Abstract
In this author's reply, we outline the four commentaries on our article and consider them as interpretations of the same relational story: part of the montage. By intersplicing the four commentaries with extra scenes from 'Montage Space', we explore again the riverine, more-than-dry, and more-than-human that both Koch and Squire choose to take downstream, the human land grab that Miller recenters, and the paradox existing between the material geography of a disputed river island and the proclamation of a virtual state, which Cattaruzza identifies. The four critical engagements with 'Montage Space' work to add depth to our own exposition of a squelchy island space and the strange creation of a new state in this contested borderscape, where statehood was violently imposed onto a space deemed to be empty and characterless rather than a vital part of a territorial dispute and a wetland biosphere reserve.

Keywords
Imagination, imperialism, island, micronation, montage, more-than-human, river, state

To be for montage is not to be for pastiche...for a whimsical hotchpotch to which there is nothing more. To be for montage is to be for a tonality of fragments...Lev Kuleshov, the avant-garde Soviet filmmaker and theoretician, referred to his own particular strategy of montage, his rapid intersplicing of differently situated people and urban landscapes, as 'creative geography'.

– Allan Pred (1995: 26–28)

If time is to be open to a future of the new then space cannot be equated with the closures and horizontalities of representation. More generally, if time is to be open then space must be open too. Conceptualizing space as open, multiple and relational, unfinished and always becoming, is a prerequisite for history to be open and thus a prerequisite, too, for the possibility of politics.

– Doreen Massey (2005: 59)

Like Gornja Siga on the middle Danube, the former US immigration inspection station at Ellis Island in New York Harbour is a river island and, like Gornja Siga, Ellis Island was a site of evolving bordering practices. A port of entry, it...
was territorially part of the United States yet juridically a site of arbitrary detention, a liminal place that exposed the incongruities and contradictions between territory, authority, law, and rights (Coleman, 2012). It was in this liminal riverine space that Perec (2008) sought to capture the American imagination through a carousel of images, opening our eyes to the intriguing blend of permanence and transience that is Ellis Island. It is, for Perec, the very place of exile, the place of the absence of place, the place of dispersal.

What Perec (2008: 137) sought on Ellis Island was ‘to interrogate, to throw into question, to test … in this non-place, this fissure’ where ‘any such quest for the trace, the word, the Other is based’ and this quest is resituated in our article to a river island in the Balkans.

Yet how do we encounter liminal spaces such as Gornja Siga that are sites of political projects, assertions amid aporia? Liminal spaces are uneasy and unsettling, and they challenge our neatest typologies. Like peripheral objects lying just out of direct sight/site, objective knowledge claims tend to overlook liminal spaces or at least misrecognize them. These spaces must be approached from situated perspectives that only add to our uneasy sense that something is missing or remains hidden. Methodologically, these sites/sights defy convention and so our investigation juxtaposes multiple slices of inquiry as montage, Benjamin’s (1982) method to leave unresolved those ideational contradictions and interrupt the contextual illusions that statist geographies are co-complicit in producing. Here we are looking for a site of progressive conceptualization that recognizes the violence of closure in places like Gornja Siga.

In this author’s reply, we share some extra scenes from our article that did not make the final cut, in order to engage with the four commentaries by Cattaruzza (2022), Koch (2022), Miller (2022), and Squire (2022). We show through literary montage that a disputed river island is not empty, it is part of a more-than-human aquatic and terrestrial world, and a historical and geographical human border dispute. The paper sets out the problem with claiming land here, and it reveals that it is an imperial act, to plant a flag in this watery more-than-dry land. What is more, the exploration of Balkanism in the paper further sinks and submerges the libertarians and their micronation, revealing the imperialism of the geographical imagination played out by the Danube, as the nearby local population is disregarded and the place is deemed up for grabs. Their act echoes the invention of Ruritania, an imaginary kingdom in the region used as a fictional background for the adventure novels of courtly intrigue and romance written by Anthony Hope (1863–1933). In Inventing Ruritania, Goldsworthy (1998) explores Balkanism, and the origins of the ideas that underpin Western perceptions of the Balkans, which cast the peninsula as tantalizingly ambiguous, European and Asian at the same time, simultaneously attracting and repelling outsiders.

Here we extend the montage and do not attempt to flatten the four responses to our paper and smooth them out. Rather, we read them as important shards of the ‘tonality of fragments’ of a disclaimed river island that has been claimed by a group of libertarians (Pred, 1995: 26–28). The commentaries add complexity to our own human and more-than-human montage, and we think about them as interpretations of the same relational story: part of the montage. To guide the reader through the four commentaries, and to perhaps map them out, or more appropriately, intersplice them, it is the riverine, more-than-dry, and more-than-human that both Koch and Squire choose to take downstream from this site as they beautifully state that the Danube simply is. Climbing onto the bank, Miller travels with the human land grab and seeks to resituate and recenter the human in this story, while Cattaruzza identifies the paradox existing between the material geography of Gornja Siga and the proclamation of a virtual state that appears through cyberspace. All of the four critical engagements with our multi-layered article add depth to our own exposition of a squelchy river island and the strange creation of a new state in this contested riverine borderscape. A place at the edge where, as Squire notes, statehood was violently imposed onto a space deemed to be an empty and characterless terra nullius rather than a disputed territory between Croatia and Serbia, or indeed part of a five country wetland project dubbed the Amazon of Europe.
Gornja Siga is only one of the disputed pockets on the Danube and newer micronations have begun to replicate the libertarians’ claims to ‘empty’ space. The Kingdom of Enclava is a self-declared micronation that claims part of a disputed pocket of the Serbia-Croatia frontier north of Gornja Siga. While Foundland-Panagua, upstream of Gornja Siga on the western bank of the Danube, is the newest addition to the map with its blog stating that it was founded in July 2021. A legal scholar sympathetic to the libertarian project examined the right to statehood of the micronations claiming these droplets of almost-land by the Danube. Considering the criteria laid out in the 1933 Montevideo Convention, they found that it was difficult to ascertain who the land belonged to in international law, and that, as first claimant, Liberland or one of the other duplicates, might own the territory. Liberland libertarians have also argued that the arrests of libertarians attempting to enter Gornja Siga are illegal cross-border kidnappings and that international law is being violated. Meanwhile, Gornja Siga is described on a Liberland website as an area along the west bank of the Danube River that is not claimed by Croatia, Serbia, or any other country, and that the boundary of Liberland was defined so as not to interfere with the territory of Croatia or Serbia.

Croatia and Serbia have dismissed Liberland, calling its creation a frivolous act and a virtual quip which requires no need for an official comment. Yet the Principality of Sealand in the North Sea approximately 12 km off the coast of Suffolk, England, and the Kingdom of North Sudan in Bir Tawil have both shared their support for Liberland, according to Liberland libertarians. Liberland passports now exist, as does a flag and an anthem, while state visits to France and a Liberland Air presidential jet have been referred to on the ‘state’ website, as have diplomatic relations with Somaliland. Unlike Liberland, Sealand had a resident population for a number of years as the former British maritime fort in international waters was taken over by a family and friends in the 1960s, with the idea it might become a pirate radio station but it never did and instead started issuing gimmick passports for a fee.

These acts might seem ludicrous and indeed they are made to look odder in our paper as they are juxtaposed with the history of a long-running border dispute and the more-than-human landscape of Gornja Siga. However, it is perhaps important to reveal our motivation here for writing about this place. We would like to state quite simply that we are writing against a land grab, no matter how small. While the act of planting a flag may seem like a stunt, and Liberland might be little more than a website, we are uncomfortable with the idea of planting a flag, creating a new state, and claiming land. We explore and give space in the paper to Gornja Siga, a river island, and we recognize the long-running border dispute which we situate in the paper historically and geographically, extensively mapping and unearthing the past and present of this river border. The idea underpinning the paper was to show the deep history of this 7 km² teardrop using literary montage, in order to make the claim of the libertarians seem even more absurd. There are scenes that focus upon the border dispute, which we show is a more-than-human story.

The bulk of the territory in dispute is downstream from Gornja Siga near the border town of Apatin, while the Island of Šarengrad and the Island of Vukovar are the most contested territories in the dispute. The Island of Vukovar is today accessible by boat from both banks of the Danube with no border controls involved in the process and could point towards a positive alternative future for Gornja Siga. Meanwhile, plans for a Serbian port in Apatin on a piece of territory claimed by Croatia have again ignited the dispute, and it looks as if this border dispute will continue, leaving Gornja Siga to the river and a subject of libertarian fantasy. The river shapes the border and was shaped in turn by human endeavor, and this is a long-running dispute between two nations and between people, and we explore the more-than-human to show this. Yet, as Miller argues, the humanness of the more-than-human is again important to reiterate in the absence of bodies on the ground in this little isle. For this reason, we counter a libertarian land grab in our paper by juxtaposing the libertarians and their micronation with a deep history of this more-than-human landscape, reading landscapes as co-fabricated
between more-than-human bodies and a lively earth, to situate Gornja Siga and anchor it in its location. We use the term more-than-human and not nonhuman to show human-nonhuman relations, as we think and write the living landscape beyond a cultural image, forged in relation to material potentials and forces in a more-than-human world.

Of course, as Squire and Koch recognize in their commentaries, reorientating the geographical imagination to the more-than-human has great potential in deconstructing understandings of territory. Yet terra nullius appears again here as a legal fiction to be exploited by colonizers hiding violent dispossession (Fitzmaurice, 2007). It is a spatial (b)ordering and a projection of an imperial imaginary in which it is deemed possible to create a new state. Liberland is shown to be a fantasy in our paper, yet it is also a land grab as Miller states. Liberland does not evidently control territory or people in Gornja Siga; rather, it is a set of right-libertarian political claims on a website, as Cattaruza points out. Paralleling its demi-terrestrial referent, Liberland surfaces as an excess of representational flows that nonetheless highlight its contingent and unsolidified nature. Our engagement with virtual representation echoes research that is ‘orientated around a shift to considering representations (in all the diverse forms) as only ever part of and becoming with a host of other processes, events, and things…shifting attention from what a text represents to the relational configuration of which the representation is but one part’ (Anderson, 2019: 1122).

In addition to a cyberspatial marking of territory by the Danube, Liberland has begun to stake claims beyond Gornja Siga. A Liberland representative office is located on Perucká Street in the suburb of Vinohrady in a residential block of flats overlooking Havlíček Gardens in Prague, Czechia; a bureau de Liberland corporate office is located in an impressive three-story building with a balcony on Rue de la Concorde in Ixelles, a suburb of Brussels, Belgium; and a consulado general de Liberland en Venezuela is sited in San Cristobal, Táchira, Venezuela. While 7 km southwest of Sombor, on the road to Apatin, Aerodrom Cora in Serbia is an imagined international airport for Liberland. It is currently a disused military airport 10 km from Gornja Siga with no terminal building and a dilapidated runway with a series of patches where planes once sat. The central hangar, command building, and flight controls were demolished during the collapse of Yugoslavia and, despite plans to create a civilian airport and renovate the runway and associated facilities, nothing has been done to date.

The cadastral map of Liberland is an ontological cartography that surfaces as an alternative to the more familiar map of Gornja Siga and the local landscape upon which Liberland writes. A few miles north of Gornja Siga, the Battle of Batina took place during World War II from 11 to 29 November 1944 at the Croatian village of Batina when units of the Red Army and Yugoslav Partisans fought against the Nazis and their allies, including the Ustaše. The Battle of Batina was one of the largest battles that occurred during World War II in Yugoslavia and as such today there is a Monument to the Battle of Batina and the Battle of Batina Memorial House in Croatia, and the Battle of Batina Museum sits on the other side of the Danube in Serbia. The monument by Croatian sculptor Anton Augustinčić shows a large figure atop a tall pedestal reaching for freedom, while friezes along the base illustrate the battle. An imperial hunting lodge called Tikveš castle is also nearby, built when Austro-Hungary annexed these lands and the Danube was straightened to leave Gornja Siga orphaned by competing boundary claims. The castle later became a well-known hunting lodge and a residence of Tito.

These fragments of montage – extra scenes and background noise – are shared to add further depth, and to sit alongside the paper and the four commentaries. To undercut the imperial desire to define a place such as Gornja Siga, we use montage and give fragments to the reader, showing the relationality and multiplicity of this place. The reader can work their own way through this contested landscape, and in so doing create their own knowledges. This alternative story is told by reiterating the imperialism of planting a flag, creating a micronation, and indeed by remembering the imperialism of the geographical imagination. Like Goldsworthy’s (1998) Inventing Ruritania, Said’s (1993) Culture and Imperialism explores the impact of representation, and in particular
the impact of British novelists in establishing and maintaining the British Empire by narrating and blocking other narratives from forming and emerging. We hope readers see the flow of Gregory’s (1993, 1995) equally critical conceptualization of the geographical imagination running through our paper just as it does in the montage of welcome perspectives of the interlocutors who have enlivened this forum.

Declaration of conflicting interests
The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work was supported by the British Academy (grant number SRG1920\101002).

ORCID iD
James Riding https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7632-5819

References
Anderson B (2019) Cultural geography II: The force of representations. Progress in Human Geography 43(6): 1120–1132.
Benjamin W (1982) Das Passagen-Werk. Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag.
Coleman M (2012) Immigrant il legality: Geopolitical and legal borders in the US, 1882–present. Geopolitics 17(2): 402–422.
Fitzmaurice A (2007) The genealogy of terra nullius. Australian Historical Studies 38(129): 1–15.
Goldsworthy V (1998) Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination. London: Yale University Press.
Gregory D (1993) Geographical Imaginations. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
Gregory D (1995) Imaginative geographies. Progress in Human Geography 19(4): 447–485.
Massey D (2005) For Space. London: Sage.
Perec G (2008) Species of Spaces and Other Pieces. London: Penguin.
Pred AR (1995) Recognizing European Modernities: A Montage of the Present. London: Routledge.
Said E (1993) Culture and Imperialism. London: Chatto and Windus.