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ISSUE 02

*Wrestling  
with*  
**UNCERTAINTY**



# 02

## UNCERTAINTY

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## INTRODUCTION

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*by*

**DR. IAN HARPER**

I am delighted to be able to support the re-launch of the student-led journal *The Unfamiliar*, now to be available both on-line and in hard copy. While “uncertainty” is the theme for this issue, one thing is for certain: The energy and vibrancy of our broader anthropological community is dependent upon, and reflective of, the vigour and creativity of our students and this is amply demonstrated by the work that has gone into this publication. With links to both the Social Anthropological Society at Edinburgh, and within the context of the broader Scottish Training in Anthropological Research (STAR) network, the enthusiasm and productivity of student input into the intellectual life of our discipline will go from strength to strength. I hope you enjoy reading this and future editions, and joining in the debates and conversations generated.

Ian Harper  
Head of Social Anthropology  
University of Edinburgh

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## THE UNFAMILIAR TEAM

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**JONA FRAS** has studied social anthropology at the University of Edinburgh, and is currently a graduate student at the Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Edinburgh. His interests include political and linguistic anthropology. He is currently preparing a research project that explores links between language and political authority in the Middle East.

**THORALF KARLSEN** is an undergraduate studying social anthropology at the University of Edinburgh. He is currently preparing for his honours dissertation fieldwork research on an oil tanker, operating along the eastern seaboard of South America. His interests include issues of mobility, globalization, transnational processes and intercultural communication in the context of the maritime industry.

**JULIJA MATULYTE** has studied fine art at the University of Westminster, and has exhibited and published her work in London, Edinburgh and Vilnius. Her interest is in narratives, sense of place and memory, and researching these subjects has led her to become an autodidact of visual anthropology. She will soon be starting a graduate course in social anthropology at the University of Edinburgh.

**MICHAEL HENEISE** studied social anthropology at the Latin American School of the Social Sciences (FLACSO) in Ecuador; theology at the University of Wales; and music at Berkeley College of Music and Florida State University. He is currently a PhD student in South Asian Studies at the University of Edinburgh, and co-founder and co-editor of the open access journal *The South Asianist*. His research explores the linkages between dreams, memory and social change in the eastern Himalayas.

**GRIT WESSER** has studied social anthropology and politics at the University of Edinburgh and is at present a PhD student in social anthropology at the same institution. She is interested in history & memory, kinship & gender, ritual, 'post-socialism' & political anthropology. Her research project explores the continuation and adaptation of ritual practice after political rupture in the post-socialist context of Eastern Germany.

**EVANGELOS CHRYSAGIS** is a social anthropology Ph.D. candidate at the University of Edinburgh. He has conducted fieldwork among musicians in Glasgow, Scotland and his research interests include grassroots music participation, creativity and the meaning of music-making as collective action.

**KATARINA OCKOVA** has studied social anthropology at the Comenius University in Bratislava and the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, and is currently a PhD student in social anthropology at the University of Edinburgh. Her project focuses on the marriage practices among the Jewish minority in post-socialist Slovakia, and her research interests include kinship and relatedness, marriage, religion, memory, and the future.

**CHRISTINE WU** is a New York-based designer with a BFA from Parsons The New School for Design. She is currently a MSc social anthropology candidate at the University of Edinburgh. Her research interests include material culture, digital media, music subcultures and global fashion tribes. At present, she is preparing her master's dissertation, which explores the connection between subculture fashion and anthropology.

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## WRESTLING WITH UNCERTAINTY

This second issue of *The Unfamiliar* is broadly devoted to the notion of ‘uncertainty’ – an increasingly prominent term, as confirmed by a Google search returning a total of 89,900,000 hits of which 64,600,000 are within the past five years alone. But what does uncertainty actually entail? Undoubtedly, its referents are as ambiguous and myriad as its omnipresence seems somewhat of an inescapable fad. It appears to feature everywhere: from the title of a 2009 film by Scott McGehee and David Siegel, to risk analysis based on complex probability calculations via Artificial Intelligence research, to the political-economic debates and everyday struggles regarding the causes and consequences of the Eurozone’s monetary instability and the global financial crisis. The well-known proverb that ‘nothing in life is certain but death’ sums up nicely why we are obsessed with it: we are concerned about our future, or more precisely, about our possible futures and the fact that these are unknown to us. In this way, everything feels uncertain.

Unsurprisingly, humanities and social sciences have paid increasing attention to uncertainty as well. The Economic and Social Research Council focuses in its *Global Uncertainties Programme* on researching issues such as terrorism and trans-national organised crime and this year’s biennial conference of the European Association of Social Anthropologists is entitled *Uncertainty and Disquiet*. But as the Swedish social anthropologist Åsa Boholm, with her longstanding research interest in risk, asked in 2003: Can there be an Anthropology of Uncertainty? This issue attempts to illustrate that, in 2012, Boholm’s suggestion that anthropology’s most useful contribution to the study of uncertainty lies in its strength of contextualisation is as topical as ever. The present material reflects the fact that uncertainty is a global human concern by bringing together diverse stories from geographical locations that are, to us, as close and unfamiliar as Glasgow and Edinburgh and as faraway and (un)familiar as India and Kenya. It also demonstrates why social anthropology matters: it investigates the multifarious facets of uncertainty as they are shaped by ‘social relationships, power relations and hierarchies, cultural beliefs, trust in institutions and science, knowledge, experience, discourses, practices and collective memories’ (Boholm 2003: 175). It does so in a variety of visual and textual forms that dare to go beyond the well-worn paths of academic discourse.

We are grateful to all contributors and very much hope you will enjoy reading through this issue, find the visual elements beautiful and intriguing, and the texts inspiring and thought-provoking. Drawing together issues as strange and varied as sports doping and archaeology, climate change and migrant labour, it may help to give us all a better sense of what the uncertainty of the modern world is all about.

*Grit Wesser*

Bibliography: Boholm, Å. (2003) ‘The Cultural Nature of Risk: Can there be an Anthropology of Uncertainty?’ *Ethnos*. Vol. 68:2: 159–178.

EXPERI  
ENCES  
OFFIELD  
WORK



# EXPERIENCES *of* FIELDWORK

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## EXHIBITION VISION STATEMENT

Experiences of Fieldwork sets out to represent the embodied experiences of University of Edinburgh anthropology students during the fieldwork process. The project seeks to demystify the fieldwork process and open up new avenues for discussion and dialogue about the ways in which researchers experience ‘doing’ and ‘being’ in the field. Using a combination of different media; photography, music, video, sculpture, incense and other ‘things’ produced by anthropology students during their fieldwork, the exhibition aims to encourage a multi-sensory exploration of the relationship between the fieldworker and his/her fieldsite. Incorporating material from a diverse range of research projects in both rural and urban contexts around the world, the exhibition will explore the themes of people, place and process. By providing a space in which to consider the significance of random encounters in the field and the throwntogetherness of the places and spaces where fieldwork is carried out, this innovative exhibition will engage with the material expression of ethnography in a very real and accessible way.

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VISUAL

ANTHRO  
POLOGY

# *Visual* **ANTHROPOLOGY**

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This section is aimed to discuss and represent a wide range of visual material, classified under the broad term of Visual Anthropology. The use of photography, drawing, film and new media is very versatile, and we are hoping that through this section we will be able to share some great images and discuss their purpose: documentation, illustration, exploration or formal research material. In this issue we are featuring work bouncing off the topic of uncertainty, encouraging a critical yet open approach towards the pictorial information, whether it is an ethnography of a last century, or an art project of the current times.

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PARALLEL

PARALLEL

ESSAYS

# *Parallel* **ESSAYS**

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“Parallel Essays” is an experimental section featuring short articles on current issues pertaining to culture and society, analyzed from the standpoint of a non-anthropological discipline and published alongside an anthropologically informed response to the article. Through this, we seek to build interdisciplinary dialogue and reveal the potential of both anthropological and non-anthropological approaches to highlight fresh or surprising aspects of various topics treated by anthropology and other disciplines. In this issue, we explore the question of doping in sports, comparing the views of a pharmacologist with those of a postgraduate anthropology student.

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