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Published PDF deposited in Coventry University's Repository

Original citation:

Wicks, S 2023, 'Using film to interpret a sense of place: a practice-based case study', *Media Practice and Education*, vol. (In-Press), pp. (In-Press).

<https://doi.org/10.1080/25741136.2023.2220095>

DOI 10.1080/25741136.2023.2220095

ISSN 2574-1136

ESSN 2574-1144

Publisher: Taylor and Francis Group

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Using film to interpret a sense of place: a practice-based case study

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a new approach for understanding the sense of place in film, based on the findings of a practice-based case study. With a background in both television production and heritage interpretation, I approached the production of a short film for a heritage site as an opportunity to investigate filmic approaches to interpreting and analysing a sense place by using the location-linked theories of space and place from philosophy and human geography and the understanding of setting and landscape from film studies. The article contributes to the ongoing discussion around the place at a time when digital technologies are increasingly altering definitions of spatiality and one's sense of place.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 2 March 2023
Accepted 27 May 2023

KEYWORDS

Place; film; location; setting; landscape; heritage

Introduction: research methods and project background

This article contributes to ongoing discussions around the place at a time when digital media are increasingly altering definitions of spatiality. I explore a range of critical issues around the use of film to interpret a sense of place which arose in the context of a case study and elaborate a model for the analysis of sense of place on the screen. During the production of the case study, a double articulation between theory and practice emerged as I asked questions and considered a critical perspective. The questions concerned the interpretation of a sense of place for a disused heritage site by means of a film, particularly with remote audiences in mind; as such I examine the decision-making process behind film making techniques for interpreting a sense of place, as well as theoretical tools to analyse a film's ability to create a sense of place. The juxtaposition of physical place and digital technology was an underlying theme throughout the project. While it is important to note that the film is not intended as a model for interpreting the sense of place on screen, but it is the reflective process through which a new approach for analyses emerged. This approach may be helpful for others involved in both the production and analyses of cultural heritage films.

The research methods include (a) a literature review exploring the sense of place from the perspective of theoretical approaches from human geography, media studies, and the

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understanding of location on screen in television and film studies; (b) a reflection on my filmmaking methods; and (c) analysis of the finished film through two theories to assess the sense of place created – namely the differentiation between *space* and *place* as understood by philosophers and human geographers (Heidegger 1951; Casey 1996; Tuan 2001) and the distinction between *setting* and *landscape* in film studies (Lefebvre 2006).

The case study focuses on a short factual film, *Beili Du Chapel, The Story of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists* (2021), produced for Welsh Religious Building's Trust and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW) for the Welsh Chapels project. The aim was to create a digital resource explaining the historical background of the chapel and its architecture. The 3D modelling files were provided for archiving within the National Monuments Record. The film has been screened for community groups and is also distributed online on the Welsh Chapels website (<https://welshchapels.wales/beili-du>). The production took place during a COVID-19 lockdown in the UK, which had some implications on the production methods, not discussed in detail in this article. The brief was to tell the story of Beili Du, a relatively humble chapel, but one geographically in close proximity to the overarching story of Welsh Calvinistic Methodism, a religious and social movement of the eighteenth century. As such, it was decided to take a dual approach by articulating both the chapel's own narrative and the wider story of the movement. The chapel still stands today but is inaccessible to the public, out of use, and run-down, and as such the clients saw a benefit in telling the chapel's story digitally. Welsh chapels are iconic buildings in the landscape, yet many are now empty and forlorn. Their heritage and legacy have had an immense impact on Welsh culture; the chapel buildings – each window, pew, and brick – are a kind of a physical proof and material testimony of the Welsh nonconformist identity. This case study looks at how this material testimony of a sense of place can be interpreted through the medium of film.

Sense of place: a fundamental human experience

Sensing, as understood through phenomenology, stands in contrast with rational knowing, described by Merleau-Ponty as 'living communication with the world that makes it present to us as the familiar place of our life' (in Toadvine 2019). Human geographer Tuan (2001) brings a phenomenological approach to exploring the place by differentiating between 'space' as open-ended, without limits, with an offer of freedom; and 'place' on the other hand as limited, closed, potentially linked to a feeling of restriction but also to homeliness, familiarity and sense of identity and ownership. The open *space* offers freedom but also leaves us exposed and vulnerable, whereas a *place* offers a safe central location from which to venture out. 'Human lives are a dialectical movement between shelter and venture, attachment and freedom' (Tuan 2001: 54). For Heidegger, the place is an essential part of human dwelling, within which we are at home (1951). So, having both the freedom and opportunity of space, and being rooted in a place or several places, is important for us to thrive. Sense of place, then, is created by human engagement with places, where the characteristics of a physical place and the personal connections to the place help foster a sense of attachment and belonging.

Most people have several places of importance and familiarity to them – such as home, workplace, and a regular holiday destination (Tuan 2001). An intense experience at a place

can leave as much of a trace as a long time spent at another place. 'While it takes time to form an attachment to place, the quality and intensity of experience matters more than simple duration' (Tuan 2001: 198). People may also feel a connection to a place which has a personal or family history; I suggest that this can also apply to a place they have never visited. For example, I have only very briefly visited the parts of Finland lost to Russia after the Second World War, but feel a connection to the region where my grandmother grew up, before having to evacuate to the other side of the redrawn border, and where my grandfather died and where his body remained. Sense of place is then determined by the experiences, personal relationships, and emotional meanings attached to a place. It engages with intangible elements as well as the physical elements of a place, such as emotions, dreams, and hopes that people relate to a place. Allen (1990, 1) describes a sense of place as 'a fundamental human experience'.

One of the key aims of heritage interpretation is to enhance the visitors' or audience's sense of place (Uzzell 1996), as such the UK conservation charity National Trust (2017) is also interested in a sense of place or 'topophilia', a term originally coined by the poet Hansen and Waade (2017). A study by the Trust examines how places affect people, how they become special, and why people feel a pull towards them. The findings of the study reinforce the importance of places in shaping people's lives. The researchers found that not only is there a 'deep underlying connection between people and places', evidenced by physical bodily responses which people struggled to articulate, but that there is also a visceral connection triggered by a mere image of the place (2017: 3).

A changing sense of place

Our understanding of place has evolved radically from ancient times to the Digital Age, where technological changes have impacted how we relate to each other and the world around us (Bautista 2013; Lindgren 2017). Digital technologies, combined with globalisation, have disrupted a sense of belonging to a place, and left people feeling an increased sense of placelessness (Malpas 2008). We are now 'less likely to see our locality as the center of the universe' and 'our physical surroundings as the sources of all our experiences' (Meyrowitz 2005, 23). Marx referred to this as the annihilation of space by time—technology has annihilated distance in terms of communication and developments in transportation have contributed to a 'shrinking world' (Musto 2008).

The move towards a networked society and away from local communities to 'multiple, shifting sets of glocalised ties' (Wellman et al. 2003), means that people are more able to self-define their identities through a multitude of media sources, often disconnected from their physical location – including through films. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when we had no choice but to stay at home while joining others online instead of at physical places, our sense of place was again disrupted – on one hand we were more tied to our physical location, but on the other hand, we travelled far and wide in the digital realm. Place is an inherently key component for heritage organisations, and during the pandemic, they joined others in attempts to overcome the significance of place by offering virtual tours of museums and historic sites. Film and digital media have been widely utilised for heritage interpretation, but as most digital media platforms are not tied to physical place (with the exception of some augmented reality applications, audio guides, and

location-based mobile phone apps), and are accessible anywhere, anytime, they are inherently disruptive of a physical sense of place. Recent changes in technology have also prompted an increase in the popularity of mapping tools and location-aware mobile technologies transforming the ways we experience locations. 'Increasingly, the types of information we find and access online depend on where we are' (Gordon and de Souza e Silva 2011, 7). Rather than detaching people from place, mobile communication technologies and location information actually (re)attach people to places (Özkul 2014). Furthermore, developments in Virtual Reality enable users to inhabit common worlds, virtual places which while being different from a physical place, do share some common features in terms of vision, sound, and even social interaction. Augmented Reality, which combines virtual and physical worlds into one experience also offers new understandings of place, augmenting our experience of the physical place. The drawback of virtualisation of place is apparent, communicating the atmosphere of place, including the sounds and smells, is harder to achieve digitally (Ciolfi 2021).

The geographer Massey (1991) argued for a rethink of our understanding of a sense of place and suggested the need for a 'progressive; not self-closing and defensive, but outward-looking' sense of place, one that is not prone to 'sentimentalized recovering of sanitized "heritages"' or even hostility towards newcomers. She called for a 'global sense of place' (p. 24), describing places as processes which contain a linkage to what is outside the place, with internal conflicts rather than single unique identities. This need for an outward-looking sense of place is linked with much of the debate in not only the heritage sector but also in society as a whole, as we address our own relationships with our past and future, again intertwining time and space together – indeed Massey (2005) stated that time and space are implicated in each other. In Wales, and in the UK more broadly, place-related debates currently touch particularly on class divides, colonialism, Brexit and migration, and as such highlight the often-emotive significance of place in our lives.

There is a bid for a new understanding of place in the fields of heritage and museum studies too. Bautista argues that place in the digital age no longer implies physicality, locality, or permanence but that place now has a symbiotic relationship with experience. People still want a sense of place and belonging, but this now refers to a 'physical sensation of comfort and familiarity' which can be part of experiencing a physical place or an online space and suggests a new understanding of place in cultural heritage in the digital age, that of a fluid *place/experience* (Bautista 2013, 226) linking with Masseys understanding of places as processes.

It is clear that digital experiences of place are changing the way we experience and understand place, prompting also an increased interest in place in screen studies (Falkheimer and Jansson 2006; Warf and Arias 2009; De Rosa and Fowler 2022). Work by Hansen and Waade (2017) and Roberts (2016) in location studies as a method for understanding how places are screened with particular focus on Nordic crime drama and by Lefebvre in film landscape (2006) has been particularly influential here. This article concentrates specifically on a sense of place, using a short film case study within the field of heritage interpretation.

The filmmaking process

Beili Du chapel is small and architecturally humble, so the project settled on dual approach: (1) telling a very local story of a small Calvinistic Methodist chapel in rural

Breconshire and (2) telling a wider regional story of the emergence of the religious and social movement and the people involved, consequently giving context to why such a humble building is of significance and worth conserving. As such, the story of Welsh Calvinistic Methodists and the events that took place near Beili Du, take half of the running time of the whole film. Following documentary filmmaker Jill Daniels who aims to '... articulate place as a lived environment for its human subjects and to analyze the varied ways it relates to the subjects in my films' (2019, 91–92), we aimed to do the same with historical figures and their relationship with the chapel and as a place.

The film takes the form of an expository documentary (Nichols 2001), with emphasis on conveying historical and architectural accuracy – this was a prerequisite with project partner Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales who record and archive archaeological and building data. 3D visualisations were constructed from laser scan data and archive information on interior detail of the chapel as it was in its heyday. The London Charter for the Computer-based Visualisation of Cultural Heritage (2006) addressed various debates around authenticity and methodology of virtual heritage 'by identifying principles concerning the importance of a clear purpose for the model, the transparency of data sources, a commitment to authenticity and historical rigour with clear distinctions between fact and speculation' (Devine 2017). The 3D modelling enabled us to show the chapel as it once was, including the flickering gas lamps, modelled after the originals, the stove, and the interior furnishings, based on records and expert knowledge, as well as showing sun rays through windows and surrounding vegetation with the aim to bring the space to life. The film also utilised appropriate archive materials, such as portraits, maps, and records as well as dramatic reconstruction footage.

We consequently used evidentiary documentary editing, organizing cuts to present a single narrative supported by logic and evidence (Nichols 2001). Narratives are known to increase belonging and attachment in urban settings (Ball-Rokeach, Kim, and Matei 2001), and cultural groups define themselves through a myth of origin '... a story that constructs the group as a community' (Alasuutari and Alasuutari 2009), clearly seen in my own background as Finnish Karelian and the lost region in Russia. In Wales, non-conformity with its manifold chapels is of direct significance to any discussion on national identity (Jones 1992) though only one aspect of a multiplicity of identities constructed through different lived histories, linking back to Massey's idea of place as a process. The Beili Du film's narrative is used to build a connection between the place and the audience, locating the specific place in the bigger historical narrative, and as such highlighting the non-conformist movement and the chapel building's significance in Welsh history. The phenomenological approach suggests that place experience is multi-sensory, therefore as well as visuals, it was important to consider sound, and how a soundscape can support the construction of a sense of place. Soundscapes are known to be able to create a sense of being somewhere (Turner et al. 2003) and as choral singing and musical gatherings were a big part of the Welsh nonconformist movements, we used audio tracks recorded at acoustically similar spaces and relevant to the setting, including a male voice singing a hymn written by one of the characters introduced in the film, an original recording of congregational chanting and an instrumental version of well-known Welsh tune Cwm Rhondda. Importantly, the narrator has an appropriate Welsh accent, and a second version of the film was produced with a Welsh voice over.

Sense of place and film: space and place

In film, the place has an obvious role as a backdrop to action, with 'setting' understood from the earliest days of cinema as playing an important role (Bordwell, Thompson, and Smith 2019, 115). Actualités, early films made by the Lumière brothers often portrayed actual events, such a train arriving at a station or workers leaving a factory (1896, 1895). These events happened in familiar places and lacked narrative construction that we are so familiar with in films today. The films reinforced audiences' sense of identity with place, as the same workers delighted in watching themselves and familiar places mediated through film. As well as being a backdrop for action and the narrative taking place in, setting can take a more active role, becoming a character in its own right and as such, a more dynamic element of the narrative. In these instances, the setting becomes part of narrative construction and provides an emotional attachment to viewers, particularly when acting as a key component of the story (Beeton 2010). Here, the sense of place also becomes a relevant consideration, and I bring together three strands: (1) the audiences' ability to read the setting in film, (2) the differentiation between *space* and *place* (as outlined above), and (3) the audience's awareness of sense of place attached to a screen location.

Films depict the differentiation between *space* and *place* utilising various techniques, from *mis-en-scene* to sound design and narrative construction. I suggest that both *space* and *place* can communicate aspects of a sense of place, but coming back to phenomenology, it is the film's manifestation of the human experience in relation to space and place and the convergence of the filmmaker's and the audience's perception of place and space (but not always due to different life experiences) or the ability of audiences to distinguish between a *space* and a *place* in film, which offers some indication of how successful the film is in communicating a sense of place. When audiences are able to read the emotional connections attached to a screen location, they have a deeper awareness of the sense of place attached to that location.

The Beili Du film is situated in eighteenth century Wales, and the setting is constructed by the viewer from the audio-visual cues – the wide shots of Welsh landscape, the historic map, the black and white archive photos and artwork, the dramatic reconstruction, the music, and the audio commentary, as well as from the knowledge the viewer already possess of the spatial characteristic of our world (Lefebvre 2006). The setting of this film is both vague – representing the whole of Wales – and precise, representing a specific chapel, but in both instances, providing a backdrop for events to occur in. Each setting has a multitude of interpretations: for example, Talgarth church is in Breconshire, which is also in the larger geographical setting of Wales, which is within the UK, in Europe and in the world. Though several specific places are mentioned throughout the film, the intention is for viewers to categorise it into two larger settings: Wales as a larger, vague setting (within which several specific places are mentioned), and Beili Du chapel as a very specific place in Breconshire.

Here I link with the theory differentiating *space/place*, and suggest that for a film to successfully communicate a sense of place, each location needs to be represented either as a *place* or a *space* using film production techniques. This means that audiences should be able to read the location related cues provided by filmmakers and get a sense of place through the film. I endeavoured to represent the chapel as *place*, creating a more familiar

sense of place for the chapel, and the other geographical locations in the film as *spaces*, introducing these locations more nebulously. This was achieved by utilising narrative and audio visual tools. The segment specifically concerning Beili Du chapel includes detailed architectural descriptions of the building and furnishings to create a sense of familiarity with the place, whereas the overall story of Welsh Calvinistic Methodists is linked to *spaces* which are less familiar, with less architectural and location-specific detail both in terms of the visuals and the soundscape. To improve the sense of place and familiarity and attachment to the chapel even further, a more personal narrative might have been beneficial.

To further test this method for analysing the sense of place in film, I consider another cultural heritage film, *Järvisedun ensimmäiset talonpojat*, (Försti 2020), similar to my case study, in order to analyse how the film presents a sense of place by making a distinction between place and space. The film tells the story of the first inhabitants of this particular Finnish region and consists of presenter pieces to the camera, an expert interview, re-enactments, and a variety of scenic shots of the location. In this film, I argue that place is represented by the region and specifically the house museum, as it is today; while the location, as it was in history, acts as space. The place where the presenter is physically located during filming, a location we can visit feels familiar to me as a Finnish person (the target audience as there are no subtitles in English or other languages) and specifically someone interested in my cultural heritage, even without having visited the specific museum. Here the characteristics of this physical place and the personal connections I have to the place help foster a sense of attachment and belonging in me. The past version of the same location, as presented through re-enactments comes across as less familiar, as exciting but also with a sense of threat at the hardness of life at the time and the unfamiliarity of the lifestyle presented. Here the intertwining of time and space and the fact that they are implied in each other becomes explicit.

Sense of place and film – setting and landscape

As well as a film's ability to communicate place/space, I use the concept of *landscape* from film studies (Lefebvre 2006; Beeton 2010) to analyse a sense of place in the film. Eisenstein experimented with the landscape in both his films and in his theory, interlinking it with music and identifying it as an emotional element, and as the freest element of the film, one which has the most flexibility to convey mood and emotion, or even spiritual experiences (Finocchiaro 2014; Lefebvre 2006). The way Eisenstein describes landscape moves away from a functional backdrop, into a more meaningful active part of the story of the film. Certain genres, such as Nordic Noir crime drama originating from Scandinavia, are well known for the setting becoming a character in its own right, and for the genre's ability to emit a strong sense of place. Creeber (2015, 22) explains that the various story-lines in Nordic Noir are '... frequently reflected in an intense sense of place, their enigmatic and barren landscapes often seen as symbolizing the psychological mood of its frequently troubled detectives'. Many traditional American westerns also portray a hostile setting which takes an active role in the narrative, at times even becoming the 'primary character or "star"' with Native Americans seen as part of the hostile land (Beeton 2008). A setting which moves away from being a mere backdrop is described as a *landscape* in these instances.

Lefebvre (2006) expands on this distinction between *landscape* and *setting* in film, with the latter referring to the space where action takes place – a backdrop and functional space which links with the action and the characters' motivations. A *landscape*, on the other hand, is more than a mere background to accompany the actions and events taking place in it. Here Lefebvre refers to Eisenstein, who describes film landscape and film music as sharing 'the ability to express, in cinematic form ... what is otherwise inexpressible' (xii) and describes the landscape as a space of aesthetic contemplation and spectacle. Using British television drama as an example to differentiate between setting and landscape, a traditional crime drama utilises a town and the crime site as *setting* for action, whereas recent post-Nordic-Noir series such as *Hinterland* (Y Gwyll 2013) share the Nordic-Noir approach of making the *landscape* a central character with the story growing out of dark brooding skies, the remote locations and wild landscape (Roberts 2016).

In terms of documentary films, Ames (2009, 50) uses the term *landscape* to describe '... the physical setting, the visual form, and the "cultural power"'. His analysis of Werner Herzog's documentary practice fits well with the conceptual differentiation between setting and landscape, as he describes how Herzog uses landscape as a filmmaking tool, surveying and displaying physical terrain as he '... charts an inner movement traversing, desire, fear, passion, dependence and fascination' (50). The cinematic landscape, Ames notes, becomes a site for eliciting emotions from the audience. Herzog himself describes the landscape in the documentary as not a representation of the physical terrain, but one that shows the inner state of mind, the inner landscape of the person whose story unfolds (Cronin 2002). His film Herzog (2005) is an apt example of this, as the rugged Alaskan landscapes are used as metaphorical tools to convey the main character's inner state of mind. The screen location is thereby not treated as a mere backdrop, nor as just the natural habitat, but as a narrative tool where the characteristics of the physical place and the characters personal connections foster a sense of place. The sense of place here is determined by the emotional meanings, such as the character's hopes and fears, connected with the place, which the filmmaker is portraying.

If a sense of place, as I describe it above, encompasses experiences, personal relationships, and emotional meanings attached to a place, engaging with both the physical elements of place but also with the intangible ones such as emotions, dreams, and hopes that people relate to a place, then I suggest that a cinematic *landscape* is a filmic answer to communicating a sense of place.

Lefebvre refers to two modes of viewer activity: *narrative mode* and *spectacular mode* (2006, 29), allowing audiences to both follow the narrative and contemplate the audiovisual spectacle of the film. Herzog wants audiences to resist viewing the world in his films through our rational eyes but instead view them sensually (Prager 2010). So, the *landscape* of the film expresses the story in cinematic form, and though this is discussed by Lefebvre in terms of exterior landscapes and natural scenes, in terms of my research on the sense of place, I suggest that the *landscape* could be read as any location – in terms of my Beili Du film case study – both the exterior wide shots and the interior of the chapel. In mainstream cinema today even natural and exterior spaces mainly function as *settings* rather than *landscapes* (Lefebvre 2006, 24), as films are narratively led, depicting actions and events rather than places. But films can also provide a visual spectacle, and

as well as following a narrative, wherein viewers are able to absorb audio-visuals as aesthetic forms.

In terms of the Beili Du case study, I find that an additional sequence with aerial footage, 3D visualisation, and/or dramatic reconstruction with music but without the 'voice-of-God' narration could have resulted in more reflective sequence, one that is less rushed, longer in duration and reflective, offering more time for audiences to switch to the *spectacular mode*, and as such being less reliant on the narration and concentrating more on cinematic visuals and a soundscape. Such changes may have helped to aesthetically better portray a sense of place. The lack of personal accounts also means that the film does not clearly attach emotional meanings to either the physical features of the place or to personal connections where those did not exist previously. As such, the detailed interior 3D visuals and descriptions may work as *landscapes* for those with a pre-existing connection to the chapel or to Welsh Calvinistic Methodists, but less so for others.

Coming back to *Järvisseudun ensimmäiset talonpojat*, the short heritage film also presents what I class as landscapes – shots and sequence where the visuals are prioritised over the verbal, offering space of aesthetic contemplation and spectacle with aerial footage of the region; and also with slow moving shots of the museum interiors, providing an opportunity for the audience to switch off from the knowledge that has been provided to experience the visual spectacle of the location and as such providing a filmmaking tool which uses the characteristics of the physical place to foster a sense of place.

Another example is a short film produced by Dextra Visual about Elwoe Castle in Wales (n.d.). This film is similar to various films created by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, in that it relies on the 3D visualisation of what the castle would have looked like in the thirteenth century, but also includes present-day aerial footage of the castle; and additionally uses an emotive music track, reminiscent of music used in feature films with historic themes. Each shot of both the present-day ruins and the 3D reconstructions has movement, and the music track spans the whole duration of the film. As there is no narrative, and every scene has a level of visual spectacle, I would argue that the film is a landscape sequence with no shot acting as a setting – even the interior ones, with no action taking place and no information offered beyond the architecture of the castle and the surrounding landscape on the screen. On the other hand, the lack of narrative and information, means that viewers with no prior personal connection are unable to differentiate between place and space in this film.

Conclusion

In this practice-based case study, I explored a range of critical issues related to the use of film to interpret a sense of place. I established sense of place as the experiences, personal relationships, and emotional meanings attached to a place, engaging with both the physical and intangible elements of place and in terms of a filmic experience, linking this with the established differentiation between *space* and *place* and *setting* and *landscape* (Tuan 2001; Lefebvre 2006; Ames 2009; Beeton 2010). Sense of place is closely linked to cultural and individual identity negotiation and construction; and despite many people's lack of clear geographical roots today, we still feel connected to places and build our identities

around those connections. Heritage sites play a part in identity conferring (O'Neill 2006) and in providing special places which help us anchor our lives to places of personal meaning and connection; film is one tool at our disposal for communicating a sense of place, particularly effective for sites which are inaccessible.

The case study concerned the production of a short expository documentary film about a disused chapel in rural Wales, which utilises narrative storytelling, 3D reconstruction, re-enactment, archives, and sound design and it was my reflective process during and after production through which a new approach for analysing sense of place in film emerged. The film's narrative follows a dual approach, telling the wider story of the religious movement and the very specific story of the chapel, in order to locate the building in its wider historical context. The familiar structure of an expository documentary lent itself well to exploring place in many respects, while lacking in others.

I suggested analysing a film's ability to analyse a sense of place by utilising two place-related approaches: Firstly, the film's ability of differentiate between *space* and *place*, thus helping audiences read the audio-visual cues in reference to on-screen locations and understand the emotional connections attached to different locations. Secondly, the inclusion of locations that act as *landscapes* on screen, which I suggest is one filmic answer for communicating a sense of place, by transporting viewers to the spectacular mode of viewing (Lefebvre 2006).

The Beili Du film managed to differentiate between space and place, using eighteenth century Wales and references to England as the overarching story to Welsh Calvinistic Methodism as a *space*, and the more intimately introduced Beili Du chapel as a *place*. As such, I suggest to some extent enabling audiences to experience a sense of place. The expository documentary format and lack of personal accounts and non-narrated sequences, meant that the film was less successful in creating a *landscape*, and in this regard may have communicated a sense of place to viewers with existing personal connections but not for others. While *landscape* has traditionally referred to exterior scenes, here I included the possibility of interior locations also acting as such. It might be prudent to consider a more reflective sequence and personal accounts in the future to achieve what is understood as a *landscape*, in order to better communicate a sense of place. I used further examples of cultural heritage films from Finland and Wales to analyse the sense of place created in these films, including reflective sequences with music and aerial shots, encouraging audiences to move to the spectacular mode of viewing.

Sense of place remains meaningful concept today, but changes in digital technologies have impacted on how we experience place. I suggest that the dual approach detailed in this article for understanding a sense of place as portrayed in film may be helpful for others researching and producing work within film production, particularly in the heritage sector. Further research might be to test the hypothesis with a focus group, which is questioned about their viewing experience to try to ascertain whether they viewed scenes as *spaces* or *places* and as *settings* or *landscapes*, thus moving from the narrative mode of viewing into the spectacular mode.

Acknowledgements

I thank Dr. Kevin Walker (Coventry University) and Dr. Miriam De Rosa (Ca' Foscari University of Venice) for their input as my PhD supervisors.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

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