U2's Songlines: From Lypton Village to Joshua Tree

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The road out would be treacherous, and I didn't know where it would lead but I followed it anyway. It was a strange world ahead that would unfold, a thunderhead with jagged lightening edges. Many got it wrong and never did get it right. I went straight into it. It was wide open. One thing for sure, not only was it not run by God, but it wasn't run by the devil either.

– Bob Dylan[1]

'We used to call it cinematic music,' said The Edge, of the album The Joshua Tree, 'Music that actually brought you somewhere physical as opposed to an emotional place – a real location'.[2] There can be no doubt that The Joshua Tree is haunted by place and places. From the unidentified place of loss and desolation that figures in the opening track ('Where the Streets Have no Name' – Ethiopia, Belfast?), to the heroin-addicted high-rise of Dublin's Ballymun ('Running to Stand Still'), the devastated villages of Nicaragua and El Salvador ('Bullet the Blue Sky'), and the depressed mining communities of Wales and Northern England ('Red Hill Mining Town'), on to the New Zealand of the band's friend and roadie – to whom the album is dedicated – Greg Carroll (in 'One Tree Hill'), then to Reagan's America ('In God's Country') and Pinochet's Chile ('Mothers of the Disappeared'). Echoing the Edge, bassist Adam Clayton described the progression of the tracks on The Joshua Tree as 'like a journey. You start in the desert, come swooping down in Central America, running for your life. It takes me somewhere, and hopefully it does that for everyone else'.[3] From outside the band, the music writer John Waters suggests that each of U2's first eight studio albums, including The Joshua Tree, could be seen 'as a journey through both their own experience and through the Irish experience of which they are a part. Each album represents a stab at creating a place, a world, a landscape, in which freedom might be attained'.[4] Like the 'songlines' described by Bruce Chatwin in his book of the same name[5] – lines of song that are also lines of journey, which, in their connecting and delineating of places, also delineate and sustain the world – the songs and sounds of U2's music stand in an essential relation to particular spaces and places, and to the movement that brings us into and through those places.

The role of themes of place and journey in U2's work, and especially in The Joshua Tree, is not indicative merely of one feature of their work among other such features, but rather points towards something essential about that work – something that enables us better to understand that work in its particularity, whether in terms of an album such as The Joshua Tree or specific tracks from it, as well as to understand their work as a whole, and so to follow 'the road out' from their Dublin origins to their current status as 'the biggest band in the world' (as they are so often billed). It is a matter, not only of grasping the particular places in which their music is located and to which it takes us, but also of grasping the way in which the experiences and ideas that are expressed and articulated in their music are centrally concerned with the problem of how we can be 'at home' in the contemporary world in the face of the homelessness that seems so much a part of it – a problem that is at the heart of the band's concern with matters both political and 'spiritual'.

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Sound always has its own form of space,[6] and in music spaces and places are created and evoked that are integral to the music as such. This is especially so in the case of popular music inasmuch as such music almost always relates to particular situations, stories, moods and locales – the directness of its emotional expressiveness is, in this respect, also indicative of its concrete locatedness and its evocation of such locatedness. This holds true not only in respect of the purely musical elements in a piece – its rhythm, texture, melody, and so forth – but also in respect of the ideas and images that may be articulated in the words of a song or in the form of a dance. Sometimes, of course, the way in which a piece or style of music relates to a certain space and place is a conscious and acknowledged feature of the music such that the music becomes almost a celebration of that very relation, and so is valued precisely because of the way in which it enables us to articulate and evoke something of who and what and where we are. This seems especially so for music that arise in places and out of circumstances in which the very identity that such music expresses has some uncertainty hanging over it – whether it be the uncertainty that comes from the fact of historical change or personal upheaval, from marginality of location, or from the disorientation that may come with youth, poverty, illness or old age.

Marginality of location is certainly a feature of The Joshua Tree. The title of the album can itself be taken to refer to two places 'on the margins' – the desert landscape that itself makes up the Joshua Tree National Park and the small desert township of Joshua Tree (near Palm Springs), both of which are located in Southern California.[7] Even though neither place is explicitly referred to in the album as such (the shots of the band against that adorn the album cover and liner notes were taken in locations further to the north, mostly in Death Valley), there is at least one reason for taking the association with the community of Joshua Tree to be a significant one: it was in Joshua Tree that Gram Parsons, once of the Byrds and Flying Burrito Brothers, died of an overdose in 1973 – it thus already had a place in rock history even before U2. Moreover, the sort of desert landscape that surrounds Joshua Tree, and is characteristic of the Joshua Tree National Park (it is the primary habitat of the Joshua tree itself), also plays a significant role in the album's ideas and imagery.

In fact, it is the Joshua tree, rather than the township or the National Park, that is referred to in the album's title and that also figures prominently on the album's cover. Although it also grows further afield, the Joshua tree dominates the Mojave desert landscape that lies within the Joshua Tree National Park, and in terms of the imagery it conveys, can be seen as symbolic, not only of the desert as such, but more importantly perhaps, of journeying and the search for place. It is said that the tree – actually a giant member of the Lily family known botanically as Yucca brevifolia – was named after the Old Testament prophet Joshua by Mormon settlers as they crossed into the region west of the Colorado River in the 19th century. The tree presented an image of supplication, its limbs stretched out to the sky and to God – an image that, in the harshness of the desert landscape in which it grows, must have seemed especially striking. Yet for religiously-minded settlers looking to open up a new country, Joshua was an especially appropriate figure to invoke, since it was he who led the Israelites in taking possession of the 'promised land' – indeed, it is sometimes said that the image the tree evokes is that of Joshua pointing the way towards the land of Israel – and the Biblical references here were presumably not lost of the members of U2. As an image of supplication, the Joshua tree embodies ideas of hope – of a new home, of salvation, of divine blessing. Yet inasmuch as supplication comes out of need, so the Joshua tree also invokes notions of struggle, toil, and

potential loss; inasmuch as it points towards the promised new home that may be attained, so it draws attention to current homelessness and alienation.

While The Joshua Tree can be seen to transport the listener to a range of places, from Ireland to Chile to New Zealand to America, it is the desert landscape in which the Joshua tree belongs that dominates the album as a whole – indeed, one of the working titles for the album was simply 'Desert Songs' (the other being 'The Two Americas'), and desert imagery appears on a number of the album's tracks (most significantly on the opening 'Where the Streets Have no Name'). The image of the desert – and of its empty, open spaces – may be thought particularly resonant with the character of U2's own sound.[8] As many critics have commented, that sound is one that seems particularly attuned to open space – albeit the constructed space of the stadium more so than the wild spaces of nature – achieved through a distinctive guitar technique as well as vocal style. The soaring, often 'anthemic' quality of much of U2's music might also be taken to be evocative of the grand 'epic' experience often associated, at least in the popular imagination, with the vast openness of the desert landscape. Yet there is also a feel of constant movement – often a running, glancing, tripping movement – that seems to characterise many of the tracks on The Joshua Tree, and that is especially evident in the restless energy of 'Where the Streets Have No Name'. If the sound of the album invokes the open space of the desert, it does so through our movement through that space, but such movement is also indicative of the character of much of the album, as expressed through its lyrics, as imbued by a spirit of search, and so of desire, of the dislocation out of which such search comes, and the uncertainty that accompanies it – if the sound of the album is of movement through space, in and through place, then so the lines of the songs are full of restlessness and movement, of searching, stumbling, tripping, climbing, touching, holding-on, shaking. Perhaps a part of the critical and popular success of the album is to be found precisely in its apparent fusion of sound and word, of content with form – in its marriage of the musical evocation of open space, and of movement in and through it, with a set of spatial and place-oriented images and ideas.

The thematization of place and space, home and homelessness, in The Joshua Tree and throughout much of U2's work, has been given explicit recognition in the writing of a number of critics, not only John Waters, but also Kieran Keohane,[9] Allan F. Moore,[10] and Gerry Smyth.[11] As Smyth notes, it is often seen to be closely associated with the character of U2 as an essentially Irish band.[12] Not only does Ireland itself have a 'marginal' status as it stands between both America and Europe, but issues of home and place also loom large in Irish consciousness – Bono himself talks of the Irish as outsiders, 'misfits, travellers, never really at home, but always talking about it'.[13]

If the idea of home, and the relation to it, is an equivocal one in Ireland, it is so, not only because of the role of emigration – often forced – in Irish life over the last two hundred years or more, but also because of the turmoil and dislocation that has so often characterised Ireland itself. On the one hand, there is a strong sense of Irish belonging, and yet at the same time, such belonging is also rendered problematic by religious and political division, and by various forms of social dislocation – whether it be that which flows from long-standing poverty or, in the world of the Celtic Tiger, from new-found wealth. In whatever manner such division and dislocation may have been evident in the personal experiences of other members of U2 (although all came from secure middle-class backgrounds), in Bono's case, it was undoubtedly reinforced by the Protestant-Catholic split within his own family, and even more so by the tragic loss of his mother in 1974. Perhaps this means that 'home' was indeed an ambiguous

notion for the young Paul Hewson. If so, then it would seem that in Lypton Village, the group of like-minded friends who met regularly at Paul's/Bono's house (the group that provided the name 'Bonovox', hence 'Bono', for Paul, as well as 'The Edge' for Dave Evans, and later also giving rise to The Virgin Prunes), Bono seems to have found something of an alternative mode of belonging – perhaps an alternative, and non-conformist, version of 'home' and of 'place'.

Yet although issues of place and alienation, of home and homelessness, of identity and belonging, may indeed be taken to have a special resonance for Irish culture and experience, they are also issues that have acquired a widespread currency within contemporary culture and experience across many different communities and geographical locations – one may say that such issues are characteristic of modernity, and no less of so-called 'post-modernity'. In the face of what appears to be the increasingly globalized character of the contemporary world, it is no longer clear what it means to be 'at home', or even what 'home' might mean and yet at the same time, there seems to have arisen a strong sense of the need for a sense of home or of belonging – a need expressed, in one form, in the articulation and assertion of sometimes new forms of national, cultural and communal identity. Although 'home' itself, along with many of the ideas of belonging and identity with which it is associated, appears as an outmoded or even dangerous concept to some, still its very persistence in the face of its questionability is indicative also of its centrality. Bono has commented that 'I didn't know I was Irish until I went to America,'[14] but in similar fashion, one might say that one never knows what it was to belong anywhere, until such belonging becomes problematic – and in the contemporary world that is exactly what has occurred for almost all of us who have been in any significant way affected by the nature and rapidity of technological advancement, and the enormity of political, social and economic change, that has characterized recent world history.

Of course, a good deal of rock music, and not only the music of U2 or of The Joshua Tree, can be seen as expressive, in more or less explicit fashion, of the dislocation and dislocation of the contemporary world. Indeed, the musical forms in which rock has its roots – particularly blues, and rhythm and blues, but also jazz and to a lesser extent gospel – are unthinkable without the social dislocation, including the movement of population, and cultural reconfiguration that characterised the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and that were themselves tied up with such 'modern' developments as industrialization and urbanization. Indeed, these musical forms are not merely the products of the rise of 'modernity', but also give artistic expression to the modes of living and feeling that are part of the experience of modernity. That experience is one in which the sense of individuality is at the same time heightened and also threatened, in which traditional frameworks, familiar roles, and previously-established identities, can no longer be relied upon, and yet cannot be completely abandoned, in which questions of where we are, where we want to be, and where we should be, take on a new urgency, whether those questions are expressed in terms either of the personal or the political and philosophical.

Moreover, the same technology that gives rise to the changes that provoke such experiences also made possible the modes of musical expression that are a response to those experiences. The power of the new musical forms that arose in the early twentieth century to give artistic expression to the experiences of modernity in a truly popular fashion, and so to give expression to the experiences of a large part of the society as a whole (this is also true, of course, of that other major cultural force of the twentieth century, the cinema), was itself dependent on new technologies of recording and sound reproduction, of communication, and of manufacturing, and of

new social formations. This is no less true, of course, of rock music itself, which is integrally dependent on the technological sophistication that comes with modernity – the technological sophistication that is as much a part of live performance as of the studio recording – and is so in a way that goes far beyond the earlier musical forms from which it derives. Yet there is also a much stronger sense of irony here too: if much contemporary rock can be seen as giving expression to a sense of alienation and homelessness that is characteristic of the 'globalized', contemporary world, it is precisely that 'globalised' world on which rock increasingly depends, and to which it is increasingly bound.

The 'irony' that appears here is evident, of course, in a particularly clear form in the case of U2. Here is a band whose music has often explicitly addressed a set of political and 'spiritual' issues that are directly related to the desolation and destruction of so much contemporary life – whether it be the personal desolation that comes from addiction, the failing of relationships or the loss of belief, or the large scale devastation that comes with famine, poverty and war – and yet who are also themselves enmeshed in a globalized 'industry' that is itself a part of the same economic and political structure that gives rise to such desolation. While such 'irony' is often seen as actually entailing a form of hypocrisy, it would be a mistake to suppose that it could ever be simply negotiated, or, indeed, that it is an 'irony' that affects only a band such as U2 have become – it affects all of those who, in fact, who, in one way or another, find themselves at odds with key aspects of contemporary society, and yet remain at the same time inescapably a part of that society and dependent upon it. Perhaps the only way of responding to such an 'ironic' situation is with an irony of one's own – and that seems to have been increasingly true of U2's public demeanour during the 'nineties and onwards – an irony that is also sceptical, questioning, and sometimes uncertain.

In an interview with Rolling Stone in 1992, Bono commented that the opening track of The Joshua Tree itself was 'an anthem of doubt more than faith' – a comment that is surely true not only of the opening track, but of the album as a whole. Not only does this connect with the restless, often driving feel that characterizes much of the album's sound, but with the fact that none of the places to which The Joshua Tree takes its listeners is there any surety, any safety, any final dwelling place – from some of those places, in fact, the only option is flight, and all of those places are characterized by loss. One response to this might be to conclude that The Joshua Tree simply represents the true state of the contemporary world: there are no places in which one can belong, and 'home' is indeed a mistaken, if not outmoded, ideal. If that were so, however, then one might expect The Joshua Tree to project something other than the sense of search and journey that pervades the album – one does not search for what one already knows cannot be found. 'I Still Haven't Found What I am Looking For', the album's second track, projects just this sense of continuing search in the face of uncertainty, yet an uncertainty also coupled with a strong sense of commitment: 'You know I believe it/But I still haven't found what I'm looking for'.

The sense of search and of journey that pervades The Joshua Tree does, of course, have strong spiritual, and more specifically Christian, connotations – this is perhaps especially so of the lyrics in 'I Still Haven't Found What I am Looking For'. But it would be a mistake to take the images of search and journey, of place, home and belonging that emerge here as merely the figurative medium for a straightforwardly religious message. Quite apart from the way in which U2 have attempted to distinguish the spiritual from the religious (not surprisingly given the damaging role that has sometime been played by institutionalised religion within

Ireland itself), it is important to recognise the way in which what is at issue in talk of the 'spiritual', and to some extent even in talk of the religious, is indeed a matter of who and what we are, and where and to whom we properly belong. It is no accident, then, that images of search and journey, of place and home, loom so large even in spiritual and religious discourse. The search for faith, and for God, is also a search for identity and belonging. This is particularly important, it seems to me, in the case of a band such as U2, who come out of a cultural and social background that is so much imbued with a sense of the religious and the spiritual as the primary frame (along perhaps with the poetic – itself often coupled with the spiritual) within which questions of identity and belonging are to be pursued. In this respect, not only the explicit concern with place can be seen as characteristically Irish, but also the way that concern is indeed often articulated in explicitly spiritual or religious terms.

Yet whether we talk solely in terms of identity and belonging, of place and of home, or in terms of God, faith and the spirit, in both cases what is at issue is a question of our own existence and the meaning of that existence. Indeed, inasmuch as our human existence is always an existence worked out in and through specific places, and the very content of our lives is drawn from those places, then it becomes apparent that the questions of God and the spirit, if we chose to frame matters in those terms, must also be directly tied to questions of the proper spaces and places of our lives and our relation to those places. To stand in a relation to God, one might say, is also to find oneself in a certain relation to the places in which one dwells – a relation that may be expressed in terms of belonging, or perhaps also, in terms of a certain form of being 'at home'. In this respect, the character of contemporary life as 'homeless', and even 'alienated', is itself tied to the character of that life as without meaning, without any sense of spirituality, without God.

If, however, the songs of The Joshua Tree retain a sense of search – if they continue to look for what they have not yet found – then surely that search must itself be a futile and mistaken one, a search that can continue in virtue only of either blindness or self-deception. The death of God which the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche proclaimed has surely already occurred: there is no place for God in modernity – indeed, the advent of globalisation means that there are no longer any 'places' at all, but only the vastness of an interconnected, de-localised 'world'. This is, undoubtedly, an extremely common viewpoint. To some extent it is a viewpoint that also plays a role in the discomfort that sometimes attends the suggestion of a 'spiritual' or 'religious' dimension to U2's music – as if it were embarrassing to find artists as intelligent and accomplished as U2 are taken to be nevertheless unable to recognise such simple and obvious facts about the contemporary world (the discomfort is often accentuated by the way in which U2 are adopted by some as providing a vindication of more traditional forms of religious belief). It is, however, a viewpoint that also seems to misunderstand what is properly at issue in the ideas of place, of home, of belonging – and perhaps, although this is more tendentious, of God and spirit – as well as to misunderstand the way in which the changes that have shaped the contemporary world remain, as Hannah Arendt once put it: 'changes of the world, and not changes in the basic condition of human life on earth'.[15]

The sense of search, and of uncertainty, that remains in the songs of The Joshua Tree, and that continues to underpin U2's music even now, reflects the character of human life as always articulated in and through its concrete locatedness. We do not make our lives out of abstract ideals, universal declarations, or globalized 'connectivity'. What gives content and direction to our lives, and so gives content and direction to who and what we are, are the people, places, landscapes and things with

whom we are actively engaged, and that call forth our attention, our care, our concern. In this latter respect, it is especially significant that the articulation of particular political and social concerns that may be seen to be present in The Joshua Tree – whether it be famine in Ethiopia, American foreign policy in El Salvador, drug-taking and urban decay in Dublin, the abuse of fundamental human rights in Chile – is always expressed through the evocation of a certain 'physical', and not merely 'emotional' place. Here, indeed, is the 'cinematic music' to which the Edge referred – music that takes the listener to a place, and in doing so connects the listener with the concreteness of that place, enabling the listener to feel and respond through a connectedness that is, in a certain sense, 'physical'– a sense of 'being there'.

It is precisely our being 'in place' that connects us (physically, responsively and emotionally) with the people and the things that we find around us – it also connects us with ourselves, since it is in our relation to who and what surrounds us that we encounter and articulate who and what we are. The way we find ourselves 'in place' is also how we find ourselves 'in' our own lives – in our concrete movements and actions in respect of other persons and things, as well as ourselves, and the relations that are constituted through such movements and actions. Moreover, in being 'in place' in this way, we also find ourselves enmeshed in a set of relationships and interactions that are themselves changing and fragile, and that therefore demand our attentiveness, our concern and our care. Indeed, this is just what it is to be 'in place': it is to be oriented in relation to our surroundings such that aspects of those surroundings motivate and direct our own actions and movements as well as being affected by them; it is to be bound by our care and concern for what lies around us; and this is also what it is to 'belong'. In this latter respect, belonging, and so too the ideas of place and home, always carries with it a sense of inevitable loss, and thus nostalgia (in the literal sense of 'homesickness' – 'nostalgia' coming from the Greek 'nostos' meaning home) can be seen, for this reason, as a necessary accompaniment of such belonging.

There can be no doubt that physical dislocation, and so a literal 'homelessness', whether of the refugee, the emigrant or the wanderer, is a widespread feature of contemporary life. Yet there is an even more widespread form of dislocation and homelessness that arises out of our inability to recognise the way in which, no matter where we are, we are always already 'at home' – the way in which our lives are already given over to the places in which we find ourselves and can only be worked out in relation to those places. Both these forms of alienation are, of course, connected, and both appear in the words and music of The Joshua Tree. The physical alienation, dislocation and devastation that is to be found in the Ethiopian refugee camp, in the destroyed Central American village, or in the Dublin high-rise are themselves products of the alienation and dislocation of much of contemporary life and culture, and of its economic, social and political structures, from the places and spaces to which it nevertheless belongs. It is this latter form of alienation that is at issue in the idea of the contemporary world – the world of both 'modernity' and 'post-modernity' – as a world to which ideas of place, home and belonging no longer have any applicability. Yet although this world is one in which we may wonder what sense is any longer to be attached to ideas of home or homeland, of a place of the heart or a heartland, still the idea or its image remains: 'In this heartland/In this heartland soil/In this heartland/Heaven knows this is a heartland'.[16]

The sense of uncertainty that is present in The Joshua Tree partly derives from the uncertainty that is present here – in the juxtaposition of the possibility that perhaps ideas of place, home and belonging no longer have any meaning or applicability with

the fact that those ideas nevertheless continue to pull on us in a powerful way. The problem, however, is not that the contemporary world has erased the human relatedness to place, or rendered notions of home and belonging obsolete (this is part of what might be taken from Arendt's comment that modernity need not imply any change 'in the basic condition of human life on earth'), but that it has instead covered over such belonging, such place-relatedness, rendering it completely obscure. The way this has occurred is through the way in which the contemporary world has indeed become, in various ways, much more uncertain, more insecure, more prone to change and disruption in new and unexpected ways, and at the same time what it is to belong, to be at home, to be in place, is at the same time increasingly taken to mean being somewhere secure, safe and unchanging. Our being 'in place', however, is a matter of our being taken up in care and concern for what is around us – things are brought close, and so brought into proximity with us, through such care and concern – and if that is so, then our being 'in place', our belonging, cannot be a matter of our being somewhere safe, secure or unchanging in the way that seems so commonly assumed. That which is demanding of our care and concern is that which is vulnerable, that which is subject to change, that which can be lost, and it is only thus that we are brought into any closeness with things, with others or with ourselves.

While on the one hand, the places to which The Joshua Tree takes us are indeed places of uncertainty, desolation and loss, they are also places in which these things can be felt and experienced only because of what is not lost, because of what is not desolated, because of what remains certain – namely our continued relatedness to those places, and to others, our continued belonging to the places in which our lives are articulated and in which the meaning and significance of those lives takes concrete form. This form of certainty, however, brings no safety or security with it – it grounds, but does not bring an end to, the character of our lives as always in question, as always also uncertain, as always given over to journey and to search. Perhaps this conclusion could not have been explicitly formulated by the members of U2 during the creative process that gave rise to The Joshua Tree itself, but they did not need to – it is the work, the album itself, and the music it contains, that speaks, that traces out the lines at issue here, that takes us on its own journey – a journey that brings us back to the one place we can never leave, the place that we ourselves are, that is our own world, our own place.

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The lines of sound and song that U2 travel in The Joshua Tree are like tortured wires – they mark out a pathway of sorts, but it is a path that trips, and sometimes cuts, a path that is in no way comfortable or comforting – a path that takes us past sites of cruelty, hypocrisy and pain. It is the path one walks when one is no longer sure which way to go – when the streets along which one walks no longer have names. For many this describes the central feature of our contemporary situation. In a world in which one can no longer rely on old ways, in which there is no longer a place that one can unequivocally call 'home', in which home itself appears under threat, the only paths available will be uncertain and shifting, and where those paths point is likely to be equally uncertain, if not illusory. The songlines that make up The Joshua Tree take us to many places, but no one of these places seems to provide anything more than another site of uncertainty and loss. The songlines of The Joshua Tree are thus not those of the nomad who is at home in the desert landscape, but the stranger lost in a land that may have once been familiar, but is now alienated and alienating. The places

to which The Joshua Tree takes us are thus the places in which we now find ourselves – they trace out paths across a contemporary world.

The tortured image of the Joshua tree may itself seem to mimic the uncertain pathways the album follows, but the Joshua tree is also named after a prophet – one who shows the way out of desolation, into the promised land. If it seems that there is no such land to which The Joshua Tree directs us, that may mean only that we have mistaken the direction in which to look. Whether or not it was part of U2's own conception in making the album, The Joshua Tree nevertheless directs our attention, not to a land beyond or outside of our own, but to the places that are already here – before our eyes and at our feet. These places are not safe nor are they secure – quite the opposite: as human life is uncertain, so too are the sites in which human life is lived similarly uncertain, similarly prone to harm and to loss. If a central problem in the contemporary world is finding a way of dwelling in that world, of finding a sense of place and of home, a sense of belonging, then this is only to be achieved by coming to an understanding of the way in which all such dwelling is constituted only through the commitment that is itself expressed in uncertainty and doubt, in search and journey, in care and concern. We do not come to belong or properly to dwell by remaining only in one place, but rather by recognising the way in which our lives are only to be given in and through the particular places in which we already find ourselves, and which are shaped by us as even as we are shaped by them. We come to belong by tracing out the lines that connect us to one another, as they also connect us to the places in which our lives are lived, and that connect those places into the world as a whole. The songlines that U2 trace out thus delineate the spaces and places of belonging, of place and of home, as they connect sites of alienation, loss and desolation – as they also take us from Ireland to America, from Lypton Village to Joshua Tree.

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[1] Chronicles, Vol. 1 (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), pp.292-3

[2] In Classic Albums: U2's The Joshua Tree, dir. Philip King and Nuala O'Connor (UK: Independent Television, 1999).

[3] Ibid.

[4] Waters, Race of Angels: Ireland and the Genesis of U2 (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1994), p.195. To what extent the idea of freedom is implicated here is a moot point – indeed, to some extent is precisely not freedom that is at issue at all, but rather identity as something that is never freely given nor freely taken, but must always be negotiated.

[5] Chatwin, The Songlines (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988). Chatwin's book is a somewhat romanticised account of indigenous Australian conceptions and practices.

[6] A point that has sometimes been missed by philosophers who have associated space with the visual or the tactile – as P. F. Strawson famously does in his Individuals (London: Methuen, 1959).

[7] Neither place, however, figures in the album – indeed, while the album includes photos of the band against a desert landscape and decaying buildings, most of the shots were taken in death Valley, some 100 miles northwest of Joshua Tree, during a three day road trip in December of 1986.

[8] Somewhat paradoxically so, since, as Gerry Smyth points out, in Space and the Irish Cultural Imagination (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p.00, sound tends to dissipate in the emptiness of the desert landscape – the desert is mostly silent.

[9] Keohane, 'Traditionalism and Homelessness in Contemporary Irish Music', in Jim Mac Laughlin (ed.), Location and Dislocation in Contemporary Irish Society:Emigration and Irish Identity (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997), pp.274-303.

[10] Allan F. Moore, Rock: The Primary Text (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993)..

[11] '"Show Me the Way to Go Home": Space and Place in the Music of U2', in Smyth, Space and the Irish Cultural Imagination, pp.159-187.

[12] See Smyth, Space and the Irish Cultural Imagination p.172 – Smyth quotes directly from Waters, Race of Angels, p.121.

[13] In Richard Kearney (ed.), Across the Frontiers: Ireland in the 1990s – Cultural, Political, Economic (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1988), p.191.
[14] Ibid, p.188.
[15] Arendt, The Human Condition (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958), p.121.
[16] 'Heartland', from U2's 1987 album Rattle and Hum, but originally recorded as part of the sessions for The Joshua Tree in 1986.