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## Dis/Comforting Shelfies: Travelling Literacies Other-Wise in Disrupted Times

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## DIS/COMFORTING SHELFIES: TRAVELLING LITERACIES OTHER-WISE IN DISRUPTED TIMES

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### Introducing Shelfie Mapping and the Thematic Visual Essay

COVID-19 is reshaping working arrangements in traditionally office-based professions. For scholars, these disruptions emphasise the need to examine how literacies travel other-wise (Lemieux et al., forthcoming) through Zoom meetings, selfie tweets, and bookshelf photographs. Here, we evoke the altered paths that bodies, objects, and ideas are travelling as workers curate, negotiate, and become implicated in ‘zoomentities’. This posthuman, trioethnographic (Breault et al., 2012) piece attempts to map these altered paths.

We began by thinking about emergent literacy practices we observed, particularly the composing of shelfies as highly curated, intentional representations of professional selves. In parallel, we attended to the dis/comfort of the shelfies and ‘zoomentities’ we became implicated in and to what was produced in the assemblaging (Johnston, 2019) as disparate things came into relation in our lives. We mapped our thinking by sharing images on Padlet<sup>1</sup> (Image 1). The resulting thematic visual essay (Heng, 2020) is accompanied by first-person accounts, to elucidate the theories underpinning these images and help readers better understand our thinking.

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<sup>1</sup> The full Padlet can be explored in more detail at [https://padlet.com/f\\_scott1/w4zlrq5v1avqhb7g](https://padlet.com/f_scott1/w4zlrq5v1avqhb7g) (password: shelfie).

# Dis/Comforting Shelves: Travelling Literacies Other-Wise in Disrupted Times

**Dis/comforting shelves: travelling literacies other-wise in disrupted times**

**What's the Use?**  
Books that arrive 2 weeks earlier than what books make it to the shelf!  
Sara Ahmed

**Historic use of the term 'shelvie'**  
I searched shelvie on google books ngrams.  
https://books.google.com/ngrams?ui=common=shelvie&year\_start=1950&year\_end=2011&corpus=28&smooth=3

**face shelves**  
I was recently on a large group zoom call and was thinking about zoom entries. I was especially thinking about how shelves can feel curated but sometimes the shelvie blur or gets misaligned with the person and the face is revealed

**Our ASEA collab**  
I hope you don't mind me taking these as I wanted to document and didn't remember to take it before... I thought OK to share here as only between us, but let me know if you'd like me to delete anything!

**Google Meet call 19 02 21**  
I was so embarrassed by all the half dismantled furniture and broken movie posters in our spare room. Covid emergency home office that asked my partner to take some of them down! I still feel awkward about it! (The best??) The British flag on his cycling poster!

**What's the Use? (4)**  
"You can outgrow books as well as clothes. The well-used book, splintered by use, becomes unruined in the sense of no longer used to make use of a book is to read a book" (Ahmed, 2016, 45)

**What's the Use? (3)**  
I love used books. I love the traces of earlier readers. I read readers to keep part of themselves behind (Ahmed, 2016, 37)

**What's the Use? (2)**  
"I thought the book from a bookshop, others might have picked it up, but they put it down again. I would take that book out of its pocket, just reminding it from a pocket can be enough to become a used book, even if I have not read it. This means that something can become used before it is used. How quietly" (Ahmed, 2016, 35)

**What's the Use? (1)**  
I was so embarrassed by all the half dismantled furniture and broken movie posters in our spare room. Covid emergency home office that asked my partner to take some of them down! I still feel awkward about it! (The best??) The British flag on his cycling poster!

**What's the Use? (5)**  
"Something can thus appear unused while being been used if that use did not leave traces when they usually appear. Use is a frame, not an activity appear as uses if not all uses appear" (Ahmed 2016, 46)

**What's the Use? (6)**  
I was so embarrassed by all the half dismantled furniture and broken movie posters in our spare room. Covid emergency home office that asked my partner to take some of them down! I still feel awkward about it! (The best??) The British flag on his cycling poster!

**What's the Use? (7)**  
I was so embarrassed by all the half dismantled furniture and broken movie posters in our spare room. Covid emergency home office that asked my partner to take some of them down! I still feel awkward about it! (The best??) The British flag on his cycling poster!

**What's the Use? (8)**  
I was so embarrassed by all the half dismantled furniture and broken movie posters in our spare room. Covid emergency home office that asked my partner to take some of them down! I still feel awkward about it! (The best??) The British flag on his cycling poster!

**What's the Use? (9)**  
I was so embarrassed by all the half dismantled furniture and broken movie posters in our spare room. Covid emergency home office that asked my partner to take some of them down! I still feel awkward about it! (The best??) The British flag on his cycling poster!

**What's the Use? (10)**  
I was so embarrassed by all the half dismantled furniture and broken movie posters in our spare room. Covid emergency home office that asked my partner to take some of them down! I still feel awkward about it! (The best??) The British flag on his cycling poster!

Image 1. Snapshot: mapping our emergent thoughts through a shared Padlet.



### Stuff-as-unauthorised-biographer (Fiona)

Reviewing the past year emphasises messy entanglements of public and private identity fragments across digital and non-digital contexts. We have become versed in reading professional identities through academic social media. Texts appear intentionally positioned to say something about their owners, as users perform and construct identities through curated shelfies spanning beyond bookshelf content (Brandabur, 2019).

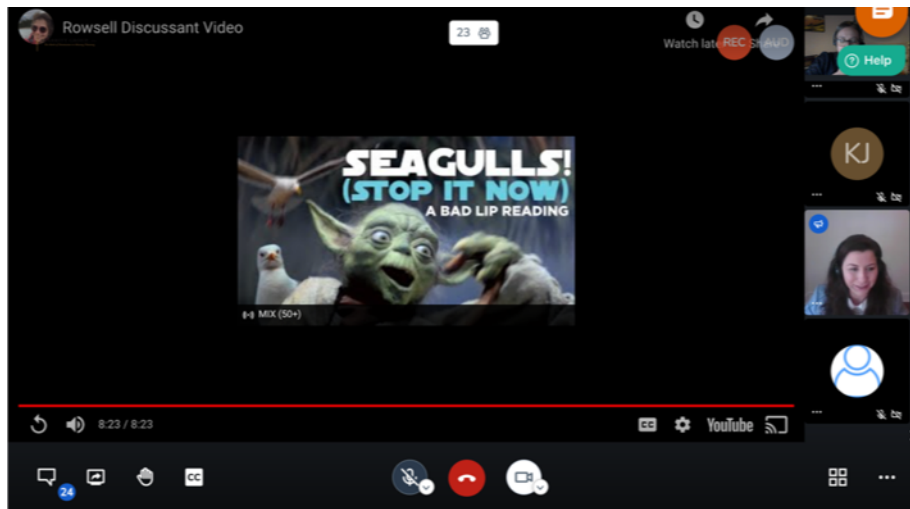
Having temporarily checked out of pandemic-era academia for parental leave, my back-to-work shelfie game felt miles behind. Well-lit by ring lights, my peers appeared via Zoom, Twitter and TV, sitting before bookcases in neat home offices. The debris of a house move and new parenthood lurked at the corners of my own screen, telling a different story about me (Image 2).



*Image 2. The debris of a house move and new parenthood.*

A discomfoting sense of identity-written-for-me crept in, as stuff from life beyond transgressed the boundaries of my professional world. Concluding a (virtual) conference, my computer threatened to auto-play for delegates a spoof video I used to entertain my baby (Image 3).



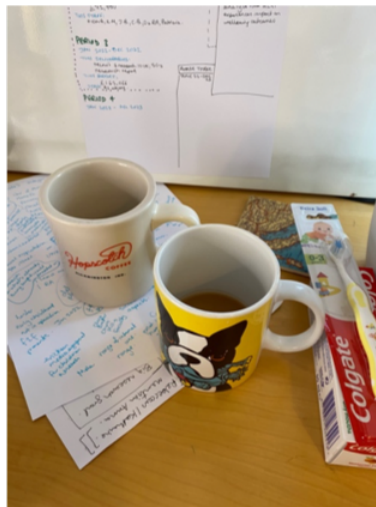


*Image 3. Seagulls! (Stop it now).*

Meeting with an important industry collaborator, my baby crawled into the room, demanding access to my keyboard (Image 4). Dirty coffee cups, baby's first toothbrush, reams of messy notes (Image 5) cats on the keyboard and napping babies (Image 6) drafted latent identities for the consumption of external audiences (shambolic-and-not-coping? Working-parent-and-proud?) before I had thought about self-identity as a working parent.



*Image 4. Tabitha demands access to the keyboard.*



*Image 5. Desktop detritus.*



*Image 6. Dis/comfort in working other-wise.*

Identity is messily implicated in shifting, synthesised text productions (Scott, 2018). In negotiating the agential balance between myself and my stuff (Miller, 2010), I felt I was losing. Ephemeral entanglements with things not intended for public consumption will inevitably be interpreted as significant in particular spaces and times, contributing to assemblages (DeLanda, 2016) that affect readings of our professional identities.

### From Books to Zoom Calls: Dis/comforting Shelfies (Amélie)

Shelfies present ideas, authors, covers, arrangements, colours, images, design, relationalities that frame theories, practices, stories and narratives in polysemiotic, denotative-connotative (Barthes, 1964) and material-discursive ways (Burnett et al., 2014). Image 7 speaks to an engagement with Ahmed's (2019) *What's the use?* and scribbled notes and quotes I couldn't ignore. First reading brought dis/comfort and quotes that rang true: "If a used book is secondhand, we might say a new book is firsthand, as if my hands are the first hands to touch it" (p. 35).

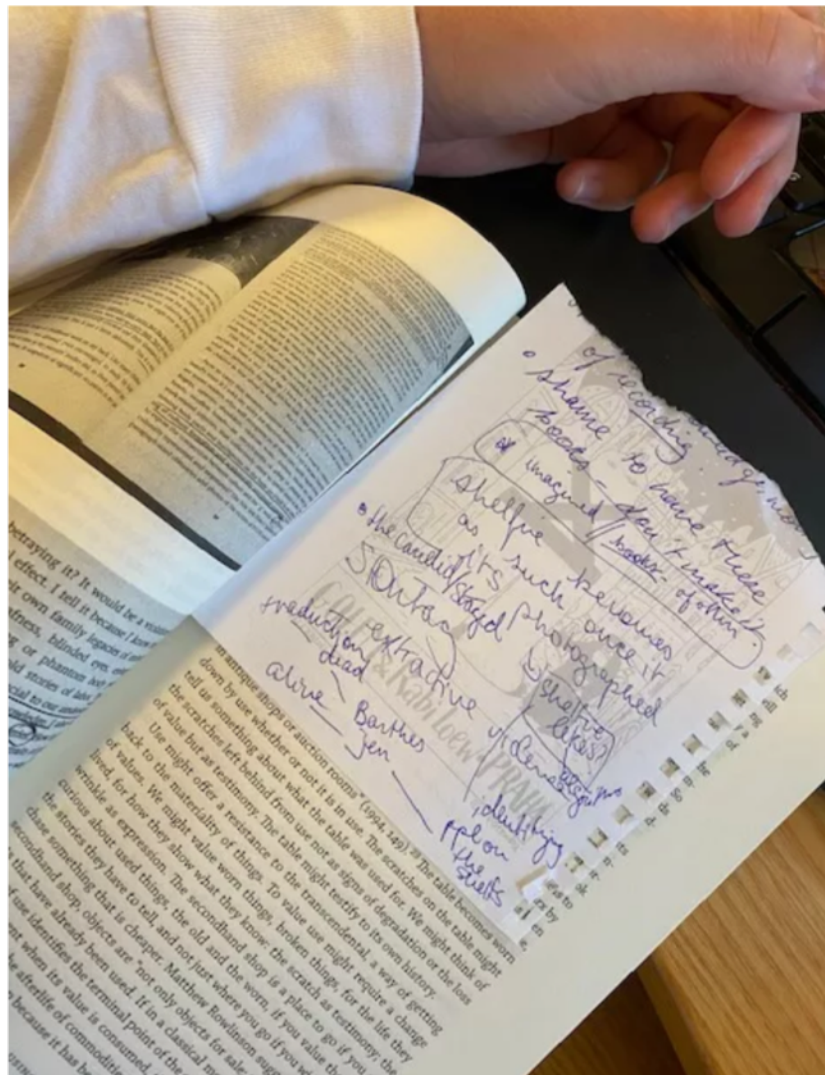


Image 7. Reading and notemaking with Ahmed (2019) *What's the use?*

I ordered the book through my institutional library to ensure community access. Ahmed's philo-feminist musings proved unexpectedly relevant: "If I bought the book from a bookshop, others might have picked it up, but they put it down again [...] something can become used before it is used." (p. 35). There's a latent dis/comfort associated with being the first (or not?) to open a library book—one that travels materially, and whose ideas travel virtually (through Zoom) and polyphonically (with myself).



Conversations with my collaborators generated more dis/comfortable dis/positions regarding where we sat, literally and figuratively (Image 8), about the unfolding meaning(s) of shelfies which, in turn, generated more considerations for the meaning of use and how ideas are used: "not all activities appear as uses if not all uses appear" (Ahmed, 2019, 46).



*Image 8. Google Meet call 19 02 21.*

How did we use shelfies? How do shelfies continue to be used?

Thinking with Ahmed's (2019) ontology of use nurtures a discussion about how books travel, in whose hands they end up, if reading translates into private literacy events (hopefully reflection), and public literacy events (such as our Zoom discussions, and the publication of this article). In sum, book travels are unpredictable, flexible, and fit within the "what ifs" of literacy.

### **Traveling Shelfies as Assembling Forces (Kelly)**

From the outset, I was intensely aware of my affective response to shelfies in the height of the pandemic. The stuff that forms social life (Barad, 2007), such as child care concerns, family commitments, social distancing, internet and resource access, came together as forces that produced a discomfort, a hesitancy, and sometimes resistance to what I understand as the planned and curated nature of shelfies.

I conceptualize the nuanced outcomes of this coming together as assembling (Johnston, 2019), which moves us from thinking about what is present in an assemblage to looking at what it produces in particular spaces and times (DeLanda, 2016). Such emphasis on the in-process production of assemblages attends to the potential conflation between seemingly stable social phenomena, such as shelfies, and the less immediately observable but just-as-present productions of one's shelfie self.

One outcome of the assembling forces during the pandemic was traveling differently due to forced life changes. Revisiting our Padlet, the first thing I notice is my different locations and lack of a curated, fixed shelfie. I am in my car, my children's bedroom, outside, or in my university-based office. Shelfies might communicate some sense of identity about who and where one is, but

I felt unstable on both counts, never knowing where I might be during our calls, or what I might be navigating.



*Image 9. Ideas, thoughts and texts.*

These traveling shelfies became assemblaging forces that produced my own dis/comfort with engaging in literacies other-wise. As a result, shelfies morphed beyond my visual zoomentity through digital spaces (Image 9), which produced a more stable reflection of my shelfies self (i.e., ideas, thoughts and texts).

### **Concluding Thoughts**

What little shelfie scholarship currently exists tends to characterise shelfies as intentional productions for the consumption of a public audience, predominantly via social media (e.g. Brandabur, 2019). Like selfies, shelfies are understood as expressions of identity, negotiated through strategic alignments of the self with ideas, authors, covers, arrangements, colours and so on. As if, perhaps, we might accrue value when our using, or being used by, valuable ideas leaves its traces on us. Attending to what was produced in the assemblaging (Johnston, 2019) of things in disrupted times, we noticed, rather, our own dis/comfort in the shifting, unstable shelfies and 'zoomentities' we became implicated in in different spaces and at different points in time.

Through trioethnographic mapping, we visually presented texts to one another for private consumption, texts we felt mattered or that spoke to our experiences and aspects of our identities. Our mapping produced a different form of dynamic, collaborative shelf/ie. This mapping placed our images into conversation with one another, and with us, un/sedimenting mapping's dynamic



territories (Lemieux et al., 2020). Through this interrelationality, we processed dis/comforting states of being associated with shelfies. Our collaboration enabled us to dis/comfort our preconceived notions of what a shelfie is (or could be), pointing to future directions for the use of a dynamic, collaborative shelf/ie-as-methodology. We argue that this approach will be useful for researchers around the globe, who want to expand work not only on shelfies, but also more broadly in literacies research.

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