse media) was also the aim of many of the workshops organized by *Writing Urban Places*, including the production of co-constructed narratives that weave visual material, poetic practices and

interviews into a 'visually expressive-form of scholarly communication' in Tampere; the construction of travelogues in Çanakkale; and production of ethnographic visual material in Tirana. See the chapters on these three cities in this publication.

Moreover, some contributions are aimed not only at producing narratives, but at using those narratives for the production of space. This is the case of 'Co-creating', in which the contributors organize a workshop with a community and invite them to tell 'stories of places and actions' as a way to learn about the sites of intervention. These stories are shared and further explored in a storytelling session where texts and images are produced. Subsequently, together these stories, texts and images are translated into 'inhabitable spaces'.⁴⁵

These are just a few ways in which narratives shape our understanding of urban places and small samples of the methods we gathered to unearth them. While our task comes to an end, the Repository of Methods continues to evolve and has now taken a life of its own. This is evident in the second part of this book, in which a diverse range of methods were tested or further developed in different cities and contexts.

On Cities

The original plan of the COST Action, in 2018, established that the initial phases – focused on investigating the possibilities of cross-disciplinary tools and techniques and previewing key literature on methods and concepts relevant to narrative analysis – should be followed by an engagement of the group in the exploration and 'testing the possibilities of identified methodologies and tools through site-specific workshops' in a series of medium-sized European cities.⁴⁶ This took place on different occasions: working group meetings, workshops and training schools for PhD students and young researchers. Throughout these activities, the members discussed various methods, aiming to raise the awareness of city dwellers

in their own urban environments and to build democratic places. These processes involved highlighting a series of narratives, identifying their origins and multiple sources, and producing new outputs that could generate knowledge and convey various interactions with those urban places. Although the activities that unfolded in those cities are discussed in detail in other chapters, grouping them according to their objectives and methods employed has turned out to be quite a productive exercise.

The first group, predominantly referring to the initial two years of the Action, corresponds to a series of meetings that provided the occasion for different looks at cities. Various activities made use of written or visual forms of communication – such as literary texts or graffiti – for the construction of meaningful itineraries. This was true of the WG3 and WG4 joint meeting in Almada, Portugal, in November 2019 and the WG2 and WG3 joint meeting in Limerick, Ireland, in December 2019, where the analysis of literary excerpts provided clues for the discovery of certain parts of the city. Confronting nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature with the present conditions of a specific urban area revealed significant changes in cities' flows, reading patterns of phenomena over extended periods of time and documenting those changes'. A similar experience was later provided during the mid-term conference that took place in Porto, Portugal, in October 2021. Thanks to the occasion offered by other projects affiliated with the Action, the walks through the easternmost area of Campanhã allowed for some activities of reading the city through the presence of graffiti and other physical elements. The perception of such traces offered opportunities to research social change and physical and cultural expressions as they develop, over time, in a particular material or cultural space.

A second group of activities, mostly corresponding to the PhD training schools and workshops, offered not only opportunities for reading the city but also to engage in the analysis and production of textual and visual material. This was the case of the training schools 'Local Stories and Visual

Narratives' that took place in Tallinn, Estonia, in September 2021 and 'Urban Chronicles in Empirical Context' in Osijek, Croatia, in April 2022, as well as in the workshop 'The City and the Myth' in Çanakkale, Turkey, in July 2022. In all these experiences, participants explored historical perspectives of the city, either through the cultural identities forged in ancient myths (Çanakkale), a past rescued from oblivion through literature (Osijek) or local urban stories (Tallinn), in their multiple perspectives, agendas and reappearances throughout time. Complementing the tasks of discussing historical, semantical and archetypal settings of these narratives, participants used different creative methods to explore and produce heterogeneous materials, including visual narratives and scholarly articles (Tallinn), creative workshops for writing, drawing, creating psychogeographical cartographies and constructing plaster objects (Osijek), and the recording of the personal experiences of each researcher during the fieldwork activities into an individual personal travelogue (Çanakkale).

Finally, a third group of activities focused primarily on the contemporary city, adopting an activist approach to the current problems of urban development and the inequalities thus generated. It was the case of the workshop 'Narrating Hiedanranta: Stories of Objects and Subjects of Urban Places' in Tampere, Finland, in June 2022, the workshop 'Skopje Brutalism Trail' in the capital of North Macedonia in September 2022 and the training school 'The Planned, the Unplanned and Everything in Between' in Tirana and Kamza, Albania, in March 2023. All of these activities brought new perspectives on the present and the exploration of multiple methods to generate different forms of activism. Either regarding the erasure of the Brutalist architecture of Kenzo Tange's reconstruction plan after the 1963 earthquake under the classicizing urban plan Skopje 2014 (Skopje), the developments foreseen for the former industrial area of Hiedanranta into a creative technological hub (Tampere) or the contrasting realities of the commercially-oriented planned city versus the informal and unplanned approaches of the local residents (Tirana). Those occasions allowed for

the exploration of visual, performative and literary methods, revealing how approaches similar to the ones explored in other activities can also be incorporated into different political, urban and architectural discourses. These methods include the use of video and cinema (Tirana), dance and performance (Skopje), graffiti making (Skopje), different types of visual representation methods, including the construction of new narratives with 'visually expressive-form of scholarly communication' (Tampere), poetic practices and midnight readings (Tampere), narratives of personal experience through situated-interviewing methods (Tampere), and the construction of multiple visual and poetic descriptions.

(Un)Classified Methods

As may be noted from the above, we attempted to group the city events under categories that come close to those of *reading*, *writing* and *activating*, following the titles of the three sessions of the webinar (Fig. 3). This classification was based on similarities in the scopes and methods used to engage with the city. Those under *reading* apparently focused on reading textual and visual material; those classified as *writing* not only read but also produced textual or graphic material; and the third group, *activating*, are those that seemingly are political in nature. However, organizing and classifying methods revealed to be a critical aspect of our work on methods and the motive of much debate throughout the entire process of the COST Action. During the webinar, one of the participants invited us to reflect on the usefulness of metaphors like *reading*, *writing* and *activating* and to question if the use of categories limits the scope of methods as they travel from one context to another. Another participant asked whether a city is something waiting to be *activated* and if the acts of *reading* or *writing* are any less political than others.

Classifying or grouping cities based on the 'main' methods employed in the different activities obscured 'minor' methods – those that are present, but seem to take backstage. This is problematic because what is particularly

interesting about the fieldwork events in the different cities is that they reveal different combinations of methods to reveal, interpret and create individual urban narratives – like the travelogues in Çanakkale, as well as collective ones – like the co-constructed narratives in Tampere. Similar discussions emerged while editing the *Repository*, in which we ultimately decided to organize the contribution to classify the collected methods released them from categorical constraints, provoking unexpected and creative applications while inviting exciting approaches that might weave different methods, configuring new ways to explore the multiple dimensions of urban places. Countless opportunities emerge: one might choose to wander aimlessly, find a bench to sit to eavesdrop on conversations and collage these moments to create a new urban narrative.

- 1 Carlos Machado e Moura et al. (eds.), *Repository: 49 Methods and Assignments for Writing Urban Places* (Rotterdam: nai010 publishers, 2023), 5.
- 2 Lorin Nicolae et al. (eds.), 'Narrative Methods for Writing Urban Places', *Writingplace: Journal for Architecture and Literature* 5 (2021), 4.
- 3 The Repository of Methods: writingurbanplaces.eu/library/links/.
- 4 The webinar is available at: youtube.com/watch?v=mpqk6if-rcU&list=PLXlMnpOPXf1eBmNLZbsQmQXSSZLdzI_jf
- 5 Machado e Moura et al., *Repository*, op. cit. (note 1), 12.
- 6 Lorin Nicolae et al., 'Reading, Writing and Activating Urban Places: Methods and Assignments', *Writing Urban Places March 2022*; writingurbanplaces.eu/reading-writing-and-activating-urban-places-methods-and-assignments/
- 7 See: writingurbanplaces.eu/about/#.
- 8 Jeong-Hee Kim, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry: The Crafting and Analysis of Stories as Research* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2016), 6.
- 9 Lieven Ameel, *The Narrative Turn in Urban Planning: Plotting the Helsinki Waterfront* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2021), 2.
- 10 Lieven Ameel, Jens Martin Gurr and Barbara Buchenau, *Narrative in Urban*

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- 11 Catherine Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2008), 14.
 - 12 Marie-Laure Ryan, Kenneth Foote and Maoz Azaryahu, *Narrating Space/ Spatializing Narrative: Where Narrative Theory and Geography Meet* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2016), 1.
 - 13 Jo Woodiwiss, Kate Smith and Kelly Lockwood (eds.), *Feminist Narrative Research*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).
 - 14 Ibid.
 - 15 Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', *Aspen* 5/6 (1967); Michel Foucault, 'What Is an Author?' (lecture, 1969), in: Michel Foucault, *Modernity and its Discontents* (1969); Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967).
 - 16 Ameel, Gurr and Buchenau, *Narrative in Urban Planning*, op. cit. (note 10).
 - 17 Ibid., 57.
 - 18 Jeong-Hee Kim, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry*, op. cit. (note 8), 8.
 - 19 Woodiwiss, Smith and Lockwood, *Feminist Narrative Research*, op. cit. (note 13), x.
 - 20 Jeremy Allan Hawkins, 'Collaging Community Narratives', in: Machado e Moura et al., *Repository*, op. cit. (note 1), 50.
 - 21 Mark Wigley, 'Story-Time', *Assemblage* 27 (1995), 83.
 - 22 Saskia de Wit, 'Imagining Dialogues with the Voiceless', in: Machado e Moura et al., *Repository*, op. cit. (note 1), 94.
 - 23 Ameel, Gurr and Buchenau, *Narrative in Urban Planning*, op. cit. (note 10), 63.
 - 24 Ibid., 63.
 - 25 Umberto Eco, *La Struttura Assente. La Ricerca Semiotica e il Metodo Strutturale* (Milan: Bompiani, 1972).
 - 26 Eyal Weizman, *Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017).
 - 27 Jeong-Hee Kim, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry*, op. cit. (note 8).
 - 28 Ibid., 6.
 - 29 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 448.
 - 30 Benedetto Croce, 'La storia ridotta sotto il concetto generale dell'arte', in: Benedetto Croce, *Primi saggi* (Bari: Laterza, 1951), 26.
 - 31 Etymology of the word 'method' obtained from: etymonline.com/word/method.

- 32 Definition adopted from the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary: oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/method#method, and the Macmillan Dictionary: macmillandictionary.com/british/method.
- 33 Machado e Moura et al., *Repository*, op. cit. (note 1), 8.
- 34 Jerome Bruner, a cognitive psychologist, recognized that there are two modes of thought: paradigmatic and narrative. The paradigmatic mode of thought is linked to positivism, which borrows methods, concepts and procedures from the natural sciences. The narrative mode of thought 'uses stories to understand the meaning of human actions and experiences'. See: Jeong-Hee Kim, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry*, op. cit. (note 8), 11 and Jerome Seymour Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986).
- 35 Niculae et al., 'Narrative Methods', op. cit. (note 2). See also the chapters on Tampere and Çanakkale in this publication.
- 36 Alasdair Jones, 'Tailoring Ethnography: (Co-)Present Cognition in Public Realm Research', in: Machado e Moura et al., *Repository*, op. cit. (note 1), 178-181.
- 37 Alina Cristea, 'Eavesdropping: Overlooked and (Over)Heard in the City', in: Machado e Moura et al., *Repository*, op. cit. (note 1), 70-73.
- 38 Esteban Restrepo Restrepo, 'Uncanny the Ordinary . . . with Cortázar', in: Machado e Moura et al., *Repository*, op. cit. (note 1), 190-193.
- 39 Clara Sarmento, 'Mapping Graffiti and Street Art: The Construction of Meaningful Itineraries', in: Machado e Moura et al., *Repository*, op. cit. (note 1), 106.
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- 41 Onorina Botezat, 'Reading the City: Literary Texts and Urban Writing', in: Machado e Moura et al., *Repository*, op. cit. (note 1), 142.
- 42 Luc Pauwels, 'Re-Acting with Images: Respondent-Generated Image Production and Photovoice', in: Machado e Moura et al., *Repository*, op. cit. (note 1), 134.
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- 44 *Ibid.*, 155.
- 45 Yazmín M. Crespo, Omayra Rivera Crespo and Irmariis Santiago Rodríguez, 'Co-Creating: Workshop Arquitecturas Colectivas', in: Machado e Moura et al., *Repository*, op. cit. (note 1), 46-49.
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