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To cite this article: Joshua Synenko (2017): Geolocating popular memory: Recorded images of Hashima Island after Skyfall, Popular Communication

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15405702.2017.1378891>



Published online: 08 Nov 2017.



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## Geolocating popular memory: Recorded images of Hashima Island after *Skyfall*

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines efforts to document Japan's Hashima Island following its appearance in the popular film *Skyfall*. It describes how the film's commercial success led to an effort by Google to produce images of the island's built environment using digital navigation technologies. It further describes how this effort led the Japanese government to include Hashima Island in a bid to gain Unesco heritage status for Meiji-era sites of industrialization. Drawing from visual studies, critical media studies, and from interdisciplinary approaches to collective memory, this article analyzes how the circulation of images depicting Hashima Island in popular culture affects continuing efforts to hold Japan accountable for injustices committed there in the past. By narrowing on the moment "after" *Skyfall*, the article concludes with an assessment of the island's Google Street View archive in terms of its broader impact on the uses of navigation, spatial presence, and digital heritage.

A tiny abandoned coal-mining village in South Japan called Hashima Island gained international attention after it was featured in *Skyfall* (2012), a James Bond film directed by Sam Mendes. As I argue in the following, the unprecedented exposure of this historically significant site has had the effect of replacing its living memory with obscure narratives regarding the "ghostly" appeal of the island's "untouched" mining infrastructure and urban ruins. By drawing parallels to diverse cultural artifacts in which the island is featured, I suggest that Hashima Island's conspicuous appearance in *Skyfall* was designed to support Japan's ongoing refusal to acknowledge its troubled past as a site of atrocity perpetrated by the country's imperialist rulers.

On the other hand, I argue that inserting Hashima Island into the specific imaginaries put forward in *Skyfall* led to a proliferation of images and ways of seeing. After the film's release, for example, the Google Corporation produced a visual archive of Hashima Island using its Street View Trekker device, in which it explicitly linked *Skyfall*'s narrative to Street View's navigational interface by urging the film's audience to "pretend that you are James Bond waiting to be rescued" (Google Maps, 2013). Conceived as a motivator to preserve the site's physical remains, the mapping initiative not only bolstered Hashima Island's fledgling tourism campaign, but it also bestowed legitimacy on Japan's bid to include the surrounding region under UNESCO's list of protected sites. World Heritage

status has now been conferred but without any formal recognition of the injustices that resulted from Japan's policy of conscripting miners from China and the Korean peninsula.

Japan's willingness to celebrate historical sites without recognizing their legacy of abuse brings to light an important distinction between "historical justice" and "collective memory." In the following, I explore how these competing concepts become embedded in popular culture frameworks and narratives. For instance, the prolific visual culture surrounding Hashima Island has undoubtedly encouraged Japan to adopt a triumphalist attitude toward the sites of its industrial past, and indeed this triumphalism tends to be reinforced with films like *Skyfall*. On a deeper level, however, beyond simply replacing expressions of loss, trauma, or reparation with hollow themes intended to produce mass entertainment, I argue that inserting Hashima Island into visual campaigns like the blockbuster film, or, indeed, the subsequent Street View archive, has in fact permanently altered the initiation, development, and cultural significance of World Heritage practices, and therefore of human rights memory in general.

I conclude the article by noting the geographical content of the images and the persistent reference to "navigation" as a key metaphor, arguing that Hashima Island may be helpful for uncovering a shift in the intrinsic value that we attribute to heritage ecologies around the world. Among other things, the Hashima Island story reveals that heritage information tends to be consumed not only in geographically specific ways, but also in highly individualized ways, as digital platforms like Street View are designed to cater to this mode of consumption. Moreover, as the Street View interface amply demonstrates, the Hashima Island story reveals that digital heritage increasingly relies upon the absence of expository material, relinquishing the heritage practitioner's responsibility to construct verifiable historical narratives for its users. I therefore argue that historical justice initiatives must find new ways to participate in mediations of popular culture, entertainment, and user-generated content.

I support these arguments by focusing on three related themes. First, I reference an ongoing dispute regarding the concepts of "historical justice" and "collective memory." I use Hashima Island's remembered role in Japan's Meiji Restoration as an illustration of this dispute, and then briefly examine an ongoing confrontation between Japan and South Korea over the treatment of conscripted laborers at the site. Second, I compare the history of representing Hashima Island in popular culture with its recent appearance in *Skyfall*, and note the gradual attrition of historical justice claims in the process. Third, through a critical examination of the heritage "user," I analyze Google Street View's geolocate content and its impact on the uses of navigation, spatial presence, and digital heritage.

## Human rights memory

In some ways, human rights advocacy and the language surrounding collective memory emerge from very different disciplinary traditions and concerns, appearing at times to represent opposing tendencies. For Andreas Huyssen, human rights advocates tend to find fault in the lack of political direction or conclusiveness that is exhibited by many collective memory initiatives, whereas those calling for a broader recognition of memory and its importance for maintaining and affirming collective responsibility remain suspicious of the universalism, or "legalist paradigm," exhibited by many human rights activists (Huyssen, 2015). This divergence largely comes down to competing disciplinary traditions

and perspectives. While human rights advocacy derives from the fields of law, political science, and sociology, the theory and practice of collective memory derive from literature and the integrated arts (Huyssen, 2015). Despite this distinction, Huyssen goes on to argue that human rights claims that do not make collective memory a central feature in their justification will appear deficient and ineffective, and vice versa. In fact, the increasing demand for historical justice that Neumann and Thompson (2015) describe as being integral to contemporary political culture coincides directly with the dramatic increase in awareness of collective memory that Huyssen previously identified as a “memory boom” (Huyssen, 1994). In effect, both phenomena are symptomatic of a felt need throughout Western culture to establish ties with the past and to remember, and therefore to address, the wrongs that have been made against specific groups.

Though it may be taken for granted that demands for historical justice and the theory and practice of collective memory are related but different, my task in this section of the article is neither to validate nor to further diagnose these underlying symptoms within the framework of “cultural amnesia,” as Huyssen has done, but rather to situate demands among the former residents of Hashima Island to acknowledge the human rights violations that were done to them (Huyssen, 1994). In the examination that follows, I focus on positioning narratives that serve to mark specific periods in modern Japanese history, briefly exploring the way in which Hashima Island came to reflect the era of the Meiji regime and its labor conditions. I then return to examine Japan’s contested UNESCO bid, entitled “Sites of Japan’s Meiji Industrial Revolution: Iron and Steel, Shipbuilding and Coal Mining.” I argue that the ongoing conflict over the validity of this bid reveals conceptual differences between “historical justice” and “collective memory.”

The abandonment of Hashima Island by the Mitsubishi Company in 1974 marked the end of an era for this region as a site of resource extraction, including its century-long history of using forced or conscripted labor. With the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the Japanese government took a decisive shift away from the feudalism of the Tokugawa shogunate, combining imperial aims with modern technology and systems of labor management. In fact, popular assumptions about the Meiji Restoration rest on the idea that a powerful centralized authority with imperial ambitions was effective in displacing the shogunate because of the latter’s inability to manage the threat of resurgent powers in the West (Beasley, 1972). Unlike neighbors such as China, it is widely accepted by scholars and historians that the Japanese authorities distinguished themselves by embracing Western technologies as part of a defensive strategy, and that this in turn became the motor of Japan’s modernization (Beasley, 1972). The early history of Hashima Island as a coal-mining outpost is just one example of this turn toward modernization, having quickly become a target for valuable energy resources along with neighboring islands.

After taking possession of Hashima Island in the 1890s, the Mitsubishi Company quickly revolutionized the means of production to vastly improve its yield of coal (Burke-Gaffney, 2002). The increasing demand for people to work in the island’s deadly mines required the Japanese to use their imperial leverage to extract labor power from neighboring countries, notably from China and the Korean peninsula. This migration created a rigid class system dividing residents on the island both conceptually and geographically, adding a further layer of stigma to the perception of the working classes as “base, little people, defeated, stragglers” (Smith, 1989). Many of the Japanese workers indeed recognized this stigma and tried to overcome it by extolling values that were engrained long

before the Emperor Meiji rose to power, including those of dignity, respectability, and the importance of family (Smith, 1989). Although these distinctions and affinities only deepened the hierarchy among the residents of Hashima Island, a close-knit community ultimately formed around the shared experience of precariousness regarding their collective long-term survival.

In 1959, Hashima Island became one of the most densely populated regions in the world with 5,259 inhabitants occupying a plot of land not much larger than a football field, rising vertically with some of the first residential buildings to be made from reinforced concrete (Burke-Gaffney, 2002). The orderly departure of these residents following Mitsubishi's withdrawal 15 years later has made the site particularly interesting to historians of modern culture. However, the island's history of labor atrocity continues to be erased in their accounts, including by the Japanese officials involved in the UNESCO bid, who reasserted Japan's singular achievements in modernization without almost no reference to this blighted legacy. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe on news of the bid's success in July 2015 said, "Japan achieved industrialization in just over 50 years by fusing foreign technology with traditional domestic techniques. This is a rarity in global terms, it has universal value and is worthy of treatment as a common heritage of mankind" (Kim & Reynolds, 2015).

Despite the official rhetoric, emerging stories of abuse in Japan's labor camps have added pressure on Japanese authorities to redress a broader spectrum of atrocities in recent years. With news of Japan's UNESCO bid, officials in the South Korean government mobilized demands for a critical review of these abuses prior to receiving the distinction, arguing that abuses occurred in no fewer than seven of the 23 sites that are mentioned in the application (McCurry, 2015). News of the bid also provoked a grassroots response among private citizens, creating initiatives such as a petition on Change.org to "Dismiss Hashima Island as designated UNESCO World Heritage Site." It further reignited a call for Japan to acknowledge its World War II-era enslavement of Korean sex workers (Kim & Reynolds, 2015), and led to revelations about Japan's treatment of British prisoners of war (POW) (McCurry, 2015).

After months of inaction, Japan finally responded to this growing controversy by appearing to yield to South Korea's demands, acknowledging that human rights abuses occurred at these various sites, and promising to create an information center in which to educate visitors (Kim & Reynolds, 2015). However, while South Korean officials initially celebrated this surprise admission of wrongdoing, the Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida immediately downplayed its significance, reportedly equivocating over the definition of the term "forced labor" in an effort to avoid legal culpability (*The Hankyoreh*, 2015). News commentators went on to criticize the South Korean position by suggesting that officials should have called for the offending sites to be removed from the application altogether (*The Hankyoreh*, 2015).

Far from occurring in isolation, these media responses evoke an established pattern of conflict between Japan and South Korea, with Japan's role as both a perpetrator of violence and a former occupier of the peninsula. As Mikyoung Kim (2013a) describes, the experience of imperial rule has left a scar of victimhood and self-blame on the Korean people that continues into the present. Referring to the concept of "han," Kim argues that Koreans have long portrayed themselves "as sentimental, passive, fateful, and inward-looking," particularly compared to the Japanese (Kim, 2013a). "Han" thus refers to a

group identity among Koreans that is rooted in assumptions about their peripheral status abroad. Indeed, the intercultural relationship between South Korea and Japan is founded on the Koreans' victimization complex together with Japan's unwillingness to fully acknowledge crimes from the past.

Despite this legacy, however, the rising tide of demand for reparations has raised important questions about the impact of historical justice on collective memory, signaling the "emergence of new international and domestic moral regimes" (Kim, 2013b). The unacknowledged human rights abuses mentioned in the preceding led to further debate regarding the specific responsibility that should be given to state actors in redressing past injustices, and about the political maneuvering that is often required for states to take on the legal, political, and ethical consequences of that responsibility (Neumann & Thompson, 2015). The UNESCO bid in particular raises questions about the way in which collective memory practices serve to shape reparative justice in general, including the selective processes that allows some collective experiences and not others to be formally recognized by institutions.

### Hashima Island narratives

Narrative is a potent carrier of messages regarding Hashima Island's role as a site of intercultural negotiation, resolution, and remembrance. Indeed, the island itself has been a subject of fascination at least since the end of World War II. Its stark concrete residential buildings support the common impression that Hashima Island represents a microcosm of Japan's early industrial capitalism, and therefore is an exquisite demonstration of human perseverance in the face of considerable adversity. Although first featured in a film entitled *Greenless Island*, which was released in 1949 by the Shockiku production company, Hashima Island became much better known after images of daily life appeared in a 1956 exhibit featuring the work of Japanese photographer Ikkō Narahara. Collectively, the growing popular interest in Hashima Island from this point forward indicates a concerted shift from its relative obscurity, becoming instead a remote and yet material reminder of Japan's early social experiment with modern industry.

In many ways, today's Hashima Island has not been able to shed simplistic associations regarding its "ghostly" urban ruins, despite the fact that it remains a living memory. The contradiction between the two is clearly on display in a documentary by Swedish filmmakers Carl Michael von Hassswolff and Thomas Nordanstad, entitled *Hashima, Japan* (von Hassswolff & Nordanstad, 2002). Fascinated as they were by this island city in ruins, von Hassswolff and Nordanstad initiated a reconnaissance in the hopes of exploiting Hashima Island's intriguing visualization of Japan's forgotten path to modernity (Schachter & Boyd, 2012). Though they were initially met with resistance from members of Hashima Island's former community, the filmmakers eventually managed to secure an agreement from Doutoku Sakamoto, a former resident, to accompany them on a tour.

As it happens, the final cut of the film is exclusively structured around Sakamoto's personal story, that of a man who feels that only by returning to the metaphorical ruins of his childhood will he be permitted to begin recuperating from a beleaguered sense of spiritual homelessness. The bulk of Sakamoto's visit involves traversing the residential interiors that were left abandoned in the 1970s, including the home of Sakamoto's now-deceased girlfriend, his family residence, and his former schoolhouse. According to one



interpretation, Sakamoto's emotional journey may serve to anchor the floating signifier of "haunting" within a deeply personal narrative that is irrefutably authentic. In fact, Sakamoto also moves beyond the personal on occasion to speculate on broader ethical questions surrounding the forced abandonment of island residents, equivocating at one point on whether the island's flirtation with modern industry should be framed as an allegory about the disposability of human life (von Hasswolff & Nordanstad, 2002).

However, I argue that the highly personalized nature of these reflections only thinly conceals the filmmaker's true intentions, and therefore their affinity with amateur photographers, who for at least two decades habitually entered Hashima Island illegally to produce a spectacular visual archive of the site. Granted, the underlying intention of Sakamoto's story appears to be to elicit greater appreciation for the way modern industrial capitalism renders human populations vulnerable, whereas the genre of adventure photography sets out to situate Hashima Island's ruins squarely within the ambit of specular entertainment. One could argue that because amateur photographers have not fully respected the specificity of the site, they are unable to mobilize sustainable critiques around the various social, political, historical, and ethical causes of ruination. On the other hand, I argue that the personal testimony in *Hashima, Japan* acts merely as a vehicle for spectacularizing the island's ruins, such that von Hausswolff and Nordenstad's film fully participates in the attrition of critical analysis surrounding Hashima Island's historic role.

According to my interpretation, the appearance of Hashima Island in *Skyfall* does not signal a radical break from the themes of testimony and social critique, but is rather another example of its attrition. In fact, Nordenstad himself has implied a connection between his film and Mendes's production, referring to a meeting he had with actor Daniel Craig, the chief protagonist in *Skyfall*, during the postproduction phase of *Hashima, Japan* (Schachter & Boyd, 2012). Granted, the Hashima Island of *Skyfall* represents an accelerated departure from the kind of testimonial narrative that haphazardly structures Nordenstad's documentary, depicting a completely fictionalized weapons outpost and the stage for a confrontation between Bond and Silva, the film's villain. While the island's history is fully erased at this juncture, I want to argue that its conspicuous presence as a prime image of ruination ultimately reveals how popular film manages both to obscure and to rewrite history, and therefore to change our expectations regarding the conventions of preserving cultural heritage objects.

During the course of his interrogation in one of the island's abandoned buildings, Silva recounts to Bond his troubled past as a former member of the MI6, noting his personal disagreements with the matriarchal "M" played by Judi Dench. Evoking feelings of betrayal and the need for retribution, Silva explains that moving his operations to an abandoned island has made him geostrategically competitive and even superior to the legitimate powers of law enforcement. Although Silva rhetorically situates London and Hashima Island as opposites, I argue that both could be convincingly described as "frontier zones," as both exhibit industrialized locales, the potential to house technological resources, and political autonomy (Sassen, 2014). For Silva, however, the city of London, like Bond and the MI6, "has become a ruin," and it is therefore a symbol of the West's declining global influence (not to mention of the Bond franchise itself). Hashima Island, on the other hand, though an "actual" ruin, represents a decentralized, illegal, and diabolical center of power for an outlier.

Above all, these associations provide cues and conditions for the way Hashima Island is remembered by the filmgoing audience. In Tom Conley's work, for instance, the presence of any geographically specific information in film offers viewers a "narrative itinerary" for the actual sites that are cinematically depicted (Conley, 2007). The visualizations provided by maps are particularly useful for delivering points of spatial reference that filmmakers may then choose to exploit in order to enhance the reality effects of their stories. The relationship to actuality "propels narrative but also, dividing our attention, prompts reverie and causes our eyes to look both inward, at our own geographies, and outward, to rove about the frame and to engage, however we wish, the space of the film" (Conley, 2007).

Such effects are certainly at play in *Skyfall*'s representation of London, the polar opposite of Hashima Island. While Silva's abandoned island represents an ambiguous space that lies beyond the reach of civilization, London is repeatedly visualized as a locus of surveillance and paranoia. For instance, when it is revealed that the MI6 command-center computer has been hacked, a picture of the London underground map slowly appears on the screen, providing the viewer with an indication of the adversary's general location. This iconic representation of London's underground provides enough information for the viewer to determine where the next battle will unfold. In effect, by pairing the cinematic image with a map that is familiar to audiences, the narrative in *Skyfall* is shaped by parallel lines that emerge from a single cartographic image, thereby bridging the distinction between fiction and reality.

This perspective may also be useful in terms of framing Google's decision to build on the film's commercial success by producing a Street View archive in which the island is depicted. Admittedly, the Street View navigation interface is narratively thin by comparison to the filmgoing experience. In a promotional video for the Trekker device, the foregrounded narrative is centered on the journey of an anonymous explorer who proceeds to stroll through the urban ruins of Hashima Island with the air of wanderlust and the innocent drive to acquire visual information. The video's nondiegetic sound provides further indication that in lieu of adopting the position of James Bond waiting to be rescued, we virtual explorers of the film's location may find satisfaction in adopting the dull curiosity of a naive tourist who is undeterred by persistent misrecognition of the site's true cultural and historical significance.

On this basis, I argue that Google's touristic gaze conceals a deepening paradox at the heart of Street View's powerful envisioning of the navigated world. While the maps that appear in the film and those produced afterward are clearly worlds apart, the aims attributed to both are consistent insofar as they reinforce a deliberate and methodical process of erasing the specificity of the site. The enforcement of this amnesic gaze has implications for our ability to recognize and acknowledge demands for historical justice, such as those outlined in the preceding. Google's Street View archive thus represents a further escalation of the narrative foreclosure that is present in all popular representations of the island. It is intriguing, therefore, to speculate on whether the Street View project bolstered Japan's official UNESCO bid, which was made soon after the release of these images, and whether Google's Trekker technology has in turn bolstered the company's involvement in heritage projects.

The use of these digital technologies also raises questions for narrative cartography. Indeed, the visual immersion that Conley describes in relation to cinematic forms is one that the geographer Sébastien Caquard refers to as a "story map," a classification in which



maps illustrate a story's spatial dimensions (Caquard, 2011). However, while including maps certainly enhances the effectiveness or delivery of stories, Caquard's argument runs a bit deeper to claim that "story maps" have always been an essential component of cartography's historical development. In other words, narrative cartography has been largely determined by falsely separating "story maps" and "grid maps," with the assumption that the latter provide technical information and spatial coordinates that cannot be included in storytelling. Caquard explains that the long-held distinction between the two has started to break down as new digital mapping technologies come to the fore. He writes, "The base map—or grid map—is quickly becoming the reference to locate ourselves in the world" (Caquard, 2011). Given this observation, initiatives like Google Street View should be conceived not only as being integral to extending the cinematic narratives that often serve as its inspiration. Beyond these kinds of considerations, I argue that by immersing in digitally mapped space, the user of the Street View images is pulled to reconsider some of the most basic assumptions we have regarding the commemoration of social worlds both past and present.

### User memory

As mapping more fully enters the digital domain, the connotation commonly attributed to "navigation," of being immersed in cartographic media in connection with the material world, expands to include actively participating in the mapmaking process. In turn, the verb "to map" becomes increasingly synonymous with all the activities of a digital interface, blending with a set of additional verbs such as to search, to modify, to destroy, and to recreate. Caquard's aim, among others, is to signify these changes by arguing that digital mapmaking activities and experiences are "post-representational." The metaphor of navigation, in other words, is "replacing the conventional correspondence theory [which is] based on the illusory idea that maps should resemble as much as possible the territory and the phenomena mapped" (Caquard, 2011).

Above all, Caquard's allusions to a "post-representational" cartography can help us to situate Hashima Island's Street View images within a heritage framework that is capable of acknowledging unique aspects of the digital platform. On the one hand, Google's initiative to map Hashima Island offers a relevant and straightforward example of "intangible heritage," consistent as it is with the aim to counter the fixation on material culture by expanding the scope of heritage practices to include lived activities, or activities that are integral to living communities, whether that be oral traditions, songs, rituals, or, indeed, the consumption of (digital) media (Akagawa & Smith, 2009). On the other hand, because Google's cache of Street View images calibrates the recorded spatial environment with navigational tools, another set of questions must be addressed regarding the materiality of the digital image and the limited spatial experience that it allows. I argue that the latter set of questions can only be addressed by adopting a post-representational cartography.

Bernadette Flynn's (2007) categorical rejection of digital heritage is a revealing example of the need to develop such "post-representational" methods and practices. Contrary to Caquard, Flynn argues that any attempt to create digital spatial images for cultural heritage purposes will inevitably fall victim to static Western paradigms of space conceived as a container of objects, "reduc[ing] spatial experience to a grid," and "privilege[ing] spatial representation over other forms and practices" (Flynn, 2007). Flynn's perspective

thus clearly places a limit on the value we can attribute to Google's Street View archive depicting Hashima Island, or, indeed, to similar attempts by others, including a group of researchers at Nagasaki University who have reconstructed Hashima Island using three-dimensional (3D) technology (Wrigley, 2015). Yehuda E. Kalay (2008) departs from Flynn's critique by noting that digital platforms bring an element of interactivity to the experience of protected environments, and that such platforms reveal a "convergence" of "arts, technologies [and] 'memory preserving' institutions." Kalay, however, implicitly reasserts Flynn's position by insisting that digitized spaces are ill equipped to accommodate the demands of material culture, as, according to Kalay, the screen will always be conceived within cultural heritage paradigms as a "barrier" (Kalay, 2008).

Both Flynn's and Kalay's perspectives aim to downplay the benefits of digital media for collective memory. Sarah Kenderline (2007), on the other hand, takes a different approach to this relationship by asking whether digital images represent a continuation of the way heritage ecologies have been visualized and remembered throughout the history of collective memory practices. To support her argument, Kenderline quotes Oliver Grau, who suggests that "images have always been subject to media technologies of spatial illusion, immersion and display," and indeed that such images have directly challenged the attempt by traditionalists to maintain the criteria of materiality as a guarantor of authenticity (Kenderline, 2007). On this basis, I argue that Kenderline's approach to the digital is consistent with Caquard's aim to develop a "post-representational" cartography, and therefore to pick apart the assumed correspondence between matter and truth.

Kenderline returns to the history of panoramic vision as a way to develop her more specific claim that digital ecologies have contributed to the advancement of cultural heritage (cf. Manovich, 2002). She suggests that panoramas served a number of different purposes beginning in the 19th century, from facilitating collective anxieties in the face of dramatic social change, to visualizing "distant lands, historic cities [and] imposing landscapes" in lieu of travel (Kenderline, 2007). Attempts at reconstructing particular sites were feats of realism that evinced a bias toward universal, utopian and "ocularcentric" perspectives that have long been associated with the Western gaze (Kenderline, 2007). Beyond this, however, by attempting to create a total experience for the viewer, panoramic vision has also tended to privilege "sensory experience rather than narrative structure," which I argue leaves the job of interpretation to the visitor alone (Kenderline, 2007).

The panoramic cosmology of Google Street View calls for a further reassessment of the intended visitor, or "subject," of the digital spatial environment. By developing Kenderline's observation that panoramic spaces enclose visitors in a total experience without any particular narrative support, I argue that further questions should also be raised about the way in which Street View panoramas uniquely participate in atomizing that experience. The Trekker device's ability to extend Street View cameras to places that are inaccessible by vehicle is yet another factor to consider, as the device uniquely simulates first-person experiences. Beyond renewing Google's commitment to supporting the criteria of realism with respect to its images, then, I argue that Trekker's mode of visualization, and Street View imagery in general, require us to refocus critical attention upon the figure of subjectivity that has been manufactured to consume such images behind the screen.

I address issues of user subjectivity in this case by returning to concerns about the atomization of heritage experience that became a strong feature within collective memory studies. The interdisciplinary study of memory has enjoyed an established tradition since the publication of foundational works by Maurice Halbwachs, who at the turn of the last century began to conceive of memory as harboring a diversity of cultural and moral aims that are shared by collectives such as families and nations, and to hypothesize that such units transmit memory content generationally (Halbwachs, 1992). The scholarly tradition initiated by Halbwachs has been developed more recently by Marianne Hirsch, who describes the transmission of memory as a form of psychic embodiment, or “post-memory,” that links generations and communities (Hirsch, 2012). Importantly, Hirsch argues that such memory content should be identified not simply through objects distinguished by efforts at preserving them, but by narratives and embodied actions that both connect to the past and are repositioned from the vantage point of the present (Hirsch, 2012). Quoting Susannah Radstone (2000), who historicizes this development, “Memory came to be understood as actively *produced*, as representation, and as open to struggle and dispute.”

Though we may locate this process in technologies of vision and in connection with Google’s archive of Street View images in particular, for others, like Pierre Nora, these related tendencies are part of a much longer transition that goes to the heart of modernity itself (Nora, 1989). In other words, the onset of modern societies according to Nora served to displace the collective memory practices as defined by Halbwachs and Hirsch, particularly with the standardization of historical record keeping and other forms of social quantification. Nora argues that as memory gives way to history, concepts of nationhood give way to society, and collectives in turn give way to individuals and populations, leaving all the adhesive properties of memory vulnerable to atomization. Memory thus becomes increasingly associated with a demand that requires individuals to attach their desire for collective belonging to particular sites and objects, or to what Nora famously describes as *les lieux de mémoire*.

While Nora’s argument provides an interesting precedent for understanding the politics of memory at Hashima Island, a further consideration should be taken into account regarding Google’s navigational platform, as the primary means by which visitors access this site. Nora conspicuously adopts a spatial metaphor to describe broader changes in collective memory, arguing that “memory attaches itself to sites, whereas history attaches itself to events,” thereby opening up the possibility for the individual seeker of memory to be characterized as a kind of postmodern *flâneur* (Nora, 1989). Though privileged in the sense of having access to a panoramic view of Hashima Island, the virtual visitor is equipped only with the limited directional maneuvering of a Street View interface. Despite the scale and magnitude of their vision, the *flâneur*’s perspective remains obscured by the very apparatus that facilitates his or her experience of the place. For Walter Benjamin, the *flâneur* is an individual who willfully succumbs to the spatial “phantasmagorias” of consumer culture, and yet one who remains fully capable of being circumspect in the face of its thin transactional narrative structures (Benjamin, 2002). In Nora’s version of the *flâneur*, this inherent capability is much less secure.

Despite these limitations, There is considerable value in exploring the potential of a user memory that resists indulging in the kind of nostalgia that Nora, for instance, demonstrates as just described. Johanna Drucker (2014), for instance, has attempted to reclaim the user interface from its supposedly malign computational logic, and ultimately to harness the powers of humanistic thinking as a way to reconceive digital platforms like Google Street View as socially accountable. Drucker argues that humanistic thinking has the effect of re-centering the “subject,” and therefore of returning to the possibility for agents to communicate an ethics of interpretation in the midst of their mediated experiences. Above all, Drucker is rightly suspicious that the kinds of imaginaries that appear in Google’s promotional material for the Trekker device, for instance, have any social or collective merits. On the other hand, there is little discussion in Drucker’s text regarding how to remain accountable to a generation of poststructuralist critique in which the humanistic subject is presented as contradictory and regressive.

On the other hand, by drawing inspiration from Alison Landsberg’s (2004) examination of “prosthetic memory,” there is clear potential for a user-based approach to go beyond debates about the narrative poverty of the apparatus, to rather consider the extent to which the apparatus itself makes memory possible. As Landsberg writes, by pairing the work of memory with the notion of prosthesis, we are free to assess how digital platforms allow us to “take on memories of a past through which [we] did not live,” and therefore to create circuits of memory that do not necessarily rely upon the historical content of pervasive images (Landsberg, 2004). This possibility is echoed by Wendy Hui Kyong Chun (2008), who suggests that digital domains are simply incapable of abiding by traditional notions of archival storage because they operate as “enduring ephemerals,” and in accordance with information’s continual destruction and regeneration. These interventions alone point to possibilities for narrative production that do not rely on simply rejecting the individual “users” or acting as storytelling agents.

In conclusion, Hashima Island’s Street View archive is a highly overdetermined space, one in which a blockbuster film has effectively silenced the demands by South Koreans for historical justice, and therefore also a century of labor maltreatment, imperialism, and global industrial capitalism. Given the unique and rather odd positioning of Google’s documentary images amidst these competing aims, the resulting profile of Hashima Island as a historic site worthy of heritage protection may be particularly interesting for scholars seeking to gain a stronger appreciation of the agencies that lie concealed by the digital enterprise broadly speaking. Indeed, the images that Google produced to honor *Skyfall*’s promotional objectives ultimately helped to prevent Japanese acknowledgment of human rights violations, and became a deciding factor in the country’s successful bid to the UNESCO World Heritage program. The middle ground that Google has managed to operate has in turn been fed through a navigational apparatus featuring the primacy of the “user” over the “subject.” Paradoxical in its aims, I argue Google’s Street View initiative has resulted less in an archive of images depicting the island, as a database for which the very precariousness in the ephemeral space of the online digital world is equally the cause of its ability to be preserved at all.

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