

## Abstract

The paper builds on recent literature on post-phenomenology to understand how politics suffuse the everyday experience of walking on an urban leisure path in Tucson, Arizona (USA). Beginning with non-representational accounts of affect, this paper then shifts to post-phenomenology to make sense of the findings on how walking the path is impacted by at least two other influences: the retail consumption infrastructure of shopping centres and advertising, and the military infrastructure of air force bases. Post-phenomenology helps us advance our understanding of how these power centers emit affective atmospheres while also situating their incompleteness and inability to fully control the production of subjectivity. By way of auto-ethnographic reflections, this paper displays (1) how retail spills into leisure space, and (2) how the materiality of warfare spills into civilian life. Post-phenomenology is a helpful approach for understanding a politics of affect in the absence of clear intentionality.

Keywords: walking, geopolitics, affect, post-phenomenology, retail, military

## 1.0 Introduction

In 2002, cultural geographer John Wylie walked Britain's South West Coast Path, accompanied in spirit by the philosophers of an emerging "non-representational" approach to theory and research (he lists Deleuze, Merleau-Ponty, Lingis, Bachelard: Wylie 2005, p. 246). Amid his poetic descriptions of self/landscape is an interrogation of "the subject", now set against a much broader array of agents, forces, materials and even specters. Wylie, recognizing the limits of his auto-ethnographic technique and positionality, puts forward a modest and yet robust version of how self and landscape merge in profound ways, often at the edges of affective experience as a sensational conditioning of life. This paper adapts Wylie's (2005) methodology for another path walking experience, this one in a complex urban environment in the Southwest state of Arizona, USA. Although similarly constrained – this paper does not research "who walks and why" (Wylie, 2005) – the worlds that open-up on this path provide us an opportunity to critically reflect on various embodied geographies of power, particularly around the overlapping and intersection of different infrastructures surrounding the path itself. To better understand some specific findings, we draw on more recent developments around post-phenomenology (Ash and Simpson 2016; McCormack 2017; Kinkaid 2021) that have followed in the wake of non-representational approaches and push the conceptual boundaries.

Specifically, our approach to the Rillito River Park path ("the path" below) in Tucson, Arizona, adapts Wylie's (2005) methodology in two important ways. First, we consider how the path's affective dimensions include the forces of at least two other infrastructural elements bearing down on it: retail consumerism in the built environment that often flanks the path, and the

military infrastructure of Air Force bases that produce a wide variety of sounds and sensations that reverberate through the city's atmosphere. These shape the affective experience of the Path in undeniable ways, an empirical and conceptual challenge not faced by Wylie's (2005) more scenic and rural path (with some exceptions; more below). Second, we incorporate the insights of post-phenomenology to better grasp the specific impacts that these infrastructures have on affective experience, as well as what their limits are. Post-phenomenology follows from non-representational theories primarily because both de-center traditional notions of subjectivity, thereby opening-up worlds that are, at times, seemingly apart from that of humans (Ash, 2020). For us, we consider how this approach allows us to track the complex findings from the walking method, findings that cannot be summarized as the result of any intentional subject (Lea, 2009), even that which puts into motion the built and mobile environments (or infrastructures) for specific purposes, those being retail and military in this case.

McCormack's (2017) vocabulary for the "worlds" of post-phenomenology is especially helpful for us. McCormack (2017) pushes forward the challenge posed by these recent trends, a challenge to account for more-than-human geographies in a way that does not ignore how they, at times, press against the human geographies of affective bodies and subjectivities. McCormack (2017) coins the idea of circumstantial world to describe these always shifting pockets of existence and experience. These worlds may unfold with or without the force of intentional interventions, and they may also contain elements of "non-coincidence", or what is referred to as a "non-unified arrangement of simultaneity" (referencing Bryant 2014; p. 7; also see Lea 2009). Rather than undermining the concerns of critical human geography, these possibilities may allow for us to

imagine other kinds of politics altogether, as some of the findings presented in this paper cannot be reduced to any intentional subject, even if we are attending to the force of mega-infrastructure (Woodward et al. 2012). There is a challenge to interpretation with our experimental walking of the path that post-phenomenology helps resolve in a way that, we hope, resonates with the concerns of critical geography, particularly around critical urban geographies of consumption and advertising (Cronin 2006; Dekeyser 2018) and especially how military geographies, particularly military airspaces (Williams, 2011; Rech, 2015) impact the embodied urban experiences of “civilian” space (Woodward 2004; Merriman et al. 2017).

Below, we offer an overview of the recent literature on (post-)phenomenology and geography, especially through the literature on walking. We then introduce the path and the methodology before moving into two substantive sections that detail how retail and military geographies intrude on the Path, respectively. While this may seem over-ambitious in scope, we emphasize that this is unavoidable, that the site (for us, at least) demands such an approach. Rather than “choosing” to combine these areas somewhat arbitrarily, we contend that they are instead *already there*, awaiting our enrollment in their affective clutches. These are not the only political materials of the path, of course, and not the only possible interpretation. For us, the affective experience of walking the path includes the force of these surrounding infrastructures as these intrude onto the path, itself an infrastructure with its own logic and governance. It is these messy overlaps that this paper examines.

## 2.0 The Politics of Walking in Urban Leisure Space

In recent years, scholars have paid more attention to walking and its immense relevance for a variety of fields of study (see Kowalewski and Bartłomiejski 2020). This paper is interested in what ethnographic approaches to everyday walking spaces and infrastructures can tell us about political life (Rose et al. 2010; Miller, 2015). That is, from an embodied, emotional and affective experience of walking the path, how can we directly detect the forces we commonly refer to as “political”? Or, what is the status of objects and atmospheres that surround us in everyday life, particularly those with more or less intentional designs on our attention and behavior, such as retail? How must we attest to the everyday and mundane experiences of these infrastructures, including the military infrastructures described here?

With Wylie (2005), walking becomes a non-representational event itself, as self and landscape are so intertwined that “the subject” seems to dissolve amid a broad array of affective and more-than-human forces. From this perspective, we suggest that any political regime must enter into an intimate engagement with such a phenomenological domain, one that includes a central role for indeterminacy. Non-representational theories move towards post-phenomenology because they often attempt to locate something that can not be named, and therefore moves beyond subject-centered ontologies (although see Wylie, 2010). Often, we find ourselves awash in landscapes that carry us into unknown worlds (McCormack, 2017), perhaps just as much as we control them through so many projects that seek to “produce” space.

Yet for all his effort towards a non-representational approach to walking the path, Wylie (2005) encounters familiar political objects along the way; for instance, a memorial plaque

commemorating a ship sunk nearby during the First World War “affected me deeply” (p. 241), he reports. Later, he describes the abrupt appearance of today’s war machinery: real fighter jets suddenly appeared that “ricocheted low overhead, dislocating the entire world and sending a group of gulls screaming up into the air in wan imitation” (p. 243). These make an impact on his “single day’s walking”, but Wylie makes few moves toward what they are begging for: a deeper engagement with the geopolitics of the landscape, and what such a walking methodology can add to our understanding of those geopolitics. Sidaway’s (2009) approach, partly in response to Wylie (2005), stands out among several who have tried to bridge this gap. Walking a different part of the same path, this one in a more urban environment, Sidaway (2009) veers sharply away from non-representational affects and into a much more familiar world. The path becomes a bundle of information about the history, geography and indeed the geopolitics of the infrastructure found along the way. In terms of the embodied experience of the path, Sidaway (2009) borrows from Pain and Smith (2008) and Müller (2008) to emphasize how feelings of loss and fear crop up along the way, shaping what are referred to as “shadows on the path”.

What is missing from Sidaway’s (2009) account, however, is precisely what Wylie (2005) was imploring us to acknowledge – the affective linkages between self and landscape. The bridging of this gap is incomplete, a gap we help fill with this paper. We have to look elsewhere for examples of work that extends affective politics in this way. Much has been said about how early non-representational theories were perhaps too far away from the traditions of critical human geography and feminist geographies in particular (see Thien 2005 and McCormack 2006; cf. Colls 2013). What stands out to us today is the exciting work that more effectively bridges these gaps

between affective experience and the most familiar and grandiose of political formations: race, nation, sex, gender, class, and any number of factors relevant for geopolitics (Crang and Tolia-Kelly 2010; Saldanha 2010; Kinkaid 2021, 2020, among others). In the literature on the geographies of walking, the politics of embodiment are sometimes emphasized, from the urban spaces of consumption in the U.K. (Rose et al. 2010) to state formation on the desert trail in Jordan (Mason, 2019) (also see Middleton 2011, among others).

We want to bring into conversation the embodied politics of walking with post-phenomenology, a current topic of some debate in geography (see Kinkaid 2021). Indeed, as cited above, Wylie (2005) includes this exact term (with the “post”) in his original paper because of how a non-representational approach challenges the existential assumptions of presence often found lurking in phenomenology. Since then, post-phenomenology refers to the expansion of non-representational approaches as well as a broader attention to the non- or more-than-human worlds. McCormack (2017) cites Ash and Simpson’s (2016) summary that such an orientation attempts the tricky feat of exploring the “excessive world that lies outside the human-environment correlate but which is central to shaping human capacities, relations and experience’ (2017, 63)” (p. 5). To be even more clear, McCormack (2017) specifies that “world” cannot simply provide the background to human action, even if it is politically charged by way of affectively setting the “mood”. Something else must be offered to help us get a grip, conceptually and analytically, on what kind of world is being proposed with such language.

The answer for McCormack (2017) is “circumstantial world”, a clever way of bringing on board everything requested by Ash and Simpson (2016), but in a way that also makes space for “non-coincidence”. The human subject, awash in the landscape that holds and exceeds it, inhabits circumstantial worlds that may be increasingly loaded with intention (following Thrift’s (2008) “engineering of affect” thesis, for example), but that remain forever open to non-coincidence, chance, wonder and other mysterious aspects of being and becoming. These “circumstantial worlds”, in other words, are not just background props and/or technologies of savvy and powerful political actors but are also conceptualized as always in motion by combining with other forces impinging on the moment, both human and non-human. McCormack (2017) urges a focusing on these moments where environment, bodies and subjectivities overlap, if only for an instant, and appear as temporary alignments referred to as “pinches” (p. 3) or, following Bryant (2014), “meshes” (p. 6).

While Wylie (2005) and others have emphasized embodied sensation in these early explorations, others like Simpson (2009) have specified how hearing, listening and sound also form a foundational aspect of experience that must be included in any post-phenomenology. Drawing on Jean-Luc Nancy, Simpson (2009) writes of a “materiality of sound” (p. 2559) that goes along with “an encounter with sound” (p. 2562) that provides an indispensable dimension of affective experience. In the context of music, Simpson eschews a snobbish reliance on interpretation of cultural codes of music in favor of a more practice-oriented appreciation in which the sound of music becomes important because of *the force it produces*. This attention to sound is important for our understanding, as it allows for a recognition of a baseline layer of reality that does not



merely set the stage for politics, nor does it signify anything. Instead, it acts as an agent itself that links objects, atmospheres and embodied spaces of human subjectivity. While we could look towards the state-sponsored spectacle of military airshows as one way of approaching the everyday geopolitics of the military infrastructure (see Rech 2015), with a post-phenomenological approach we glimpse the military materials as enacted in another more mundane way that is difficult to delineate. Nevertheless, we insist that this kind of airspace does generate a political realm of only sensation and sound, a realm that may or may not fall neatly into the traps of spectacle or any other theory of state power (Koch 2018).

Drawing on these resources and McCormack (2017) in particular, unusual and non-essential spacetimes become detectable and thereby expand our understanding of what exactly is happening when we take a leisurely stroll on the path. Some interventions to the atmosphere are intentional, insofar as the built retail environment is a set of objects, materials and commodities set in motion in particular ways that resemble seduction and other kinds of intervention (Thrift 2008). Other interventions simply happen without evidence of any infrastructural intentions, thereby pulling the subject into strange and unplanned for spaces. The stroll on the path, then, might appear innocent on the surface but is in fact loaded with dangerous and wonderful potential.

### 3.0 To the Path

“The Loop” is a network of paved paths around and through Tucson which currently extend over 100 miles. Running along the dry riverbeds, the pavement offers cyclists and pedestrians year-round connectivity and the joys of (mostly) car-less transport. When the summer monsoon rains arrive, the riverbeds (“washes” in local lingo) once again gush with water and debris from the overflow of consumer society (shopping carts, trash, discarded furniture and other random objects). The dramatic Sonoran Desert landscape attracts many nature lovers and outdoor enthusiasts who also come for the abundant sunshine and blue skies. Cyclists and pedestrians utilize the Path for recreation and as a partial escape from the city that resembles many other “sunbelt” cities: miles and miles of sprawling roads, parking lots and identical strip malls and other corporate architecture. The section described here runs along the Rillito River, through the Rillito River Park, a section that runs through the northern-central part of the city for around 12 miles (Figure 1) just before the landscape rises in elevation into the mountainous foothills to the north (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Rillito River Park map on the trail (photo by author).

Figure 2: Rillito riverbed with path in the bottom right corner (photo by author).

While most of the Path avoids motor-vehicle traffic, there are occasional intersections and other places where the city blatantly spills onto the path. Sometimes the path seems to transport you far into the desert and away from the city, while other times the sounds of the highway ring faintly nearby. Or, when you thought you were isolated in the desert you suddenly arrive in a strip mall. Sometimes, from above, the sounds and sensations of military air traffic descend on the path, producing a *force moving through the air*. It is worth highlighting the two major employers of the city: Davis-Monthan Air Force Base on the city's south side, and Raytheon, a massive weapon systems company whose products fuel conflicts around the world, including in Yemen where civilian deaths have been linked to weapons traced to this Arizona facility (Stern 2018). While Tucson is known as a progressive stronghold in a conservative state, there are plenty of pro-military subjects that inhabit the city, particularly those associated with Raytheon and the Air Force base, as well as an Air National Guard unit housed at the Tucson International Airport.

In adapting Wylie's (2005) walking methodology, the narration below draws on post-phenomenology to navigate the play of forces shaping life on the path, including corporate retail environments and military aircraft training for warfare.

#### 4.0 Post-Phenomenological Politics on the Path

#### *4.1 Methodology*

The first author lived in Tucson for roughly nine years and is responsible for collecting the data. Having experienced the path many times himself, and inspired by Wylie (2005) and others, he made two research visits to the path near the end of his residence there in 2018: one visit was solitary and another was in the company of a friend. In adapting Wylie's (2005) method, a digital voice recorder was used to record the entirety of the solitary walk. The device was left recording everything, including verbal notes made along the way about the sensations and events that were occurring. This walk solitary walk was transcribed not only for the words said, but also the full array of sounds captured by the microphone, thereby including traces of the surrounding environment (see Miller, 2014); for this reason, they are referred to as "verbal/sonic fieldnotes" below. Following Woodward et al. (2012), the goal is to record and respond to fullest array of things possible that compose the research site; or, in other words, the "noise" (p. 208) that does not always fit with theories that excessively privilege subjectivity. Constructing a transcript this way, therefore, provides a record of this noise, which can also include silence (Meyer 2021). In fact, when considering what findings were most meaningful during the solitary walk, the silences, as we will see below, offered a clue that something had taken place during the walk that froze us into a temporary constellation that deserves recognition.

More selective verbal notes were taken during a second walk to document the sounds and sensations of military air traffic. Instead of leaving the recording device turned on for the entirety of the walk, it was used only to document the aircraft when they presented themselves. A basic

digital camera was also used to document elements of the path and its surroundings. In addition to these two visits, the first author also began documenting the sound of the jets flying overhead in the city. Drawing on these and other materials below, we provide an outline of what post-phenomenology has to offer our understanding of these mundane leisure spaces in the city.

#### *4.2 Circumstances of Consumption*

The solitary walk began on an early summer morning after a short city bus journey to a trailhead. According to the recording and transcript, the first 15 minutes of the walk are, admittedly, unremarkable and somewhat boring: the ground surface is split between smooth blacktop with painted lines and more rocky, muddy earth; birds chirp, dogs bark and motor-vehicles hum along out of sight; domestic sounds trickle out of homes adjacent to the path. Other objects appear such as signage (“rules of the path”, for example) and a public art installation. Before long, I come to one of the first commercial installations visible from the Path: a shipping container (referred to as a “crate” below) improvising as a billboard, behind a chain linked fence in an industrial lot. The container’s widest and longest surface faced the path and displayed the words, clearly painted in black over yellow, “Truly Nolan Pest Control”:

“The bikes are mostly cyclist types, so far. Truly Nolan Pest Control crate will facing... (incomplete sentence, mind wanders). Can’t be sure, but it sounds like heavy metal from the cleaning cart guy in the park. Truly Nolan pile of rubble next to the power plant. UASC

crate, crane (bike whiz by). UASC mimics Truly Nolan, or vice versa. (chirping)(crunching footsteps)... (steps for 30 seconds, silence). (source: transcript of verbal/sonic fieldnotes).

In transcribing the audio file word for word, sound for sound, we detect a disturbance in the alleged “subject” of the walk. The researcher-subject trails off, transcribed as “(incomplete sentence, mind wanders)”. Something happened that I am unable to comprehend or recall; as I narrate the scene, *something takes me away* and I find myself mumbling. To be clear, this has nothing to do with Truly Nolan Pest Control. While there is some registration of the signage, the moment is almost immediately diverted, an example of a “non-coincident, non-unified arrangement of simultaneity” following McCormack (2017; p. 7). Yet these moments of attention are what retailers and advertisers are battling for. What if the impact was unconscious (see Roberts 2012), perhaps worming its way into the subject, waiting to deploy when the time is right – when I am, indeed, in need of pest control? Advertising may also work through anticipatory logics (Dyckhoff 2017; cf. Anderson 2010) that prepare the subject for a future relationship. The objects and signs of advertising, then, help shape the post-phenomenological circumstances of consumer subjectivity that may or may not arrive at last. At the least, the shipping container-turned-billboard leads me to question the prevalence of advertising along the rest of the path, of which there is plenty.

As I continue walking the path, the transcript reveals other strange moments that may have gone unnoticed without such a methodology. I sometimes become absorbed in various confluences of

forces that leave me spell-bound, or transfixed, on some object or space that may or may not have anything to do with the material infrastructures around the path. The excerpt below is reminiscent of Jane Bennett's (2010) experience looking into the gutter of a city street and finding "enchantment" in the discarded objects found there (p. 4). Something takes hold, momentarily, but forcefully:

"Further away from radio. Trailer area expands. (sound of car passing). Cactus friends. (whizz of a bicycle)... Recycle bins outside trailers, cars in front and to the right the area for the horses. (Stop). Horse friends. Connects to the bike path (mumbling). (footsteps, 20 seconds, silence) (chirps) (40 seconds) (1 minute) (2 minutes) (Stop - very quiet) (I stop for the photo) I should keep going and not get caught up in any of these mini-vortex – Friends, or whatever they are" (source: transcript of verbal/sonic fieldnotes).

This extended pause (over three minutes in duration) in the walk and in the commentary signals, again, something more-than-representational and beyond our capacity to really identify what it was that stopped me in my tracks. A confluence of forces – space, vision, thought, sensation and/or memory, perhaps – capture me in a force-field of *absorption*. The best I could do in terms of describing the experience was to invent something: "friends", "mini-vortex" or "whatever they are". McCormack (2017) has something similar in mind in discussing the "mesh" or "pinch" that occurs when different spacetimes overlap and produce affective experience. Kathleen Stewart (2010, 2014), cited in McCormack (2017), suggests how this can be

“a condition, a pacing, a scene of absorption, a dream, a being abandoned by the world, a serial immersion in some little world you never knew was there until you got cancer, a dog, a child, a hankering... and then the next thing – another little world is suddenly there and possible” (quoted in McCormack 2017, p. 8).

McCormack goes on immediately to suggest: “Stewart reminds us, then, that the concept of world, or of worlding, can still do work by providing a way of holding on to the affective force of a form of gathering” (p. 8). Importantly, we want to insist that these kinds of experiences of affective life are what political and economic forces *take aim at* in their production of space. While urban advertising includes a clear intention, the appearances of commercialism on the path, in fact, are more difficult to discern. The improvised billboard described above is a relatively minor intrusion as compared to the urban advertising analyzed by Cronin (2006), Dyckhoff (2017) and Dekeyser (2018). Instead of these highly intrusive forms of advertising, the retail environment of the city often spills-over onto the space of the Path almost haphazardly:

“...approaching the mall. Large building straight ahead, the triangle through the trees. Starts to become clear what is there. [I was] going to say, there are no markings or logos, but I’m wrong; “Dilliards” [department store] starts to emerge as I move around that plant” (source: transcript of verbal/sonic field notes).



Figure 3: shopping mall in the desert, on the path (photo by author).

That is, while the Path can sometimes transport the subject beyond the city and into the lush desert landscape of plants, cactuses, flowers, rocks and occasional horses, the retail infrastructure is never far away and constantly sneaks back in. Big-box retail lurks in the trees (Figure 4); car dealerships, supermarkets and convenience stores wait just around the bend; the Tucson Mall draws you in when the path, abruptly, stops (Figure 5), forcing you to confront its mega-spatiality.

Figure 4: Retail lurking in the trees (photo by author).

Figure 5: Path ends at the bus transit station and across the avenue from the Tucson Mall, seen in the upper left (photo by author).

Cronin (2006) draws on Henri Lefebvre to avoid an overly textualist approach generated by other canonical theorists of consumption (also see Pinder 2011). What this kind of urban intervention seeks is not a direct payoff, but a long-term solidification of consumerism as a way of life, what we could call the affectual “worlding” of consumerism (again following McCormack and Stewart). To what extent is retail capital capable of making an affective impact? How do our vulnerable moments when our mind drifts off become moments of accumulation for capital? The ubiquity

of advertising make it appear as an anticipatory technology, such that it is unsure of what impact it may have in the future, if any at all.

In short, there is much to suggest that retail capitalism is increasingly interested in this level of intimate existence. This article is concerned with how such a material landscape becomes integrated into everyday life insofar as it shapes the conditions of possibility for subject formation. Highlighting the affective force of “friends” and “vortex” above is a way of getting closer to what McCormack (2017) calls the “circumstantial” moments in which the material world thickens, or coheres, around a modicum of sensation and the attention of an embodied subject, caught up in the whirl of affective forces. He writes:

“it is an attunement to the immanent process of worlding, a responsiveness to the ongoing fluctuations of the circumstantial as that which touches the act or event without ever being essential to its substance” (p. 8).

The commercial signage and infrastructure are there, always embedded in the built environment itself. They are there for any user of the path, either walking slowly and getting lost in the brush, or speeding by on a bicycle. These materials form a key aspect of the techno-political atmosphere created by retail capital, but they are not everything. These moments of drifting into vortices and friends are empirical examples of what McCormack means by the “non-coincidental” aspects of circumstantial worlding, those that keep the world open to alternatives and non-essential

futures. The vortex and friends described here are not captured by retail capital, although it is always lurking in the shadows, waiting patiently for its time to come.

While retail capital is present, it is not the only mega-factor shaping life at the path and in the surrounding city. Another infrastructural force produces another kind of impact that is perhaps less intentional, but no less important. Fighter jets, buzzing in and out of the bases, send sonic waves from their engines through the sky and into our bodies. The path, and the city at large, is remade from above, making it an unlikely, unusual and mundane military geography.

#### *4.3 Infrastructural Non-Coincidence in Military Skies*

“Tucson even has F-16s from an Air National Guard base soaring around the valley... When you hear the air curdling, you don’t know at first if it’s wind or an 18-wheeler pushing down Interstate 10, and then there’s a roar, and backswept wings appear and disappear above you”

(Stern, 2018: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/11/magazine/war-yemen-american-bomb-strike.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article>)

The air space above Tucson is large and wide, adorned with jagged and rocky mountain edges on all sides. The sky here is simply enormous in a way difficult to describe. Sometimes it roars. As Stern (2018) describes above, the air “curdles” along with the appearance and disappearance of

the jet itself. There are vibrations as well, as the undulating waves produced by the powerful engines hit in rhythmic succession: whoouuoosh-(roar), whoouuoosh-(roar), over and over again. The jets, in fact, produce a variety of affects – clothing and flesh may vibrate for an extended period during a fly-over, while windows rattle in their panes. These most certainly form part of any post-phenomenology of life in the city, including the path. As Simpson (2009) puts it, we are always “immersed” in the “sonorous” (2568), perhaps just as much as any other sensual circumstance (also see Revill 2016). In this case, military mobilities affect and co-produce the atmosphere that the rest of civilian society must experience, whether they realize it or not.

While the presence of the aircraft overhead the city is constant, there are days when the jets are inactive. During the solitary walk described above, there were no sign of them at all. During the second visit a few days later, the skies were again quiet at first. Then, rather than seeing the jets, we first heard and felt them (Figure 6):

“We hear the roaring sound of an airplane, louder, it seems, than the commercial flights coming in and out of the Tucson airport. DMAB [base] is active and we spot the tiny triangle of a jet high in the sky, yet with its powerful engine, the entire sky roars with a kind of wave. We later notice commercial airliners that make a softer, quieter sound, but also repeatedly hear the louder roar we associated with the fighter jet. Gazing up, we can’t find it. Later, we spot a pair of fighter jets apparently heading back towards the base moving southeast through the sky

almost directly over the Tucson Mall; and then another single jet higher up heading the opposite direction.” (Source: verbal/sonic fieldnotes)

Figure 6: where is the jet? (source, author).

These sounds and feelings of the jets are more palpable than their visual presence. Sometimes, as noted above, they do not appear in vision at all, yet their presence is undeniable. In the weeks leading up to the walks, I began describing the different sounds in everyday life in fieldnote jottings:

“At 9:16 a.m. a familiar shriek emanates from above. It begins as a familiar rumble, then turns into a higher pitched shriek. The sharpness gains strength and intensity for around one minute, then begins to drift away. By 9:21, it is gone, replaced by the other usual sounds, like cars honking and passing on Speedway Ave., and today the more pleasant sound of rain falling on the concrete landing of the apartment building”. (source: fieldnotes).

I always imagined that these specific sounds came from the F-16 jet. These can sometimes be seen high in the sky, pointy and triangular shaped, traveling alone or with others. Sometimes, though, they cannot be found visually, despite the considerable noise and sensations they create on the ground. The more common aircraft seen in over the skies of Tucson, though, looks and sounds very different. The A-10 Thunderbolt II “is a common sight in the sky above Tucson”

reports a local radio journalist, who adds that there are “more than 80 of the planes headquartered at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base” (Conover 2016). Rather than the roaring shrieks produced by the F-16, these boxy-shaped jets produce different sounds and affects through their distinct flight paths and schedules, as well as their different design and purpose. Rather than fly high and fast in the sky, they are designed for “close-air-support” (Stilwell 2015) in battle zones, with large caliber guns mounted on their nose. They typically fly low over the city and always in pairs or in a group of 4. In my fieldnotes I distinguish the aircrafts:

“7:10 pm. Wednesday. A sharp roaring through the sky, overpowering the sound of the palm trees in the courtyard swaying in the wind. It lasts 30 seconds and then is gone.

Earlier, I heard a similar roaring in the sky. Very high up, far past where the A-10s fly, I could finally make out the triangular figure shooting ever skyward. They fly higher but have louder engines. These are the F-16s, or something like that.

A-10s in pairs. Seen from certain angles, they are a horizontal mass of boxy-figures mashed together.

Pointy plane= F-16. Multi-tone and undulating sound, high in the sky.

Boxy plane= A-10. More monotone, loud, higher-pitched, low in the sky” (source: fieldnotes).

In addition to the “shock and awe” that this technology can produce as a psychological weapon in the war zone (Anderson 2010), these military mobilities in civilian space produce another wartime affective atmosphere that deserves our attention. While the “shock and awe” bombing campaign of Baghdad in 2003 was an intentional act of war, the same cannot be said about how these bombing machines, training for deployment, produce another kind of powerful affective experience for the civilian population “back home”. Not surprisingly, there have been community complaints about the noise from the base (Conover 2017; Pawlyk 2016) and the activity there is a source of constant political negotiation (Seligman 2016; Sicard 2018). The base has been compelled to defend itself as producer of noise. Their website includes an option to “submit a complaint” which includes a “Noise Concern Q&A” (<https://www.dm.af.mil/Contact-Us/Noise-Concerns/>). The base claims to have put in place multiple “noise abatement” strategies, as well as offers an explanation for the specific flight paths of the aircraft. How, then, can we make sense of these sonorous military geographies?

This is where post-phenomenological thinking is very useful. These sonorous dimensions of the base do not cease to be political simply because there is no clear intentionality underpinning and driving their existence. We are not claiming that the base intentionally produces noise as a psychological or ideological device aimed at the civilian population. Even though there is no evidence of intentionality in the deployment of the aircraft in such a way in this instance, the presence of the militarized sounds and sensations is meaningful, nonetheless. Even in leisure spaces of the city, such as the path in the Rillito River Park, far away from the base itself, military machines reverberate through our bodies. This sonorous and sensational landscape is the precise

area where the “lines between civilian and military mobilities, lives, technologies and spaces can be blurred” (Merriman et al. 2017, p. 45). The Air Force simply arrives in the form of sonorous sensation, emanating from above the city, the result of an anticipatory infrastructure that is always preparing for war.

This constant rumbling creates a field of sensation and possible awareness, as urban inhabitants may or may not wonder why there is so much noise coming from the sky. How can we make sense of this overlap, this spilling over of military machines into everyday civilian life? As a post-phenomenological geopolitics on the path, the account provided above insists on attending to the ways that politics installs itself in these moments of affective life. The jets move through the sky, making an undeniable impact on the affective atmosphere of the city. Does this ever link to the formation of military subjectivities among the civilian population? Does it matter? Importantly, Simpson (2009) argues that people paying attention to sound and listening to it (music in their case) may not always be the most relevant angle of analysis. “Listening is not always a ‘listening to’ but rather a ‘listening with’” Simpson urges (p. 2570), seeming to suggest that what people might say about the sound is less important than its mere presence in the first place. Rachel Woodward (2004) also maintains a similar stance toward military infrastructure in general, as its mere presence makes an impact and deserves critical scrutiny; there is something powerful and important about “this very fact of being there” (p. 35).

Another option for understanding the geopolitics of the base would be to examine military events that do contain more evidence of geopolitical intentionality. Events like military fly-overs and



airshows have been shown to be powerful generator of geopolitical formations (Rech 2015). Indeed, in 2016 the “Hawgsmoke” competition, hosted by the David-Montham Air Force Base, is a good example. Crews came from around the country to compete in bombing simulations and other competitions that the local public radio journalist covered as if it were a sporting event. “Team Captain America as they were known around the squadron” he reports “did very well taking home top honors in two bombing competitions as well as being the overall winner” (Conover 2016). In these ways, we find a kind of geopolitical spectacle (Retort et al. 2005; Koch 2018; Bos 2021) that operates through more familiar lens that do not require post-phenomenology.

We take this as an opportunity, then, to highlight another kind of politics created by the bases that are more difficult to discern, which are the sonorous sensations themselves in everyday life, separate from the spectacle of Hawgsmoke. Since the closing of that 2016 event, the daily hum and activity of the military infrastructure continues apace and must count for something in terms of everyday geopolitics. While Rech (2015) points to the airshows as an opportunity to create the conditions for geopolitics, we also point to these more mundane occurrences as well. Following McCormack (2017), these overlaps form *non-coincident military circumstances*, as temporary alignments that, again, do not require an intention as an explanation – yet there they are, creating so many sonorous and sensational edges grasping at the perceiving subjects below. As such, the base also constitutes an *infrastructural non-coincidence*, as these circumstances are somewhat widely distributed by the numerous aircraft that have moved through the skies of Arizona now for many years. As such, we witness the infrastructure bearing down on the affective

atmosphere, but without it pre-determining anything regarding human subjectivity. If and how subjectivity forms in relation to this infrastructure is up for grabs and depends on many other factors, of course.

## 5.0 In Conclusion, Political Circumstances

Since Wylie's (2005) walk on the path, many scholars have responded to the debates around non-representational theories by offering ways that familiar political and social formations seep into affective domains, and how affect is often a key for understanding these formations (see Kinkaid 2021, 2020). Our contribution adds to an emerging conversation around critical post-phenomenological geographies, particularly those seeking a middle-ground between more-than-human geographies and affect-oriented accounts of embodied subjectivity. Specifically, we elaborate on key concepts from McCormack (2017) – circumstantial worlds and non-coincidence – to add interpretive significance to empirical findings from our own auto-ethnographic experiment. The affects of this path, situated in a complex urban environment, include the forces of retail and military infrastructures, thereby thickening the play of forces shaping the experience of the path. There are two contributions we highlight in conclusion.

The first is that affect-oriented and auto-ethnographic walking methodologies can account for geopolitical forces. Wylie (2005) did not set out to capture the geopolitics of the walk, but his attention to the confluence of self and landscape via affect can be easily transported to other complex landscapes in which a more explicitly geopolitical analysis is required because of the way affects circulate among populations, particularly in the wake of feminist geopolitics (Sharp 2020).

The affects of the path in our experiment include evidence of geopolitical forces pressing down on them but without overdetermination, as we see them as instances of affect emerging through “massively distributed processes and assemblages” (McCormack 2017). Wylie’s (2005) method, adapted for our purposes here, has shown effective in specifying how this takes place in specific ways, and we encourage further experimentation.

The second contribution illustrates how multiple geographies of leisure, consumption and the military overlap in this affective space. Post-phenomenology helps us consider the simultaneity involved in these spaces and the significance of intentionality among the logics that structure them. While the retail landscape always includes logics of intentionality (manipulation, seduction, etc), even there we find instances of non-coincidence in the affectual processing of the landscape in situ – what were referred to as “friends” and “vortex” as exemplars of McCormack’s (2017) “pinch” and “mesh”. When it comes to the military geographies overhead, this aspect of post-phenomenological thinking is especially helpful because it does not require any trace of intentionality. Just because there is no clear sense of intentionality (no domestic version of “shock and awe”), however, does not mean that the sounds cease to be political. Their mere presence in everyday life creates a basis of experience from which life and politics emerge. While we also highlight the ways that militarism does blend with consumption by way of state-sponsored military spectacle that does push a clear message, our main concern is the mundane presence of the aircraft in the sonorous landscape. This subtle militarization of atmosphere in civilian spaces, in particular, is best considered an example of what McCormack (2017) calls non-

coincidence in circumstantial worlds. On this point, we posit an *infrastructural non-coincidence* that nevertheless makes an impact on the conditions from which subjectivity emerges.

The path itself, then, is in the terrain of a mundane struggle over sensations, attention, movement, spending, and any number of other interactions. While it may have a logic of its own that is not considered here (for instance, from an urban planning perspective) we find it intersecting with these other infrastructures that introduce other set of interventions, intentional or not. As a circumstance of movement and mobility, the path directs activity on the ground while also crossing-over with so many other paths – the paths of commodities that shape the surrounding built environment; the paths of aircraft training for war; and the paths of capital that fuel each circuit of investment. With post-phenomenological concepts drawn from McCormack (2017) and others, we attend to these overlaps and to the differential logics of intentionality that course through them. Somewhere amidst it all is life on the path. Future work should integrate such analytics with more fine-grained and targeted methodologies for understanding the many kinds of difference (see Cockayne et al. 2017 and Kinkaid 2020, 2021) that flow through such complex spaces. Focusing more on how difference moves through the spaces of post-phenomenology (the pinch, mesh, friends, vortex) – and how these may be productive of difference – may be productive of powerful new routes forward with research in this area.

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