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**ATMOSPHERIC METHODS GUIDE:**

# **POETRY**

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## BACKGROUND

Poetry is becoming more commonly used in fields such as marketing, where poems have been showcased at the Consumer Culture Theory Conference and International Place Branding Association Art Gallery. It is a creative and flexible method which can be effective for communicating personal, emotional, and vulnerable experiences of place. Researchers and/or participants may choose to write poems in the moment from scratch, or use other approaches such as 'erasure' poetry, where words of an existing text are erased until the final poem remains. Poems can be written using traditional materials (e.g. a notebook and pen) or digital devices (e.g. smartphone notes app or voice recorder). Poetry also works well when combined with other methods such as videos to bring the poems to life.

*"I would have thought I'd feel quite silly standing around with a notebook and writing. And I didn't actually. I felt it was okay"*

(Rebhead, Interview participant)

## HOW TO GET STARTED

*Remember, this is a flexible method you can adapt to your particular research situation, but here are a few tips to get you started...*

- If using the method as a researcher, it is useful to spend some time in the place you are researching whilst writing down some observational fieldnotes about its atmospheric and sensory qualities to draw on as inspiration for your poem(s).
- If using the method with participants, think about whether you will be writing poems in the place being studied, or in another format such as within a sit-down workshop context. If writing poetry in situ, consider whether you will follow a route set by the researcher or allow participants to lead the way.
- If you or your participants are feeling less confident about writing poems from scratch, you could choose some existing texts with atmospheric and sensory language to use for erasure poetry. Ensure to select texts your participants would feel comfortable working with as the base for their poem(s).

## WHY USE POETRY?

Poetry enables people to express their anticipatory feelings about a place, their experiences while they are in a place, and their memories of a place. It is a flexible method which can be produced in different ways and combined with other creative techniques such as videos and drawings. Writing poems about a place's atmospheres can also be an enjoyable process for some, once some time has been spent using the method.

## WHAT MIGHT BE CHALLENGING?

It is common for people to feel a bit apprehensive about writing poetry, especially if they have limited experiences with the method or anticipate their poems would be received negatively by others. The person writing the poem can sometimes become more internally focused on personal memories of a place, rather than the sensory environment around them. It can also become tiring when producing poems from scratch over an extended period in the field.

*“A wave of anxiety rushes through my stomach as I imagine myself writing my poem. I imagine I will feel very uncomfortable doing this, as I haven’t really written poems before and I am worried the output will be of an embarrassingly poor quality”*

(Chloe’s research diary)



# The main high street

## Montreal, Vegas style

As an iconic place in the American urban vernacular (Klingmann 2007), Vegas is fast becoming the paradigmatic example of the postmodern city with its pastiche aesthetic, growing in neon excess – a more is more mix where everything is an imitation of something or somewhere else. Urban sociologists have also pointed to the city's role as the prime example of the McDonaldization or "Disneyization" of society, in which everything becomes part of a themed (and branded) experience (Gottdiner 1997, Gotschall 1995, Lukas 2007, Sorkin 1992, Howes 2003).

So what happens when a themed environment itself becomes a theme? From September 9<sup>th</sup> to October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019, the Montreal Casino hosted "Vegas Nights." Vegas Nights at the Montreal Casino involved a buffet of over the top spectacles and sensations, right down to a small scale replica of a Vegas style wedding chapel (where couples could get "married for fun" in a ceremony officiated by a drag queen). Casino patrons could order a "pure shot of energy" in the form of a Vegas style cocktail, or maybe a deep fried sharing platter, the marketing of which prompted you to "Fat like a King." They could also be wowed (and occasionally underwhelmed) by a resident magician, and boogie down on the dance floor with Chewbacca.

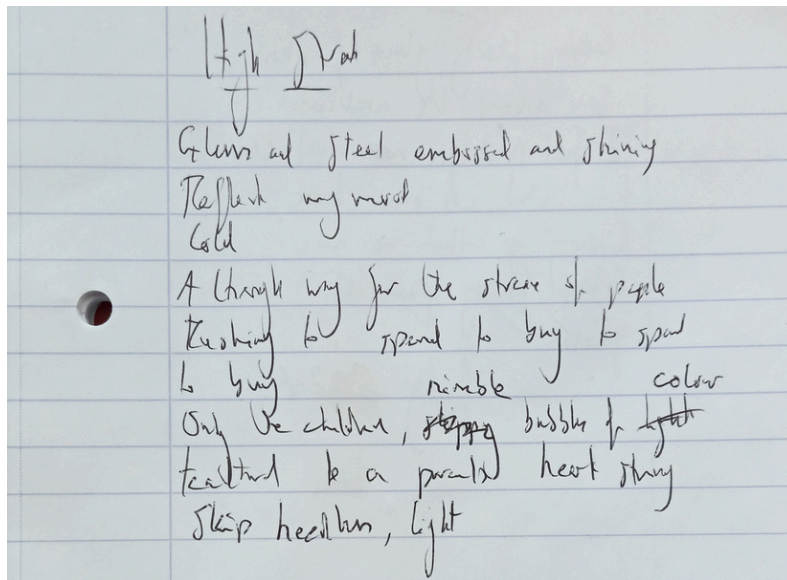
A copy of a copy par excellence (such that even Baudrillard (1994) could scarcely imagine), Vegas Nights at the Montreal Casino offer a fascinating mix of simulation and stimulation for the sensory ethnographer to probe. By examining the casino's embrace of the Vegas style more is more esthetic, we can begin to understand the impact of the on the sensory ambiance of the casino, as well as the broader attempts to create immersive experiences – where risk taking is entangled with the provision of "fun for all the senses" – which increasingly define the casino environment.

## A "glittering jewel" in the Montreal skyline

Built in the reimagined French and Quebec Pavilions of the Expo 67 site – in the city's Parc Jean Drapeau – the Casino de Montréal is a featured attraction in the Montreal skyline. As you cross the bridge heading toward the casino – its steel girders lit with strings of Hollywood marquis lights, whispering at coming attractions – the casino glitters on the horizon. This is far from a happy accident – the redesign of the casino took care to embed lighting into the skin of the building so as to make it glimmer with opulence even from afar ("Casino de Montréal," Provencher Roy Architects n.d.). One visitor remarks that it strikes her as a chandelier – a shimmering bit of extravagance suspended from nothing.

The casino's exterior, even on closer examination, is striking. A glass curtain in its shimmering façade hints at what is inside, with dashes of gold and lights flashing between hues of blue, green and red that echo the machines inside. The mat out front – an always evocative red carpet – welcomes visitors with the note "Par pur Plaisir." The front entry hall is decked in more glittering walls and expensive gilt ornamentation, including some beguiling gold statues who seem to peer down at the new patrons with curiosity and beckon them inside. The entryway feels vaulted – aspirational and with room to breathe – and almost seems designed to obscure what lies beyond. Patrons waiting to check their coat can begin to hear the machines just around the corner, however, and – once they





Rebhead's high street poem

## PRACTICAL TIPS

- So poetry feels less daunting, consider providing a flexible range of approaches and suitable materials. For example, texts rich in evocative and sensory language could be used by researchers or offered to participants, along with highlighters, pens and pencils, for use in erasure poetry. Those writing poems should also have an open choice of what style of poem to create.
- Researchers and participants should be encouraged to not only focus on their past memories of a place, but also their sensory and atmospheric experiences of the place being studied. It can be helpful to write poetry in situ to immerse the poet first-hand into a place's atmospheres.
- Rest stops should be factored into data collection, as the poetry method can be quite tiring both physically and mentally. Organisers of group tours using the poetry method, for instance, can look for suitable resting places, such as public seating, quieter spots and covered areas in advance of fieldwork by visiting the place themselves or by using online maps.

***"Soon enough, this becomes quite a fun and humorous exercise... It's been much more enjoyable than I expected... I actually found it improved my mood"***

**(Loretta's research diary)**

## POETRY IN ACTION

Pablo Arboleda worked in collaboration with a video editor, writer, voiceover actor, and sound mixers to produce a videopoem titled 'Cyclical Ruins' to express the changing feel of Spanish tourist spaces in the low season. The videopoem enabled Arboleda to express the changing atmospheres of tourism spaces and how the absence of people and activity in a place can generate a particular ambience, which he argues written text cannot always effectively convey. You can watch or listen to the videopoem [here](#).

## TO LEARN MORE ABOUT POETRY

Preece, C, Rodner, V, and Rojas-Gaviria, P. (2022). Landing in affective atmospheres. *Marketing Theory* 22(3): 359-380.

Arboleda, P. (2023). Cyclical ruins: A videopoem on sun and sand tourism spaces in the low season. In Sánchez-Fuarros, I, Paiva, D, and Calvo, D. (eds). *Ambiance, Tourism and the City*. Oxon: Routledge. 95-109.

### To reference this guide:

Lipworth, L and Steadman, C. (2025). *Atmospheric Methods Guide: Poetry*. Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University.

To read about other atmospheric methods, search online for the full guide titled 'Atmospheric Methods Guide' by Dr Chloe Steadman and Loretta Lipworth