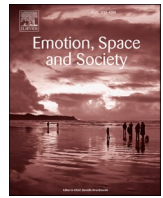




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# Miracle boats and other wonders: Locating affect in the narratives of recovery and removal of Japanese post-disaster debris

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## ABSTRACT

This paper investigates how affective space is located and constructed in post-disaster places. In elaborating this concept, we observe the media narratives developed around the debris created by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in the Tohoku region of Japan. The tsunami waves washed away over 20 million tons of debris, some of which was retrieved in foreign countries and brought back to Japan to be memorialized. We contend that the media narratives on the journey back home of these debris items represents a valuable example to assess how affect emerges and is localized in space. We do so by drawing on geographical theories of space and affect, as we analyse how media narratives follow three broadly defined movements: (i) the displacement of the object, its disappearance from home on March 11, 2011; (ii) the discovery of the object years after, on the other side of the Pacific; (iii) the return home for the purpose of memorialization.

## 1. Introduction: homecoming

On April 22, 2015, an empty fishing boat washed ashore on the coast of Alan Davis Beach, in O'ahu, Hawai'i. It was identified as the *Daini Katsumaru*, a 20-foot vessel from Japan. The boat reached the Hawai'ian shore four years after the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, which devastated the coast of Japan on March 11, 2011. Upon learning of the ship's discovery, the Japanese government and the Department of Land and Natural Resources of Hawai'i arranged for it to be shipped back. The return, heralded by the media as a miraculous event, was orchestrated to coincide with the fifth anniversary of the disaster, March 11, 2016. The boat is now an integral part of the memorial display at the Ogatsu Cultural Centre (Miyagi Prefecture).

The *Daini Katsumaru* is just a minuscule portion of the 5 million tons of debris washed away in the Pacific Ocean by the 2011 tsunami (Norio et al., 2011). While most debris was lost at sea, from time to time an item would reach foreign coasts and be traced back to its place of origin. Since September 2015, 64 items have been found and identified on the coasts of the Okinawan islands, the United States, and Canada (Paterson, 2016). Some of these were brought back to Japan and memorialized.

Our article aims at framing the process of affect-spatialization: we use written media narratives related to Japanese debris as a choreography of spatial movements in which, through narrative and

performative repetitions, objects are caught in networks of relations of affect, becoming receptacles of abjection or heritage. Narratives of the 2011 debris foster practices of affective heritage-making, as well as trauma resolution. Allegorically mimicking the journey of post-disaster Japan, the homecoming of displaced, salvaged items culminate with their spacial re-inscription into affective places of meaning. Conversely, the larger, undifferentiated mass of debris is removed to make space for new buildings and new lives.

We borrow from geographical and cultural theories of affect (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010; Massumi, 2002; Wetherell, 2013), atmospheres (Adey, 2013; Anderson, 2006, 2009; Ash, 2013a, 2013b), and affective heritage (Tolia-Kelly et al., 2017). The materials for this paper have been collected as part of a wider project conducted in the Japanese North-eastern coast across 2016 and 2017. Such materials include newspaper articles, both Japanese and international; Japanese and North American official reports; blog entries; internet comments. The data has been analysed following narrative analysis and Wetherell's approach to affect and discourse (Wetherell, 2013).

This article is divided in four parts. We set off framing affect and affective atmospheres, emphasising the existence of diverse active intensities in affective endeavours, and elaborating on the implications of spatiality of affect in heritage creation. We then offer an overview of the 2011 Great Eastern Japan Disaster, focusing on how both the Japanese

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and United States governments have implemented policies to manage debris. Third, we navigate the methods of data collection and analysis used to extract moments of affect from textual sources. Finally, we analyse written media discourses on debris to show how, while the general debris mass narratives focus on removal, certain items are returned and elevated as affective symbols of the 2011 disaster.

## 2. Affect, space/materiality, heritage

In the past 15 years, affect has gained importance in fields such as geography (Anderson, 2006; Davidson and Bondi, 2004), political sciences (Massumi, 2002), feminist and postcolonial studies (Ahmed, 2004; Clough, 2008), anthropology (Rutherford, 2016; White, 2017), urban studies (Ansaloni and Tedeschi, 2016; Bille et al., 2015), psychology and psychoanalysis (Brennan, 2004; Wetherell, 2013). In geography, in line with Ben Anderson's definition, we understand affect as 'a transpersonal capacity which a body has to be affected (through an affection) and to affect (as the result of modifications)' (Anderson 2006, p. 735, emphasis in the original). It is a moment of unformed and unstructured potential that involves an array of modalities, competencies, properties, intensities and atmospheres that are not contained in bodies, but transmitted by the interactions of people and environment, spanning from long-lasting phenomena to brief and tenuous ones (Brennan, 2004).

The not-yet-formed potential of affective intensities escapes articulation, like a background hum (Vannini, 2015), that is 'not an inert, natural backdrop but a collectively lived and shaped condition' (Anderson and Ash, 2015, p. 34).

Affect emerges in the co-presence of subject and object (Böhme, 2001). Recognizing and bringing to the fore this 'in-betweenness' of human bodies and non-human attributes (expressions) does 'preclude [...] any sense that the one represents the other. Expression is not signification, it does not represent bodies – it intervenes in bodies' (Buchanan, 2020, p.69). The spatiality of affect has been conceptualized as constitutively plastic, a transmission of intensity that implies a distribution across different, multidimensional understandings of space, through virtual and habitual practices (Bissell, 2015).

To ground affect in its material potential we draw on the concept of affective atmospheres (see Anderson, 2009), a term recalling an intuitive physicality, described as 'corporeal expressions in bodily feelings' (Anderson, 2006, p.736), that can elicit transpersonal intensities, auras, waves of sentiment, sense of place (Closs-Stephens, 2016, p.182). Framing affect in terms of affective atmospheres points at how affects can be collective and be transmitted between people (Adey et al., 2013, p.301), forming configurations that are 'forceful and affect the ways in which we inhabit [...] spaces' (Bissell, 2010a, p. 272). As Ahmed argues, affects (which she does not see as clearly distinguished from emotions) press on bodies, taking on a life of their own through circulation and exchange (Ahmed, 2004), and forming expressive materialities and qualities of place that have immersive potential (Adey, 2013).

Such subtle, yet 'vibrant matter' (Bennett, 2010) is not limited to more grounded sensibilities (senses, bodily reactions), but can create a resonance between narratives and our imagination, and create affective atmospheres, a 'kind of charisma' that is impressed into the place audiences are reading about and imagining (Adey, 2013). The reader is thus at the same time interpreter and meaning-maker (Iovino, 2018). The locus of this affective agency is the intensity found between the human/non-human, made explicit in our analysis by the interplay in and through the bodies (text, pictures) of media narratives and the reactions exemplified by readers' comment to such narratives.

Types of media can be thought about as 'technologies of captivation' (Ash, 2013b), environments that foster affective engagement (captivation) 'in order to successfully negotiate the ongoing flow and immediacy of an encounter' (Ash, 2013b, p.41). Technologies of attention, of listening or of memory are indeed ontologically part of affect, but this raises the question of how the infra-empirical materiality of affect is transmitted (Blackman, 2012). We contend, following Clough, that the

potential materiality of affect can be conceptualized as in-formational, 'moving from the cybernetic conceptualization of information to information conceptualized as intensity or force immanent to matter' (Clough, 2010, p.225), localized in a specific space when peaks of intensity are attained. After the 2011 disaster, the highly emotive media coverage favoured the development of an attunement, between the audience and the disaster narratives and images flowing on their screens (Massumi, 2011). Attunements are the fundamental ways in which we find ourselves in certain dispositions that can traverse the subject and find purchase as atmospheres outside and between individual human bodies (Ash, 2013a).

Disasters produce ideologically and politically oriented narratives of hope, empathy, and of (imagined) community, discursively materialized in heritage sites. Memory is always constructed, interactive and inter-relational, and cannot be separated from affects (Curti, 2008). In recent years, a growing number of publications (see Crang and Tolia-Kelly, 2010; Tolia-Kelly et al., 2017) have depicted how processes of heritage and memory-making frame narratives, practices, and material remnants in complex affective formations. There is an apparent contradiction between the non-representational order of affect and the representational order of memorialization and ideology, but as Jacob Miller and Vincent del Casino note: 'Memorial sites [...] are actively fashioned as experiential and textual devices to shape a particular affective response and emotional reaction from the visitor' (2018, p.2). Heritage, as a materialized social memory, is constructed not only by physical landmarks, but by the body of the person that is feeling and interpreting the (hi)story of the heritage site in the present (Waterton and Watson, 2017). By engaging in cultural performance and memory-making, the past and the present exist in a dialectic flux, a topography of memory to make the connection between past and present seem permanent, tangible, and spatially situated (Till, 2005). The debris selected for memorialization is infused with narratives meaningful to the local communities and the Nation as a whole (White and Frew, 2013). In this process, affect can be perceived in media narratives as matter and materiality that are not stiffly grounded and bounded, but 'lively, elemental, excessive, forceful, interrogative, distributed, more-than solid, more-than-earthly, emergent, and in process' (Merri-man and Jones, 2017, p.3). In the case of post-2011 Japan, affective discourses on recovery and resilience are encapsulated by narratives on the debris, told through flows of movement and then fixed in the post-disaster space as traumatic but hopeful and empathetic signs.

## 3. The journey of Japanese debris after March 2011

On March 11 at 2.46 p.m., Japan was hit by the fourth strongest earthquake ever recorded by a seismograph. Thirty minutes later, the tsunami it caused reached land, rising over 30 feet high in some areas, washing away buildings and people alike, taking 18.000 lives, and damaging the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant, causing a nuclear meltdown in three reactors. As the water receded, it carried with it a staggering amount of wreckage. Millions of tons of rubble and debris were produced, 5 million tons of which are estimated to have sunk or to be still floating at sea (Norio et al., 2011, p. 36). The mass of buoyant materials, eerily floating adrift, was initially captured by satellite imagery and aerial photos of the waters surrounding Northern Japan immediately after the tsunami (NOAA, 2013a<sup>1</sup>). In the following months, the so-called Japan Tsunami Marine Debris (henceforth JTMD) became a source of concern especially for the United States. An astonishing 100.000 items of cumulative debris landings to North America were recorded in the following four years, prompting two main narrative modules: one of close relations between the United States and Japan, where objects are selected among debris and returned to their

<sup>1</sup> National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration of the USA, henceforth NOAA.

original owners or places (see Paterson, 2016), and one informed by suspect and even dread for the potentially dangerous matter coming ashore (see McKeown, 2017; Murray et al., 2018). Such relatedness is spatially situated, carefully negotiated, and emotionally expressed, depending on the outcomes of each specific encounter (Ansaloni and Tedeschi, 2016). We analyse these discourses in detail in the discussion (Section 5).

On the Japanese side, the first notes giving guidance on how to confront the debris issue came on May 16, 2011 from the Ministry of the Environment, detailing how to dispose of the debris on land and on the coast. Coastal municipalities deployed plans to retrieve and dispose of the wreckage sunk within the port facilities area (UNEP Report, 2012). However, there was no response on what to do with the debris lost at sea, which within days become so large that patches of it were visible on satellite imagery (ibid). JTMD soon became visible by the collective imaginary as well. Sensationalistic North American media created *ad-hoc* headlines with the terrifying possibility of radioactive materials turning up on their shores, while Japanese discourses on removal heavily relied on debris clearing/cleansing as metaphor for starting anew. Nonetheless, a number of items were recognized as special, prompting narratives and assuming affective values both in North America and Japan. They became central in the cathartic healing from the 2011 trauma. This duality reflects the set of unbridled potentialities constituted by affect emerging in unpredictable and deliberately constructed circumstances (Shouse, 2005).

## 4. Methods

### 4.1. Data collection

This paper features material collected online (from newspapers, blog posts, users' comments) by the authors during the years 2017–2018. The online sources were published between 2011 –the year of the disaster, and 2016. During our respective fieldworks in the Tohoku region in 2016 and 2017, we came across stories and heritage landmarks related to the JTMD and the debris. We used online sources, and especially newspaper articles, to assess the mainstream narrative patterns concerning the debris items. Media narratives do not simply describe, but can re-configure past events in the present, by reassembling the story in a way that is perceived as meaningful, a sort of 'stitching together, a kind of *bricolage* or experimental tinkering that makes new connections' (Gibbs, 2015, p.225). These accounts are often elevated as symbolic parables of loss, (re)gain, and hope, mobilizing affective charges and emphatic, affective atmospheres.

We used internet search engines to look for sources on these stories and landmarks, both in English and Japanese. During the search, we came across written stories about other items not encountered during the fieldwork, and included those as well. We compiled all sources –newspaper articles, users' comments, blog posts-in a list of roughly 150 entries (80 newspaper articles, and around 70 comment threads, and blog posts with related comments), until we reached a point of saturation –we could not find new stories, new items, or comments that expressed different opinions or feelings from what we already collected. We then went through the list compiled, and excluded all derivative material (eg. Japanese articles directly translated into English). When we encountered similar articles, we followed these criteria to choose which to include: (1) widest mediatic circulation; (2) source reliability; (3) in a few instances, we chose articles which, while factually unreliable, highlight the sensationalism that underpins most of these media narratives.

We obtained a list of 50 entries between blog posts and comments, and 29 original newspaper entries, 16 international 1 and 13 Japanese 2. The list includes national newspapers (e.g. The Guardian, BBC.com, The Japan Times, Yomiuri Shinbun), and local newspapers from areas in which the debris was either found (such as for Kawai Online), or came from (Ishinomaki Kahoku, Miyako Mainichi). To better frame the

context and institutional politics and policies on the disaster and the debris, we also considered material collected using keyword search in the archives at IRIDeS (International Research Institute for Disaster Studies at Tohoku University); official reports on the 2011 JTMD: (1) 'The Japan Tsunami Marine Debris Report' (NOAA, 2013a); (2) 'The Response to the Misawa Dock on the Washington Coast Report' (NOAA, 2013b); (3) 'Proceedings of the Japan Tsunami Marine Debris Summary Meeting' (NOAA, 2014); (4) 'Detecting Japan Tsunami Marine Debris at Sea Report' (NOAA, 2015); (5) The United Nations Environmental Programme's report 'Managing post-disaster debris: the Japan experience United Nations organizations' (UNEP, 2012); and (6) 'The 2nd Anniversary of the 3.11 Earthquake Progress Report' (Japanese Reconstruction Agency, 2013).

### 4.2. Data analysis

To analyse our data, we first translated the Japanese sources into English. We coded the material using the software Atlas.ti, looking for repeated patterns of themes, such as emotional/affective narratives. In the case of users' comments and blog posts inspired by newspaper articles, we did not directly aim at assuming the affects of those who wrote such entries, but to look for instances of an affective transmission in place that is, to the best of our knowledge, produced by the media sources they address. Affect, by its own definition, focuses on the mundane, sensuous, relational aspects of encounters, and shies away from objective analysis and broad generalizations (Vannini, 2015). While most academic refer to affect as inherently extra-discursive, more recent work in affective methodologies (Ash, 2013a; Gibbs, 2015; Wetherell, 2013) attempt to recompose the schism between affect and discourse (as well as affect as excess of signification), using different approaches and with varying efficacy.

Our challenge was not to reduce affect to the extra-discursive realm (Wetherell, 2013), to separate the cognition/representability and the affect/non-representability registers, but to show their interdependency (Ash, 2013a), and observe how they are mobilised in affective media discourses. Textual narratives were thus approached as processual, enactive, performative sensibilities, which incessantly move, relate, and become (Sumartojo and Pink, 2018). They are transmitted between bodies, and exist as autopoietic movements that generate and are generated (Adey, 2015), as the media texts produced reverberate affectively with an audience and can activate fear, solidarity, hope, pain. To analyse the textual sources collected, we favoured a narrative approach, following the idea that heritage can be brought into being, shaped and negotiated by being narrated to audiences (Edelheim, 2015).

Ultimately we considered our sources as complex affective-discursive assemblages (see Wetherell et al., 2015), which, following Delanda's interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari, are defined as heterogeneous multiplicities in a relation of exteriority, in which each part that composes it are shaped by potentially infinite interactions (Delanda, 2006). While the stories for each debris items differ, the common imaginary of the narration follow a pattern: the displacement of an object, its miraculous retrieval, and the pathos-filled description of the trip back home for memorialization. This became the basis for the three-movements analysis that we develop in our discussion.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Fragments of anguish: removing and forgetting

During the earthquake aftershocks and the tsunami waves of March 2011, the landscape opened up like a bleeding wound. Collapsed buildings, boats, exposed wires, cars were found covering the whole Sanriku coast, and the orderly landscape mutated in sudden, violent absence, as space lost its cohesive structure. Towns and roads became an indeterminate and provisional chaos: the socio-spatial formation of debris, which emerges as rupture with the ordinary, emanated a

powerful affective charge. Some of the debris floated towards North American shores. Such materialization brought to attention by USA newspaper articles and newscasts, situates affects of fear and terror into objects that invade the national and personal borders. After the Fukushima Daiichi accident, non-Japanese media were concerned about the radioactive waste from Fukushima, and debris washing ashore was perceived as invasion.

Sensationalistic media fuelled the atmosphere of danger around these items, using broad narratives and linguistic features that, when related to audiences, feed into human and non-human assemblages. The interactions between media and audiences, thus, can express an affective capacity. In a 2017 article, the Daily Star titles: 'Lost Fukushima ghost ship washes ashore in Hawaii with MUTANT creatures on board' (McKeown, 2017, capitalized in original). Here, tone and word choice (ghost ship, MUTANT) perform an affective role, as they 'seep and imbue its material and biological fabric [of debris] with affect' (Adey, 2013, p.291). The writer 'presents himself as "discovering" these emotional reactions and then authoritatively models them' (Wetherell et al., 2015, p.58), bringing about a sense of intensified presence (Adey, 2013). These intensified atmospheric assemblages radiate inwardly and externally, pressing upon the collective body (Anderson, 2009) of media audience, and creating a perceivable impression of place as dangerous. And if place is inhabited by ghost ships and mutant creatures, an affective transmission of uneasiness emerges in online comments such as 'The trash is not that bad, it's the radiation that they need to be talking about and you can't see it.' (Daily Mail, 2013), or skepticism, as shown by comments such as "'None of the floating debris has any detectable radioactivity': I don't believe that for a minute' (Daily Mail, 2013).

Affective reactions are culturally oriented and contextual. Unsurprisingly, in Japan the removal of debris is underlined by narratives of hope, making space for recovery and reconstruction, erasing any visible memento of both the disaster and the difficult emotional and affective trauma experienced by the Tohoku people. Places of disaster negotiate painful pasts, ethically problematic situations, and strong emotional and affective reactions from locals and audiences alike, whose intensity in the interaction with space resonates in unexpected and sometimes contradictory ways.

An example is provided by the ship *Kyōtokumaru*, a 360 tons tuna trawler, lifted by the waves and pushed 750 m inland, stranding on a bed of debris in what once was a residential area. The mud-drenched remnants of houses, cars, less fortunate boats, trees and other materials were promptly removed. The ship resisted, as it was simply too far away from the coast to be brought back to the sea. It remained as an ominous silhouette, heavy and burdensome. Spread globally by media outlets, it became a symbol, which travel agencies would include in their programs (Reiji, 2014), and locals would pray at (Associated Press, 2013). However, in 2013, it was decided to dismantle it (Andō, 2013). The media narratives on the *Kyōtokumaru*'s 'disappearance' stress the discourse of the ship being 'a visible symbol of what happened here' (McNeill, 2013), an atmospheric discomfort that presses and imposes on the recovering community, a story of tension between the affects of grief and hope, which flow from physical landmark to media narration, and back to a new physical state of hopeful absence, as the removal of the ship affectively recalls the removal of painful memories. According to interviews made by the News Post Seven (2014) to local residents, two of the most common comments were: '*Omoidashitakunai*' (I do not want to remember), '*Miru no ga tsurai*' (It is painful to look at). The presence of the boat formed a geopoietic atmosphere, generating and being generated by the interactions of bodies and affect, of place and narratives of place (Adey, 2015). However, affective sensibilities are complex and contested: while a vast majority of the community voted for the removal, 30% favoured its memorialization (Andō, 2013), choosing the painful material remnant as memory that compels them to imagine alternatives and better futures (Oppermann, 2018). The materiality of the ship is thus caught up in a complex assemblage of pain and hope, distributed through the affective media discourses which play across human and

non-human bodies to produce spaces which can reverberate even in its absence. The complex affective configurations that call for removal or memorialization all strain, in the end, towards what Brown and Reavey (2014) call a 'vital memory', something that 'much as it may be desirable to find ways in which they can be expunged, they become so intertwined with a sense of self that they must be retained' (p.331). Active forgetting 'choosing to defer some aspect of a personal history for present purposes – has to anticipate the needs of others in the future' (ibid.).

## 5.2. 'Miracle boats' and other wonders: memorialized debris as political expression of post-disaster territoriality

The oceanic currents transported significant items, which became the *foci* of narratives of resilience, gratitude, loss, and recovery. In this section we look at memorialized debris items, noting how the narratives around them follow three broadly defined movements: (a) the displacement of the object; (b) the discovery of the object years after, on the other side of the Pacific; (c) the return home for the purpose of memorialization.

### a) Displacement

The 2011 aftermath narratives by professionals and amateurs were spread throughout Internet and traditional media, providing a space to collectively make sense of the losses. The affective qualities that emanate from media narratives of the disaster are somehow constructed and tailored by media, tethering flows of information which regulate the ways people respond to such events (McCosker, 2013). These flows of non-human materialities are expressed by assemblages of affects, emotions, physical debris, media narratives, human action and reactions, and political metanarratives. The stories of each debris item, found and brought back, tend to be culturally patterned: on the North American side, the narratives present emphatic openings related to either the 2011 disaster, or the discovery of the item. Paterson's (2016) article begins with: 'It was a gloomy, grey day in the middle of the Pacific Ocean'. The charisma of such narratives is effused and diffused through atmospheres that immerse its audience within what Hansen and Verkaaik (2009) call the mythology emitted by a place – ultimately, what they define as 'contagious qualities' (p.5) that are said to seep in and out of bodies. On the Japanese side of news, the pattern steers towards a 'mythology' that suggests hope and gratefulness: 'A training ship from Iwate Prefectural Takada High School [...] After two years and seven months, the ship returned to Japan in a beautiful shape, and the students were ecstatic. It looked like a miracle' (Asahi Shinbun, 2013).

The atmospheres produced by such assemblages allow audiences to attune to it in culturally relevant ways, and create associations between the entities that exist within materialities. If 'affect is material that matters' (Kavka, 2008, p. 33), in Japanese media, narratives on the debris are deliberately constructed so that the material remains of the disaster become coherent, powerful assemblages that transmit a hopeful message to the community and the nation at large. Affective moments arise within material encounters: as a witness of stranded debris observed: 'That is when everything changed. This belonged to someone, this is someone's property' (Paterson, 2016, p.2).

This sentence encapsulates the scope that these stories, and yields a direction towards which a space moves and unfolds through the lens of media narratives, offering an opportunity for closure, packaged to integrate the trauma by actively creating affective associations between various material 'cusps' (Dawney, 2011). These affective practice are routinely used in news media and while narrating, they perform, construct, articulate and communicate a pattern of culturally-oriented relations (Burkitt, 2014). These cusps, materialities within materialities, punctuate points in a wider movement that we recognize as the journey of displacement of objects caused by the violence of the tsunami. As these objects disappear in the dark waters, the loss



intertwines with a sense of absence and void. This violent displacement can still impact years later, when some items suddenly resurface, bringing with them affective nets of painful remembrance.

## b) Discovery

After disappearing, the debris is discovered in a foreign place, framing a symbolic rebirth. Among the five JTMD items recovered and identified in the CNN story, the *Kamome* rowboat is probably the one that sparked more international interest. Come ashore in California in April 2013, it belonged to Takata High School, in Rikuzentakata. After cleaning it, the pupils of California's Del Norte High School organized its return to the Miyagi Prefecture, establishing a bond between the two schools. The story of the little rowing boat is told in a bilingual illustrated book, *The extraordinary voyage of the Kamome* (Dengler and Miller, 2015), and the Japanese press glorified the ties built between the two institutes, which developed in a yearly summer exchange program. The 'miracle boat' (*kiseki no bōto*) is currently kept in the Iwate Prefectural Museum. The affective charge of these objects stems from the media narratives around it: after the object has been found, it was separated from the debris' shapeless mass and became an allegory, the stand-in for all people who were washed away by the tsunami. Such media effects work because they reinforce contemporary and future responses by offer an emotional, embodied perspective, not just descriptions and storylines (Wetherell et al., 2015, p.63). Narratively, these reports involve personal stories and direct quotes, creating emphasis, molding atmospheric performances of feeling that press and impress upon the audience (Ahmed, 2004) and, even more, on the physical object they refer to, in an interwoven process of affective transmission.

Media narratives harness subjective relations with found objects to feed into collective affective atmospheres: the item needs to be taken back home. When the Daini Katsumaru (see Introduction) was retrieved, media attention focused on the personal story of Ogatsu resident Sanae Ito, daughter of Kiyoshi Ito, the last registered owner of the Daini Katsumaru. Although her father had died in 2003, long before the disaster (a fact that has not been mentioned in most articles on the Daini Katsumaru), Sanae had kept the boat, at least until all family belongings were washed away by the tsunami. When the boat was found in Hawai'i, media reported Sanae's words: 'I feel that my father is guiding his boat back' (Azambuja, 2016). Her story, while true, has been edited and constructed by media sources to push to the forefront a coherent narrative that re-orient and artificially organises the event of death or disaster to be available to audiences. These narratives flexibly assemble and reorganize subjective feelings, memories, perceptions, contexts, spaces, histories and relationships (Wetherell, 2012), and mobilize discourse and semiotics in affective formations (Wetherell et al., 2015). Authors, in a sense, invite readers to participate in the affective practices enacted, in a way that creates a shared felt space, an atmosphere that is vital and expressive, and that can connect to the material landmark it refers to, in our case, the debris item (Wetherell, 2013).

As a travel blogger commenting on this story wrote: 'a real feeling of the tsunami's fury cannot be realized only by letters and images'. This quote evokes an idea that the magnitude of this tragic event defies the materiality of texts and pictures, and needs something more to be 'felt'. This need for something more could be vehiculated by the material remnant: the boat itself, as vessel and generator for the confused affective intensities of the locals and the spectators witnessing the story through media. Such attunements are not mute, but grounded in corporeal expressions that act in social context and accounts for ethical, political, cultural, performative aspects (McCormack, 2008). The discovery of these objects prompts in audiences a sense of closure, as BBC's 'Five Remarkable Stories' and the other articles mentioned above conclude remarking a positive message. 'I was shocked but also I've yet to recover a single one of my belongings, so I am really happy about this' said Misaki, whose football was recovered in Alaska (Paterson, 2016). After the Tanohata village's signpost was retrieved in Hawaii and

returned: 'the people of the village "are slowly but surely walking on the path to recovery as a united body" said its Mayor Hiroshi Ishihara' (ibid.). Through media, affect and affective responses traverse the subjective and embrace the collective, carving out a 'landscape of groups', where history is formulated, and a collective 'we' is imagined (Wetherell et al., 2015).

Through the narrative progression from despair to a hopeful ending, media can convey a spike in the intensity of affect passing from body to body, in the resonances that circulate about, between and that sometimes stick to bodies, transpires within subjects, accumulates across relatedness and interruptions (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010).

## c) Re-implication

The Daini Katsumaru's physical journey ended on March 11, 2016, when the small boat was finally returned to Ogatsu, in Japan, by the vessel Miyagimaru, whose captain declared he gladly took the boat on board as an 'act of charity' (Azambuja, 2016). In 2018 it was announced the completion of a storage facility to conserve and exhibit the Katsumaru (Kahoku Shinpō, 2018), with the boat at the centre, surrounded by pictures, maps, and explanatory panels. The construction of the small exhibition facility was coupled with the publication of the booklet *Kaettekita Kofune* ('Small boat coming home', Ito et al., 2017). The president of the Daini Katsumaru Preservation Society, in a speech to the volunteers and benefactors who raised 1,5 million yen for the facility, said: 'I think this [referring to the Katsumaru] holds a different value from the other remnants of the disaster' (Kahoku Shinpō, 2018). Indeed, by making such objects 'special' and elevating them as locus of memory and heritage, the aura that surrounds these objects becomes entrenched with an atmosphere that emerges as a medium for the inscription of various dispositions (Barnett, 2008). Matter is densely storied (Oppermann, 2018, p.411), and the dialectic re-implication of the debris imbues the physical item with an affective charge that crystalizes the affective entanglements into place.

Memory questions history, pointing to 'problems that are still alive or invested with emotions and value' (LaCapra, 1998, p.8). In dealing with a past that has not passed away, history tests memory, while memory addresses the historical centrality of trauma and its constitutive role in the construction of identity. The affective atmospheres of places of memory, as Tolia-Kelly, Waterton and Watson contend, coalesce in places of heritage, including physical landmarks, as 'material precipitates of affective memories' (2017, p.35). These memories are located in the flow of time, as complex formations of affects, relationships, images and material things (Brown and Reavey, 2014).

Memory simultaneously forms and is formed by the recreation of spaces and places, through entangled and overlapping emotions, affects, narratives, and as such it may be understood as performative (Curti, 2008). Accordingly, the memorialization of the JTMD builds around the items not only a physical shelter, but also networks of narratives dense with feeling and meaning that are situated at the nexus of material and immaterial, 'issue forth as a cross-over of the material and the immaterial, flowing and refusing to coalesce, and forcing the audience's gaze 'towards indeterminacy' (Bille et al., 2015, p.4).

These flows, as they circulate in-between bodies with multiple intensities, shape narratives, political messages and meanings, as well as the life of heritage sites and spaces (Tolia-Kelly et al., 2017, p.35): as the Preservation Society's president stated, the Katsumaru came to mean not only a different value, but a vastly wider one. Memory is not simply a matter of 'episodic compartmentalization, meaningful representation or ... conscious retrieval but also chains of associations of the (pre- and post-conscious) body' (Curti, 2008, p.107).

A last, significant example of memorialized JTMD is one that eschews return narratives, as the piece did not, in fact return to Japan: in the April of 2012, in Canadian British Columbia, a Harley-Davidson motorbike was found ashore. Its owner, Mr. Yokohama, tracked shortly after, did not accept the manufacturer's offer to refurbish and

ship back his bike, but expressed his wish to have it memorialized in the Milwaukee Harley-Davidson Museum, to be a reminder of 3.11 (Joslin, 2012). The Harley quickly became a sensation as ‘the motorcycle that rode the tsunami’ (Billcock, 2016), and even more resonance had the owner’s reaction to a further offer of a brand new bike from Harley-Davidson: ‘According to the museum, Yokohama respectfully declined the gift, saying that he didn’t want to be “a tall blade of grass among a shorter lawn.” [ ...] He lost pretty much everything [ ...] members of his family, all his possessions’ (ibid.). The rust and salt-encrusted Harley is now the centrepiece of a permanent exhibition at the museum, once again remarking how affective flows are not experienced the same way and with the same intensity by all bodies (Tolia-Kelly, 2006). Indeed, while for Mr. Yokohama the presence of the motorcycle back in Japan seemed to remark the absence of what never came back, for the museum-goers the focus was on its exceptional voyage, coalesced in its very presence. Here memorialization, materiality, and branditisation uncannily blend producing flows of affects in a process of inscription that creates topographies of memory. As the curator of the Harley-Davidson Museum said, ‘Objects communicate things that sometimes words don’t do justice for’ (Billcock, 2016). And it is in the space between words, and between the tangible object and the narratives, meanings and affects that surround it, that we can find the ‘compositional’ structure of our world (Latour, 2010) – a common world of manifold beings and alien affinities (Iovino, 2018, p.113), traversed by ever-changing heterogeneities (Bennett, 2010).

## 6. Conclusion: Stubborn suspensions

In this paper we discussed the potential of media narratives on the debris lost at sea in the 2011 disaster in Eastern Japan to form spatialized configurations of affect. Empirical cases on processes of spatialization of affect are still underdeveloped, and this article aims at giving an insight in how media-transmitted affects can collapse into the infrastructural materialization of heritage. We do so by discussing how media narratives infuse debris objects with certain affective atmospheres and, in the context of post-disaster media, we observe how this visual witnessing facilitates ‘the deframing of disastrous events in a way that tethers global engagement and attention directly to the flow of affect’ (McCosker, 2013, p.382). Considering affects, we highlight the powerful role of media in determining affects and atmospheres, as they mediate people’s experience with disaster and other news, creating anticipations, expectations, opinions (Edensor, 2012). These culturally-oriented narratives evolve in time, which is dynamic, multiple and heterogeneous. The complexity of apprehension and transmission of affective responses highlight the ‘various (and uneven) networks of time stretching in different and divergent directions across an uneven social field’ (May and Thrift, 2003, p.5).

Regarding the remains that were not moved after the tsunami, they are characterized by a certain fixity, stubbornly stuck to the levelled geography of the coast – those things that were either too huge to move, or too minute to filter out. They constitute, as opposed to the memorialized treasures, unwanted memories, and landmark thorns in the sides of those who felt ready to forget and move on (see for example Andō, 2013). In the lack of everything else, from houses to railroads, to cars, and to loved ones, the remains assumed the ambiguous role of a reminder. They became a material qualifier of the historical riskiness of land and sea. For many of those items, removal became a vital issue to local authorities.

We suggest that to better understand processes of media spatialization of the Japanese debris – or of debris and disaster remains in different contexts – it could be useful to look into the audiences’ perceptions. By using in-depth interviews and qualitative methodologies to bring forth audience’s perceptions, ideas, expectations, opinions, feelings in relation to the media coverage of the debris, and observe their narrative and affective flows on the receiving end.

In our analysis we observed how narratives of the 2011 debris are

transmitted to audiences in emphatic ways that model certain affects such as fear and hope, and that such affect can be received and memorialized into place conveying a varying and uneven degree of affective expressions. Such response (from North Americans afraid of the dangerous mass washing ashore, or from local Tōhoku residents festively welcoming back special items) fosters the potential to translate affect into embodied, place-grounded heritage constellations.

In the stories considered above, debris items are either charged with affective qualities (e.g. the Daini Katsumaru, whose journey was covered by the media as a tale of loss and recovery, symbolizing the bond between a daughter and her father), or become the reification of human connections framed by the processes of relief, reconstruction, and restoration of the northeastern Japanese coast.

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- 1 International sources: BBC (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-35638091> and <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-23678723>); The Guardian (<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2017/may/12/tomohiro-muda-icons-of-time-japan-tsunami-debris-in-pictures>); HawaiiNewsNow (<http://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/story/31273224/fishing-boat-from-japan-tsunami-makes-its-way-home>); The Daily Mail (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2075110/First-Japanese-tsunami-debris-washes-West-Coast-9-months-disaster.html> and <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2487555/Island-debris-size-TEXAS-2011-Japanese-tsunami-headed-straight-U-S.html>); The Australian (<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/archive/in-depth/kesennuma-votes-to-destroy-tsunami-ship-kyotokumaru/news-story/059096146a1a47fe496fc8dc653f15d?sv=f7de164282e670ed024b4f32b4ba38e5&nk=f054eed3aa0509072011df7a59b39b20-1521553685>);
- 2 The Washington Post ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/science/wp/2017/09/28/plastic-junk-brought-invasive-species-to-u-s-after-japans-2011-tsunami/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.954ccab717f2](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/science/wp/2017/09/28/plastic-junk-brought-invasive-species-to-u-s-after-japans-2011-tsunami/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.954ccab717f2)); USA Today (<https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/03/11/hawaii-boat-tsunami-debris/1976281/>); Hakai Magazine (<https://www.hakaimagazine.com/news/a-tsunami-of-trash/>); The Daily Star (<https://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/weird-news/651799/alien-fukushima-tsunami-ghost-ship-boat-hawaii-mutant-creature>); For Kawai Online (<https://www.forkauonline.com/miyagi-takes-daini-home-japanese-boat-put-on-a-boat-and-sent-back-where-it-came-from>); The Smithsonian Magazine (<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/motorcycle-rode-tsunami-180960327>); CBC (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/japan-s-tsunami-beached-ships-lifted-back-to-sea-1.1122659>); Jalopnik (<https://jalopnik.com/5913547/harley-swept-across-ocean-by-tsunami-will-be-preserved-as-memorial>); The Irish Times (<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/asia-pacific/japanese-city-votes-to-scrap-tsunami-ship-1.1493110>).
- 3 Huffington Post Japan ([https://www.huffingtonpost.jp/2013/09/09/18th-kyotokumaru\\_n\\_3891553.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.jp/2013/09/09/18th-kyotokumaru_n_3891553.html)); The Japan Times (<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/03/07/national/illegal-nu-clear-dumping-in-shiga-raises-alarms/>); Yomiuri Shinbun (<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/feature/TO000305/20160609-OYT1T50019.html>); Kahoku Shimpō ([https://www.kahoku.co.jp/tohokunews/201803/20180311\\_13005.html](https://www.kahoku.co.jp/tohokunews/201803/20180311_13005.html), [https://www.kahoku.co.jp/tohokunews/201804/20180427\\_13044.html](https://www.kahoku.co.jp/tohokunews/201804/20180427_13044.html), and [https://www.kahoku.co.jp/tohokunews/201802/20180226\\_13042.html](https://www.kahoku.co.jp/tohokunews/201802/20180226_13042.html)); Asahi Shinbun (<http://www.asahi.com/special/news/articles/TKY201310220411.html>); Nikkei Shinbun (<https://vdata.nikkei.com/prj2/shinsai2016-memory/and> [https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXLASDG11H6G\\_S6A310C1CR0000/](https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXLASDG11H6G_S6A310C1CR0000/)); My Hawaii ([https://www.hawaii-arukikata.com/news/2012\\_0711-tsunami.html](https://www.hawaii-arukikata.com/news/2012_0711-tsunami.html)); Ishinomaki Kahoku

(<http://ishinomaki.kahoku.co.jp/news/2018/03/20180310t13005.htm>); Miyako Mainichi (<http://www.miyakomainichi.com/2012/04/33298/>); Sankei News (<https://www.sankei.com/world/photos/160225/wor1602250043-p3.html>, <https://www.sankei.com/affairs/news/170315/afr1703150041-n1.html> and <https://www.sankei.com/world/news/160225/wor1602250043-n1.html>).

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