

SEATON SNOOK, AND THE BUILDING OF A PARAFICTIONAL SEASIDE TOWN

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Seaton Snook was a small town on the coast of County Durham, UK, on the north bank of the River Tees. It was a thriving community of fishermen, blacksmiths, teachers, seacoalers, labourers, and musicians. There was a church, a school, a fairground, an indoor market, a zinc refinery, an RAF station... then in 1968, it disappeared. There are no government records or newspaper reports referring to the town after that year, and apparently no former residents still living. The area where Seaton Snook stood now forms part of the Teesmouth National Nature Reserve¹, a mixture of sand dunes, salt marshes, grazing pasture and ash piles, with no indication whatsoever that it was once the site of a bustling town.

As a child, I spent many hours playing on the sand dunes of Seaton Snook, with no knowledge of the town that had once stood there. Yet I always felt I could hear the voices of a not-so-distant past, barely shimmering up from beneath the inescapable washing of the waves. I have spent the last five years building an online archive of sounds, music, photographs and writings from the town and its people,² in an attempt to form a picture of what life was like in Seaton Snook, and what actually happened there.

Amongst nearly 100 audio artefacts, the Seaton Snook archive contains music by classical composer Gaynor Leigh, who wrote for piano, harpsichord, and a local brass band; Robson Booth, who we are fairly certain wrote a collection of tunes for the Northumbrian smallpipes, created a very important local documentary work intended for radio, and may have been instrumental in the creation of the UK's first pirate radio station; and field recordings of the zinc factory by Agatha Pilkington, with interviews with the workers as part of Pilkington's campaign to improve safety regulations around workers' hearing protection. I present some of the artefacts in this article, and I would encourage you to visit the website so that you can listen to the audio files as you read along.

The Peoples Mass

¹ Ian Forrest, 'Seaton Common / North Gare Pier / Seaton Snook and Seaton Channel', *Teesmouth Bird Club* <<https://www.teesmouthbc.com/seatonsnookarea/>> (accessed 11 December 2020).

² <https://www.seatonsnook.com/> (accessed 7 August 2023)



Figure 1: The Peoples Mass, c.1967.

The Peoples Mass formed around 1964 and played around north-east England until 1967.³ Their stage personae played up to the ecclesiastical nature of their name, with the members of the band referring to one another only as 'brother' on stage (it is unclear to what extent they were influenced by German/American proto-punk band The Monks, playing in Geinhausen, West Germany, around the same time). The first artefacts from the band we found were four photographs from around 1967, of the band engaging in a 'Freak Out' (see Figure 1), described as 'where you would take lots of drugs and smash your instruments.'⁴ The photos taken at the Shy Tiger in Stockton-on-Tees show Drummer James Woodward, Bassist Edward Clark, and guitarist Fred Foster. The singer, George Brallisford, is taking the photographs. A fifth member, guitarist Frank Warnes, had died in 1965 in a fishing accident.

Brallisford was an interesting character. He was politically aware, and angry about the cultural neglect of the music from his hometown, particularly the way in which local accents and dialects were erased from the pop scene in favour of American accents. He explains in an unpublished 1964 interview with *Beat Instrumental*:

³ The lack of apostrophe in the name is deliberate, in reference to the then-respectable socialist-leaning, desegregated, Peoples Temple Christian Church Full Gospel, run by Jim Jones, who would later be responsible for the deaths of over 900 people in what became known as the Jonestown Massacre.

⁴ Kate Tyzak, 'Peoples Mass Photos', 6 August 2017.

Look at Gerry an' the Pacemakers, right: [Gerry] Marsden's singing about "Ferry Across (sic) the Mersey", which is like where he's from, it's a part of who he is, where he was brung up, it's a part of his soul; and he's singin about it in this horrible American accent! Why doesn't he sing in his own? ... that's taking the Mersey away from the people of Liverpool ... I want to tell people the stories of where I'm from. An I want to tell them in my way, in my voice, an in my bloody accent!⁵

The fact that the band was so determined to perform songs about local stories, in their own accent and dialect, was one of the reasons why they never made an impact on the wider music scene. We can hear Brallisford's accent coming through in the recordings we have of some of their rehearsals, including their signature song 'Join Hands With The People's Mass', and their rendition of an old folk song from the area, 'I Can Hear a Siren' (dialect words are translated in the right-hand column):

I can hear a siren	
A <i>skrike</i> o'er <i>roaky</i> Seaton	<i>scream; foggy</i>
A <i>bonny</i> way te end me days	<i>lovely</i>
Nothin left but <i>hyem</i> to lay	<i>home</i>
An feel the <i>kelpie's</i> fingers ways	<i>mermaid; move</i>
Aroun me <i>pow</i> aroun me neck	<i>head</i>
An <i>slip</i> me slip me <i>doon the beck</i>	<i>float; down the stream</i>
An <i>scumfish</i> all me <i>thropple</i> noo	<i>smother; throat</i>
An end me days alone wi you	

Performances of this song would culminate in a frenzy of noise, and occasionally in the aforementioned smashing of instruments.⁶

Upon listening, one notices the chromatic ostinato of the song, evoking the inescapable sound of the sea at Seaton Snook (see Example 1).

⁵ George Brallisford and unknown interviewer, *Interview with George Brallisford for Beat Instrumental* (Seaton Snook, 1964) <<https://www.seatonsnook.com/gbinterview>>.

⁶ We have a recording of such an occurrence in the archive, and it is remarkable how unspectacular the sound of smashing electric guitars turns out to be: a guitar will usually take one or two blows before snapping, and with the strings no longer near the pickups, the only noise is of so many chunks of wood smacking against the stage.

I can hear a si - ren, a skrike o'er roa - ky Sea - ton. A
 3 bon - ny way te end me days, No - thin left but hyem to lay, an
 5 feel the kel - pie's fin - gers ways, a - roun me pow a - roun me neck, an
 7 slip me slip me doon the beck, an skum - fish all me throp - ple noo, an
 9 end me days a - lone wi you.

Example 1: 'I Can Hear a Siren' (trad.).

The tune is certainly unusual, but it is not impossible that some of the songs of the people who lived in Seaton Snook were created in isolation of the conventions that governed other tune-writing in the area. Many of the early folk music collectors - especially Sabine Baring-Gould and Henry Fleetwood Sheppard - deliberately refrained from publishing tunes with unconventional tonalities, as they felt these strange sounds might not be 'acceptable to the musical public'⁷

Gaynor Leigh

Local composer and piano teacher Gaynor Leigh (Figure 2) was the only child born to Archibald and Alma Leigh, and was raised in one of the original workers' cottages, as Archibald was a worker at the Zinc Plant. Alma was a self-taught pianist and often played in the zinc workers' social club. It was she who gave Gaynor her first piano lessons. As a girl at Seaton Snook school, Gaynor proved to be very bright and at age 11 she received a scholarship to study at Henry Smith Grammar School in Hartlepool. At Henry Smith she was given more formal lessons in music and was particularly inspired by a lecture given by Scottish composer Euphemia Allen, composer (under the pseudonym Arthur de

⁷ Henry Fleetwood Sheppard, 'On the Melodies of Songs of the West', in *Songs and Ballads of the West.*, ed. by Sabine Baring-Gould and Henry Fleetwood Sheppard (London: Methuen, 1891), p. xlvi.

Lulli) of *The Celebrated Chop Waltz* (better known as *Chopsticks*). After completing her studies Gaynor started training as a schoolmistress at St Hild's college, Durham (now the College of St Hild and St Bede) but upon the sudden death of her father in 1911 she suspended her studies at St Hild's to return to Seaton Snook, working at the newly established Seaton Snook School as an uncertificated assistant until its closure in 1938. She was popular with the children but was never fully accepted by adults on her return from Durham.



Figure 2: Gaynor Leigh (1893-1957), from the private collection of Jane Hopper.

Leigh incorporated the ostinato of 'I Can Hear a Siren' in many of her pieces, most overtly in the melody of 'Waltz of the Graces', a piano piece written for the Mayor's Gala dinner at the 1925 Seaton Snook Carnival (see Example 2).⁸

⁸ 'Waltz of the Graces' was even converted to be played on the Grande Carousel at Seaton Snook fairground, and we were fortunate enough to unearth a recording of the carousel on the 1990s ITV magazine programme *Look at Brookwood*, during a segment on the Woking Fairground Museum; this can be heard on the Seaton Snook website.



Example 2: G. M. Leigh, 'Waltz of the Graces' (1925), bars 1-6.

Leigh also wrote a piano primer especially for her own students, pages of which we found in a charity shop in Redcar. In 1930, Leigh wrote to a friend saying,

What fun it would be for the children to have studies and exercises to play, that relate to the people and places they see every day here in The Snooks!⁹

Waves, from the primer, showcases this same ostinato (Example 3). Interestingly, there is no time signature or final barline:



Example 3: *Waves*, from Gaynor Leigh's piano primer, 1931.

Similar figures can be found at several points in Leigh's 1910 harpsichord piece, *The Crofter's Dream*.¹⁰ This programmatic, ecology-minded work is Leigh's most substantial keyboard piece, and was inspired by a story told to her by a crofter living on the Wide Open¹¹ in Seaton Snook:

A cowherd living on the Wide Open told me of a dream he had. He was sat peacefully amongst his cows, looking over the sea. A restlessness in the waves brought with it the factories that now stand at Seaton. With the factories came the staining of the land, the asphyxiation of the children, the endless screaming fires. As the herd stared into the poisoned turquoise

⁹ Gaynor Leigh, 'Letter to Jane Hopper', 1930.

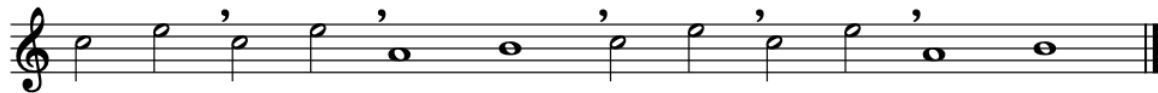
¹⁰ The piece was performed in 2021 at the Horniman Museum in London by the harpsichordist Jane Chapman; a video is available on the Seaton Snook website.

¹¹ The large area of grazing pasture at the north end of the town.

pools, Jacob Cox's Horse cried, and the final destruction of Seaton Snook came crashing down. He awoke at peace, certain that the Earth would finally reclaim what was hers.¹²

Strangely, the 'poisoned turquoise pools' would also be mentioned by The Peoples Mass in their song '(Join Hands With) The Peoples Mass', as well as by former resident Anna Wren in Robson Booth's fascinating 1959 audio documentary, *The Seaton Snook Tape Ballad*, in reference to the pollutants leaking from the Seaton Snook zinc works. The zinc works suffered a massive explosion in 1968, shortly before the town disappeared from public record; the sound of the explosion was captured by zinc works administrator Agatha Pilkington in her series of field recordings from the plant.

To return to *The Crofter's Dream*, the piece opens and closes with the motif shown in Example 4.



Example 4: Gaynor Leigh, *The Crofter's Dream* (1910), bar 1.

This is almost identical to a motif in Fig.3 (below) from a collection of pieces for the Northumbrian smallpipes, found amongst the effects of Robson Booth.

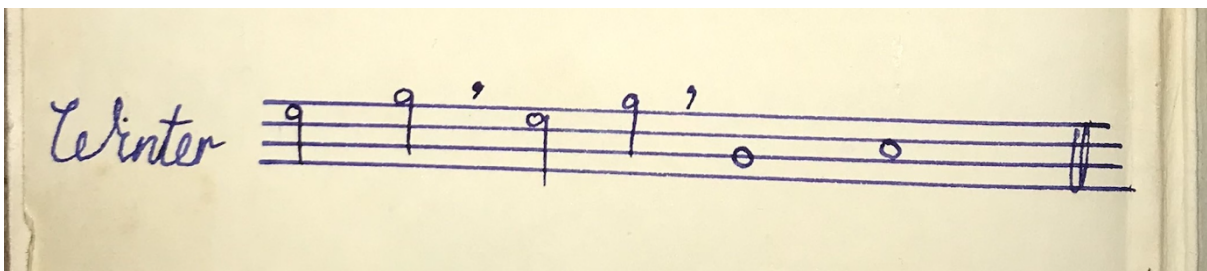


Figure 3 the Winter Tempo, from the papers of Robson Booth

The Seaton Snook Northumbrian Smallpipes Tunes

So far we have uncovered nineteen pieces for the smallpipes across three books, all referring to people, places and events around *Seaton Snook* such as the annual May Day stinting, Jimmy Walls'

¹² Redacted, 'Note Accompanying "The Crofter's Dream"', 8 June 2018.

shooting accident, and the wreck of the *Dorothea* (Fig. 4, below).¹³ They follow the AABB form familiar to pipers, and include jigs, rants, hornpipes, marches, and airs.

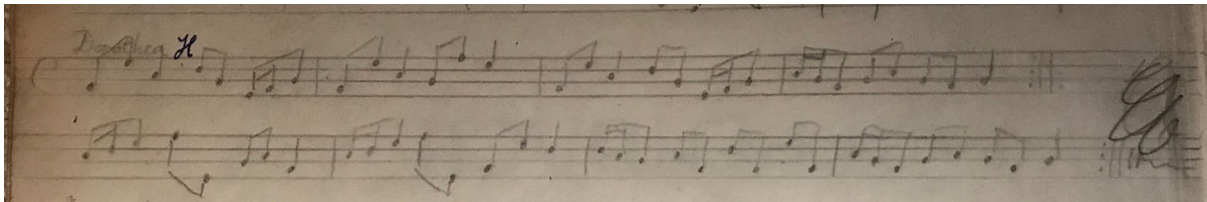


Figure 4 "Dorothea", from the papers of Robson Booth

The four short 'Tempo' motifs – *Lenten*, *Sumer* (sic), *Harvest*, and *Winter* - were found written in ink on the back page of a copy of *Hymns Ancient & Modern*, and were to be played before and after any performance of a *Seaton Snook* smallpipe tune, depending on the time of year. Additionally, certain pieces, such as *Dorothea* (above), *Hay from Crosby's*, and *Timon's Getting Married!*, are marked with indications that these tunes should only be played in the appropriate season. This highly idiosyncratic performance practice appears to explain why none of these tunes were adopted into the wider folk tune repertoire: any session in a folk club would surely have been ruined by the one stickler from the Snooks, insisting that everyone play the appropriate Tempo.

Parafiction

Many readers will by now have gathered that Seaton Snook, as it is described in the archive, is not entirely real. There was indeed a small settlement called Seaton Snook in that area, and it did die out in the late 1960s, but that was simply due to changes in local industry leading people to gradually drift away; circumstances much less dramatic than a catastrophic explosion or a Brigadoon-like fantasy.

What Happened to Seaton Snook? is a parafictional artwork. Parafiction, as described by art historian Carrie Lambert-Beatty, is art that 'plays in the overlap between fact and fiction, in which... real and/or imaginary personages and stories intersect with the world as it is being lived.'¹⁴ She goes on

¹³ The pieces as written have no clef, no key signature, and only four lines to a staff: as the pieces are in the same key, using the same eight notes, the clef and key signature are redundant; the bottom line is not needed since the tunes never reach lower than a G. The four-line staff has a precedent in the William Dixon manuscript from the early 18th Century, which was deduced by Matt Seattle to be music for a similar 9-note instrument, the border pipes; see William Dixon, *The master piper: nine notes that shook the world: a border bagpipe repertoire*, ed. by Matt Seattle, 2nd rev. ed (Peebles: Dragonfly Music, 2002).

¹⁴ Carrie Lambert-Beatty, 'Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility', *October*, 129 (2009), 51–84 (p. 54) <<https://doi.org/10.1162/octo.2009.129.1.51>>.

to say, ‘Simply put, with various degrees of success, for various durations, and for various purposes, these fictions are experienced as fact.’¹⁵ It appears real, and in talks and performances I present artefacts from the archive as real, but this appearance of reality is achieved through a multiplicity of parafictional techniques, including artificially aged audio recordings, misappropriated photographs, local history, historical musicology, and myth. *Seaton Snook’s* purpose is to use parafiction to raise questions about the centuries-long economic and cultural neglect of my home region of the UK, and to explore how listener experience can be shaped by the stories we tell about music.

To give an important example of parafiction, Cheryl Dunye’s 1996 parafictional film, *The Watermelon Woman* presents the story of a forgotten black actress from the 1930s: Fae Richards, a queer woman, who would play stereotypical ‘Mammy’ characters, and who went completely uncredited throughout her career. People like Richards are largely absent from the historical record, not because they didn’t exist, but because the people who write the accepted historical narratives chose to overlook them; sometimes deliberately, sometimes maliciously, and sometimes unconsciously through longstanding cultural biases. Dunye had to create Richards herself, in order to tell the story of people like her. Quoted in the earlier Lambert-Beatty paper, Dunye says parafiction ‘allows artists to imagine the lives of marginalised historical individuals while simultaneously marking their erasure from the historical record.’^{16 17}

Jennifer Walshe’s *Aisteach* project (2015, ongoing) is itself a parafictional archive, of artists and composers of the Irish avant-garde. Walshe’s approach was a significant model for my own in creating *Seaton Snook*. In a talk given in 2018 on *Aisteach*, Walshe said,

There was no way to go back and say, “These things happened.” We had to go back and look at history and think ... It was like looking at a Tarmac car park and [saying] “There’s a tiny crack there - maybe a seed could just land in that crack, and there’d be just enough dirt that that seed could grow into a plant”¹⁸

¹⁵ Lambert-Beatty, p. 54.

¹⁶ Lambert-Beatty, p. 57.

¹⁷ Other examples of parafictional works include *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), which although best remembered as a fun, found footage horror, also explored the idea of the Internet as a source of misinformation; *The Atlas Group* (1989-2004) by photographer Walid Raad, which used fake photographs of the Lebanon to investigate how we document war; political activists The Yes Men, who use deep fakes and hoax websites for corporations and politicians to highlight their damaging activities; and composer Johannes Kreidler, whose 2009 work *Fremdarbeit* put capitalist exploitation at centre stage of the concert hall by claiming to have outsourced the work to underpaid composers in India and China.

¹⁸ *Imaginary Histories*, dir. by Jennifer Walshe (Sonic Acts Academy, 2018)
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqbCcvuB21s>> [accessed 10 January 2019].

It is not enough simply to present a serialist string quartet next to a photo of a coal miner and say, 'He wrote this'.

When faced with the concept of Irish Dadaists, for example, their existence would have to be explained and justified. The Dadaists, as we know them, emerged from a large middle class with a certain amount of disposable income and spare time. As there was no comparable middle class in Ireland at the time, therefore, the Irish Dadaists would have to be working class. Walshe and her collaborators researched the labour laws of the time and found that the Guinness factory in Dublin had remarkably progressive workers' rights policies, paying the workers well for not-unreasonable hours. Additionally, the company as a whole encouraged art and creativity amongst the workers, with drawings by members of staff being displayed in the shop front.¹⁹

The question of 'Why, then, have we not heard of these people?' is also thoroughly explored. Walshe argues that, rather than being part of the same movement, the Guinness Dadaists were separate from the more famous European Dadaists. Walshe argues that, while the Dadaists with whom we are familiar were pacifists and largely apolitical, this would have been unlikely for their Irish counterparts, who would have lived through the Irish War of Independence and then the Irish Civil War. Not only does this create a plausible rift between the Irish movement and the European movement, but it also affords Walshe licence to explore social and political themes within a Dadaist framework.²⁰

As a whole artwork, *Aisteach* is presented as a website and a book, with only a hidden disclaimer alerts the viewer to its parafictional nature. This is in contrast to Walshe's earlier collection of works under the *Grúpat* banner: unlike *Aisteach* it is made very clear at the outset that these works are by Walshe herself working under the guise of various alter egos with varying degrees of depth in their personae and backstories. As such, several individual pieces appear on the works list of Walshe's own professional website.

A Methodology of Parafictional Art Creation

To be convincing as a parafiction, *Seaton Snook* must:

- 1) be based on a significantly developed mythology,

¹⁹ As discussed in *Imaginary Histories*.

²⁰ As discussed in *Imaginary Histories*.

- 2) ground this mythology in real-world events and contexts,
- 3) be presented convincingly as a work of factual documentary, not fiction.

During my PhD research at the University of Southampton under Matthew Shlomowitz and Drew Crawford, I developed a methodology of parafictional art creation (Fig 5, below).²¹

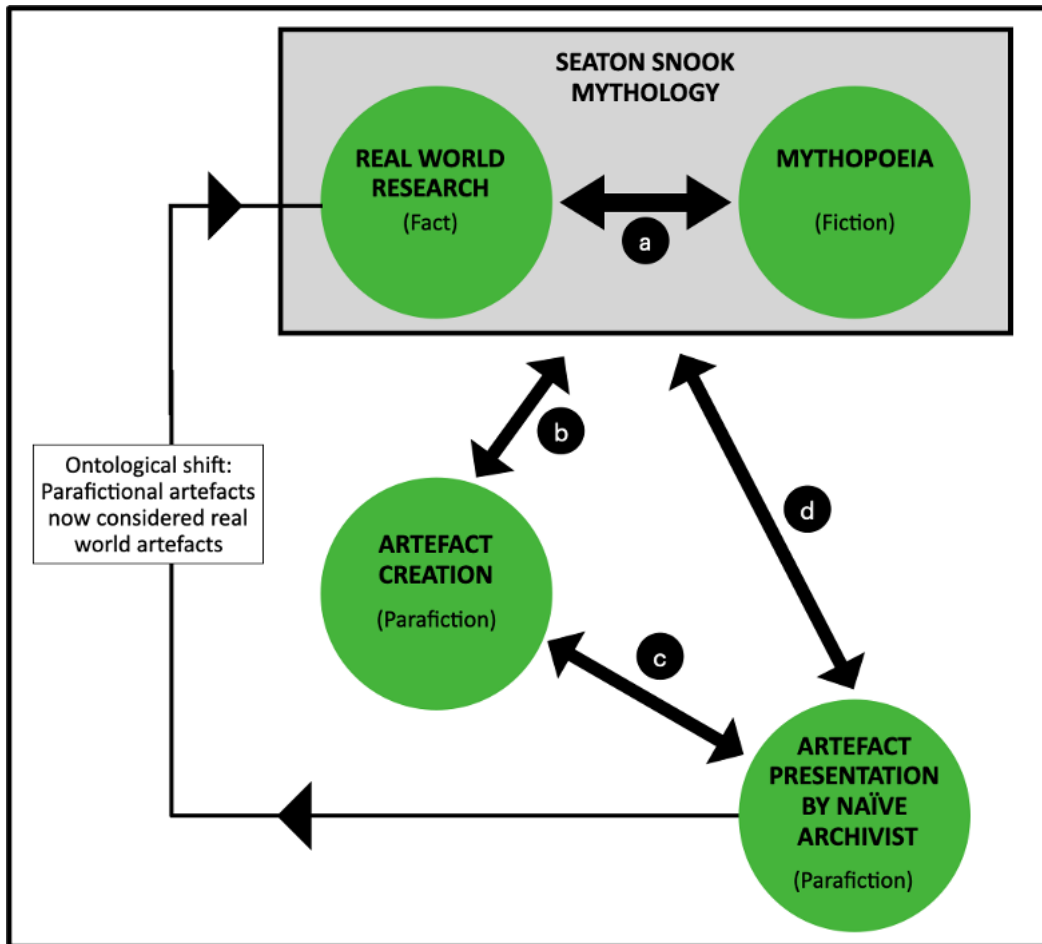


Figure 5: Methodology of Parafictional Art Creation.

Developing the mythology requires a constant dialogue between real-world research and myth-building, or mythopoeia: finding gaps in known history where the fictions could exist, and investigating ways in which fictional concepts could be plausibly brought into reality. Subsequently, artefact creation and artefact presentation both refer to this ongoing dialogue, as well as feeding back into it with new mythological possibilities. The methodology is non-linear, with cross-referencing and feedback loops throughout the creative process. As such, it would be possible to

²¹ The methodology owes as much to the philology and world-building of J.R.R. Tolkien as to any musical influence and is discussed at length in my thesis.

continue a project such as *Seaton Snook* indefinitely, with each new artefact adding to the mythology, and generating new lines of creative enquiry for the creation of further artefacts.

Upon their presentation on the *Seaton Snook* website, the artefacts undergo an ontological shift from being the fictional creations of the Artist, to being real historical documents to be presented by the Archivist of the *Seaton Snook* website. Additionally, once presented on the website, these artefacts, along with their supporting documentation and analyses, retain this realness and can now be used as sources of real world research by me as Artist. This goes beyond making the characters and events of *Seaton Snook* believable to the audience: as part of the creative process, I must believe that the history of *Seaton Snook* is real, and the artefacts, once created, can be accepted as such. When the Artist asks, 'Is this real?' the Archivist can answer, 'Yes – we have the artefact to prove it'.

To use The Peoples Mass as an example, real world research indicated that it was possible for a psychedelic rock band to exist in *Seaton Snook*. It also indicated their sound: similar to bands of that period like Herbal Mixture, Spooky Tooth, and Traffic. But the mythology also needs to explain why they didn't 'make it', why Brallisford's insistence on singing in his local accent and dialect meant that they would never be famous. This required researching accents and dialects of the time, and the reasons why this accent in particular was the subject of discrimination.²²

When it came to the artefact production, the songs are written in an appropriate psychedelic folk-rock style. I played the tracks in a similar style and with an appropriate level of musical skill, with period-appropriate equipment where possible (I could not find a vintage drum kit so I used suitable drum samples). The recordings were then treated to make them sound not only like they had been recorded in 1967, but also as if they had been recorded in a rehearsal room on ¼-inch tape with a terrible microphone. All of this entailed a cross-referencing of the myth of the The Peoples Mass in my parafiction with real world research into what The People's Mass would have sounded like if they had really existed.

As the archivist who presents the artefacts, I have to forget everything I knew about their creation, analyse them as I found them and link the songs, compositions, people and events on the website. Particularly interesting was the recording of the George Brallisford interview with *Beat Instrumental*. Once I had written the interview, I had to record it, playing the roles of both Brallisford and the interviewer, transfer the interview to poor quality tape and then, as archivist, transcribe the

²² The other reason why the band didn't make it, was because their drummer, James Woodward, was terrible, and was only in the band because he knew Ken and Marjory Tyzak, who owned the Blue Lagoon club where the band rehearsed. The Blue Lagoon and the Tyzaks are entirely real.

recording. At some points the distortion on the tape is so bad that the archivist cannot understand what Brallisford is saying and there are gaps and estimations in the transcriptions.²³

I do not keep notes about which details I invented and which details were discovered through my research. This was deliberate: I want to confuse what is real and what is fiction; I want to forget. Forgetting where fiction ends and reality begins, means that I have to treat all the artefacts on the archive as fact. Other artefacts emerge that refer to these Peoples Mass recordings, just as they would with any other historical record; and so the cycle continues.

The purpose of *Seaton Snook*

Why not just conduct a straightforward study of a real County Durham seaside town?

A parafictional approach allows artist to explore a wider range of issues and situations than a purely factual or historical account. *Seaton Snook* can use a psychedelic rock band to highlight regional isolation from government; it can probe Britain's use of slave labour in the 20th century, queer identities amongst Traveller communities, or the effects of factory wastewater on marine life, and still be believable parts of the *Seaton Snook* mythology. As Dunye's *The Watermelon Woman* demonstrated, parafiction can include people and places who have been excluded from the historical record, using art to bring them into being. It may be a parafictional site but seatonsnook.com contains possibly the only genuine record of life on the nomadic community of homemade houseboats of the Tees estuary.

Additionally, parafiction does all this in an immediately engaging manner and, to reiterate Lambert-Beatty, 'intersect[s] with the world as it is being lived.'²⁴ Because the audience experiences it as fact – in this case as an internet archive, and the feeling of falling down an online rabbit hole at 2am – and because the fiction is so intertwined with the real world – the appropriation of real people, photographs, historical events and news articles, the real-world performance of Snookish music, and my own in-person presentations of the archive as a body of fact²⁵ – parafiction can get under the skin more so than, for example, historical fiction, in which you *are* sometimes prompted to ask

²³ The exegesis section of my PhD thesis was also presented as recordings and transcriptions of conversations between myself as the Artist, and myself as the Archivist, extending the parafiction into the commentary itself.

²⁴ Lambert-Beatty, p. 54.

²⁵ I was honoured to present the archive at the Hartlepool Folk Festival in 2022, where I interacted with people who remembered visiting the real Seaton Snook as children, and were – thankfully – enthusiastic about these new stories.

‘What if?’ and to consider alternative possible realities; however you are always aware that you are reading a book, and when the book is closed, the story is closed with it.

The elephant in the room is the morality of tricking an audience in this way. In August 2020, I received an email from a local gentleman warning, ‘If much of [seatonsnook.com] is the work of your imagination, then that's fine, of course as long as it does not appear to be factual and it is made explicit that it is fictitious or semi-fictitious.’²⁶

But Lambert-Beatty maintains, ‘The fact that parafictions are queasy-making is key to what they are and what they do.’²⁷ If I played safe, and the artwork was more obviously fictional; if it did not intersect so much with real history, real people, real events; it would be far easier to dismiss it as a whimsical piece of fantasy.²⁸

There will be visitors to the site who have never considered that there might be anything artistically interesting going on in a north-east seaside town like Hartlepool. But there is, and there was back then in the days of Seaton Snook, and for a moment, I hope, people believe it. Once they have believed it for a moment, they may be start to consider why they didn’t believe it before. I use parafiction to prompt people to consider this alternative reality themselves rather than simply telling them what to think.

As Lambert-Beatty suggests, audiences may feel a certain discomfort about the trickery involved in these constructions, but may also ‘go away in a strange kind of educated ignorance, their worldviews subtly altered – perhaps in truthful ways – by untruths.’²⁹

At this point it is useful to point out the difference between parafiction and ‘fake news’. Aggressively political parafictionalists The Yes Men are unabashed about their use of deep fakes, hoax websites, and fabricated public figures, claiming to have ‘reclaimed the ancient technique of fun subterfuge, [using] fake news for good.’³⁰ Despite their use of the term, however, they distance themselves from fake news creators by saying ‘As always, we ... revealed [the hoax] afterwards – which of course the thugs don’t.’³¹ The distinction between parafiction and fake news, then, is in the visibility

²⁶ From an email to me dated 17th August 2020.

²⁷ Lambert-Beatty, p. 68.

²⁸ A legitimate local history website recently ran two articles on the history of the real Seaton Snook, and used my website as one of their sources, quoting things that were figments of my imagination, without any verification. Additionally, I managed to list *The Crofter’s Dream* on the Petrucci Library of musical scores, before moderators took it down as it was too recent to be out of copyright.

²⁹ Lambert-Beatty, p. 56.

³⁰ ‘The Era of Fake News for Good Has (Re)Begun’, *The Yes Men* <<https://theyesmen.org/rant/era-fake-news-good-has-rebegun>> [accessed 27 January 2021].

³¹ ‘The Era of Fake News for Good Has (Re)Begun’.

of its authorship: the author of fake news is deliberately obscured; the author of parafiction is deliberately discoverable. Indeed, political analyst Michael Jensen writes ‘the covert nature of [fake news] means they are manipulative, as the sources and aims of the communications remain hidden.’³² *Seaton Snook* contains a disclaimer – albeit hidden – and a simple Google search of my name would reveal parafiction to be a part of my compositional practice.

As the work appropriates real people, events, and situations, I do feel I have an ethical responsibility to treat the issues faced by the characters of *Seaton Snook* with respect and this is sometimes a difficult line to walk. In 1963, the BBC broadcast *Waiting for Work*,³³ a documentary highlighting the unemployment problem in Hartlepool, which prompted an abundance of food parcels and clothing donations from all over the UK. In 1974, another BBC programme, *Nationwide*,³⁴ visited Hartlepool to report on the hardships caused by continued high unemployment and the impact of the three-day week. Some of you might have seen the horrendous Channel 4 poverty porn in 2019 that was *Skint Britain*,³⁵ which presented a shocking report on the struggles of jobless people in Hartlepudlians as they adjusted to life as guinea pigs for the Government’s Universal Credit system. In television drama, too, well-meaning left-wingers, would use a fanciful idea of “The North East” in order to underline Working Class-ness.

To adapt feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey’s term, these dramas and documentaries are very much made under the ‘Southern Gaze’: while attacking a damaging government policy or social inequality the filmmakers perpetuate the idea that those poor people in the North East are other; inferior; convenient victims. In programmes like these you will rarely find mention of Hartlepool’s various galleries, museums and arts centres; the health- and finance-related support groups set up by members of the community; the successes of the international Tall Ships Festival and Hartlepool Folk Festival. The town is suffering, yes; but it is not wallowing in its own filth, unwilling to try to make a better life. It is important to me that *Seaton Snook* not fall into the old habit of painting a selectively grim picture of the area just to make a political point.

Seaton Snook seeks to make a case for the artistic output of a community being a crucial part of its identity, with compositional techniques, instruments, and performance practises that are all unique to *Seaton Snook*, as the town’s artists mark its existence in the cultural record.

³² Michael Jensen, ‘Russian Trolls and Fake News’, *Journal of International Affairs*, 71.1.5 (2018), 115–24 (p. 116).

³³ *Waiting for Work*, dir. by Jack Ashley (UK: BBC Television Service, 1963).

³⁴ *Nationwide: Hartlepool*, dir. by Philip Tibenham (UK: BBC Television Service, 1974).

³⁵ ‘Skint Britain: Friends Without Benefits’, dir. by Owen Gower, Aaron Black, and Phil Turner (UK: Channel 4, 2019).

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