

re:think



“The Tradition”, Paola Tine.

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# re:think

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# From the Editors ●●

Since re:think Vol. 2 was published, touch and connection have gone from an essential part of everyday life to a scarcity; a memory of physical closeness with others. In the silence between the previous issue and this one, there has been a sense of mourning that we endured through lockdowns, for the state of the world around us, but also for the connections to the world that we had temporarily lost. Sat in our rooms, we have been profoundly apart from each other, grieving for lost moments, memories that 'should have been' with friends, family, and strangers alike.

Throughout this time, however, our contributors have submitted incredible ethnographic pieces that creatively reflect on how we connect with the world around us. These pieces, written largely before the first lockdown restrictions came into place, re-evaluate how we connect with global structures of history, worship and belonging, while simultaneously revering the local and the personal; celebrating the awkwardness of intimate communication

between people, the wonders of physical and emotional care, and how this communication even expands to the way we understand ourselves. This issue brings ethnography through global and personal-level communication, back to ourselves, in our own houses and our own bodies.

Re:think has established itself as a journal where creative forms of ethnography are valued and welcomed, and this issue expresses the power of ethnography at a time when compassion, care and connection have been on our minds more than usual. How we communicate ideas, imagine the future, and how we care for each other, are the guiding questions undertaken by our contributors.

The editorial collective feel that putting this issue together has been an honour: to the wonderful authors of this issue, thank you for trusting us with your incredible work. Special thanks also to all our peer reviewers, to Dr John Harries for organising and guiding us throughout the process, and to Rebecca Wojturska from the Edinburgh University Library and Collections for her indispensable help in bringing this issue together.

# Searching for Miss Menzies • Tracing the ghosts of eighteenth-century sex workers in Edinburgh

## Academic Essays

### ABSTRACT

Historical records allow the lingering presences of people of the past to be traced. This study documents a search for recorded eighteenth-century sex workers in Edinburgh, assessing whether ghosts can be brought under anthropological inquiry. I find that through informing myself of the history of these women, I was able to construct a sense of their presence. Insofar as I created these ghosts, I argue that the political dispositions of the ethnographer drive attempts to locate the past in the present. I conclude by reflecting on the ethnographic significance of this attempt at conducting an ethnography of the spectral.

**keywords:** ghosts, sex work, Edinburgh, spectral ethnography

Beth Simpson

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Escaping a blizzard one February afternoon, I took refuge in the National Library of Scotland. Sifting through the rare collections section, I found a book entitled *Ranger's Impartial List of the Ladies of Pleasure in Edinburgh*, published in 1775 (Tytler, 1979 [1775]). The book documented the nooks of Edinburgh where an eighteenth-century man was able to find a lady. I recognised the names of these places and had visited many of them several times. Yet, I had never inhabited them in the awareness of the ghosts they housed.

In this discussion, I tell the tale of my search for the ghostly traces of Edinburgh's "ladies of pleasure" from a time gone by (Tytler, 1979 [1775]). I draw on Armstrong's method of "spectral ethnography", as a means through which "presences" of the past can be brought under anthropological inquiry (Armstrong 2010: 246). Yet, I critique his suggestion that the ethnographer should remain uninformed about the potential ghosts lurking in these spaces whilst conducting ethnography. Instead, I argue that it was in the knowledge of the



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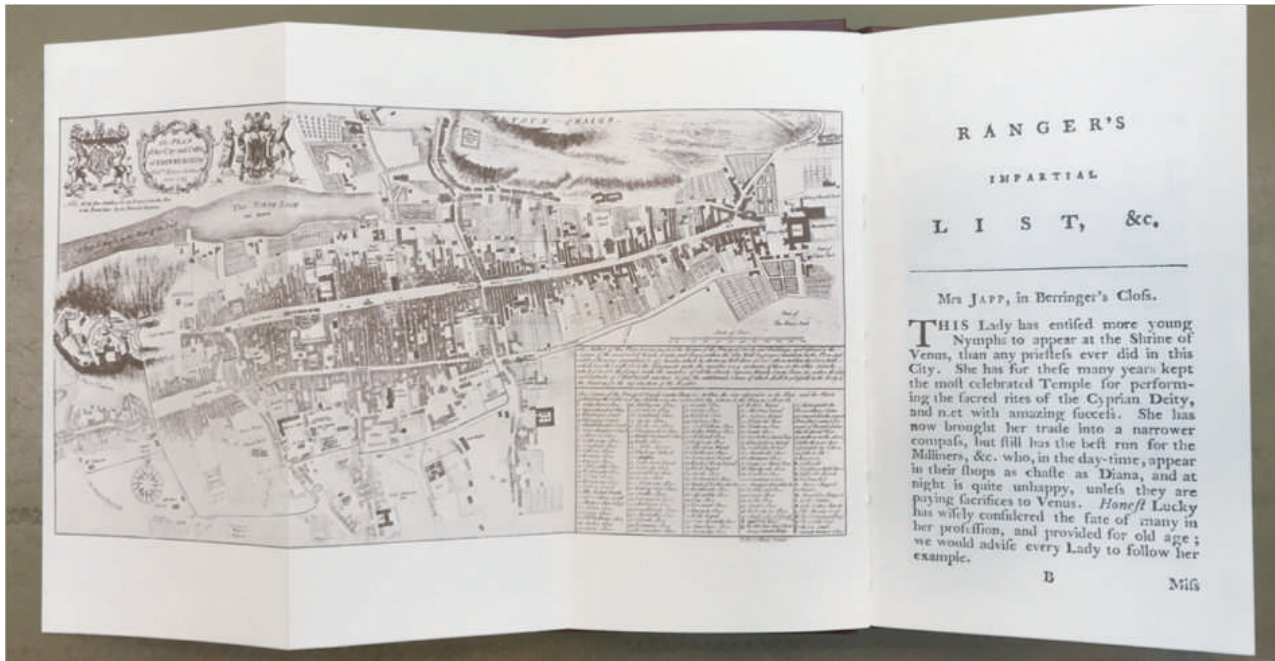


Figure 1: Ranger's Impartial List of the Ladies of Pleasure in Edinburgh (1775) (photograph by author)

history of the spaces I visited, and their former inhabitants, that I was able to make manifest the ghosts of Edinburgh's past. As such, I claim that the ghosts I experienced were a historically informed creation which was both politically charged and ethnographically significant.

*I walk out of the library and turn right. 8 minutes, my map tells me, until I arrive at Bell's Wynd and meet Miss Menzies. Tall, fair hair, good skin and teeth. Bell's Wynd is one of many alleyways which stem off the Royal Mile. I have always been drawn to these alleys; at once so close to the centre of the city, yet eerily hidden from it. I enter. The noise from the city subsides. Drops of rain fall heavily from the bricks above. I look around, there is no life here, just a distant hum of it. The city, at once so familiar, begins to scare me. I imagine myself in this location, back in time existing as Miss Menzies. In this fantasy I feel her presence both within and beside me. She exists down this street, in the loud-*

*ness of the drop of rain, in the shudder that electrocutes my body as I see someone walk towards me. Yet, she only exists because I have brought her here, traced her and made her manifest in this alleyway, in the loudness, in the shudder.*

What does it feel like to experience a ghost? Ghosts, for Bell and Edensor, are a sense of the "presence" of beings who are not materially there (Bell 1997: 813; Edensor, 2008: 325). For Freud, they are a feeling of the "unheimlich" (Freud 1919: 222). That is, an awareness of that which is "concealed, kept from sight", which is at once uneasy, yet harks back to the "old" and "familiar" (Freud 1919: 220-222). It seems there is a chasm between the ghost and the person, which is temporarily overcome in experiences of the spectral, inciting a sense of discomfort that we have felt the essence of something usually set apart from us. Though their presence suggests an ability to travel temporally, it has been

argued that ghosts are rooted in spaces (Bell 1997: 816, Carsten, 2007: 7). In their geographical establishment, ghosts (ironically) “give life” to spaces, transforming, as Bell suggests, a “space” into a “place” (Bell 1997: 815). Prior to the afternoon reflected on above, I had walked down Bell’s Wynd several times. Yet, I had never felt scared there or imagined myself both as, and in the presence of, an eighteenth-century sex worker. The meaning of this space and the feeling it invoked within me changed in my knowledge of its past inhabitants.



Figure 2: Bell’s Wynd, Edinburgh (photograph by author)

Armstrong offers the method of “spectral ethnography” as a way to study experiences with ghosts anthropologically (Armstrong 2010). Spectral ethnogra-

phy should be carried out in “abandoned” or “isolated” spaces, in which the ethnographer can open herself to a feeling of non-physical presence (Armstrong 2010: 244). Further, she should remain unbiased and uninformed about the history of the place before visiting it (Armstrong 2010: 246).

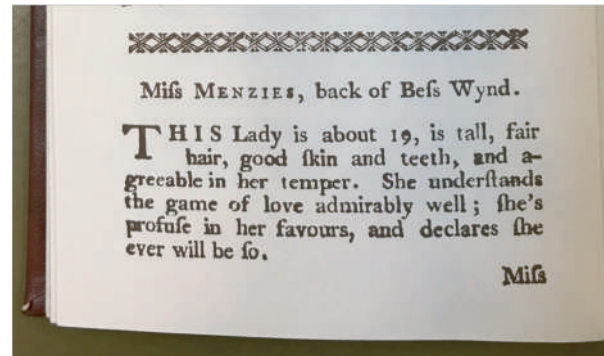


Figure 3: “Miss Menzies” (photograph by author)

In keeping with Armstrong’s first instruction, the alley in which I traced Miss Menzies is a space of isolation, lurking silently behind the bustle of Edinburgh’s Royal Mile. His second instruction, however, is a methodological point I wish to challenge. I argue instead that, in reading the history of Miss Menzies, I was able to reconstitute an essence of the past and project it onto my experience of Bell’s Wynd in the present. The record of her past informed the way I felt in, and interacted with, the space, making manifest the ghost I expected to find.

Bell suggests that the “ghosts of place” are “always our ghosts” (Bell 1997: 821). They are both filtered through, and reflective of, the way we view the world and our expectations of it (Bell 1997: 831). A question arises here. Namely, does the constructed nature of my ghostly experience render this attempt at spectral



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ethnography self-defeating? For the remainder of this discussion, I will argue that it does not. Instead, I will claim that the process of constructing this ghost, in the knowledge of its past, can be understood as an act of resistance which is both politically and ethnographically significant.



Figure 4: Past locations of the women in Edinburgh (GoogleMaps photograph by author)

## An act of Resistance

The political significance of this manifestation of the spectral becomes evident when the question is asked of why I chose to search for the traces of these women in particular. That is, sex workers from the eighteenth-century, whose presence I was only able to fathom from records left in a dusty book, housed in the rare collections section of the library. These are presences of the past that have been somewhat forgotten, or pushed to the periphery, of Edinburgh's history. I hark back here to the aforementioned chasm between the ghost and the person, which gives rise to a feeling of the "unheimlich" when crossed (Freud 1919: 222). Freud's claim is that this feeling of discomfort emerges when something that

has been "repressed" comes into our awareness (Freud 1919: 240). Departing from this idea, I suggest that the feeling of separation between certain ghosts and certain people is explainable by the fact that the ghost has been denied, or repressed, from the social experience of the person.

Processes of forgetting, Renan suggests, are crucial to the construction of the nation (Renan 1990: p. 11). For Carsten, in the creation of national identity, it is the stories of "those who live... at the margins of the state" that are "omitted" (Carsten 2007: 20, 25). I want to apply these suggestions to the constitution of the city of Edinburgh and the place of its forgotten ladies of pleasure. I suggest that these women occupy the space of 'ghost' because they have been denied, or marginalised, in the collective memory of Edinburgh's past. This denial is made evident by the improbability of my discovering the book in which these women are recorded. It is furthered by my physical experience within the peripheral spaces in which they once inhabited; spaces which suggest that these women are not simply the ghosts of Edinburgh's past, but were also the ghosts of its eighteenth-century present.

Seeking out the stories and presences of these marginalised figures is a way to bridge the gap between the ghost that has been repressed and the society that has repressed it. The ghosts we actively search for are the presences of the past which we feel are being hidden, gathering dust. Thus, the creation of ghosts will always be foregrounded by the political inclinations of the creator, in an attempt to reclaim forgotten histories. The intentionality behind my construction of the ghosts of these women is a political act because it resists the denial of them in the collective memory of Edinburgh, through bringing

them into a conscious, present awareness.

## Conclusion

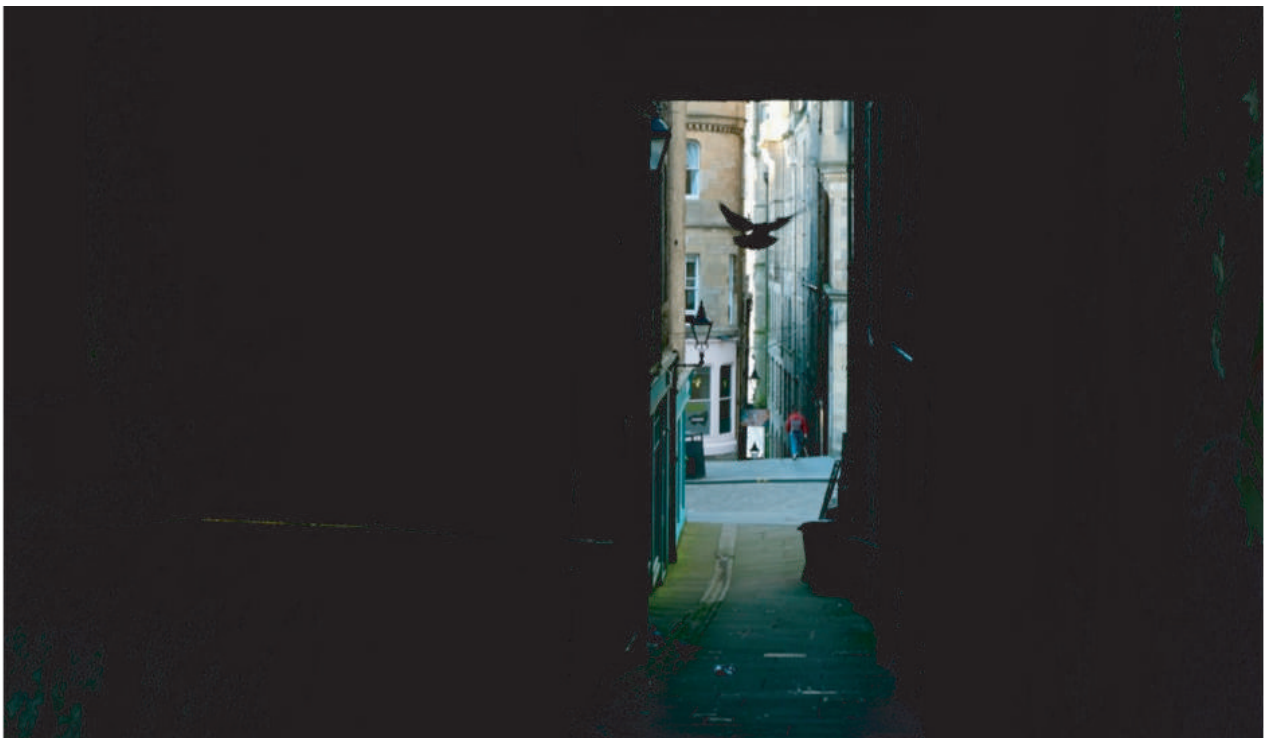
I propose that this process is ethnographically significant because it holds a mirror up to the method of anthropological fieldwork. Too often, Armstrong claims, ethnography is constructed “out of the ethnographers personal experiences, biases and viewpoints” (Armstrong 2010: 246). Encountering the presence of a feeling or essence, as opposed to a living person, the spectral ethnographer becomes acutely aware of what she is projecting onto the situation. Insofar as the ethnographer will always filter the worlds of her informants through personal, embedded ontological frameworks, this projection is implicit in the nature of the ethnographic project.

In undertaking spectral ethnography and recognising the ways in which it is constructed through the political concerns of the ethnographer, we become aware of the fact that we always construct ethnography. All ethnography is a “partial truth” (Geertz 1986 in Armstrong 2010: 246). Thus, it is in the recognition of my politically motivated construction of the ghost of Miss Menzies that I argue for the ethnographic value of spectral ethnography, as a method for confronting and resisting the biases which frame anthropological inquiry.

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Figure 5: An alleyway in Old Town Edinburgh (photograph by author)



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# Caring for the dead : affective relationship between people and human remains in Aguni, Okinawa

## Academic Essays

### ABSTRACT

This essay will examine the affective relationships people have with human remains and, by extension, the souls of the deceased in Aguni, Okinawa. In conceptualising care, I will explore how *senkotsu* (bone washing) and other emerging mortuary practices, such as cremation, perpetuate and reconfigure the cycle of care between the living and the dead. The element of fear and disgust present in these interactions will also be explored, as such notions centre around these care practices. I demonstrate that with the use of senses such as touch, people forge intimate and affective relationships with the dead. Furthermore, I will explore how changing practices alter the ways people fashion caring and affective intimacy with the dead.

**keywords:** care, affect, human remains, *senkotsu*, Okinawa

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Aguni is an island that is part of the two-dozen Okinawan Islands that make up the southernmost part of the Japanese archipelago. It is located 60km northwest of the main Okinawan island, which is connected by a ferry that comes in and out of the island once a day. As one of the islanders reminded me after the ferry leaves the dock at 2:10 pm, the people remaining are the ones you are with throughout the night and until the ferry arrives again at 12:15 pm, the next day. The island has an area of 7.64 km<sup>2</sup>, and the current population of the island is just under 700 people. It has one izakaya (1), three grocery stores, three restaurants, one clinic, and no crematoriums.

Due to this lack of crematoriums on the island, people in Aguni have historically, and still do to some extent, participate in the practice of bone washing, or *senkotsu*. *Senkotsu* is a practice which comes after a wind burial, where in Aguni bodies are put in individual coffins and stored away in the cave-like communal graves for at least 3-4 years. This is unlike other forms of wind burials,

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where the corpses are exposed to the elements for it to decompose. The remains are then brought back out to be washed individually with water by their family, friends, and sometimes neighbours.

Initially inspired greatly by the work of Krmpotich, Fontein, and Harries (2010) on the emotive materiality and the affective presence of bones/human remains, I wanted to seek out what it is that the bones *do* to people. However, as I furthered my research, it became clear that what I should be looking at instead was what it is that bones do *with* people, as they constitute intimate and affective relationships with the living. With this essay, I hope to further the understanding of the extensive relationship people have with the deceased in Aguni, Okinawa.

### Care in the context of Aguni

A typhoon was coming, and the wind was strong. I was sat on the back seat of the car with Wada-san, a mainlander in his 30s who has been working on the island for a few months, and Satoshi-san, a 41-year-old man local to Aguni, driving. I was accompanying them to put the ashes of the father of one of the villagers to rest in *munchū* or a communal grave. The windows were opened to let in a mixture of the scent of sun-baked asphalt, the ocean breeze, and the faint scent of sugarcane that always lingers on the island. With the heat of the Okinawan sun blazing above us, I felt my thighs sticking to the leather seat.

Satoshi-san turned to me, visibly

amused. ‘ちなみにもうあの世だから。もう死者の世界に入ったよ’ - ‘By the way, we’ve just crossed over to the other world. You’re in the land

of the dead now’. A burst of astonishment issued from both Wada-san and me. Satoshi-san proceeded to chuckle cheekily, seemingly satisfied from receiving the reaction he expected.

As Satoshi-san made clear death is very close to home in a place like Aguni. From my outing with Satoshi-san, I found that it is only about a 10 minute drive from the villages. In Aguni, the living reside in the east where the sun rises, and the dead inhabit the west where the sun sets. As far as the villagers are concerned, it has always been like this. The dead and the living have cohabited the island for as long as they’ve known. People laugh at the occasional tourists who visit and marvel at the idea of ‘the other world’ existing on such a small island. However, there is also danger and risk that accompanies the villagers from having such space in close proximity. Many of the villagers would not go near the graves if there were no reason to and people who are deemed vulnerable, such as pregnant women and children, are advised not to go there for fear of ‘bad’ spirits. As a non-islander and an outsider, I was told multiple times to verbally introduce myself when I reach the graves so as not to alarm the spirits, and to carry bags of salt as protection. When asked directly no one made mention of a known evil spirit but everyone still showed great concern about an ‘outsider’ entering ‘in case something happened’.

The weariness directed towards me

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(1) Japanese equivalent of a pub that serves both food and alcoholic drinks



was in contrast to how the villagers acted once they had reached the graves. People seemed relaxed, as they sat to eat and drink in front of the graves. They talked of their ancestors and recently deceased relatives and friends with great fondness. The tension and worry exhibited by the same people had vanished entirely. People expressed their need and desire to care for the dead out of affective and emotional motives, and yet believed that those they loved and cared for were also capable of harm and danger.

To prevent harm being inflicted, there are several rituals, varying from everyday practices such as serving tea to the deceased, to some that are ceremonially done at specific times and places. Through these practices, the ancestors may grant you things like good health or financial security, and yet the failure or misconduct of these rituals and communications may result in their rage (Higa 2010: 205). As described by Kawano, 'Although faith is not necessarily a primary reason for people to conduct rituals for *kami* (2), buddhas, and ancestors, the well-being of ritual practitioners and their families figures centrally as a motivation for ritual activity' (2005:21). Due to this, I would argue that the care provided for the dead is met with a return, completing a 'cycle of care' that perpetuates itself through people's actions and practices.

To conceptualise what care is in this context I take Fisher and Tronto's definition of care as a starting point:

*'At the most basic level, we suggest caring be viewed as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web' (Tronto & Fischer, 1990:40).*

I suggest that the definition is broad enough to include the living and their deceased counterparts, on account of their possession of a *mabui* (3) – a soul, and therefore a sense of 'self'. As they approach the topic of care from a feminist perspective, Fisher and Tronto were interested in looking at care activities that were understood as something invisible yet ever-present through the work of women behind the scenes. The definition characterises caring as a practice, as well as articulating the aspect of caring involving 'well-being' within interdependent relations. This aspect of well-being is paramount when observing practices of care in Aguni as social interactions with the dead centre around the very act of making sure of the dead's welfare and the protection and prosperity provided in return.

As Loaiza (2018) conceptualises, the notion of concern is also at the core in the trajectory of 'care' within the realm of social practices. This concern leads to the 'enactment of vital values' (Loaiza 2018:17), which I argue, in this case, is the maintenance of the relationship between the living and the dead. Loaiza (2018) observes the body as a locus of experience yet understands that bodies do not experience lives neutrally or privately. They are instead sites where future concerns are projected (ibid.). This is because bodies do not exist within a neutral vacuum but in a social environment, which is characterised by interactions. These dynamics of interactions create space for concern. Hence when people are caring, it is from a place of concern.

Traditionally in Aguni, it is believed that after a person passes away, the family is obligated to perform a set of rituals after the first, third, seventh, thirteenth, twenty-fifth, and the thirty-third year. Following the completion of the rituals

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after the thirty-third year, the deceased becomes a *kami* or god (Baksheev, 2008). As my informants insisted, the dead cannot complete their journey to become a *kami* alone since the living must execute the ritual practices. The dead are highly dependent and in need of living human actors to 'make' them into ancestors/-gods. The relations are established by both entities, the living and the dead, through acts of caring. However, as people in Aguni understand, caring is not just a matter of love but also of fear.

### Fear of Mabui

Aguni's summer knows no rain unless it comes all at once like a bucket full of water turned upside down. Getting the timing right to hang your laundry is crucial. One by one, I picked up my freshly washed clothes to hang on the line.

'Oneēsan' (4) , piped up Satoshi-san, who lived next door to where I was staying. He was wearing his grey boiler suit and white rubber boots; he was coming back from tending to the millet field. He continued as he walked over the small cement fence between the two properties to get closer, 'I heard you're researching about *senkotsu*. Someone I know is laying the ashes of their father to rest on the 5th of July. You should join us if you want. It's not every day that we open the graves anyways'.

Excited by the invitation and in an effort to keep the conversation going, I thanked him and continued, 'It does look like hard work opening the graves'. Satoshi-san giggles and corrects me instantly, '大変とかじゃなくて普段は開け

ちゃダメだから' – 'It's not about hard work, you're not meant to open it unless it's times like this'. Still laughing lightly, he walked away, as I stood there, contemplating what he meant.

This conversation with Satoshi-san haunted me for a while, not knowing the meaning behind that comment. The graves in Aguni are quite particular. Being communal graves (or *munchū*) they are as big as some bedrooms. As Aguni is a volcanic island, the graves are dug into the malleable tuff, and the entrance is sealed with stones piled on top of one another. And to open said grave it takes at least two people to move the heavy stones one by one. When I made that comment above, all I had in mind was how tiresome it must be to open the graves. However, what Satoshi-san meant was something completely different. You are not expected to open graves without caution or purpose because of the *mabui* that reside inside.

As Takahashi (2015) observes, there are two types of *mabui*: one that inhabits the living and another that inhabits the dead. In Okinawan belief, the *mabui* is free-flowing and is prone to leave the body. Due to this, there used to be a practice in which two adult men would go up on the rooftop and shout '*mudutoō*' while they waved fans to try and bring the *mabui* back when someone was gravely ill and at the verge of death (Takahashi, 2015).

As there are *mabui* for the living, there are *mabui* for the dead. Again, there are two kinds of *mabui* for the dead: evil spirits - one that has not passed over to 'the other world' and brings harm to the living, and ancestral spirits, those that have gone to 'the other world' and

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(2) *Kami* is a Japanese word for god or deities often (but not necessarily) associated with Shinto.

(3) The concept of *mabui* would be discussed in more depth further on in the paper.

become gods that protect the living (Takahashi, 2015). As Eduardo Kohn argues in his book, *How Forests Think*, which explores the complexity of human interaction with the surrounding ecosystem for the Runa people of Ecuador's upper Amazon, 'spirits are real' (2013:216). They are not only real because people take them to be real but because it can be used to inform existence. They are real in a way that affects people in Aguni and how they organise their lives, much as they affect the Runa in Ecuador.

As *mabui* are unpredictable as well as unstable, they could be dangerous and harmful. You are not supposed to open the graves if there is no need to because people fear upsetting the *mabui*. People should be cautious about being close to the graves. Some could be made gods, as 'gods emerge with human practice' (Kohn 2015:216), and some could turn evil. Hence, the living and the dead can mutually perpetuate the cycle of care, but it can be disrupted if the care provided isn't received successfully. This creates tension in the relationship with the dead; intimate yet distant, cared for yet feared.

Deceased entities are understood as relational beings with autonomous power to give back to the living. Furthermore, the completion and fulfilment of care by the living is what gives the dead the status and the capacity to give back. Due to the temperamental nature of the *mabui*, fear and anxieties are present in these relationships too. This creates some unease in the relationship established by the people in Aguni. However, I argue that affect and emotive motives sustain an intimate relationship between the dead and the living, especially through the employment of senses such as touch.

## Affective relationships through the sense of touch

The sky is blue and dotted with big towers of clouds. I feel the breeze in my hair. It tickles my cheeks. Tanahara-san, a man in his late 60s who acts as a self-appointed guide to show occasional tourists around the island, and I are sat under a gazebo. It mimics the shape of a *hanagasa*, a large hat in the shape of a hibiscus flower that is worn during Okinawan traditional dances. We were at the Mahana observational deck, the highest point on the island, where you have a 360-degree view of the island and the sea that lies beyond. The open field is liberating, and the sounds of distant waves wash over me.

Tanahara-san said through frowned brows:

‘段々だんだん洗骨に手を入れて手伝ってくれる人がいないとかわいそうになる わけ’ - ‘I feel pity as there are fewer people who decide to put their hands in and help with *senkotsu*’.

‘When it [*senkotsu*] was done a couple of years ago, there were not any elderly people left, and when I saw the neighbourhood lady help...’, he looks down at his feet for a second. Looking back up again, Tanahara-san continues, ‘It's not something you can do alone. Two people can't do it either. You need five, six people at least. But it's not enough with there being five, six people’.

He utters with one raised brow:

‘本当にやってくれる人。触ってくれる人’ - ‘People willing to do it. People that are willing to touch it... When your mother passes away, and it's fine if she's cremated, but it's

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*whether you're confident that you can pick up her now brittle bones one by one and wash it. It makes you think, doesn't it? Even though she's your parent'.*

We maintain eye contact, his eyes searching. The silence only lasts a couple of seconds. Tanahara-san remarks, now with a slight smile:

*‘だけど、最後の別れで気持ちよくちゃんとして送ってあげようという気持ちになれるかどうかの問題’ - ‘But it's a problem of whether you feel that you want to send them off and say your last good-bye properly and respectfully’.*

Tanahara-san raises an important issue – and that is that *senkotsu* is a highly emotional process. And touch is employed to create intimate and meaningful inter-corporal connections. Here I will attempt to demonstrate that although touch is a sense often neglected by anthropologists (Blake, 2011), it defies and eases the boundaries between bodies (dead and alive), as well as dichotomies between subject/object. Furthermore, touch relates to care, but there is a common ambivalence. Caring comes with fear much like touch comes with fear or even repulsion.

### Touch and the politics of 'putting your hand in'

All of my informants have mentioned at one point or another the physical and emotional hardship that comes with the practice of *senkotsu*. How 'well' the

flesh rots and how much decomposition is left on the bones is something people mention a lot when talking of *senkotsu*. When there is some rotting flesh left, like in the case of Noriko-san's father, who passed away 25 years ago, the emotional toll is much more predominant on their families. Noriko-san said, 'I didn't want to show his changed form to anyone else... and it made me think about what my father would think about how people perceived him when they saw him like that'.

Unlike the sanitised and 'bounded' body that is expected of dead and dying bodies in hospitals today (Lawton, 1998), the remains to be washed in *senkotsu* could come with various levels of decay and rot. A 'bounded' body is one that contains – one that retains control of their bodily degradation and odours (Lawton, 1998). Similarly to Lawton's study on the effect smells could have on the (un)desirability of dying bodies, Howes also makes a point about the sometimes offensive and unsavoury nature of smells. Modelled after the paper 'Percussion and Transition' by Rodney Needham, Howes parallels the connection between percussive noise and transition, to that of olfaction and transition. According to Howes (1991), smells are boundless, always transcending boundaries. They are evasive and 'out of place', and for these reasons, death is a 'dirty business' as it is highly unstable and liminal (Howes 1991:140). This is why people in Aguni talk about how much decaying flesh is still on the corpse. Because the 'unbounded' corpse with its evasive odour is repulsive. Their repulsion is a challenge people must overcome in order to care for the dead.

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(4) Japanese word used to address women meaning 'big sister' or 'young lady'.

Due to these unpleasant characteristics, death becomes more medicalised and distant in Japan, as well as in many other parts of the world. Interactions with the dead are often left for professionals, whether they are doctors or funeral directors (Krpmotich et al., 2010). The disturbance people feel at the appearance and the smell drives them away from the practice.

‘手を入れる’ ‘To put [your] hand in’, was a phrase used by all of my informants to describe people participating in the practice of *senkotsu*. This points to the act of physically touching the bones. There is something highly destabilising about human bones/remains since they are located between being subject and object – person and thing (Harries, 2016). In discussing the Beothuk, people who were native to Newfoundland, Canada, Harries further illustrates this destabilising nature of human remains. As the presence of the exterminated Beothuk remains emerges the absence of their lives and what used to be also comes to the surface. As once dead and ‘vanished’ bodies/remains come to light, people are confronted with the absence of *the lives that used to be* (Harries, 2016). This nature of bones, once being ‘people’ and now without the same life force, places them in a precarious status. Due to its uncertain subjectivity/objectivity, people are torn between feelings of obligation to ‘do right’ and pay respect to the deceased by ‘putting their hands in’ and taking a much less labour-intensive and ‘clean’ way to lay a person at rest – cremation.

‘二度悲しむわけ’ ‘It saddens [you] twice’, said Sumiko-san, a woman in her mid-90s, as a great-granddaughter of hers fumbled around the room in search of her toys and one of her teenage grand-

daughters napped in the same room. ‘After the wind burial is done, you have to see the bones again, it brings back sad memories, so you end up suffering twice’.

She continued, leaning forward and with widened eyes, ‘I was so scared when I saw the skull, and that’s why I didn’t put my hands in for either of my parents. That’s why the younger generations won’t put their hands in either’.

This feeling of fear and discomfort is commonly shared amongst the people of Aguni. However, it is also true that not having enough people that would ‘put their hands in’ results in strong emotional responses, much like the sentiment expressed by Tanahara-san. These emotional responses are triggered by the emotive and affective relations people have with the deceased, and by extent, the bones. As Seigworth and Gregg conceptualises, ‘affect is found in the intensities that pass body to body (human, non-human, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations between those resonances themselves’ (2010:1-2). Persons and human bones develop and maintain strong affective relationships. It is seen by some that the politics revolving around whether ‘people put their hands in’ or not could result in the making or breaking of these relationships. Paradoxically, however, the emotional depth of relationships present when people are alive may be what bars them emotionally from ‘putting their hand in’. The closer people are and the more love they feel for the person the harder it may be to see them so drastically changed. Due to this emotional paradox, transformation of the practice was required to sustain the relationships into death.



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There is a Japanese expression, ‘心を打たれる’ literally translated to ‘to be struck in the heart’ and of which the English equivalent would be ‘to be touched (emotionally)’. Like seen in such colloquialism, touch is something that evokes emotions (Peloquin, 1989). As Montagu claims, ‘touch is not experienced as a single physical modality, as sensation, but affectively, as emotion’ (1971:110). Much like the osteoarchaeologists, who work without any barriers in-between their own bodies and skin and that of the skeletons they study, touching with bare hands create intimate inter-corporal connections (Sofaer, 2012). As Sofaer (2012) argues, this is also due to the nature of the skeleton being ‘inside-out’, lacking in a singular physical boundary that is constituted by the skin in a living person. This gives another sense to the ‘unboundedness’ of the skeleton, as the point at which the skeletal body ends is indistinct. This makes the act of touching skeletal bodies distinctly intimate.

Touch is also a sense that defies subject/object distinctions (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). Touch always poses an ontological argument that contends the fact that one always touches another that touches back (Sofaer, 2012). To reiterate, ‘the pressure involved in touch is a pressure on ourselves as well as upon objects’ (Stewart, 1999:31) – even though in the case of a skeletal body or a singular bone, the deceased may not actively touch back or sense being touched. However, the very fact that you feel them implies that they (even involuntarily) touch you back, and therefore reciprocate (Sofaer, 2012:142).

Touching is not only intimate because of the act in itself but also because of the association it has to the care and comforts it provides. As Blake

(2011) finds in her ethnographic fieldwork in an oncology ward at a South African children’s hospital, touch was used both by the children who are hospitalised and the adults, whether they be parents or nurses, as a source of comfort and a medium to convey feelings of care. Touch was not only emotional but also utilised as a form of pain alleviation, which proved efficacious. Much like a kiss on an injured toddler’s knee by a mother, the performance of touch in itself retains power (Thompson, Ritenbaugh and Nichter, 2008). In Aguni, touch, by ‘putting your hands in’ to wash the bones, is essential not only because it instils a sense of intimacy but also because it is infused with the sense of care and comfort for the deceased. This employment of touch is in stark contrast to the mainland Japanese practice, where cremated bones are picked up by family members with chopsticks and touch is very carefully avoided.

### Mediated change and new senkotsu

In an autobiographical book where Masao Nakazato writes about his *anmā* (Okinawan word for mother), he writes, ‘Elders say that cremation is like roasting chicken, and it is ‘murder’. It is the murder of the soul, and you become a murderer’ (2004, 108).

‘最大の親孝行はそのまま土に返すことにある’ ‘The best way to honour your parents is to give them back to earth’. Sumiko-san and many others in Aguni shared similar views with the elders mentioned in the book. Her great-granddaughter now sat quietly watching the TV. Sitting up on the sofa with her legs tucked in underneath her buttocks, she straightens her posture. ‘本当に本当に胸がさけるよう

な思いで、、’ ‘I really really felt like my chest was being ripped open...’ said Sumiko-san, firmly shutting her eyes - her shoulders tense. Sumiko-san continues:

*‘When one of my siblings first said they wanted to be cremated and when I saw them go in the incinerator, I thought my chest was being ripped apart. When they came out, I couldn’t even tell what bones they were. Not even whether it was human or not. That’s why I didn’t like it, but 世は世に従え (proverb meaning ‘we must follow the order of the world’)’.*

As Sumiko-san said, times are changing and so is Aguni. However, there are difficulties and unease that accompany these changes. As aforementioned, sensuous and affective intimacy, in touch as well as through different ritual practices, is important for the living and the dead. This intimacy, however, sometimes proves difficult - even repugnant. The real question then turns to what happens to these intimate and caring relations when change is presented.

Noriko-san and her family had decided to cremate her mother’s body and bring her ashes home in an urn, which would then be moved to the same urn as her husband’s. This relatively new process of cremating the body and moving the ashes from one urn to a special urn called *jīshigame* (one that is typically bigger from a conventional urn and adorned with decorations) is also called *senkotsu* today. It is also observed that people would sometimes wet the ashes with water or *awamori* (5) before moving it into a *jīshigame*. Noriko-san’s sentiment of traditional *senkotsu* being hard work, physically and mentally, is echoed amongst all of my interviewees. Due to that, most choose to do it the ‘new way’.

However, although the process is drastically changed, the central ethos remains the same - to rest them in their final stone homes or *jīshigame*. As long as that is done, the deceased can live a content afterlife, therefore giving them the chance to give back to the living and complete the ‘cycle of care’.

The final resting place matters. Stone dwellings, or *jīshigame*, in the West is where the dead would spend their afterlife, whereas the living inhabits the East. Furthermore, at the material level, cremation acts as a vehicle for generating a new form of human remains (Kujit et al., 2014). From a historical standpoint, in wider Okinawa, there had been a push for a transition to cremation by the local government for health and hygiene reasons just before the breakout of WW2 (Sakai, 2005). In post-WW2 Okinawa, the push for cremation also took the form of women’s liberation movements. The war, outbreak of malaria, and severe malnutrition lead to more death than Okinawa had seen before (ibid.). The communal village graves were overcrowded, and at the worst times, the bodies had to be washed hardly after a year (ibid.). Since in most places around Okinawa, *senkotsu* was viewed as a woman’s job (6), women were forced to conduct intensive labour, both physically and mentally. Consequently, the shift from *senkotsu* to cremation was well received, especially by the women, which made the bones ‘clean’ instantaneously (ibid.).

‘Burning of the body is a destructive act’ (Kujit et al., 2014:15). However, it also accelerates decay (Prendergast et al., 2006). This cuts off years for natural deterioration of the body, which takes at least 3-4 years in wind burials where in cremation it takes mere minutes. Although the transition to this more violent form of

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the mortuary rite was received at first with horror and apprehension, people in Aguni are starting to embrace this change. This is, however, mediated with the maintenance of more traditional ideologies that lie as the essence of the process of making gods and ancestors.

### To cremate: a kinder act?

*‘母がどうしても連れて帰りたいたいという気持ちが強かったので’ ‘My mother insisted on taking him home’ – her voice cracked. Noriko-san was sitting in front of me. She looked at me with her lips pressed hard together.*

*Noriko-san held back tears as she fiddled with her handkerchief in hand. Her father passed away twenty-five years ago in a hospital in mainland Okinawa, and Noriko-san knew that ‘if they [her family] didn't clean him, no one would'. However, this process wasn't mirrored for her mother when she passed away thirteen years ago, as cremation became more prominent and fewer people opted for a wind burial, which ultimately leads to senkotsu.*

*Still with her handkerchief in hand Noriko-san continued, ‘Senkotsu is hard work. And to be completely honest, my siblings and I never wanted to see our parents in a state like that’, she sighed. ‘We decided that we would clean her nevertheless, although it was different from what we did with our father’. The method of ‘cleaning’ that they opted for in the end was to cremate the body.*

Traditionally, cremating a body is inhumane, disrespectful, and painful to

watch. However, times are changing, and more people are opting for cremation. Part of this is due to the change in where people pass away now. According to Koja et al. (2012), the death rate recorded in Aguni from 1986 to 2006 was 284, with 81 of them (28.5%) passing away within the island and 203 (71.5%) passing away outside the island. Within those statistics, 90% of those that passed away on the island did so in their own homes, while most of those that passed away outside the island did so in hospitals. With only a small clinic within the island, most people with severe or terminal illnesses would have to go to the main island to get treated.

There is only one ferry per day, coming in and out of Aguni. If the families of the deceased do decide to bring back the corpse to the island, they have two options: to organise the body to be carried on the ferry or to charter a helicopter for some privacy. Either way, it is a relatively cumbersome and potentially expensive process. In contrast, to have the body cremated and brought over in an urn on the ferry is a much more comfortable and discreet process.

Practical and financial convenience is one of the reasons that people may choose cremation over wind burials, and ultimately, *senkotsu*. However, that is not the only one. Yet again, revisiting what Tanahara-san said when families and friends don't volunteer willingly to ‘put their hand in’ and help, it induces an acute sense of pain and pity for those that are mourning the deceased. Following M. Rosaldo's argument that emotion is not

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(5) Okinawan alcohol made out of rice

(6) The gender implications for *senkotsu* was less severe in Aguni, and men also participated in the practice although it was led by women most of the time (Koja et al., 2003)

something in opposition to thought, but as ‘*embodied*’ thoughts, thoughts seeped with the apprehension that ‘I am involved’ (Lutz and White, 1986), this affective response is vital to the changing tradition. Gaining insight from what my interlocutors have mentioned, the abandonment may be heartbreaking not only for the living but for the dead as well. This matters greatly. People in Aguni have (and still do to some extent) practised *senkotsu* out of highly affective motives –love, honour, and obligation. Many are choosing cremation for the same reasons. Hence, although there are practical matters that factor into the transition of *senkotsu* to cremation, I argue it is also out of the same care and concern for the deceased that drives the people to make the change, as well as make it a feasible and ethical option.

The materiality of the ashes is ‘dry’ in contrast to the ‘wet’ corpse (Hertz, 1960). As Hertz contextualises, through the violence of fire, the corpse is transformed and altered in substance to ashes, in which the deceased acquires ‘a new body’, ‘one which is stable and beyond further deterioration’ (ibid.). Furthermore, possessing the quality of dryness, it diminishes the ‘sorrows and dangers’ that the living may experience as a corpse decays (ibid.). Ashes are ambiguous in nature, being both a person and a corpse, yet not resembling either (Prendergast et al., 2006). However, this ambiguity and stable status of the ashes allow for the living mourners to interact with the deceased in a much safer manner. A deteriorating corpse invokes a strong emotional response in people that isn’t mirrored when interacting with ashes. Similarly, apparent from the concern voiced by Noriko-san, it may shield the deceased from feelings of embarrass-

ment or shame from exposing themselves in their decaying bodies.

However, this change in materiality and the lack of wetness alters the relationships people have with the remains. Previously, I have discussed the risk, disgust, and ambivalence that accompany the process of forging intimate relations and bonds. Dry ashes may aid to remove these negative emotions associated with interacting with the dead. However, it may also remove the element of intimacy. I argue here that feelings of fear and repulsion are not opposite or in contrast to intimacy, but intrinsic to it.

Durham formulates that, ‘Disgust creates intimacy, as much as the more common observation that intimacy creates disgust’ (2011:149). Durham, in discussing disgust in the anthropological imagination, expresses how disgust is dependent on proximity and hence intimate. For example, faeces become disgusting when we are faced with the prospect of having to touch, smell, or see it (ibid.). However, faeces in a contained space, out of reach, is unwanted, yet not disgusting (ibid.). The very act of feeling disgust is an impulse inhabiting both the body and the mind (ibid.). It is a ‘gut-feeling’ that is felt physically as well as something one imagines, through taking on the perspective of another or a different situation. The imagined idea of washing the bones may not be disgusting. However, to actually do it, and in some cases, the thought of having to wash the rotting flesh off of the bones, could be disgusting.

As Noriko-san said, *senkotsu* is hard work. Here, I would like to suggest that it is hard work because of its highly intimate nature. Of course, it is physically straining to wash all the 206 bones in the human body, but it is not merely the physicality of it. Intimacy is vulnerable. To



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engage in this empathetic endeavour to be disgusted, and therefore intimate, involves emotional labour. As a result, it may be that cremation is a kinder practice, both for the living and the dead. The dead are sheltered from the gaze of the living that would look at them in disgust, and the living are devoid from enacting such vulnerable, intimate practices.

The practice of *senkotsu* has changed drastically within the last couple of decades to accommodate the lives of the people today. Cremation, as it is much more convenient and immediate compared to the wind burials, has risen as the dominant form of the mortuary rite. However, some of the core beliefs that dictate the mourning process stay the same. This includes the importance of moving the remains to the final resting home. This core belief informs us on how the cyclical-ity and mutuality of care are enacted by the majority of the people today in Aguni.

However, the quality of intimacy is altered with the change in mortuary practices. Touch is no longer used, and the removal of repugnance towards a decaying body also removes a vital part of what made the relationship so intimate. Today, the mortuary practice of putting the dead to rest is still informed by more traditional beliefs, as people attempt different methods such as wetting the ashes, as mentioned above. These alternative methods of cleansing and purifying the bones such as wetting the ashes, provide a new way in which people interact and show care for the dead. I believe that these new ways of *senkotsu* still come from a place of deep affection and care. However, the quality of care presented is changed as dry ashes remove the possibility of intimacy. The juxtaposition of having care and fear, love and disgust, coexist was what made *senkotsu* so affective yet dan-

gerous. This quality is now changed, although the name *senkotsu* remains.

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# Scripted Politics • An analysis of the Scottish State's reliance of Charisma

## Academic Essays

### ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the goings on of First Minister's Questions in the Scottish Parliament. Through the realisation that this spectacle is largely semi-scripted I make the argument that the idea of the state relies on the charisma of events like this in order to encourage engagement, thereby reinforcing its existence. I argue that the alternative of pitting facts and figures against each other without the spectacle lacks the charisma to engage an audience in the idea of the state. I conclude that spectacle remains a useful analytic of state power.

**keywords:** power, scottish parliament, charisma, state

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On 12th May 1999 Scottish Parliament met for the first time in 292 years. This was following a 1979 referendum in which the people of Scotland were asked the following questions: 'Do you agree that there should be a Scottish Parliament as proposed by the Government?' and 'Do you agree that a Scottish Parliament should have tax-raising powers as proposed by the Government?' In response to both questions, the public answered yes, thus leading to the devolution of power from Parliament in Westminster to a Scottish Government in Holyrood. Decision making in areas such: agriculture, energy and tourism now lay in the hands of the Scottish Parliament. With creation of the Scottish Government came the creation of the position of First Minister of Scotland, the leader of the government in Scotland. Since 2014, Nicola Sturgeon of the Scottish National Party holds this position. Once a week the First Minister fields questions from Members of Scottish Parliament (MSPs) across the political spectrum. This event is open to the public and streamed online for all who

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wish to watch. It is the public performance of this event that I will be analysing in this paper.

## Act One

Parallels have been drawn between the performance of state power and theatre before (Geertz: 1980), and it is with this comparison that I will start my paper. The opportunity to notice similarities between going to see a play and First Minister's Questions (FMQs) started before even entering that chamber when my ticket is checked, and I am pointed towards my seat, much like in a theatre. The seating is tiered, and all facing towards to focal point down below. There is rope separating the VIP seats at one end of the gallery from us in the cheap seats, and like seeing any show, we are expected to sit and silently observe as the Ministers perform to us from down below. There are many ways the setting evokes the experience of seeing a play, although with the booing, applause and table slamming it more often resembles cheap pantomime rather than a night in the West End. What is a striking difference however is that it appears all the actors had trouble learning their lines since they are still holding their scripts.

The chamber is dominated by an arc of MSPs' desks facing towards the Presiding Officer in the centre. In the middle of the arc is the First Minister fielding questions with the confidence of someone at home on the stage. Around her groups of MSPs sit in groups according to their political party. Whenever the first minister moves either up to her lectern, or back down to her seat, her folder full of reams of facts and figures moves with her. The folder has an array of coloured tabs pointing out the side, and a

new question, like the start of the next act, is marked by the finding of a tab and the turning of pages to it. Even when she is stood up addressing the room, her eyes never move too far from the paper in front of her. She moves her gaze around the room, resting for a second, either on the MSP who delivered the question, or to the Presiding Officer and then back to the paper in front of her. Whatever she does her black folder is an anchor to which she always returns. The same can be said for the supporting members of the cast. All those with speaking parts are marked by their lecterns being flipped up and paper resting on the stand, and again when they do stand and speak their lines are, to a certain extent, read from their scripts.

While saying that what is spoken in the chamber is word-for-word what is written down in front of the ministers may be an exaggeration it does raise the question what would happen if the paper was removed from the lecterns? Would the ministers freeze and fall silent? Would they suddenly run out the room in embarrassment? Would Nicola Sturgeon implode? Unlikely, but the papers role in providing facts and figures that form the basis for the questioning and debate does beg the question of the importance of theatrical displays such as this. Could the bare facts not be pitted against each other and then posted online for public consumption? Alternatively, would it not be possible to write an algorithm that you feed statistics into and a fully formed debate is presented at the end? In this paper, I argue that the role of events such as this is to present the inner workings of political power to the public in a way that is engaging. Making the public engage helps the idea of the state reinforce its existence in the public imaginary. I want to quickly note here that it would be equally valid to analyse wheth-

er what is presented to the public is a warped version of the workings of political power, showing only what the state wants the public to see, but this is not the focus of this paper.

## Act Two

I want to start by briefly discussing the state, and what it is. Radcliffe-Brown's view of the state was that it was a fiction. He argued that the state "does not exist in the phenomenological world" instead must be considered a "collection of individual human beings connected by a complex system of relations" (Radcliffe-Brown 1955: xxiii). The idea that the state is not something that physically exists is something that Abrams takes forwards in his concept of the state idea. Abrams distinguished between the state-system, the practice and institutional structure of government, and the state-idea, the state as a social construction created by the collective belief in its existence (1988: 82). He viewed the state idea as a mask that blocks the public from seeing the workings of political power (1988: 79). This is where I want to depart from this line of thinking.

Where Abrams sees the idea of the state as a mask, I want to consider it a mouthpiece. For Abrams the state-as-mask served to conceal, I argue that the mouthpiece does the opposite. Spectacles such as FMQs vocalise and make public the inner workings of political power. They serve to present a version of the workings of political power to the public in a way which attempts to engage them, thereby reproducing the idea of the state. This idea manifests in the reading of 'scripts' as described above. The paper in front of the ministers can be considered to be workings of political power. They are

collections of facts, figures and statistics that show behind the scenes of politics, the evaluations of enacted policies, the work of think tanks advising of future policy and statistics representing the state of the country. FMQs serve to pit differing opinions from the inner political workings against each other, in a form of semi-scripted theatre that is consumed by the public. I want to consider the spectacle itself to represent the idea of the state. It is what is projected and purveyed to the public. It is one of the ways in which the public engage with the state, thereby reinforcing its existence. This leads us back to the question posed earlier of the need for this performance, why can political workings not just be presented to the public as they appear on the paper in front of the ministers? Or as debate formed by an algorithm which is fed by the information on the sheets and then distributed to the public?

## Act Three

When we consider the idea of the state as a mouthpiece rather than a mask, we need to consider what would make an effective mouthpiece? My answer to this question is charisma. Facts presented on paper do not have the charisma required to make the public engage. If the public do not engage with the debate, which is the idea of the state, then existence of the idea of the state comes into question. As with any social construction, it requires people to participate in it in order to reproduce its affect and therefore its existence. On the other hand, having ministers read the facts and figures and pit them against each other in theatrical display like this produces the charismatic affects needed.

Max Weber described three types



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of legitimate authority: Traditional, rational-legal and charismatic (1946). What is central to this essay is charismatic authority. Weber saw the authority as individual gains over the public due to their personality and charisma. Shils developed Weber's thinking seeing charisma as something that was more pervasive, existing within institutions rather than just in a single figure (Shils 1965: 200). Following this line of thought makes charismatic authority a spectre omnipresent throughout parliament, rather than solely contained in a leader. This authority is made tangible in the theatrics of FMQs. In the situation of parliament, charisma gives the spectacle of FMQs authority. The paper in front of the ministers cannot command authority to the same extent as it lacks charisma. It cannot stand up, call to arms, wave its fists or berate its opposition. It is just words on a sheet. The authority gained through charisma is what makes the people attend to the spectacle, they engage with the way that political workings are presented to them, therefore engaging with the idea of the state. It is through this that the idea of the state is reconstituted. If we turn back to the ethnographic descriptions with which we began, we can see that while politicians need their scripts that equally the scripts are in need of politicians. The facts on the pages require something to animate them, to make them catch the public's attention. Without the spectacle in which they verbally hurled back-and-forth across a room by the performers, they lack any of the authority that this charismatic event produces.

Comaroff and Comaroff posed the question "Has Foucault not convinced us that it is the panopticon, rather than the theatre, that holds the key to power in its modernist form?" (2004: 802). Through

their analysis of policing in post-colonial South Africa they demonstrate an inversion of the Foucauldian argument that power is diffuse, internalised and implicit (2004: 804). Comaroff and Comaroff argue that in South Africa the enacted spectacles of policing signify not a return to a pre-biopolitics power-as-spectacle, but instead that theatre has never been absent from modern policing (822- 823). They suggest that, spectacle attempts to, not only make the state tangible, but also produce a public that recognises its authority. I suggest we see a similar use of theatrics with the Scottish Parliament. The injection of charisma into the inner workings of power by publicised debate aims to produce a spectacle. A spectacle through which the public engage with the idea of the state, thereby reinforcing its existence. State power is enacted in a dramatic and centralised form through the animation of a 'script', rather than the diffuse and intangible power outlined in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977). While I make no attempt to argue the degree to which these spectacles are successful in engaging the public, I think we can see, as the Comaroff's do, that spectacle is still a useful analytic of power.

## Curtain

To close, the power of the state is performed in events such as FMQs, through a form of semi-scripted theatre. These theatricals are required in order to engage the public in the event. The idea of the state in these events serves to present the workings of political power to the public in a way that continues the state's effect on the public. This effect serves as to keep the idea of the state alive. The alternative of scripts without the specta-

cle, the display of raw facts and figures, lacks the charisma to engage the public. Failure to engage the public would result in the disappearance of the idea of the state, as it relies on people's engagement with the idea for its existence. This realisation enables us to see that even within move towards pervasive modern power spectacle retains its relevance. The comparison of the parliament to the theatre endures as a useful analytic of the politics of today.

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# Snapshots of Sanctuary ●

## Self-definitions of immigrant support in Eugene, Oregon

### Academic Essays

#### ABSTRACT

Since its inception in the 1980s, the US ‘Sanctuary Movement’ has been the source of contentious political debate and academic discussion. Although originally a clergy-based effort of transnational activism, ‘sanctuary’ has since diffused beyond the bounds of any one movement or social denomination. In this ethnography, ‘sanctuary’ is examined as a term inflected in diverse, instrumental, and meaningful ways by those participating in immigrant-support groups and non-profits in Eugene, Oregon. Research was conducted over a two-month period from August through September 2019 and funded by the London School of Economics’ Summer Ethnographic Project.

**keywords:** sanctuary, asylum-seekers, undocumented immigrants, social activism, volunteering, US immigration policy, moral regimes, contested legality

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On a crisp, sunny Saturday morning, I met an elderly couple for coffee at the Friendly Street Market, a place emblematic of Eugene, Oregon’s self-branding as the ‘Berkeley of the North.’ Proudly catering pricey ‘natural’ products to a clientele that generally tended towards the left of the political spectrum, it was the favored meeting place of several of my (retired, white, liberal) interlocutors. This particular pair had been recommended as valuable interviewees by contacts at the local church, which I had visited the previous week on a fact-finding mission regarding the congregation’s role housing Salvadoran immigrants during the 1980s Sanctuary Movement. After brief introductions, our discussion took on a comfortable cadence despite the somber content; they had both been active with the American organisation ‘Witness for Peace’ — Paul (1) as a long-term photographer and Pam as program director — spending years of their lives documenting the atrocities committed by the US-supported Contras against Nicaraguan civilians. Over the decades they had

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continued to make trips ‘down’ to reconnect with the individuals they had met in Central America and from their combined written and visual works had produced a book, published in 2013. Its glossy pages featured large black and white pictures of individuals and families, accompanied by parallel texts in Spanish and English, preserving the words ‘as they were spoken’ of those depicted.

With the sunlight slowly spreading across the patio and our coffees gone cold, I took out the book, newly purchased from a local bookshop. Paul rummaged in his black rucksack for his special ‘signature pen,’ while Pam revealed with a teasing smile that he brought it everywhere, even on their backpacking trips. An unpretentious black rollerball, this pen — used to inscribe a personal message from the author to the holder of the book representing the culmination of their lives’ work — had been carried up and down mountains on the back of a man well into his eighties. Though physically light, it was a weighty symbol of accomplishment, commitment, and continual aspiration, metaphorically contributing to the stoop in this man’s shoulders and the deep creases bracketing his still-bright eyes. These two ‘witnesses’ to decades of turmoil wrought by American hypocrisy carried the stories and images of their Nicaraguan interlocutors with them always, refusing to lay them down even in their hard-earned years of retirement. Perhaps it was also a comfort in these troubling times to possess *real*, tangible, memory-laden proof of the part they had played in counteracting the forces of xenophobia and neo-imperial-

ism in the best way they personally could.

That evening, with their book weighing down my own backpack, I climbed Skinner’s Butte, looked out over the city of Eugene — its leafy streets cast in the golden hue of dusk — and rewrote the (provisional) thesis of this paper. Against my expectations, it emerged as a response to the distinctly sceptical theories with which I had read in preparation for fieldwork. I’d like to call it my contribution to activist anthropology, but perhaps it is more of a personal challenge; right now, in this world we’ve inherited, it’s too easy to be a critic. Over the previous weeks, the word ‘well-intentioned’ had surfaced in my mind and emanated from my lips, a descriptor which seemed to capture the ambiguities performed by those seeking to ‘welcome’ and support immigrants into this self-consciously (largely) homogeneous locale. I realized then, however, that focusing on the ethically problematic consequences of those unintentionally replicating power differentials (see Bagelman 2013, Perla & Coutin 2010) drew attention away from the *context* of ambiguity — the state-led historical, legal and rhetorical infliction of uncertainty upon the everyday lives of individuals. The members of the immigrant-support networks I spoke with at length over my weeks in Eugene without exception articulated their actions not as driven by civil duty or allegiance to national and international legal precedents. Rather, they spoke of ‘waking up’, ‘feeling fear’ and a visceral and intimately-experienced *necessity* to act — explanations that in their reliance on abstractions (‘doing what’s right,’ ‘acting on what I believe’) reflected the insecurity wrought by (what many per-

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(1) All names have been changed to protect the identities of interlocutors.



ceive as) a radical, hateful regression of general American sentiment towards immigrants and the ‘Other’ since 2016.

The present moment is a profoundly and uniquely disillusioning one; this was reiterated by interlocutors who had lived through previous periods in which national policy provoked public ‘awakening’ and backlash. With unsettling rhetoric about ‘mass raids’ and ‘crack-downs’ emanating from the White House and little verifiable information on the extent of Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s (ICE) reach into local law enforcement and databases, the guarantee of secure spaces impenetrable to malign insurrection seemed as untenable as a sandcastle enduring the battering of wind and waves. What was, however, acknowledged as constant, reliable, and regenerative were the personal connections formed within the network of advocates to which they belonged. From what I have seen and heard, community organizing and outreach, even on the most informal level, has the potential to crystallize enduring social bonds, to magnify the granular and animate the mundane with the fifth dimension of compassion.

Emerging from these crystallization is a pluralization of a term previously used in the singular, proliferating ‘sanctuaries’ that are mutable, momentary, adaptive, and tenuous. The strands that temporarily construct and uphold these ‘safe places’ are woven from the fibres of interpersonal connection and empathy, conduits through which resources and services flow with refreshing reliability. In this way, activism — from grassroots initiatives to enactments of national policy-change — endures, and ‘well-intentioned’ advocates and allies sustain an affective counter-narrative contradicting increasingly-vocal outcries of intolerance and exclu-

sion. Their ‘sanctuaries’, exceeding spatial delineation, are aspirational models of what citizenship *could* look like, how ‘belonging’ *could* be defined. For now, their sanctuaries remain by definition places of exclusion, small-scale reprieves from the antagonism beyond their real or discursive boundaries. When the term is no longer needed — when the specter of deportation or hate-based violence has been vanquished — ‘sanctuary’ becomes obsolete. There is, then, also something hopeful in its present ambiguity.

## Setting the scene

In mid-June President Trump launched a campaign of escalation via Twitter, leveraging threats of imminent ‘mass raids’ against Congressional Democrats resisting extremist fortification of the southern border (McCausland & Ainsley 2019). These announcements created ripple effects throughout the US, reaching my hometown of Chapel Hill, North Carolina in a flood of email updates from watchdog groups like the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and text alerts from grassroots immigrant support groups warning of suspected ICE activity in the vicinity. On 12 August 2019, the eve of my first day of fieldwork in Eugene, Trump dropped another bombshell, announcing a new ‘public charge’ rule that would allow courts to cite immigrants’ use of public services, including Medicaid and food stamps, in determining their eligibility (i.e. *deservingness*) for legal status. Arriving in the wake of this announcement, I personally witnessed how networks that had become primary sources of information and physical resources for undocumented immigrants and asylum-seekers gauged the conse-

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quences for those they worked to protect and were propelled with dire expediency into the roles of first-responders.

Eugene, Oregon, population 171,000 (US Census 2020), is located forty miles inland of the Pacific, nestled between rolling evergreen hills generously called ‘mountains’, small-scale replicas of the giants peaking over the horizon. The tree-lined avenues — exemplary in their grid-patterned legibility — slope down from the hills, shaping the city into a bowl bisected by the Willamette River. Approaching the city-center, wide streets lined with scruffy bungalows give way to neat, multi-story Craftmans, and, finally, to polished office buildings. East of Downtown, multi-suite apartment complexes, brick-pillared behemoths, and perfectly manicured lawns compose the expansive campus of the University of Oregon. A city with many layers, Eugene is a ‘village’ where wind-chimes, Tibetan peace-flags, and liberal yard signs accompany overgrown vegetable and flower gardens; it is a university town, where the Duck is not a specimen of local wildlife but a ubiquitous grimacing mascot; it is a burgeoning capital — ‘Track Town, USA’ — expanding outwards and upwards as it prepares to host the 2021 World Track Championships; it is a safe-haven for liberals fleeing the ‘red’ hills and finding comfort in a bubble of urban ‘sanity’; and it is an encampment for the unhoused staking claim to street corners, underpasses and river-banks with tents, shopping carts and bikes overflowing with lifetimes of possessions. Eugene’s overwhelming ‘non-Hispanic white’ majority (estimated 83.3 per cent) spans income brackets and rates of homeownership (US Census Bureau 2020). If extreme poverty (often correlated with substance abuse) were to have a

colour here, it would (also) be white.

My interlocutors themselves fell largely within a segment of the educated middle-class that was also decidedly liberal, politically as well as in matters of fashion; hiking pants and tie-dye were not frowned upon as they would be in London. My ever-growing contacts list began with just a few names passed on by my primary adviser in the field, Dr. Kristin Yarris of the University of Oregon. By association, I was already ingratiated those composing the local asylum networks, with whom she had partnered as a Spanish-speaker with anthropological expertise in Latin America. I left each interview, informal discussion or community meeting with the details of further contacts scribbled on my notepad, so that when I tried to visually organise the collection of people whose words comprised the primary sources for this paper, I imagine something like a sprawling Venn Diagram with multiple overlapping and concentric circles of various sizes. Initially, when my focus was on grassroots volunteer groups, the vast majority of my interlocutors were retired, well past middle-aged, and white. Steadily, as my anthropological viewfinder widened in scope and timeframe to include staff members of local and state-wide legal aid centers and resource-providers my perception of the local immigrant-support system grew in depth and demographic diversity.

### Contemporary ‘sanctuaries’

At the time of my arrival in mid-August, the Friends of Sanctuary group was in the throes of an existential crisis. Having sprung into existence following the 2016 election with a large and diverse membership, the group had been slowly but steadily reduced to just a handful of retirees,

now forced to question a mission statement that had never before been formally articulated. In the self-ascribed position of allies, they had undertaken an impressive letter-writing campaign in response to a 2018 ballot measure, Measure 105, that would have overturned Oregon's three-decades-old Sanctuary Law, a unique and highly-significant policy criminalising the expenditure of public funds to assist ICE. Now that the Measure had been defeated and the 1987 law effectively reaffirmed, the 'steering-committee' found itself navigating uncertain waters. Around a rickety table outside the Friendly Street Market, ideas for a 'statement of purpose' were contributed with an air of mutual consolation for their waning potential as catalysts of communal mobilization.

Later, I met a committee member, Marta, for a one-on-one interview at her expansive home, which doubled as her massage studio. We sat on cushioned lawn chairs beside a landscaped pond complete with trickling waterfall, sipping unsweetened iced tea. She spoke in an energetic torrent punctuated by lively hand gestures. From the group's beginning, she confided, 'we recognized ourselves always as an *allied* organization and we were very, very careful to get our direction from the targeted communities, which here in Eugene-Springfield primarily would be the Latinx community,' adding with pragmatic acceptance that 'it's just time that we evolve.' To her the word 'sanctuary,' featured so deliberately in the group's name, meant 'fostering' and 'bolstering community... opening our hearts and literally our doors to people... because I have privilege.' To illustrate, she spread her arms as if to embrace the entirety of her beautiful sunlit garden and the spacious home behind us. She

seemed to be alluding to the tacit consensus reached in the meeting earlier — that the members felt their job was mainly to be informed and ready to 'jump into action' when the next 'big thing' happens. For now, they would be 'welcomers,' politically-informed allies, 'neighbors' who had over the years carved out their own safe spaces in comfortable homes and familiar meeting-spots, yet who remained partially suspended in the ideal realm of intention.

Interestingly enough, meeting bi-monthly in a musty, repurposed farmer's market in Eugene's Downtown, was a coalition whose members were *literally* opening their doors to asylum seekers who had legally crossed the southern border and were awaiting court hearings. At the time of writing, seven individuals, including a single mother with three children, were living in the homes of those (self-described 'empty nesters') 'privileged' with extra rooms and the flexibility of schedule allowed by retirement.

Settled into a velvety, overstuffed armchair in his dimly-lit sitting room — the antique shelves lining the walls practically sagging under the weight of innumerable tomes — \*Bill surveyed me through wire-rimmed glasses, the very image of a prolific professor mellowed with age. In measured, chronological prose he recounted the founding story of a local asylum network, starting with a friend's spontaneous decision to 'go to the border and see what's going on there [herself].' Realizing the extent of need amongst those without destination or support state-side, she began to hand out her cell-phone number, 'not really knowing what she was getting herself into.' In the end, an asylum-seeker finding herself stuck in a detention center in Colorado had called the number as a last resort,

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and a subsequent ‘living room meeting of friends’ resulted in the first asylum ‘sponsorship,’ taken on by a group yet to be named. Soon, one sponsorship turned into several as sponsored asylum-seekers passed on the group’s contact information to friends and family in detention; Bill reflected, ‘it was a learning curve for all of us.’ Particularly challenging was the enlistment of dedicated sponsors and the continuous fundraising required to absorb the fluctuating costs of bonds and legal fees ‘because the federal government keeps changing the rules.’ When Bill continued his narrative, however, it was with the gung-ho attitude of a pioneer happening upon unsettled territory:

*“I think that's one of the great strengths of grassroots operations, is that 'when you ain't got nothing, you've got nothing to lose', as the song goes, and we're highly adaptable—we don't have to worry about covering our overhead. We're fluid in terms of membership. We're only now talking about getting structure, in terms of an organisational structure. So, it's been very egalitarian, which has been really empowering to anyone who shows up— to see that if they put in some energy, they aren't low on the totem pole, they're just like the rest of us trying to figure things out. And we're a little paranoid about the degree of digital evidence we have about who we are. Because we never know if it's going to cross the line into more repression.”*

Immersed in the story of the network’s spontaneous unfolding in conditions likened to 1930s Germany, I was thrown when Bill added, as a side-note, that I probably wouldn’t meet the ‘19-year-old kid’ who was sleeping upstairs; she tended to sleep late. Awakened suddenly to the reality of sponsorship, I listened with rapt attention as he

elaborated – albeit briefly – on his experience as host. Speaking for the first time with a hint of trepidation, his gaze breaking with mine, he described his association with the asylum-seeker upstairs as a ‘father-daughter relationship’, admitting that it has been ‘curious’ navigating his new status as sponsor. He revealed that, at first, she had felt ‘she had to ask me for permission for everything’ but had since ‘made some bad choices’ inducing ‘some stress that is typical of a father-daughter relationship, I suppose.’ My attention piqued by his use of kinship terms, I heard echoes of a conversation that had occurred at the beginning of our interview.

About an hour earlier, after I had launched into my usual self-introduction, his cellphone had rung shrilly and, after a short exchange with the caller, had been placed on ‘speaker’ for my benefit. Elizabeth was calling to report on a scheduled ICE check-in to which she had accompanied Maria, a young Guatemalan asylum-seeker soon to move into Elizabeth’s home. She mentioned that the first officer they had encountered had been ‘quite nice’ – ‘well not *nice* but also not *unfriendly*.’ While in the office waiting for Maria’s paperwork to be processed, they met a Salvadoran family: a woman, her husband – facing immediate deportation – and their two children. Elizabeth, breathless, emoted that ‘her heart was just bleeding’ for this young family. Before exiting the office, she had given the tearful couple a ‘big hug.’ Shaken by what they had witnessed – ‘we were just *devastated*’ – she and Maria were now going to ‘do something fun’, ‘maybe a walk by the river to just relax.’ When I met Elizabeth in person a few days later, Maria had moved in and Elizabeth was introducing herself widely as a ‘proud mother’ of ‘[her] dear Salvadorian refugee.’



The kind of ‘sanctuary’ manifested in Bill’s pleasantly cluttered house was, then, a front for much more complex processes at work on both practical and affective levels. Not only were the wheels of financial support and volunteer assistance in need of continual greasing, the potential for expansion continued to stretch the group outwards to encompass more and more asylum-seekers with connections to those already in Eugene. From its inception, the asylum network’s version of ‘sanctuary’ was intimately personal, initiated by a physical connection at the border and sustained and expanded similarly through profound emotional connections to specific individuals. Bill and Elizabeth’s ‘sanctuaries’ were also arenas for negotiations of power and belonging, as sponsors suddenly became responsible for the physical safety of people whom they had known prior to arrival only through second-hand accounts of trauma endured in their home countries. Bill, aware that the term ‘rescue’ contained problematic implications, nonetheless used it defiantly, hinting at meaning behind his designations of ‘father’ and ‘daughter.’ While strangers were required first to prove their trustworthiness or reciprocal affection, for such intimate relatives as ‘daughters’ sacrifices were made without contestation or second-guessing. Furthermore, the parent-child designation held a certain stability and immutability hard to come by amidst the current political onslaught. At the ‘Welcoming Potluck’ where I next encountered Elizabeth, I took note of her maternalistic remarks and embraces, which Maria received stiffly and with a straight face. Despite this apparent disconnect, however, I saw in Elizabeth’s actions an attempt to integrate this new arrival into her own vision of ‘safety,’ in

which the responsible, capable parent unconditionally protected her ‘jewel’ (Elizabeth’s words) to the extent of her ability.

## Defining ‘sanctuary’ amidst structure

This concept of ‘sanctuary’, connoting a *feeling* of safety brought on by moments of demonstrated social connectedness, was echoed even amongst those who held staff positions at certified 501(c)(3) non-profits or were central nodes of established, time-tested community organisations. In these organisations, higher degrees of bureaucratic stratification and tighter protocol helped circumvent, or at least gloss over, the miscommunications, ethical conflicts, and logistical delays that were common side-effects of ‘egalitarian’ decision-making processes. The data I collected through interviews with staff and coordinators showed, however, that the reliance of these non-profits on finite grants and their accountability to ever-changing federal immigration restrictions, accompanied by the risk of greater collective liability, shrouded their work in an uncertainty similar to that felt by more informal networks.

The day after I arrived, I met with Marisa, a staff-member at *Centro*, a local non-profit located outside the city centre. Sitting across from me in a windowless room furnished with a mismatched sofa set and a pile of children’s toys in one corner, her expression remained set in a pragmatic, emotionless mask, her eyes glazed with fatigue. Her own take on ‘sanctuary’ was issued firmly: ‘it’s problematic’. She said that it was a ‘beautiful rallying-cry for liberal allies,’ and simultaneously heard by those on the ‘right’ as



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‘free for all.’ In both cases, the term was deceiving and unrealistically totalising. In her opinion, Oregon’s ‘Sanctuary Law’ was vaguely worded in comparison with the laws of other ‘sanctuary states,’ and its ambiguities brought undue uncertainty into the lives of immigrants and their supporters. According to her intel, ICE was already waiting outside courtrooms and churches, often not identifying themselves as federal immigration agents — ‘how can we predict what they will do next?’. Simply, her position was that ‘sanctuary’ as a term could not describe *reality* for those living in fear.

To her, if it is to retain any relevance, ‘[sanctuary] is all about offering protection’, with family preparedness being central to physical protection and emotional well-being. She pulled out a large three-ring binder and began flipping through the contents: tables for families to complete with important contact, medical and identification info, slots for copies of identification documents, and several pages of ‘Know Your Rights’ information. She handed me copies of the pages containing the contact information for local, state-wide and out-of-state legal aid and counselling services. First compiled following large-scale immigration raids in the area in 1997, the packet was intended not to provide immigrants with legal advice, but to make them aware of the tools already at their disposal and to consolidate these in an accessible format that could be used in the case of emergency, as well as to protect them from fraud. ‘Sanctuary’ to her was entirely contingent on the possession of information on legal procedure and personal rights; it was her duty to provide the basic materials from which her clients could build ‘sanctuaries’ of their own. With these materials individuals could insure their homes and family

members to the best of their ability, by taking making legible what they *already* had. In worst-case scenarios, these documents could evidence a generally- recognisable kind of belonging; neat tables and laminated IDs pieced together a life with local connections that would clearly be complicated and destructive to uproot, as attested to poignantly by a woman whose reputation as an anchor of community preceded her.

Carmen, whom I met on a resplendent late-August day at her workplace in Cottage Grove, a town in southern Lane County, was a tiny woman whose slight figure was magnified in my eyes by both her dynamism and other interlocutors’ extolling words. Seated at a small table in the corner office she shared with Roberta, her long-time partner at the Family Resource Center, she described in strongly accented English the Language Learner’s Program that she led every Friday for immigrant children and their parents. Without a hint of arrogance, she described her own centrality within the community of Mexican families that had begun settling in the area in the 1990s, now expanding to include a growing Guatemalan population. She and Roberta had been at the Center for twenty-six years, forming partnerships across public service and legislative agencies, a constancy that was critical to their role as trusted advisers. When she put on a legal clinic to inform parents of their rights under the new ‘public charge’ policy, parents actually came, *and* they left, in her words, ‘relaxed’, knowing there were people there who they could call on in case their status or use of resources were questioned. Because she was also on good terms with the local police chief, she gave each family a contact card with her name and phone number; if they were apprehended or threatened by law

enforcement, she could be called on to ‘negotiate’ on their behalf. ‘Sanctuary’ in the context of the Resource Center was a roster of familiar, dedicated support-people, a tool-kit of information on rights and preparedness, *and* a place where basic needs — cans of beans for cooking traditional dinners and child-seats for toddlers — were acknowledged and fulfilled. In bringing together all these components, ‘the center allows you be human.’

With an air of finality, Carmen performed a vivid metaphor; her hands spreading across the surface of the table, she explained ‘this [America] is a huge wound and it’s bleeding, but during those three hours [on Fridays] we’re putting a little Band Aid on a little corner of the wound.’ With one hand she cupped a ‘little corner’ of the table – the space they were protecting. ‘In that moment, they’re safe,’ she concluded. Triumphantly, Roberta added ‘and they walked today!’, meaning the mothers who had come to the center’s open house. They had walked with the confidence that they would arrive safely at this ‘sanctuary’ created through the hard work and compassion poured into the space by Carmen and Roberta. When Carmen had first moved here, Cottage Grove was ‘mostly Caucasian and scary,’ but by offering her services, as so many were now doing across the county, she immediately began forming connections that grew deep and branched outwards like the roots of a tree, anchoring herself in this place and becoming the supportive trunk for new growth.

## Conclusion

Alma — her tanned, strong-boned face bring to mind portraits of Mayan

nobility — acted as another such node of inter-communal contact in her leadership position within Eugene’s *Grupo Latino de Acción Directa*, a group providing updated Know Your Rights information and connecting immigrants with local service providers. Sitting across from me at a local bakery, she described her decision to offer her translation services to the above-mentioned church during their 1980s Sanctuary effort as a ‘step... into thirty years of war.’ For many of my interlocutors, involvement in local advocacy and activism had thrown them onto a battlefield, more literal for some than others. Whether by visiting war-zones, crossing physical borders or attempting to break down less visible walls locally, they had dedicated vast sums and years of their lives to cover ‘little corners’ of a weeping wound that refused to heal; to many, it seemed it had become increasingly infected in recent years with the germs of xenophobia propagated by the highest governmental authorities. Motivation has waxed and waned along with the activity and effectiveness of the groups composing Oregon and Lane County’s immigrant-support networks. The present moment, as well as the best path forward remain unclear and distinctions between the ideal and the real (and everything in between) continue to be contested on a daily basis by individuals who have made it their mission to expand the scope and cohesiveness of these multiple ‘sanctuar-ies.’ Alma, her posture straight and her gaze steady, brought it all together:

*“...to me a lot of that sanctuary stuff for the state and even Eugene, it’s, it’s symbolic. Does that that fix everything? And does that keep ICE from coming in? Does that keep our community from feeling any safer? I think probably more important than anything is*

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*that it's an important message that our community needs to hear in order to be reminded that they're not alone....*

*...being able to be in front of the families and to talk directly and have them see what you have for them is important because it's a reminder. One is, the resources are important to them. The other thing is then they can see a collective of individuals who are there for them, who support them, who have resources for them, so that they don't feel alone."*

Almost as an afterthought, she added without breaking the stride of our conversation, 'And the 'sanctuary' stuff has mostly been for *me*; I connect around that with our allies.'

And here is where I read the potential for a different 'belonging' than that recorded in documents and sealed with official stamps of approval, one that stretches across backgrounds, ethnicities, languages and potentially even national borders. At the center of this model is the individual and their own definitions and feelings of what 'safety' and 'security' entail. People become connected by threads of face-to-face recognition and personal interaction, entwining over years or — in the case of great external pressure — months into tapestries of solidarity. As my interlocutors have variously described, 'safe' places can only be created by those who *themselves* feel secure and supported in constructing them, and the construction process continues after immigrants have arrived, weaving those involved into the fabric of sponsors' and supporters' everyday lives. In the case of sponsorship, this interweaving has been rushed such that tears appear that require effortful mending, even some careful unraveling. It is a learning- while-doing, without

the mentorship that more established agencies and embedded individuals like Carmen are able to provide through decades of experience and networking. Yet, uniting all these efforts is the reliance on personal relationships and the power of sentiment and empathy to create moments in which *care* is directly felt by those who need it most. Some interlocutors ascribed these moments to the divine while others referred to preparedness packets and legal aides. Regardless, each of their unique combinations of practicality and aspiration had driven them to action, enacting visions of 'sanctuary' that defy essential definition, yet all push back against the singularity and intransigence of 'illegality.'

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My fieldwork was carried out as part of an ongoing project on Oregon sanctuary and solidarity conducted by University of Oregon professor Kristin Yarris, the principal investigator for this research. The project has IRB approval and clearance for ethical research with human subjects. Kristin Yarris and her contacts in Oregon served as invaluable mentors and advisers in the course of my participant observation, and I thank them dearly.

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# Soft Activism • Exploring pedagogic engagement in the 'clean-tech playground'

## Academic Essays

### ABSTRACT

This paper will explore pedagogic engagement in a Dutch sustainability site, De Ceuvel. Self-labelled as the 'clean-tech playground', De Ceuvel is a publicly accessible site which houses scientists, creatives and a café, and whose ambitions focus on the transition towards a sustainable future, given the context of the current ecological crisis. Drawing upon a two-month research internship, I suggest that sensory and aesthetic engagements are fundamental to the site's function by allowing pedagogic transmission. I introduce the concept 'soft activism' as a means of exploring pedagogic engagements and the activist sensorium.

**keywords:** sustainability, 'soft activism', pedagogy, aesthetics, senses

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In Amsterdam's Noord district, nestled amongst willow trees and sat on the water's edge, is a community of land-bound houseboats. This is De Ceuvel: the 'clean-tech playground'. Far from the city-centre's wobbly canal houses and hordes of tourists, a different picture emerges. De Ceuvel is a scruffy sanctuary, a green 'urban oasis' in a jungle of concrete. Like most of the land on the northern border of Amsterdam's river IJ, the area has an industrial history.

Throughout the twentieth century, the site that now houses De Ceuvel operated as a shipyard where boats were hauled ashore from the canal to be cleaned. The lack of environmental regulations at the time left the soil polluted with heavy metals, and the site was subsequently uninhabited until the early 2000s. However, after the municipality created a competition for a free ten-year tender for the site's development in 2012, it was collaboratively transformed by the winning team of landscape designers, architects, and a sustainability consultancy firm into the 'regenerative urban oasis'

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that it is today (De Ceuvel 2019). De Ceuvel's surrounding Buiksloterham district area is being rapidly developed with a distinct emphasis on sustainability, focusing on 'circular, smart and bio-based development' (Metabolic 2019). The area is also riddled with issues of gentrification as land prices rise dramatically.



Figure 1: Map of Amsterdam and de Ceuvel (Google Maps 2019)

De Ceuvel opens out to a café and a colourful courtyard, with people sitting outside enjoying rare bursts of Northern-European sunshine. Steel tracks are still etched into the concrete of the courtyard; a reminder from when they were once used to transport the ships. Occasionally, the concrete cracks to reveal tufts of grass and a slight orange smear as the remaining polluting metals stain the ground. The site's three zones are illustrated on figure 3. On the left is the greenhouse and tech-boat, which grow herbs for the café. There is also a houseboat called 'Metabolic Lab', which provides

space for workshops, film screenings, and talks. In the centre are the café and courtyard, used for larger events, such as De Ceuvel's annual festival. On the right are thirteen land-bound houseboats that act as offices for scientists and entrepreneurs working on sustainability projects, and as government-subsidised studio spaces. A winding path, elevated above a tangle of elephant grass and willow trees, circles the houseboats. The greenery is referred to as the purification park due to the processes of phytoremediation that the plants undertake, removing pollutants from the soil. Together, these elements comprise the 'clean-tech playground'.



Figure 2: The De Ceuvel courtyard, with café on the left, and steel tracks in the foreground (Source: Alice 2019)

De Ceuvel is registered as a 'broedplaats' [breeding ground] in line with Dutch governance terminology. Thijs, the 'cultural programmer' at De Ceuvel, explained the oxymoronic nature of a 'broedplaats' as a 'government-sanctioned free space'. Typically, 'broedplaats' are sites which were previously squatted, and have subsequently been granted legal status by the municipality. As a 'broedplaats', De Ceuvel houses scientists and entrepreneurs developing new sustainable technologies,

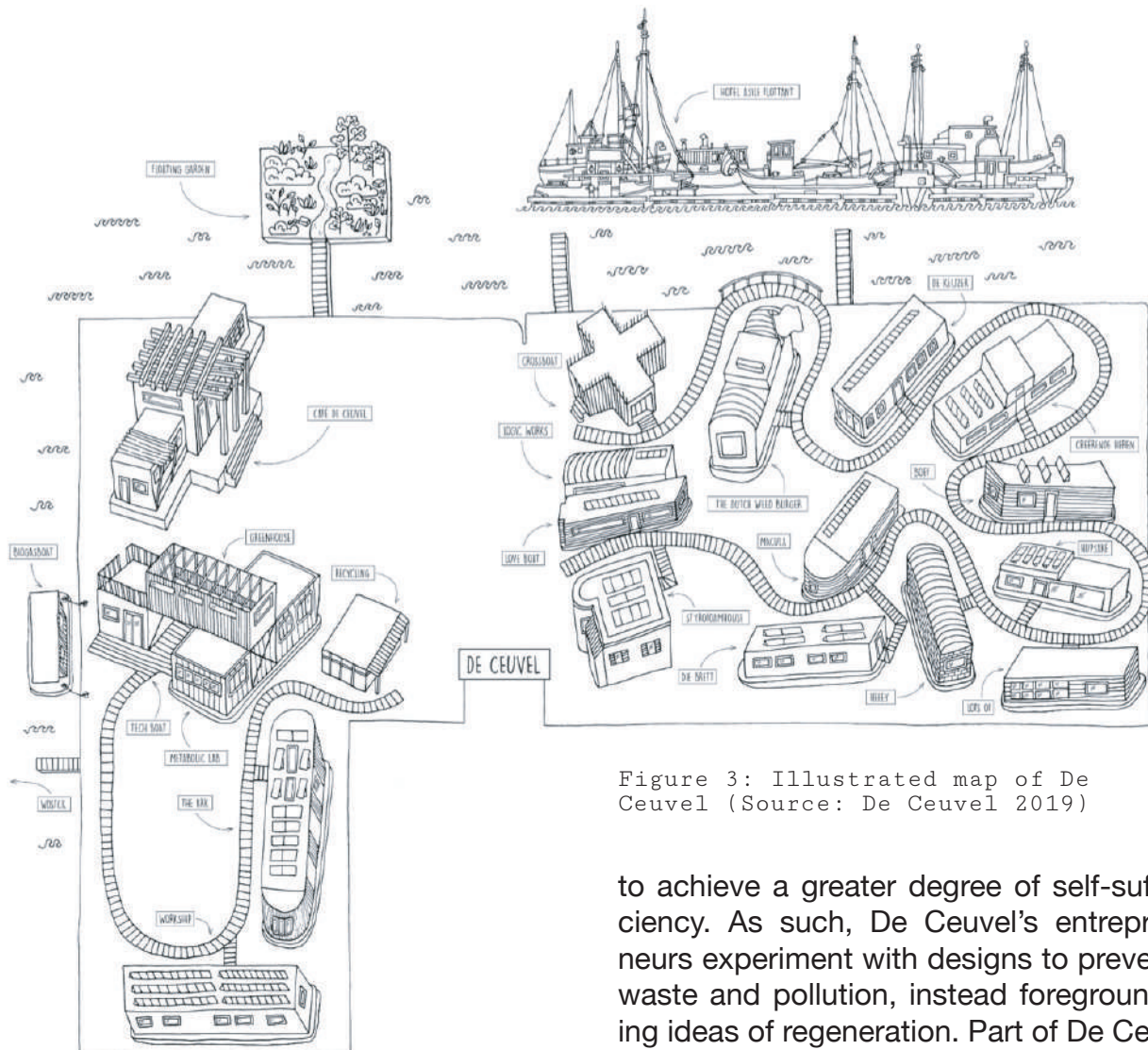


Figure 3: Illustrated map of De Ceuvel (Source: De Ceuvel 2019)

and creative activists encouraging people to engage with these developments as a means of collaboratively inspiring the transition towards more sustainable ways of living. The various components of De Ceuvel do not work in isolation; instead, they are in conversation with one another. My paper focuses on these intersections, asking how modes of engagement function within De Ceuvel.

De Ceuvel's vision of sustainability revolves around an ambition to be materially circular, which is to say that material waste is reduced and reused, in an effort

to achieve a greater degree of self-sufficiency. As such, De Ceuvel's entrepreneurs experiment with designs to prevent waste and pollution, instead foregrounding ideas of regeneration. Part of De Ceuvel's ambitions revolve around the premise that 'not only the transition to a circular economy and society is a technical change, but also a cultural one. Through independent art and cultural programming we hope to inspire kindred spirits and to involve them in a larger, growing movement from innovation to a sustainable country and a world' (De Ceuvel 2019). The site hosts a variety of film screenings, activist meetings, arts exhibitions, workshops, and an annual festival, all open to the public, as a means of inspiring this transition through experimentation and creativity, in the hope of making sustainability 'tangible, accessible



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and fun' (De Ceuvel 2019). De Ceuvel is unconventional, and occupies a unique middle-ground between activism, education and leisure, resulting in ambiguities about the site's identity. I suggest that De Ceuvel is best understood as a utopian social development project, expanding comprehensions of social action beyond protest or formal institutional structures. As a co-founder of De Ceuvel, Daan, described, their vision was intended to be 'kind of inspirational, or inviting, like, this is what's possible!' Taking a cue from discussions of 'soft speech' (Mitchell 2018) and 'soft science' (de Costa & Philip 2008), I propose that the concept 'soft activism' is fruitful, and I will use this throughout my analysis. De Ceuvel's activism can be described as soft because it is informal, experimental and accessibly designed, attempting to traverse the confines of traditional activist projects. It is a form of activism that is intentionally porous to both disciplinary boundaries and material sensitivities. To the best of my knowledge, this terminology has not been deployed in anthropology hitherto.

Amidst the recent rhetoric within sustainability and environmental activism that 'the science has spoken' (IPCC 2019) regarding the ongoing ecological crisis, De Ceuvel's emphasis on non-scientific and non-technological processes seems curious. Intrigued by the ambition to transition to a circular economy and society through cultural means, my research asks why non-scientific and non-technological processes are crucial to De Ceuvel's sustainability mission, and how these relate to the site's pedagogic intention. Throughout my analysis, I use the phrase 'pedagogic intention' in relation to De Ceuvel's socially aspirational ambitions to 'transition to a circular economy and soci-

ety' (De Ceuvel 2019). This intention encompasses the desire to change people's ways of thinking and acting in the name of sustainability relying on processes of education. This paper responds to the current ecological crisis and analyses modes of engagement with De Ceuvel's message of sustainability.

The term sustainability is highly contested, with Tsing recently exclaiming, "sustainability" is the dream of passing a liveable earth to future generations, human and nonhuman. The term is also used to cover up destructive practices, and this use has become so prevalent that the word most often makes me laugh and cry' (Tsing [in Brightman & Lewis] 2017, 51). Indeed, there is much debate over the construction of scientific truths in relation to sustainability, and inconsistencies within the realm of sustainable development and environmentalisms (Haraway 1988; Ingold 2019; Brightman & Lewis 2017). I use the term sustainability throughout this paper to mirror De Ceuvel's vision. This paper focuses on the ways in which people can be made to see, and potentially made receptive to, this vision. Brightman and Lewis' *The Anthropology of Sustainability* (2017) provides a comprehensive analysis of the complexities and critiques of contemporary understandings of sustainability, and it is this body of literature that this paper contributes to by relating it to questions of pedagogy and aesthetics.

In line with Haraway (1988), I do not claim to be a neutral observer, and hope that a thorough explication of my own positionality enables my work greater validity. The controversiality of engaged anthropology has been a topic of much contention (Sanford & Angel-Ajani 2006; Low & Merry 2010). As Low and Merry have pointed out, activist and academic

endeavours are ‘never autonomous’ (Low & Merry 2010: S211). Hale has forwarded a vision of ‘activist research as a method through which we affirm a political alignment with an organised group of people in struggle and allow dialogue with them to shape each phase of the process’ (Hale 2006: 97). Despite my consideration of De Ceuvel as a site of ‘soft activism’ where people choose to submit themselves to De Ceuvel’s message and are under no obligation to change their actions accordingly, elements of Hale’s assertion ring true. Throughout my research I similarly aligned myself with De Ceuvel’s ambitions through my interests and actions, enabling ongoing dialogue about their ambitions to create a more sustainable future.

## Sensory and aesthetic engagements

*“For me, as a person, it makes a lot more impact if I’m actually here, if I actually touch it, walk around it, and also... it’s a bit like ‘uhh’ [she rolls her eyes and points her palms to the sky], but feel a certain type of energy, or feel bonds... you know, when you get here and you feel like ‘aah’, this urban oasis thing, that’s something you have to experience... it really helps to be here, to feel it...”*

Luna, De Ceuvel team

Luna’s comment illustrates the importance of bodies, senses, and emotions; people’s ability ‘to feel it’, in their experience of De Ceuvel’s vision of sustainability. This paper focuses on material experiences, where the sensate body meets the sensual world. I address two lines of analysis. First, I consider the role of the sensory body in relation to recent anthropologies of embodiment and

emplacement. This builds upon the spatial turn in anthropology and contributes to recent calls to re-ground analyses of pedagogies in material practice (Gilbert 2013; Hasse 2015; Ingold 2000; van de Port 2011; Webster & Wolfe 2013). Second, I propose that ‘aesthetic formations’ (Meyer 2009) are essential within De Ceuvel, creating modes of feeling together and encouraging new ways of thinking and acting (Eagleton 1990; Webster & Wolfe 2013). As such, this paper argues that sensory interactions and ‘aesthetic formations’ are crucial to understanding De Ceuvel as a space of pedagogic transmission and transformation.



Figure 4: Sander in the greenhouse (photograph by author)

## A sensory reality

Sander sat in the corner of the greenhouse, bathed in blue light from the reflective plastic on the ceiling. He is in charge of the aquaponics system; an experiment where a wall of plants and herbs are grown inside the greenhouse. Above the greenery, an irrigation pipe feeds water down through the layers of basil, mint, and edible flowers. Fish



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faeces from a tank below the planters is carried through this pipe, enriching the soil with nitrates and phosphates. This same water is purified by the plants as they absorb the nutrients, allowing it to be returned to the fish, in turn allowing the cycle to be repeated. Sander and I discussed his project amongst the soundscape of rhythmically falling water droplets, breathing in the thick, wet air. Sander explained why he thought visitors to De Ceuvel liked to see it:

*“Well, I think it’s because you have plants in here, you have life going on, in the middle of a city... I think that’s what attracts people, it’s this green wall, you come in and you have the sound of running water, all of this life going on, the smell... so it’s catchy, it’s interactive, it’s real.”*

He went on to say:

*“You can read about it on the internet, of course. That’s what I’ve done as well. But there’s another thing when you come in the place, and you see how it works. You see how the plants are growing, hear how the water runs, you see the screws... Again, you are working with the physical rather than the abstract world”.*

Sander’s comments linked the senses with the ‘real’. Similarly, Aya, the landscape architect who maintained the purification park, explained; ‘I think that being here adds a lot to the experience, and when people see it, it’s not theory anymore, we did it!’ Again, her emphasis lay on the ‘real’, and ‘[doing] it’, emphasising practice over theory. Sander and Aya’s focus was located in their immediate, material world, reliant on the body as experiencing (Csordas 1990).



Figure 5: The “green wall” (photograph by author)

This reliance on sensory participation as a mode of understanding was not limited to those working at De Ceuvel. One of my interviewees, a woman named Alice, similarly highlighted the importance of the body in understanding the ‘real’. She first visited De Ceuvel accompanying a group of French delegates who had come to learn about the projects and experiments taking place, acting as their translator. I sat with her after their visit, discussing how she had experienced the site. She explained:

*“I feel that the kind of atmosphere it creates, it totally opens you up, to then looking at things and seeing what they really are, so then you see the [bio-]filter, and the whole logic of this, the houseboat, how it filters the water... it’s sort of a physical experience, you know? The body becomes part of the understanding... it feels very kind, very inspirational, and then you experience it fully, the knowledge that is being passed on...”*

Like Sander and Aya, her comments pointed to the importance of her body and senses in her learning process, and the destabilisation of a sensorium allowing new ways of seeing. Her words seem strikingly similar to those of van de Port in his discussion of the Bahian Candomblé, where ‘revelations that come to you, engulf you, unsolicited, unpredictable, as an immediate fully embodied knowing,’ as part of his discussion of the ‘really real’ (van de Port 2011: 12, 23). Despite van de Port’s ethnography centring on mystical and religious experiences, both observations point to the need to seriously consider bodily engagements as central to knowledge processes. From these examples, I propose that embodied participation is essential in creation of the De Ceuvel ‘reality’; the ‘real’ is reliant on bodily and sensory interaction, emplaced within the material world.



Figure 6: The bio-filters used to clean the water used in the houseboats (photograph by author)

As Thijs explained, ‘sometimes you really

have to experience something in real life... when you’re here, then you really feel and see it, and it becomes tangible, it becomes reality.’

Building upon Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the preobjective (1962) and Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice (1977), Csordas has argued ‘the body is not an object to be studied in relation to culture, but is to be considered as the subject of culture, or in other words as the existential ground of culture’ (Csordas 1990: 5). However, there has recently been a notable shift away from the body as the subject of culture, to encompass emplaced understandings of our environment (Harrison 2000; Ingold 2000; Ingold & Vergunst 2008; Low 2003; Pink 2011). In line with this, Low has proposed that ‘embodied space is the location where human experience and consciousness takes on material and spatial form’ (Low 2003: 9). I suggest that within De Ceuvel the body is actively embedded and engaged in material surroundings, both producing cultural form, and acting as a means for expression (Ingold & Vergunst 2008: 2).

The emphasis on ‘tangible’ world-making manifests itself also in the belief that traditional academic approaches are disconnected from the ‘real’. Almost everybody working at De Ceuvel was highly educated, determined, and ambitious in their utopic visions. However, there was ongoing dissatisfaction with written, traditional, academic forms of communication and engagement surrounding sustainable education. After having been away from the site for a few days, Sander, the man from the greenhouse, asked where I had been. I explained that I had gone to the library in order to do some research. This sparked an ongoing joke about how pointless my ‘library time’ was in comparison to the

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processes and practices taking place within De Ceuvel. Similarly, as my field-work drew to a close, one of the De Ceuvel team questioned, 'Why are you going back to University? The earth is dying!' I recognise this was not a critique of me personally, nor the calibre of university output, which those working at De Ceuvel valued very highly. Instead, it continued the emphasis on emplaced participation in De Ceuvel's vision of sustainability. Aya explained, '[you have to take the] knowledge that's there from the universities and just use it practically!' calling for implemented practice as opposed to theory; prioritising sensory engagement in one's environment. In this sense, there is a de-privileging of written text in favour of embodied and experienced action. Thijs explained:

*"Yeah, I mean, of course we have to get information to the people, and to inspire them, and also give them something practical which they can actually build in their homes if they want to... We do feel this sort of missionary urge to give people information, and make them change their lives, and knowledge is a really important aspect of that"*

Thijs's comments suggest that De Ceuvel can be understood as a transitory space, enabling the move from theory to practice, in order to achieve their pedagogic ambitions. Of course, there is a distinct irony in writing about sensations and corporeality whilst relying on language that contradicts the inversion of knowledge previously outlined. Van de Port discusses his discontent regarding 'an academy of science where logocentrism reigns unchallenged' critiquing the 'fiction that a scientific discourse offers the privileged forms to represent and come to know reality' (Van de Port 2011:

15). Similarly, Barad has criticised that overwhelming power of language to 'determine what is real' (Barad 2003: 802). It is possible to find a commonality between these authors and those at De Ceuvel. World-making practices at De Ceuvel do not centre on words. They centre on emplaced learning, situated in the body, and embedded within material practices as a mode of 'being-in-the-world'. These processes add weight to the spatial turn in the anthropology of emplacement, calling for the need to situate analyses of the body within the sensate, material world. It is in this sense that De Ceuvel's 'soft activism' encompasses a mode of being-in-the-world.

Drawing upon recent theories of New Materialism, Hasse calls for the reconceptualization of analyses of learning within material practices. She proposes that 'cultural learning is moving matter changing our material and conceptual (as well as visible and emotional, tangible and motivational, present and future) fields of attention' (Hasse 2015: 296). The pedagogic emphasis on sensory and 'sensational forms' (Meyer 2009) creating 'reality' develops Lave and Wenger's suggestion that 'learning is a way of being in the social world, not a way of coming to know about it' (Lave & Wenger 1991: 24). Within the De Ceuvel community of practice, pedagogic processes are dependent on embedded world-making practices, and reliant on sensory engagement. In this sense, being-in-the-world can be understood in the dialectical sense of 'becoming' (Low 2003: 14).

### 'Aesthetic formations': ways of seeing and modes of feeling

One afternoon, two visitors sitting



at the De Ceuvel café stopped me as I walked through the square. They were curious about the site, having never visited before, and asked me if I knew anything about it. I offered to show them some of the projects taking place and explained the ideas and ambitions behind the site's conception. As we walked together, the first woman exclaimed, '[it's] really interesting.... The presentation of [De Ceuvel], the design... the playfulness... the feeling, it's like sending us back to being kids in school.... it's like a new way of learning!' The second visitor, Hana, added '[it's] inspiring us to think in different ways so we can act in different ways'. These women's comments illustrated their perception of an inviting, experimental atmosphere, and a communal mode of feeling.

The significance of this atmosphere in fostering people's engagement with De Ceuvel was not limited solely to visitors to the café. An elderly Canadian woman visiting Amsterdam to partake in the citywide 'We Make the City' festival came to De Ceuvel to push her manifesto of 'integral cities', outlining how she envisaged our shared future. Curious, I asked her how she planned to circulate her manifesto. She explained she wanted to 'look for places like De Ceuvel.... it has energy... you need to feel that feeling to get interested', and that such places were needed to 'change the philosophy' in relation to sustainable thinking. It was striking that she immediately focused on the feeling and communality of the space, rather than the expertise, connections, or professional reach of the people working there. Comments such as these illustrate the fundamental importance of the feelings of inspiration, invitation and being welcomed at De Ceuvel. These feelings are central in fostering people's engage-

ment with the site's transitory and transformative processes. I mentioned this observation to Thijs, who seemed unphased. He summarised others' experiences by saying:

*"When you walk around here you get inspired by the environment, by the architecture, and the greenery, and all the things that are happening here, and all the people who are working here... I think people get emotional or at least it moves them... maybe just a little bit... but yeah, it does move people into believing in the green fight and making a change in their lives."*

In line with Aristotle's notion of aesthetics, Meyer has defined the aesthetic as 'our corporeal capability on the basis of power given in our psyche to perceive objects in the world via our five different sensorial modes [...], and at the same time a specific constellation of the senses as a whole', connecting the aesthetic to the sensory texture of all experience (Meyer & Verrips 2008: 21 [in Meyer 2009: 6]). The term aesthetics is understood as such throughout this analysis, rather than the more common association with the beautiful, or considerations of bourgeois hegemonic domination through habitus (Bourdieu 1984). Instead, the aesthetic is a category enabling the analysis of sensory life, locating the aesthetic within, rather than separate from all other aspects of social life (Eagleton 1990; Zuñiga 1989: 41). Meyer puts forward the concept of 'aesthetic formations', arguing for the 'formative impact of shared aesthetics through which subjects are shaped by tuning their senses, inducing experiences, molding their bodies, and making sense, and which materialises in things' (Meyer 2009: 7). In line with this, aesthetic formations produce a particular subjectivity or

habitus. The concept of 'aesthetic formations' is highly productive in relation to De Ceuvel, and forms the conceptual basis for the ethnographic considerations. The concept illustrates that knowledge produced in the body is neither ahistorical nor asocial. Instead, modes of feeling are learnt. As such, the women's engagement with De Ceuvel must be understood within a sensorial structure that renders their experience meaningful, fostering their engagement. It is necessary to note, however, that within Meyer's work, 'aesthetic formations' are groups of people, whereas in De Ceuvel I suggest that the 'aesthetic formation' encompasses wider material relations. In response to Meyer's 'plea for a broader understanding of aesthetics', I propose that De Ceuvel is, in itself, an 'aesthetic formation', enabling shared modes of formative interaction and engagement (Meyer 2009: 9).

## Conclusion

As Hana, the visitor from the square, said, these modes of feeling encourage people to 'think in different ways so [they] can act in different ways'. In Rival's recent ethnography of a sustainability park in São Paulo, her informants laughed at the 'absurdity of turning agroecology into aesthetics for urbanites' (Rival [in Brightman & Lewis 2017: 195]). The examples from De Ceuvel sharply contrast this, placing 'aesthetic formations' as crucial to the site's communal modes of engagement and pedagogic practice. Similarly, recent journals that focus on formal learning have outlined that 'learning can be enhanced via what could be referred to as choosing the 'scenic route' of experiential learning' (Webster & Wolfe 2013, 24). Again, the examples from De Ceuvel contradict understandings of the

experiential as the 'scenic route', due to 'aesthetic formations' being indispensable to the site's pedagogic intention, rather than a secondary addition. Within De Ceuvel, 'aesthetic formations', reliant on sensory participation, attempt to facilitate new 'ways of thinking' and modes of feeling, with the aim to prompt dynamic engagements with sustainable living.

De Ceuvel is an experiment with sustainability which invites people to participate in sensory and emotive modes of interaction, using engaged processes of social practice to co-create visions of sustainability and reality. Through the extension of analyses of formal learning to the informal playground of 'soft activism', I have shown that pedagogy within De Ceuvel is dependent on the invitation of sensory engagements with the material environment, introducing visitors into an 'aesthetic formation'. The force of feeling in De Ceuvel necessitates a consideration of pedagogic practices as located within the sensate body, rather than in written forms of knowledge transmission (Haraway 1988; Meyer 2005). Developing van de Port's call for radical empiricism which encompasses the sensational and the sensuous, I have extended the criticism of the alleged incompatibility between scientific and sensory knowledge formations, illustrating a vision of sustainability activism dependant on non-scientific and non-technological processes (van de Port 2011: 20, 25). Furthermore, this paper adds weight to anthropology's 'urgency and political relevance' (Latour [in Brightman & Lewis] 2017: 40) in the face of the Anthropocene through elaborating the idea of soft activism and illustrating that ecologies of pedagogic engagements are located within material, sensate, and affective practice.



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# Painting the Self in a Study of Modernity • Using Art in Anthropological Research

## Academic Essays

### ABSTRACT

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In this article, I propose the application of the concepts of ‘small’ and ‘big’ stories theorised by Lyotard (1984) to the discipline of visual anthropology by focusing on the issues of ‘generalisation’ and ‘individuality’. The primary question on which I focus is: ‘how do we integrate individual case-studies with generalisations in anthropological research in a way that provides a balanced account of small and big stories?’. To answer this question, I share the theoretical and methodological challenges of using art within my recent research in Nepal (2017-2020), in which I discuss the making of individual selves in relation to kinship, gender and conflict in the context of a problematic dichotomy between modernity and tradition. This method I have defined elsewhere as the ‘art-tool’, an approach which combines art and written anthropological narrative. The final result of this methodology is what I call here the ‘research canvas’. I argue that there are various creative phases throughout a research in both its written and visual outcomes, and that the research canvas is only the final stage. This is a complex creation in which various insights are combined through semiotic codification. I suggest here that in using this methodology, the artist-anthropologist can provide an extensive account of all the relations occurring within a research project, including the subjectivity of the author and the mediation between generalisation and individual narratives.

**keywords:** generalisation, kinship, modernity, Nepal, self, subjectivity, tradition, visual methods

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“

*The moon was once believed to be a god, but now humans have been there, so we know that it was wrong.*

*(field notes, January 2019)*

*We cannot continue to regard the 'writing up' of ethnographic work as innocent. On the contrary, a thorough recognition of the essential reflexivity of ethnographic work extends to the work of reading and writing as well. We must take responsibility for how we choose to represent ourselves and others in the texts we write.*

*(Hammersley & Atkinson 2006, p. 258).*

Anthropology is a work of art. It is about making a puzzle and solving it, but as making and solving are synchronic processes, it can be a tricky task to accomplish. This is where art comes into it. In my research in Nepal among the Newar people of Bhaktapur (2017-2020), I met and talked to hundreds of local people, and formally interviewed more than one hundred on several topics. Discussing with them their ideas and feelings about what the process of modernity entails, and on the role of tradition in their society, I found that what matters to them is the construction of their own selves

balancing between what the others think and want from them, and what they themselves desire.

This process of self-construction comes as the result of 'modernisation' or 'development' (Nepali: *bikas*), seen by the people as both a historical phase followed by substantial economic changes (the end of the dictatorial regime of the Rana kings in 1950 and the beginning of democracy after a bloody civil war and the consequent opening up of the country to rest of the world after 100 years of forced isolation) and an epistemological phase in which social relations are reshaped and social and cultural values are negotiated. This takes place in a dialectic discourse between old established notions of the person as a pawn on a pre-established social stage and new ideologies of freedom of determination (Levy 1991, Nepali 1965). The latter involves a refusal of the hierarchical systems which were perpetrated by the kings and religious institutions.

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On another hand, the process of self-construction encompasses a reflection over the concept of a 'moral person' (Nepali: *naitika vyakti*) and it is accompanied by a high degree of conflictuality within changing households and within people's own *mana* (which means 'heart-mind' as opposed to *dimaag* which means 'brain-mind'), leading to a phenomenon of interior sufferance referred to as *mana kharlhagu*, which literally means 'heart-talk', described to me as a sense of loneliness and extreme sufferance (Nepali: *Dukha*). Within this process, people might choose different 'moral' pathways, by following, refusing or rather adapting prescribed social roles, kinship relations and magico-religious beliefs. In this conglomeration of individual narratives and interpretations, I found that all the respondents portrayed development as a flow of change marked by paradoxes and contrasts. Consequently, besides my doctoral thesis, I have developed a corpus of artworks in which I have tried to represent the flow of this process of development and its problemat�city as well as individual perspectives.

After reflecting on individual case-studies in some preliminary works, I then tried to balance what people said and what they did with my own interpretations within a final larger work in an attempt to combine 'small' and 'big' stories. With these concepts, philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984) referred to the contrast between theories over society and knowledge, such as the idea of progress, scientific truth and freedom, as opposed to the micronarratives of individuals. According to him, the postmodern philosophical thought itself is characterised by the acknowledgement of diversity and irreconcilable incompatibility of people's perspectives, beliefs, dreams and

desires, and as such it supports the role of micronarratives as an epistemological pathway.

In this project I refined an artistic methodology to be used in anthropological research on which I have been working on for the last seven years, and which I call the 'art-tool' method (Tine 2017; 2019). The primary methodological question on which this work is focused is how individual case-studies can be integrated with generalisations in anthropological research in a way that provides a balanced account of the many collected stories and also communicates both the informants' and the researcher's point of view. To address these issues, I developed the 'research canvas'. This is a complex creation in which various insights are combined within a semiotic codification, the final stage of a complex research made of various creative phases that correspond to the traditional research steps including data collection, analysis of the material and the final production. This could take the shape of a collage, painting or other creative work in which various insights are combined.

The fact that the research canvas is the final and (possibly but not necessarily) larger work, does not mean that this is the most important work in a research collection. In fact, the individual stories and case-studies are the core of any research. Thus, the advantage of this visual methodology is to underline the importance of these small stories, by making them visually tangible in addition to the written reports of these stories. The visual works, here proposed in the form of paintings, have similar function to photographs of informants and narrative reports of their stories in anthropological works. Think for example of the use of photographs in the monumental book 'Balinese Character' by



Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson (1942) or the artistic photographic work in 'Vita. Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment' by Joao Biehl (2005) in which the main character is shown in some photographs in the confinement of the asylum in which she is secluded.

This endeavour contributes to the ongoing debate over the use of art in anthropological research. In fact, while general consensus has been reached in the last thirty years on the importance of the use of visual methods in the field, the post-fieldwork production of art for the expression of insights is more problematic. The methodology of the research canvas proposed in this article has the advantage of presenting an elaboration of all the research phases within the same work and of expressing the main research findings from both the points of view of the informants and of the researcher through artistic representation. As this project is currently still a work in progress, I will not showcase the research canvas here, but only some of the preparation material.

## The Problem of Generalisation

The use of art in anthropology has been proposed as a method of enquiry in recent years (Sweetman 2009, Sullivan 2012, Tine 2017) for its ability to convey a deeper understanding of non-verbal contents than can be achieved through text alone (Banks 2001, Cox & Wright 2012, Prosser & Loxley 2008). A revision in the aims, methods and expressive tools of the discipline and a discussion on the topics of 'subjectivity', 'generalisation' and 'individuality' in ethnography and ethnology is now urgent (Clifford &

Marcus 1986, Marcus & Fisher 1999, El Guindi 2011, Foster 1995). Consequently, the issue of how to incorporate and represent all of the individual stories taken from field research, which has been central in modern anthropological debate, must now be dealt with in the new context of anthropological artistic production.

There are two main objections to the processes of generalisation. The first objection is based on a constructivist perspective according to which each observed phenomenon is time and context specific (Lincoln & Guba 1985) and 'our insight can only be a reconstruction of subjective perspectives of people in specific situations' (Mayring 2007). The second one takes a rationalist or post-positivistic position, arguing that inductive proof from individual sentences is not possible because each theory can always be disproven by occurring exceptions (Popper 1959). In between these two extreme theories, there is what Malcolm Williams (2002) has defined as 'moderatum generalisation'. According to this approach, singular aspects "can be seen as instances of a broader recognizable set of features. This is the form of generalisation made in interpretative research (Mayring 2007, p. 131). Anthropological research generally uses a combination of theoretical framework and comparative literature analysis. Specifically, the former consists of the development of an inductive theory while in the field during which insights are perceived, theorised and verified until saturation is reached, while the latter compares relevant texts on the topic, and can lead to the construction of complex meta-analysis.

## Anthropology as Art

The passage from the rough materi-

al to a meaningful text, through theoretical sampling and comparative literature analysis, is the most difficult part of anthropological research, and probably the most misunderstood. This is the passage from ethnography, seen as the collection of material and data in the field, to anthropology per se, seen as the analysis, interpretation and presentation of the research material in a way that attempts to 'convince the reader that we have understood other "forms of life", showing that we have truly been there' (Geertz 1988, p.4). According to Clifford Geertz, anthropology should be seen as a kind of text in which the anthropologist is a creative author.

The construction of the 'writerly identity' (Geertz 1988, p. 7) and of the text itself can be problematic due to the epistemological fear of telling an honest story in an honest way to 'prevent subjective views from colouring objective facts' (Geertz 1988, p. 7). Further complicating the task, according to Geertz, anthropologists are often 'confronted by societies half modern, half traditional; by fieldwork conditions of staggering ethical complexity; by a host of wildly contrasting approaches to description and analysis; and by subjects who can and do speak for themselves' (p.71). He proposed that what anthropology should do is evoking, not representing, under the premise that anthropological work is an act of creation and imagination, and not a lab report (p.136). The resistance to this conception was (and often still is) based on the 'confusion, endemic in the West since Plato at least, of the imagined with the imaginary, the fictional with the false, making things out with making them up' (p.140). Consequently, these resistances now need to be abandoned in favour of anthropology as 'comparable art' (p.139).

In accordance with what Geertz proposed, and starting from this very issue regarding the construction of anthropological texts, which has been long since disregarded as unimportant, and which has led too many anthropologists to be simply ethnographers (Ingold 2008), my proposal is to produce art as an outcome of ethnographic research and anthropological reflection in a way that encompass all the research phases, from the fieldwork to the final work. Thus, this presents the same challenges that scholars normally find when passing from ethnography to anthropology. The technique proposed here involves a multi-phased project, in which reflection occurs within the making, culminating in an all encompassing 'research canvas'.

A combination of collage, new and archival photos and fieldnotes within my paintings helped me to explain the flow of modernity as a process of change and the way in which individual narratives construct a collective social world. Additionally, I attempted to put into practice the representation of the 'world of lived experience' (Ingold 2011), in order to offer a visual insight into what I as the researcher have understood and felt, with the goal of bringing the viewer to participate in the experience of the social actors. Before showing some practical examples of this passage through art, I will summarise my research findings to demonstrate how I have made artistic representations of them.

## Modernity and Development

Modernity in Nepal is featured by inter-related material and immaterial changes. The material aspects include improved economic conditions, the elimination of caste, the spread of media,

infrastructures, and education. These conditions allow people to make previously untenable choices, under the influence of new social models of interaction and ideologies that have been propagating through society over the last seventy years. Recent decades have seen this process greatly accelerated. New models of interaction include changing family structures and dynamics, the evolution of social solidarity and the emergence of love and friendship relationships that are based solely on personal choices rather than on traditional affinity of kinship, family, phuki, thar and caste. New ideologies include democracy, capitalism, liberalism, individualism, secularism, scientific thinking and medicine.

In the past, the connections between social groups and individuals were functional to balance the mesocosm between the macro and the micro level, the human and the divine, the known and the unknown, the inside and the outside. In contrast, now this kind of complementarity and cooperation has more selfish motivations and relations are often established for personal gain. In reaction to a hyper controlling society, many people are now seeking caring relationships, based on personal choice. Here one can observe the emergence of the importance of the individual and of personal choices that take precedence over the rest of society. As such, love marriages are progressively acquiring social importance beside arranged marriages; nuclear families are substituting joint families; caste beliefs are giving space to social solidarity; sacrifices are being questioned as respect for life is increasing; friendship groups are replacing the guthi organisations; and parents and children are moving away from the old dynamics of respect towards more open relationships.

Trust is now sought within relationships as it is no longer a certainty dictated by social positions. This shift of perspective and the desire for change and choice against a predefined way of being has been made possible by the process of modernisation, with its ideological influence over social identities, and models of interaction and lifestyle. However, this process is also being heavily resisted by sects of Bhaktapurian society. This can often be seen within enlarged and traditionally structured families, guthis, priests and, to some extent, government policies and attitudes.

However, it should be noted that modernity also means materialism and the adoption of a new commodified way of forming social identities, which is in many ways only superficially freedom of choice. Now modernising social pressures are telling people what to buy and how to behave, leading to conflicts and difficulties in making decisions. Trying to provide a visual account of all of this, I have developed a personal artistic style.

## Towards the Research Canvas: Methodology and Style

In this visual project, while passing from individual narratives to interpretations, I have pursued three main goals:

1. To visualise the process of development in Nepal and its paradoxes.
2. To visualise the stories, lives and experiences of respondents, by focusing on the salient moments of epistemological relevance in their lives in the context of socio-cultural change and economic turmoil.
3. To visualise the anthropological process

itself, namely the making of the research from ethnography to anthropology.

To address these goals, I have developed my artistic project over different phases of production. The following scheme shows the passages in the artistic production, seen as visual versions of traditional research phases.

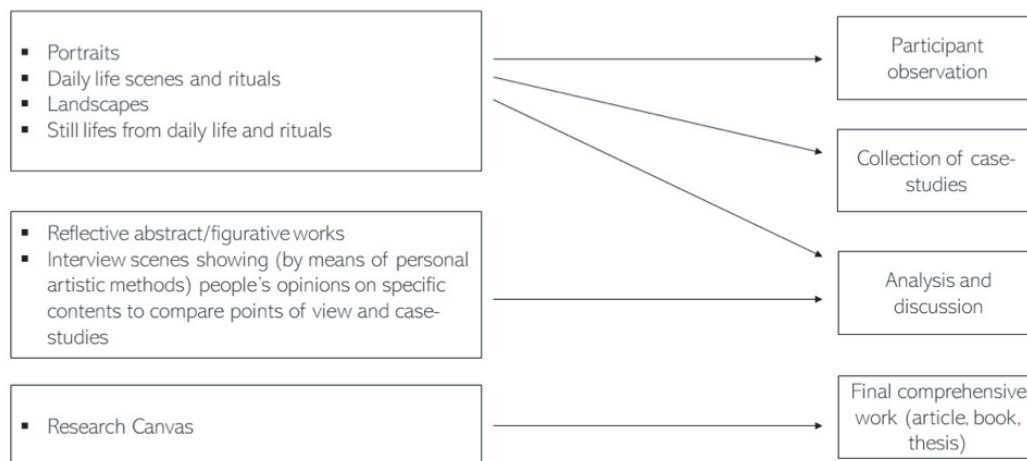


Figure 1: Visual representations of research phases

First of all, I produce some preliminary works, which can either be created while in the field or after. These include portraits, ritual scenes, daily scenes and still lifes of ritual and daily objects. I view this as documentary material equivalent to participant observation. I personally mix this production with digital photographs that I reuse later. In addition to these, there are some more theoretically dense or 'thick' works. These are works representing the subjective experiences of modernity, which are the equivalent of ethnographic material regarding case-studies. These can include reflective and more abstract works that are the fruit of reflection and the imaginative process; interview scenes in which I include my

presence as a researcher (at least a more evident presence than the other works in which it is still there but in the form of an unavoidably partial observer and maker); diversified perspectives on a given topic that reflects the views of the informants; and finally, the research canvas, to which all of the previous phases should lead.

The research canvas is the equivalent of a whole anthropological written work.

Regarding the more stylistic aspects, I have attempted to use diverse artistic methods with the goal of balancing and presenting different points of view. I achieved this by developing a peculiar use of portraits to represent the fragmentary nature of the self and to show its character of construction at the intersection between individuality and society. I have in this way tried to provide a visual account of micronarratives, before creating the final work. The semiotic apparatus has been developed through the use several artistic techniques, such as '*chiaroscuro*' (from the Italian words *chiaro*:light and *scuro*:dark), an artistic techniques

## Painting the Self in a Study of Modernity :

that builds enlightened scenes in dark settings that I found useful for the subjects representing rituals that address the unknown including death, spirit possession and illness. I also used abstract portraits to convey the sense of feeling lost, with unfinished parts representing the unknown and a colour palette of black and white is used to represent the past. While I will not discuss these choices in any further detail in this article, in the next section I will show some practical examples taken from my doctoral thesis.

### Visual Section

Here are some examples from the first and second research phases, which leads to the final work. These images are examples from my visual fieldnotes, or 'small stories', which include portraits, still lifes, and daily and ritual scenes.

While these initial works represent the beginning of my thoughts as they develop in the field, with a similar function

to documentary photography, the works belonging to the subsequent reflexive phase offer a better understanding of my reflections after the fieldwork, and are the preparation of the research canvas. These works are not representative, but rather reflective. In this phase, more complex images are created, using a personal semiotic code, which I argue should always be clearly defined.

For example, in 'The Tradition', I do not represent actual traditions, but rather the way in which I have understood how people see them. Traditions are preserved within all of the elders and middle-aged people who support the symbology and reproduce the daily gestures that make sense to them in their attempt to maintain social codes and roles, mediating between the microcosmos of individual lives and the macrocosm of the deities. In this artwork, these keepers of tradition are represented without their bodies, because the face is the most important part of a person (according to many people), and it is the

Figure 2: 'Newari Man in Traditional Clothes' (image from author)



Figure 3: 'Street Seller of Grains' (image from author)





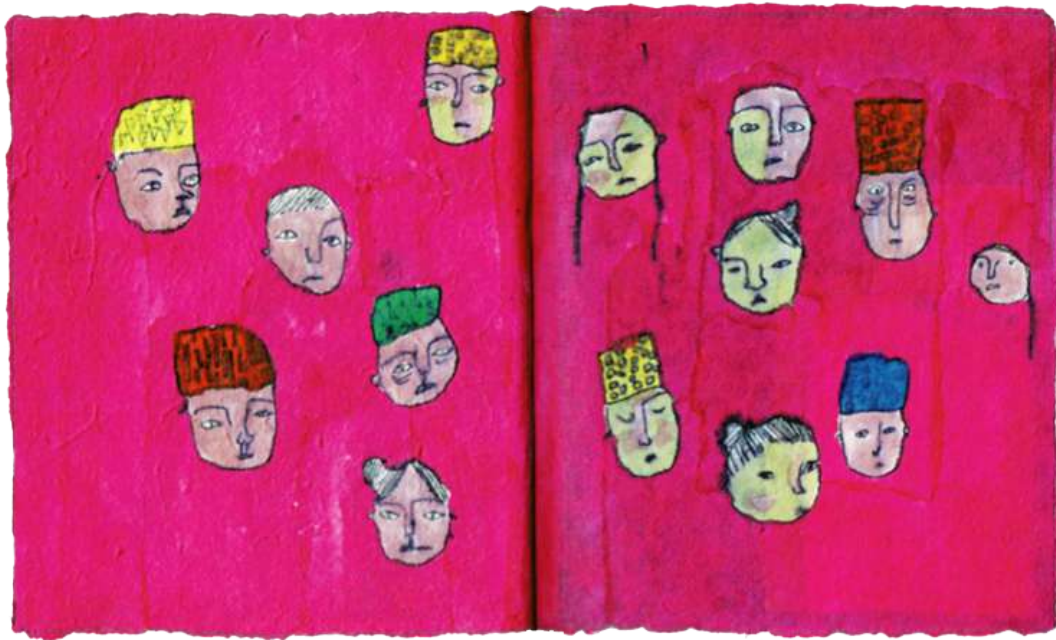


Figure 4: 'The tradition'  
(image from author)

place where their identity, and their social respectability is located. A uniform colour in the background substitutes a realistic landscape, because traditions are located on an upper level, a sort of spiritual dimension that transcends space and time. This explanation is a kind of semiotic analysis of my own work that I develop either pre-or-post-making.

Similarly, in the work entitled 'A man', I show again a face without body, but this time a landscape is represented. People cannot exist without their spatial background in which social relations take shape. However, this cityscape is windowless to prevent observation. This basic landscape is the dominium of the thoughts and feeling of this man, his inner dimension. This artwork is already a generalisation that I have made, because the man represented is, in my perception, any man taken in his existential individual dimension.

Finally, in 'Out There in Kathman-

du', which recalls the title of a book investigating modernity in Nepal by Mark Liechty (2010), a group of young people are enjoying themselves in the periphery of Kathmandu, whose buildings are visible in the background, while the moon exists as the only natural element. The moon has appeared in many of my drawings, and I explain this in two ways: the first reason is that nights in Bhaktapur are very dark, there are no lights in the streets and buildings are often dark because many buildings have either been abandoned or have not yet been repaired from the recent 2015 earthquake. Therefore, the moon is a very visible element in Bhaktapurian nights, and it has entered into my imagination. It must have entered the imagination of local people too, and in fact, the second reason is that many interviewees have mentioned that the moon is believed to be a god. However, humans have now been on the moon and this is cited as evidence against the existence of

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gods by more educated people. In the work 'Out There in Kathmandu', the moon is a spatial and temporal connector, with both Bhaktapur and the past. Young people go to Kathmandu to have fun, because it is full of pubs and restaurants that animate the nightlife.

In 'Hierarchy' I attempt to show the narrow-minded and antidemocratic view of many high caste priests (Nepali: *puroits*). Here I have attempted to represent the way in which the general group of priests view social relations. Furthermore, in the collection of faces located in each square of the traditional hat, I have represented smaller images of *puroits* to show the individuality of each of them, the vast majority of whom support similar ideologies. They are the keepers of tradition and the old Sanskrit knowledge of religion and they therefore have power to control the life of each Newar person through the superiority of their knowledge. The big

head at the center of the table may at first evoke the concept of individuality, however, it is in fact the representation of a *puroit* in his generalised form. It symbolises the maintenance of traditional rituals and hierarchies and the support that they provide to the entrenched system of social power.

The table 'Friendship' is about the emerging topic of friendship, one of the key findings in my research. The absence of perspective is an important element in the grammar of this painting. A group of heads on the top of the table show how vertical and horizontal hierarchies (vertical and horizontal heads) are challenged by modernising structures of power and social relations. As reported by the interviewees, friends are important in case of need such as getting to the hospital, to help with cremation in case of death, and to help in case of financial hardship. For the youngest people (new generations), friends are for having fun. Some keywords are present in this table, such as trust, help, fun, health, and these are all topics

Figure 5: 'A man'  
(image from author)



Figure 6: 'Out There in Kathmandu'  
(image from author)





Figure 7: 'Hierarchy'  
(image from author)

from my interviews. Friendship and other relations are located between emotions and materialism. On the right side of the table is the head of a priest. His traditional hat and the *tika* (1) on his forehead recall his role as the keeper of the traditions. This is to remind us that some social groups oppose the ongoing social change. Just under this face, a chaos of cars and bikes going in every direction tells the story of chaos in modern Nepal. This is the landscape that I have chosen as a background for this artwork, an element useful for spatial location.

This is the daily landscape for any person who lives in the city, particularly those that go to Kathmandu for work.

Finally, 'In the middle', portrays a man wearing white and with his head shaved. These are the visual cues that he is within a mourning period in which certain restrictions are applied. However, respecting these

cultural restrictions is not easy for him, as his teenager children have different priorities. The episode that inspired this painting occurred on his son's birthday which took place during the mourning period. As the father could not allow a birthday party to take place in the house due to cultural mourning restrictions despite wanting to make his son happy, his son organised a party at the house of a relative from the mother's side, who was not included in the mourning group as they belonged to a different lineage. This created some friction within the house, and while his wife supported the decision of the husband to enforce the rules of mourning, she also suffered to see him upset. The story of this man shows the problematic nature of making the self and the struggle of modernity and offers a reflection on modern fatherhood and on the making of individual priorities. Portraits have become a fundamental artistic form on which I have been experimenting to portray the fragmentary nature of the self.

Figure 8: 'Friendship'  
(image from author)





## Conclusive Remarks

In this article, I have discussed the use of visual arts, specifically painting, in the discipline of anthropology. I did so by focusing on both theoretically and practical aspects from my research in Nepal in which I investigated the making of the self in relation to kinship, gender and conflict in the context of a problematic dichotomy between modernity and tradition. In the visual production, I attempted to take individual stories into account as well as my understanding of a changing lifeworld, by addressing power issues, social identities, contrasts between generations and evolving relations. Here the problem of generalisation was partially overcome, thanks to the combined use of portraits and of theoretical compositions.

The artworks evolve from visual fieldnotes (which are drawings made in the field or in the process of analysis) to follow up paintings on canvas (in which I represented rituals and daily life scenes, extracts from interviews and research insights). The main difference between artistic outcomes in the various phases of the research are both theoretical and practical. During the initial phase, visual fieldnotes can function as a database for further reflections. This phase is followed by a production of 'reflective drawings', which can be more abstract and less literal, but still figurative. This process of abstraction is a fundamental phase of the research, mirroring the passage from ethnography to anthropology. By showing some extracts from the first stages of my visual work, I have suggested that the research canvas could function as a visual version of anthropological work itself, seen as the result of data analysis and the production of an interpretative form of generalisation.



Figure 9: 'In the middle'  
(image from author)

In the research canvas all the passages are present, articulated through a semiotically constructed code of expression, and the combination of all of these reflective images offers a new work with newly constructed contents that are more than the sum of its parts. In this methodology, both a solid research background and the use of a personal style will always be fundamental. In conclusion, I wish to state that it is true that good narratives do not necessarily need images. However, to visualise the informants and their stories can have a powerful effect on the reader, as it can help to immerse them within the 'thick' material. The importance of the use of visual methods here lies in the ability of visual expression to convey a deeper understanding of non-verbal contents than can be achieved through text alone.

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# Running into trouble • Exploring the negotiation of public space between running groups and other users

## Academic Essays

### ABSTRACT

This paper looks to investigate how running groups function in public space, both in how they find their way and how they interact with other users. It builds on theories of wayfinding and the study of mobilities to examine how different spaces change how group running occurs. The research is based on the use of head-mounted video footage of group runs to provide insight to the practice and experience of collective running in the city. In this way, this paper seeks to engage with efforts to utilise more mobile methodologies within ethnography.

**keywords:** running, groups, way-finding, social interaction, public space

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University of Edinburgh

Jumping, pausing, sidestepping. An easy evening run with friends after class was quickly turning into an obstacle course. Nor was this the first time I had experienced the challenge of running with others along Edinburgh's busy streets. As many as 10.5 million people (Sports Insight, 2014) are estimated to run regularly in the UK, often in groups and often along similarly busy streets to my own. Reflecting on this, it seemed a wonder so many people manage to use public space in this dynamic way without mass collisions or the complete breakdown of the running experience.

This project is an attempt to delve a little into how group running functions in crowded and contested spaces through the analysis of video footage taken of running groups in Edinburgh. By exploring how runners co-manage potential conflicts with other users, the project seeks to contribute to the better design of public space. Improved design of public space then offers the opportunity to increase recreational activity and its benefits for public health and sustainability.

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## Running into trouble :

Scholars generally divide running participants into three categories: the athlete, the runner, and the jogger. These categories are often contentious, particularly with the status of joggers seen as lacking in 'status and prestige' (Smith, 1998, p.190). This paper seeks to adopt a participatory approach to the sport by using the term 'runner' as a catch-all for the full range of different speeds, time-commitments and meanings invested into the practice by different people.

I attempted to conduct this research in a reflexive way, acknowledging the biases and experiences that I bring to the position of researcher. My own background in running stretches for more than a decade, covering a range of distances from 800 m track meets to 50 km trail runs. Given this, I would consider myself well-versed in the knowledge of running and well positioned to engage with people's own experiences of their running at a level of mutual understanding.

### Theoretical foundation

Past researchers have put forward several differing concepts of wayfinding, the process of moving between places, with differing theories suggesting the use of a mental map (Tolman, 1946) or navigational techniques akin to seafaring (Gell, 1985). This paper builds on the more recent work of Tim Ingold (2000, p.42), who argues that wayfinding is an ongoing, interactive process with an environment that is 'continually taking shape around the traveller'. It uses Ingold's theory to consider how the specific dynamics of group running affect the experience and process of wayfinding.

This research also looks to build on the existing literature on running as a

mobile practice. Much of this has currently focussed on the meanings attached by runners to the practice, such as for competition (Vettenniemi, 2012) or as a form of work on the body (Bale, 2012). Other research into running, meanwhile, has



Figure 1: the head-mounted camera used for the film work in this paper, and jacket with hood to make the camera less obtrusive. (photograph by author)

delved into how runners interact with different users of public space, adjusting to perceived social norms and learning to read the movement patterns of pedestrians and dog walkers (Cook, 2016).

This paper also looks to build on the work of Allen-Collinson (2008) into 'co-running', analysing how two runners interact with each other during the practice. The analysis presented here seeks to expand upon the work of Allen-Collinson by moving beyond pairs to examine groups of runners.

Lastly, this research adds to debates over how running challenges 'the legitimate and appropriate users and uses

of public space' (Bergamaschi et al., 2014, p.10). Runners often perceive themselves as 'liminal agents' (Cook, 2016) in public places yet can be seen by others as taking over and blocking shared



Figure 2: runners spreading to fill out the space on the wider pavement (photograph by author)

spaces (WalesOnline, 2011; McKenzie, 2013). These perceptions have tangible impacts on the practical interactions between runners and pedestrians, drivers and others.

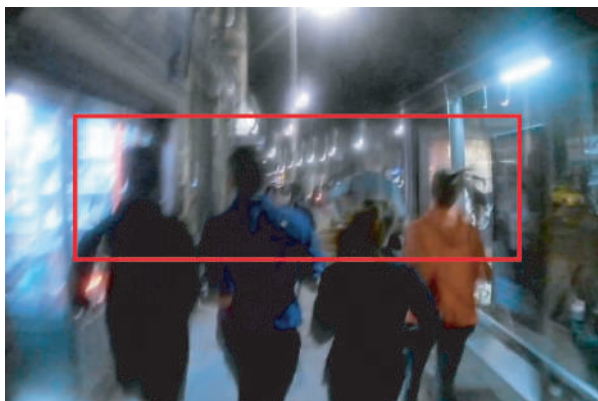


Figure 3: runners bunch together as they find their way past a bus stop. (photograph by author)

## Moving as a group

Running as a group requires specific strategies for adjusting to the fixed environment. Each runner within the group

must respond to the movements of the other runners around them, as well as the physical environment as it is presented to

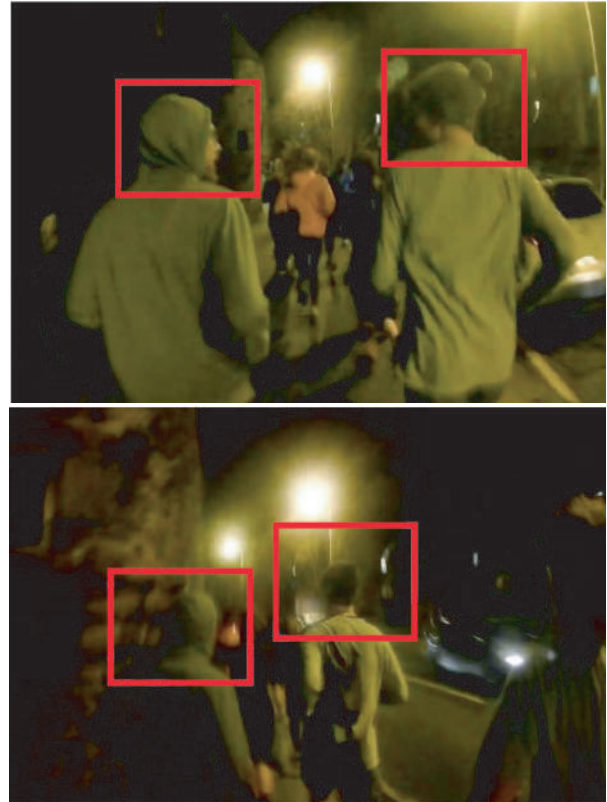


Figure 4: one runner drops behind another as they approach a narrow section of pavement. (photograph by author)

them. This differentiates the experience of wayfinding within a running group from that of an individual runner.

Where space allows, the group will expand across the path and utilise the full amount of space available. Figure 2 presents one example of this tendency, where the runners have stretched across the pavement, running in a line of four with significant gaps in between each runner. This allows an ideal amount of space for the runner to move and adjust to any minor changes in surface or pace.

However, runners in a group must frequently adapt to a range of obstacles in



## Running into trouble :



Figure 5: multiple runners drop into line to leave space for a pedestrian on their left. (photograph by author)

their environment which reduce the space in which they can continue along their path. Running groups exhibit a variety of different strategies to tackle these situations. In Figure 3, the runners have bunched together, making the gaps between each runner as small as possible to allow them to fit through the space between the shops to their left and bus stop to their right.

Figure 4 highlights an alternative strategy. Here, two runners are approaching a narrow section of pavement due to a building which juts into the path. In response to this, the runner on the left drops his pace and falls in behind the other runner, sacrificing the flow of his run so that his running partner can continue

Figure 7: the group leader turns her head to check the progress of the rest of the group. (photograph by author)

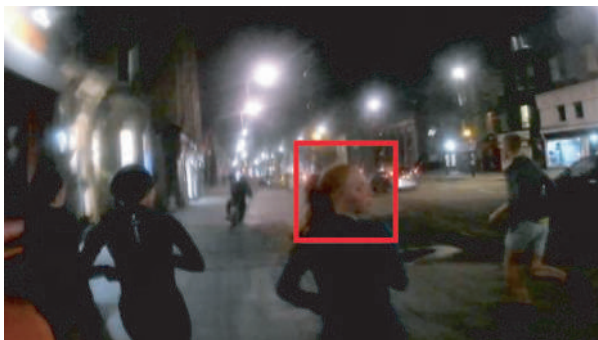


Figure 6: the running group splits as it approaches a bus stop (circled in yellow). (photograph by author)

uninterrupted. This strategy is of dropping behind is often reciprocated by people running together as they take turns to drop behind at various pinch points along their route.

A similar tendency of runners to reduce their pace rather than the space between them can be seen in Figure 5, where the runners have fallen into a line to leave space for a pedestrian to pass on their left in the opposite direction.

One final method frequently employed by runners is shown in Figure 6. The running group is approaching a large bus stop which includes several people waiting for the bus. This situation presents multiple potential complications for the runners. These include the physical struc-

Figure 8: the group leader attempts to indicate the route to those following her by pointing. (photograph by author)







Figure 9: Runners approaching multiple obstacles, including a rubbish bin (1), an oncoming pedestrian (2), a bus stop (3), and a dismantled cyclist (4). (photograph by author)

ture of the bus stop, the potential movement of waiting passengers, and the potential arrival and disembarking of passengers from a bus pulling into the stop. In the face of this added complexity, the unified nature of the group's movements breaks down as the runners split. A majority choose to pass on the left of the bus stop whilst two of the runners judge the situation independently and pass the bus stop along the roadside on its right.

Splits such as these tend to be avoided where possible by running

Figure 11: a series of tight pedestrian passing manoeuvres carried out by two runners along an 800m stretch of George IV Bridge, a busy street in the heart of Edinburgh's Old Town. (photograph by author)

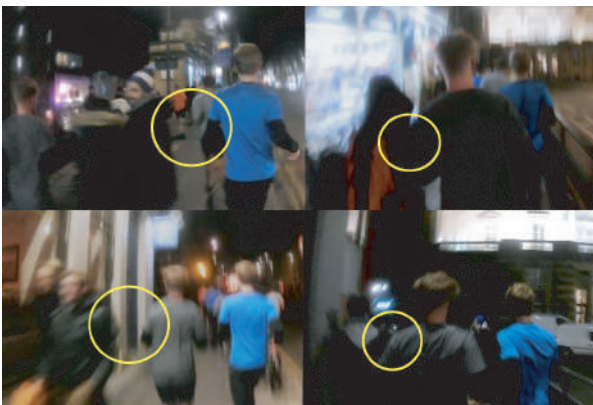


Figure 10: a close pass between the runner in orange and the pedestrian to her right. (photograph by author)

groups, as they can lead to runners being lost from the group in the confusion of separated routes through a section. One mechanism in which groups often minimise the chance of a split is through the presence of a designated group leader. In Figure 7, the group leader for this run is turning her head to check back on the progress of the rest of the group behind her. By assigning responsibility to an individual for leading the run, the remaining runners in the group are given a focal point through which they can base their wayfinding decisions. This can then help to produce more uniform decisions in complicated situations like in Figure 8, as the group follows the direction of the leader. For example, Figure 8 highlights the group leader pointing forwards down the path, gesturing to those around her how the route will develop from where they are.

## Negotiating the pavement

Despite the wealth of obstacles that frequently face them, runners choose to use the pavement wherever possible, rather than resorting to the use of the road

## Running into trouble :

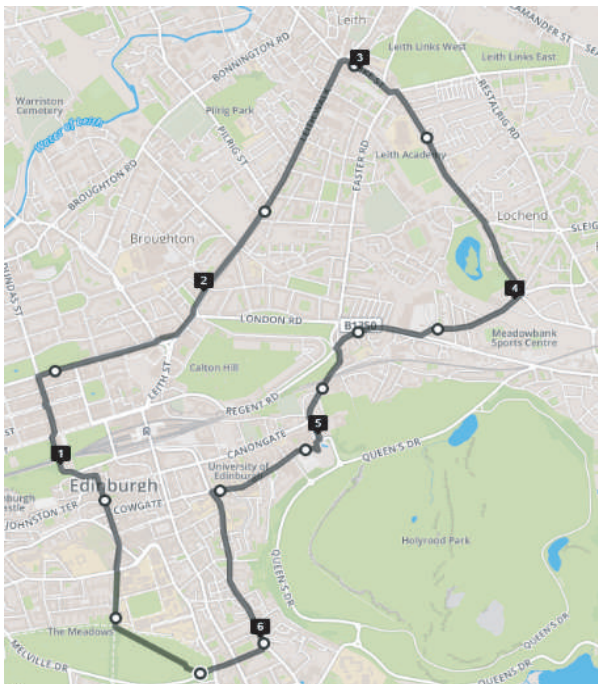


Figure 12: A map of one group run undertaken, including sections along Princes Street and the Royal Mile (map made courtesy of Strava).

as a potential alternative. In Figure 9, the runners are faced with numerous potential hazards (numbered in yellow). These combine fixed obstacles, such as the rubbish bin (1) and bus stop (3), with mobile (or potentially mobile) subjects, such as the oncoming pedestrian (2) and dismounted cyclist (4). In not choosing to use the road, the runners are left with a narrow and unpredictable space through which to avoid any collision. Group running further complicates this process as the runner must respond to the movements of others in the group and adjust to any additional space they take up on the runner's route.

Avoiding collisions in these circumstances requires a significant level of 'experiential expertise' (Collins, 2018) that is developed through the accumulated practice of running in public space. In Figure 10 below, the runner in the orange

jacket is attempting to pass a pedestrian on a busy walkway. With multiple other runners to her left, the group setting places additional pressure and difficulty on the individual runner in avoiding collisions.

The pedestrian, meanwhile, makes no attempt to adjust her position, unaware of the runners approaching her. This leaves responsibility for avoiding collision entirely with the runner who successfully passes the pedestrian by the smallest of margins (circled in yellow).

Tight passes are commonplace amongst runners' interactions with pedestrians (Figure 11), demonstrating a level of consistent judgement and skill that generally allows runners to manage a few dozen such passes on any city centre run. Runners' confidence and ability to negotiate their use of paths with pedestrians and other users further highlights this basis of skill.

The confidence of most runners in managing these interactions is evident from the routes they choose. The series of tight passes shown in Figure 11 are all taken from a group run with the Edinburgh University Hare & Hounds running club along the route shown in Figure 12. The running club organises group sessions every week and so the choice to use busy paths and areas of the city, despite the greater number of interactions that will have to be managed, demonstrates the relatively small issue that other users of space present to runners. The route taken in Figure 12 includes sections on Princes Street and the Royal Mile, the two busiest streets in Edinburgh (Edinburgh Football Index, 2017).

The running group increases the likelihood and potential risk of these instances as pedestrians get caught between mobile actors and can see no clear path away from the oncoming run-

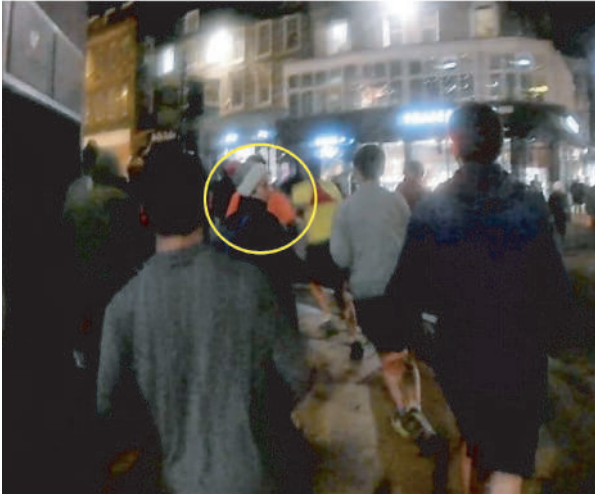


Figure 13: a woman is caught in the midst of a group of runners as they turn off Princes Street. (photograph by author)

ners. Figures 13 and 14 demonstrate two instances of walkers who react at short notice to the approach of a group of runners. In Figure 13, the woman is caught amid a large group of runners trying to turn the corner off Princes Street. The turn produces a bunching effect as runners slow down to pass, increasing congestion and further complicating the interaction with the pedestrian. Her reaction is to stop still, an action which greatly aids the runners in avoiding a collision as they can find their way through the small gaps around her.

Conversely, in Figure 14, the dog walker reacts to the oncoming runners by attempting to move himself out of the way of the oncoming runners. Though there is far more available space for both the walker and approaching runners in this scenario, the unpredictability of the walker's movement makes this situation more difficult for the runners in trying to avoid him. This serves to further highlight how the general success of runners in negotiating the pavement relies on their agency as the more mobile actor.



Figure 14: a dog walker attempts to move out of the way of oncoming runners. (photograph by author)

Cook (2016) questions the reasons why runners feel responsible for avoiding collisions and this question can in part be answered through practicality. Runners have accumulated experience of avoiding collisions where they have taken responsibility for adjusting away from the pedestrian and tend to use this to good effect. In contrast, situations like in Figure 14 where pedestrians attempt to take responsibility for their own movement can be counter-productive. The runner's passing manoeuvre is often jeopardised rather than helped.

## Splitting the group

One aspect of the group that helps runners adapt to the potentially unpredictable movements of pedestrians is through splitting into pairs and threes. Figure 15 gives an example of how the larger group has split into a series of staggered pairs. Here, behind a leader at the front there is a series of three running pairs, as runners maintain parallel proximity with another and leave a space of a few metres in front.



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Filtering into conversation pairs in this way helps to enhance the sociality of running as conversation is more easily maintained between runners in smaller sub-groups. The conversation pair also aids adjustment to pedestrians and other users as each runner pays attention to the movements of the other. In this way, the pair can adjust their pace and movement for each other to create space when passing other users. Due to the small gaps between each pair, each can act relatively independently from the group as a whole.

In Figure 16, two runners are approaching a potential obstacle. A pedestrian is passing close to a phone box as a separate walker moves towards the runners. The runner in blue looks to pass the pedestrian on his right in the gap between the phone box and him (1). However, the runner misjudges the space available and is forced to adjust to pass on the left at the last minute (2). Her running partner speeds up and adjusts to the left to then create a gap for the runner in blue to pass on the left (3), allowing her to move around the pedestrian and re-join her partner (4). This series of adjustments by both runners indicates how running in

Figure 15: A group of runners splits into conversation pairs. (photograph by author)



pairs can aid in negotiating obstructions on the pavement.

The runner on the left adjusts her pace to create space for her partner, whilst the gap between the pairs allows the runner in blue to slow as she diverts to pass on the left without interrupting the pace or direction of the pair of runners behind her.

## Using the road

Another means by which runners attempt to manage their interactions with other people in public is through using the road as an alternative, and otherwise unused path.

Figure 17 presents two runners from a larger group running on the road in the face of passing and oncoming traffic. Here the presence of multiple runners on the road encourages others to follow suit in picking the line behind these two runners. This extends Cidell's (2014) analysis of the transgressive use of space where runners encourage each other to use spaces they would otherwise feel excluded from. Rather than this phenomenon being limited to the formal setting of the

Figure 16: a runner (red box) must adjust her pace whilst her partner (dashed red box) moves to the left to accommodate her as they pass a pedestrian (circled in yellow).. (photograph by author)





Figure 17: two runners (numbered in yellow) using the road despite one car passing and another approaching. (photograph by author)

running race, the group run provides a more flexible, everyday dynamic in which runners feel legitimate in their use of the road as a running path. Taking over the road space in this way allows runners to avoid potential hazards. Figure 17 is taken from a poorly lit street with narrow pavements, and so the runner may feel better able to see their route from the road. The road also offers more flexibility in adapting to obstacles as the runner can move to either side of the road rather than being limited to a single stretch of pavement.

Figure 18: runners straying onto the road to avoid the pedestrian waiting at the road crossing (circled in yellow). (photograph by author)

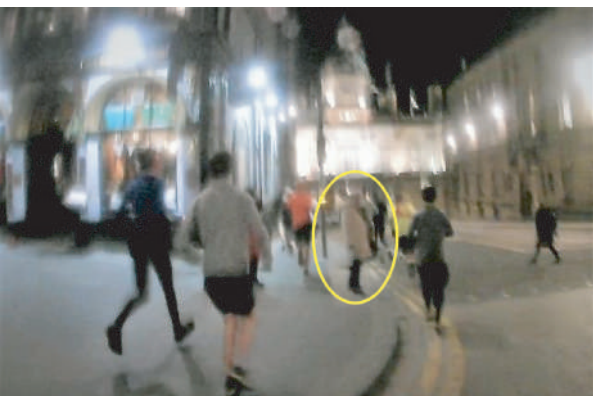


Figure 18 highlights another scenario in which the road has been used by runners to avoid potential obstacles. Here the use of the road allows runners to circumvent the pedestrian (circled in yellow) waiting at the crossing. Taking up the road as a path in this situation requires a significant combination of both in-the-moment environmental knowledge and previously accumulated knowledge of the location.

In choosing to utilise the road, the runner must be aware of potential car traffic, how they might re-join the pavement further on, and the change of traffic lights in order to judge whether the pedestrian is likely to move or remain still. On top of this, the runner uses prior understanding of the relative likelihood of traffic and the trustworthiness of the road surface for running on, based on factors from the weather and time of day to previous experience of traffic levels in that location.

The design of the street can often encourage the use of the road as a running path. In Figure 18, the ease of dismount from and re-entry to the pavement - thanks to its width and the low height differential to the road - makes it easier and faster for the runner to use the road.

Conversely, in Figure 19, the runners are encouraged make extended use of the road as they are prevented from re-joining the pavement by the railings separating the two. The group setting increases the use of the road through its collective momentum. Whilst the individual runner sets their own pace and so loses nothing from taking a diversion to avoid a railing such as this, the runner within a group must minimise diversions and disruptions to their pace in order to keep up with the group or to close any gaps. The collective pace of the group sets a



## Running into trouble :

pressure to meet it. This leads to a greater use of roads as one example of a means in which distance can be shortened and the group's spatial proximity maintained.

## Conclusion

This research has sought to explore how group running changes way-finding and interacting with other users of public space in the city, both as an experience and practice.

This study of group running offers support to Symonds et al.'s (2017, p.4) description of wayfinding as 'an interpretive craft' and 'a cognitive, social and corporeal process'. For example, runners' use of the road involves a re-interpretation of their role in space, taking temporary ownership of an area that is otherwise designated for the use of vehicles. Runners in a group consider multiple factors in their decision to use the road.

Figure 19: runners are prevented from rejoining the pavement by a roadside railing (circled in yellow). (photograph by author)



They bring prior knowledge of the specific road or place to gauge likely traffic and safety levels, combining this with audio-visual perception of traffic as well as the paths chosen by other runners in the group.

This paper has also explored how group running changes the interactions between runners and other users of public space. Runners consistently attempt to anticipate and manage their interactions with pedestrians, relying on their accumulated expertise (Collins, 2018) to navigate through tight situations and respond to multiple obstacles simultaneously. The potential for collision appears to greatly increase when pedestrians become aware of the runners. The pedestrian becomes an unpredictable figure, preventing the runners from taking control of the situation. This issue is exemplified by the incidents involving the dog walker on the Meadows and woman caught on the

corner of Princes Street.

This research has sought to engage with calls for more innovative, mobile methods in the study of mobilities (Heath & Hindmarsh, 2002; Buscher & Urry, 2009). The use of a head-mounted video camera enabled the capture of runners' movements in real time and opened up the possibility to study specific details of how runners adjust to each other and their environment. We often neglect the details in everyday practices of movement and adjusting to others, and this necessitates methods that capture the participants directly. Whilst running now has a significant basis of social science study, this has been almost entirely conducted through interviews and autoethnographic accounts (Bale, 2012; Little, 2017; Allen-Collinson, 2008). Expanding the use of video recording and analysis in the study of running therefore offers significant potential for further research.

By exploring how group running functions in public space, this research has shown that running groups can make it easier for participants to find their way through the city, especially when a group leader is present. The group also brings alternative meanings to the run, making it an opportunity for competition and social connection. Further research could profitably explore how the individual's relationship to running, in terms of self-image and confidence, affects their experience of running in a group and along busy streets. Additionally, more study could be conducted into the specific signals and markers, such as pace and arm movement, which allow runners to successfully adjust to each other.

Though group running can complicate interactions with other users of public space, the runners studied were able to avoid any issues caused by this

and adapt successfully to the people they encountered on route. This suggests that the busyness of city streets or parks need not be considered detrimental to the success of public health initiatives that involve using these spaces, such as parkrun, jogscotland and the Sweatshop running club. In light of this, the research presented here offers support for increasing investment in group running as a means of increasing exercise levels, such as the £3 million recently given to Parkrun by Sport England 'to enable it to set up runs in harder- to-reach communities' (The Guardian, 2019). In this way, I hope that a better understanding of how group running functions can make a small contribution to the continued growth of group running as a positive agent for social change, helping to combat rising inactivity and poor health by marrying exercise and social engagement.

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# Expressions of Sacred Cultural Capital : A Spatial Temporal Ex- ploration of Bengali Islam

## Reflective Pieces

### ABSTRACT

This short photo essay presents an aspect of work in progress. First hand observational notes and photo recordings were taken around the socially structured field habitus of the East London Borough of Tower Hamlets, its religious spheres of sacred cultural capital dispensation i.e. religious ritual ceremonies, social meetings and Mosques during 2012- 2015 and 2016 -19. The photo essay aimed to capture an important perspective in the adoption and reproduction of religiously coloured expressions of sacred cultural capital the significance and social order of faith and how this has shaped and marshalled the social actors in the space they occupy.

**keywords:** bangladeshi, bourdieu, british, islam, immigration, habitus

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This photo essay, recruiting Bourdieu's 'thinking tools', explores the remnants of the cultural capital legacy, the sacred capital consecrated by successions of migrant middle eastern agents of social change in shaping the Bengali sub-proletariats workers of Sylhet into primed successive generations of petite bourgeoisie British Muslim Bengali workers. Whilst the original social conditions, the synthesized orthodox values, and the beliefs that fashioned the agency and practices and shaped worship for the ancestors of the current retroactive practices of the Bengali Muslims may have long vanished, those practices seeded by their forbears have not vanished with them.

Instead, deliberate organizing action cultivated a tangible and intangible cultural capital legacy and conserved practices that still live on. These are faithfully authored by the current embodying Bengali social actors residing in Tower Hamlets, found in their actions, their shared history, their language and sacred literature of legitimacy. The orthodox core set of practices has elicited

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## Expressions of Sacred Cultural Capital :



Shadwell Mosque: Salat, ritual Islamic prayer, prescribed five times



Ford Square Mosque: a new building project for worship & Islamic Study

a complete jurisdiction concerned with the teleological whole of life where every social actor prescribing to its doxa has derived their Islamic identity and social function from the same Islamic source code (Bourdieu, 1991).

### Sub Islamic Field of Tower Hamlets

Today, Tower Hamlets remains an emblem of multiculturalism transformed by generations of immigrants who have permanently imprinted their philosopheme in passing through its unfixed transformational sphere. The collective power of the 'institutional entrepreneurs'

i.e. the pioneer and first generation Bangladeshi proletariats to position themselves as key forerunners shifting the social plates for the proceeding generation, have over the decades altered the public field, transforming the sphere into a sub-Islamic field marshalled by a new social community with an interpretation of an Islamic doxa (Bourdieu, 1985).

By retracing the spiritual journey of their forbearers and mirroring the received pattern of spiritual practice, accepting those dispositions as the given norm, they have ultimately reproduced their faith. Their behaviours, utterances, and obedience to a sacred Islamic capital framework has allowed transnational Bangladeshi



The East London Mosque & London Muslim Centre



Former Synagogue - now used as an ancillary building to Brick Lane Mosque





Muslims to embody their history in their present circumstances and create a spatial connection, a direct path in unison to their past as Bengali Muslims (Bourdieu, 1977).

Those who practised their faith infrequently only experienced their spiritual pattern dimly. Those who practised regularly reinforced that pattern of memory by engraining these patterns in-between their generation and generations after them in their cultural capital value exchange that has become second nature. Their cross-generational determination to preserve the core corpus of

Islam's tenets seeded in their Bangladeshi homeland stands as a testament to the enduring appeal of one the world's most potent and powerful sources of faith (Bourdieu, 1991).

### Collapsing cultural codes of Bengali representation and Arabic re - representation

The dominant signs and symbols which appropriate meaning in the religious supervision and social administration of the sub-Islamic field of Tower Hamlets retains its ancestral precepts as



## Expressions of Sacred Cultural Capital :



a patriarchal production through the convention-engrained *modus vivendi*. The trope of transformation – first generation men abandoning Bengali or western attire for Arab / middle eastern robes and sporting beards, first generation women no longer wearing sarees and kurtas but hijabs and Abaya – is subverted.

The visual change in hybridity and the appealing mix of cultures in dress identity remains zeitgeist in its production, distribution and consumption, most strikingly evident during the twice-yearly Islamic celebrations of Eid Al-Adha, Eid Al-Fitr as well as weekly Friday prayers. This pseudo-modernistic relation has

pressed into silent serviceable operation for decades the sense that Arab cultural capital has a circulatory religious charge of its own and, furthermore, that anything rich in Arab culture could not possibly be un-Islamic.

Bengali neo-traditionalists rejecting western fashion have adopted the dress of the Bedouin with a missionary zeal. The social meaning of their choice of apparel has migrated and ascribed a different reading by the Bengali populace to demonstrate their religious authenticity in aligning with the dominant Saudi interpretation of a homogeneous Islamic culture and identity (Bourdieu, 1985).





## Symbolic systems & Methodological Practises

Through inner purification, British-born Sylheti Muslims became a part of an enlarged world of Islamic sociolinguistic understanding, padded with Arabic lingua franca and global communitarian belief that would unite their Bengali Muslim consciousness, piety, ritual and social reality in a new Islamic symbolic system. A sacred religious cultural capital with a whole corpus of dispositions and methodological practices has unified their heterogeneous mode of production and connected their everyday customs, linguistic habitus and religious practices with the dialogical values of the global social Islamic field and beliefs of millions of Muslims across the world.

## Conclusion

Discerning the presence of Bourdieu both in the background and foreground of these scenes, I have argued that spiritual thought and bodily work has been an integral part of the Islamic faith. For the British Sylheti speaking Bangladeshis Islam has historically been, and continues to be, a religion of peace and prosperity. The patterns of existence prescribed around 1400 years ago by Islam are a way of life for the Bangladeshis that has provided the moral architecture, the cultural transmitter and the *raison d'être* for the British Bangladeshi Muslims.

For the Sylheti speaking British Bangladeshis, the deployment of a specific set of practices that were distinctly Islamic, characterised by mind and manpower in the course of preoccupation of prayer and worldly work, would be manufactured in the image of the ethno-reli-

gious group to create a new Islamic space and place (Bourdieu, 1971). Today this basic core framework has been successfully reproduced intergenerationally, through the reproductions of close kin networks and the operation of a specific set of social practices and social action. Both of these are suffused with Islamic representations replicated through migration by the early Sylheti settlers within the predominance of the family. Successions of settlers have transformed the urban space of Tower Hamlets' previously secular domain with into a sub-Islamic field with religious citizens. Religious agency and identities culminate into a rich and vibrant ethno-religious multicultural Tower Hamlets.

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# “My Body is My Tool”... and the Pen is Mine! • An Exploration of Feminist Visual Practises Reflective Pieces

## ABSTRACT

During my research with women performers at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, I adopted drawing as my primary tool for collecting and analysing data. I found that the best way to capture the value of theatrical performances was through an effective visual medium. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to illustrate the potential of drawing to be a feminist tool. My informants created whimsical and often absurd narratives of women's violation and dissent. With the help from my drawings, I shall put the themes of vulgarity and vulnerability into discussion with the ability of theatre to politically effect.

**keywords:** visual methods, empowerment, performers, theatre

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As an arts festival, the Fringe has a distinctive artistic character that is shared and transmitted across the city of Edinburgh. The Fringe provides an important outlet for artistic experiences and output, giving a platform to a range of provocative shows that verge on the absurd. The dignity of the city dissolves to make way for theatrical displays of comedy, cabaret, circus, and controversy. My research consisted of performances by women, which used varying theatrical devices such as comedy, cabaret and clowning to produce semi-autobiographical performances. One artist epitomised this unconventional genre of performance as: “Not traditional, a little bit cabaret, live art, a bit of a gig, absurd humour, a hotchpotch of stuff.” Women working in the Edinburgh Festival Fringe used their emotions, experiences and embodiment to sell shows and spark conversations. Performers made empowering statements in their shows that they claimed to be *for* women, about *being* a woman. In doing so, conventional characteristics of femininity, were exhibited and

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deconstructed for the public. Women's genitals (figure 1), menstruation and body hair were put under the spotlight to the amazement and disgust of international audiences.

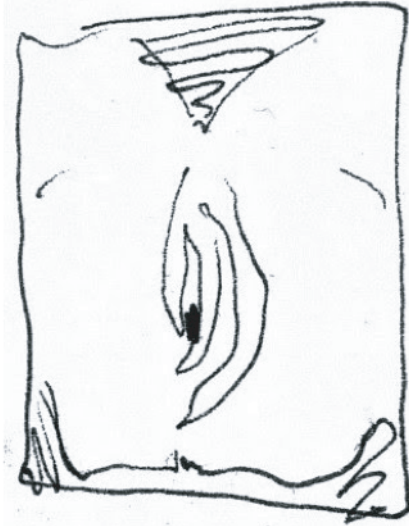


Figure 1: "Pussies" (drawing by author)

Due to the nature of live performances—especially performances of nudity—photography and video recording was prohibited. This led me to explore drawing as an analytic tool, allowing me to interpret the performances uniquely and effectively express what I observed in a more complete form.



One challenge that anthropologists face is bridging the gap between the world they experience and the world they are describing (Etmanski, 2007: 8). My drawings (see Figures 2 and 3) tend to have a cartoonish quality to them, which I feel portrays the playful nature of the Fringe.

The study of theatricality has urged anthropologists to expand their medium past just text to account for the live nature of performance (Flynn and Tinius, 2015). Thus, visual methods helped me minimise the distance between the research and myself by drawing out the exaggerated moments of performances and imitating the visual language used onstage (see Pink 2007: 109). Drawing emerged as a useful medium within feminist anthropology as it explores distinctive ways of narrating women's experiences and expressions of identity. Central to feminist methodological concerns is the researcher's position in the field and the issue of voyeurism (Foster, 2016: 55). Drawing encouraged

Figure 2: "Rose Theatre" (drawing by author)

my relational reflexivity, enabling me to destabilise vision as an inherently masculine technology (Mulvey, 2009). Drawing gave me ownership of the gaze and allowed me to be reflexive of way I carried out my research, just as my women performers attempted to reclaim themselves from the heterosexual male gaze. My drawings, as aesthetic works of art, have an inherent purpose: to engage with the viewer, as art 'readily strikes a chord, more easily than words' (Chamberlayne and Smith, 2010: 5). Thus, I found that drawing made my ethnography performative as well as objective (Flynn and Tinius, 2015), giving a voice to the performers' narrative and moving the reader to reflect upon the world discussed.

## Viewing the Female Body

The body has a dynamic and material effect on live audiences, producing knowledge and affecting the senses of others (Shepherd, 2006: 6). For performers, their physical display has a functional duty to attract and maintain the gaze of the audience, as a form of embodied labour (Dean, 2005). The performers combined an eclectic mix of bodywork and spoken word to resist or parody feminine norms and expectations. Selling loud and proud stories of women's empowerment and sexual liberation exemplified how feminist politics of agency and self-determination were endorsed within the praxis of the Fringe.

Mulvey (1975) views the role of women in the entertainment industry to be positioned as objects of male desire for male audiences; women's appearances are strongly coded with visual and erotic impact, signifying male desire (Mulvey, 1975:62). As a result, much of second-wave feminism has been concerned

with the idea of sexual liberation. For the women I interviewed, performing provided an avenue for them to remake their bodies and create empowering safe spaces to share them.



Figure 3: "The Spiegel Yurt" (drawing by author)

By using the language of the body to be disruptive and demanding of the space, performers deconstructed the traditional docility of femininity. As one performer, an Indian-American immigrant, Arzoo told me: "My body is my tool; it drives my performance".



Figure 4: "Excerpt from fieldnotes" (drawing by author)



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Catherine from *Cyst-er Act* used bizarre humour to juxtapose the shame and embarrassment women are still expected to endure in their lifetime, such as pain and sexual violations. Catherine drew on her own gynaecological conditions, disclosing the sheer amount that “women have to put up with.” My drawing (see figure 5) of *Cyst-er Act* depicts the particularly controversial imagery of a priest’s mitre upon Catherine’s naked body, creating an image that is intentionally disruptive and full of symbolic meaning. Catherine deliberately invoked religious and gendered symbols to challenge social boundaries. On the surface, the religious motifs are symbolic of the patriarchal religious power (Seal, 2013: 296) that she then subverted with humour. However, I felt that the need for theatrical impact limited and even undermined important discussions of patriarchal power.

There is a tendency for popular culture to depict feminists as angry, unfeminine and hateful of men (Tomlinson, 2010: 3). These harmful stereotypes have deeply affected people’s engagement with the movement and has served to delegitimize the uptake of women’s anger as a legitimate response to social views of power (Frye, 1983:86). Many of my performers used the angry feminist stereotype as a parodic device, calling themselves “angry”, “rowdy” or “ballsy”. Tatiana, an American performer in her thirties took this in stride. Her show was an “ugly portrayal of sexual assault, misogyny and self-loathing,” disguised as stand-up comedy. She played the role of a rape victim, unravelling onstage (see figure 6). For me this drawing represents the anguish I saw onstage. The colour red symbolises heartbreak and the spilling out of emotions. This picture juxtaposes

Tatiana’s vulnerable body onstage with what she calls her “feminist take on some classic jokes.” This image is meant to be striking and unsettling, mirroring my reaction to the performance, and elucidating similar emotions.



Figure 5: “Cyst-er Act” (drawing by author)

Butch Princessa (figure 7) proudly asserted “I’m fat, I’m hairy, but I’m happy with that... I want to show others that they can be too” demonstrating that, whilst performers’ sex appeal may be mobilised for commercial benefit, there was room for resistance. First luring the audience in with deliberate sexualised advertising, Butch Princessa would then unleash a pantomime of vulgarity. By bringing to light the “ugly” or “unconventional” aspects of being a woman in performance, the performer actively resists the commodifica-



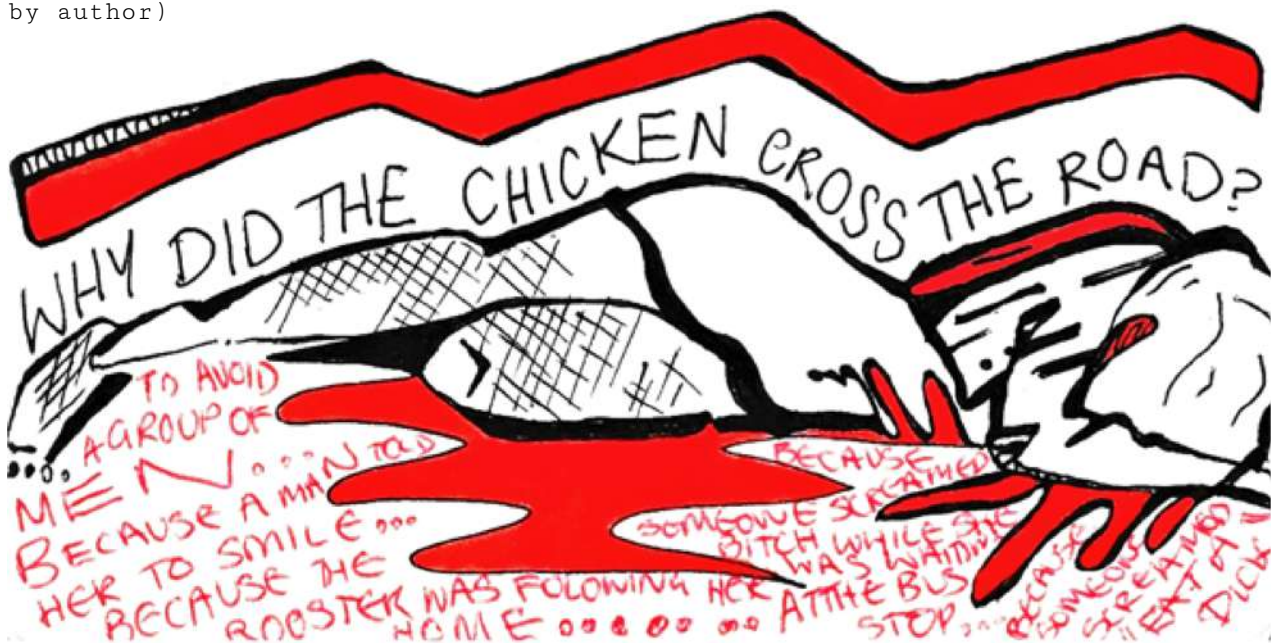
tion of conventional femininity in the entertainment industry; reworking what is acceptable for a woman performer to do onstage, and thus what is commercially sellable.

Disgust was a popular trope amongst feminist Fringe performers. Much like second-wave feminist Judy Chicago (Red Flag, 1971), women performers deployed Blood-related shock tactics to ignite feminist conversations. (Figure 9) depicts the performer Ruby spraying herself and the stage with tomato sauce, laying in symbolic “menstrual blood” to the delight and disgust of a fully packed audience. Gasps and mirthful groans punctuated the audience. I believe this drawing captures the exhibitionism of the act; however, I did not want to frame it as something disgusting. As a woman, I wanted to reflect on the liberating quality of putting the menstrual experience centre-stage. (Figure 8) on the other hand is a depiction of a I felt that in this drawing the reader would be able to imagine themselves in the epicentre of the

ribbons, wanting to capture the “live immediacy of performance” (Flynn and Tinius, 2015: 343). Both performances were playing with the menstrual taboo, by making fun of and celebrating it. Menstrual blood has typically been made invisible in European society, rendering it a concealed and private sanitary issue (Mauss, 2003 [1934]). However, by centring it within artistic practises, the performers conceptualized the experience of menstruation in creative and transformative ways. Blood is a powerful ritual symbol, and I used the colour red in my ethnographic drawings as I feel it has deep emotional resonance (Manica and Rios, 2016) and has the visual capacity to communicate powerful messages.

*Contra*, by Laura Murphy, a young English lesbian, offered a spellbinding mix of spoken word and aerial rope performance. In my artistic rendering (fig. 10), I hoped to stylistically capture the fluid and creative nature of her show. The scene evoked satirical Garden of Eden imagery, with a naked woman eating an apple, and

Figure 6: “Brandi's Comedy” (drawing by author)



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a snake-like fixture behind her. In her performance, Laura became dangerously entangled in the rope we were led to believe she had control over. With her spoken word, Laura told the audience of her efforts to have agency within the heterosexual male gaze and used her rope as a metaphor for her struggles; was wrapped up in an appraisal of her naked form and strength and juxtaposed against her resistance to heteronormativity.

The show *Cyst-er Act*, (see figure 11), celebrated the “sacredness of the vagina which was once worshipped and then lost.” Thus, in my drawing I used red to symbolise fertility. Whilst some might argue that an emphasis on gender bodily distinctions reinforces naturalised ideas of gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987). I believe that the performer of *Cyst-er Act* Catherine, calls for a re-evaluation of the female body, by appreciating its erotic

Figure 7: “Butch Princessa” (drawing by author)

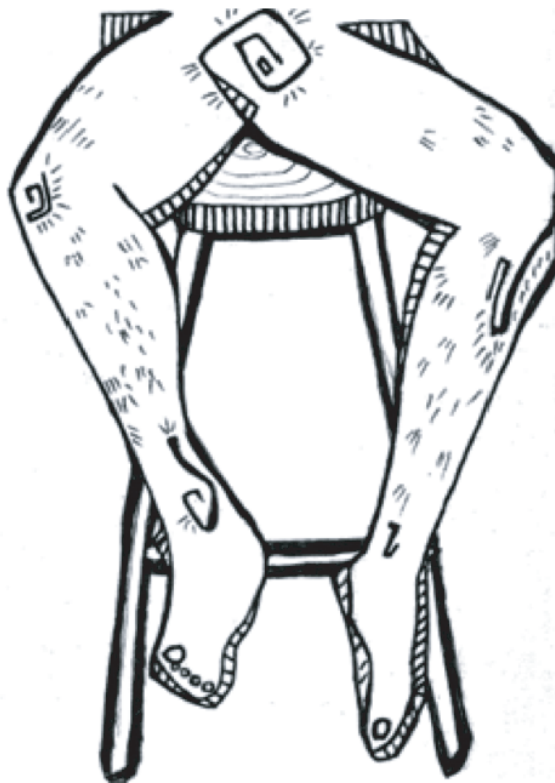


Figure 8: “Yuck Circus” (drawing by author)

power: “we need to reconnect our bodies to our own feelings of empowerment, which has nothing to do with the male gaze or being reproductive.” Conventionally in the entertainment industry women not only had to appear attractive but also “sexually productive” (Adkins, 1995: 147). Catherine resisted this prescription by drawing attention to her naked body, actively engaging the audience in confronting their attitudes of the attractiveness of older women (Dean, 2005: 770). As a group of women in their forties, Catherine proclaims: “We want to show that we don’t give a shit, so others might be empowered.” Women are encouraged to engage with their bodies in a way that might encourage agency and empowerment.

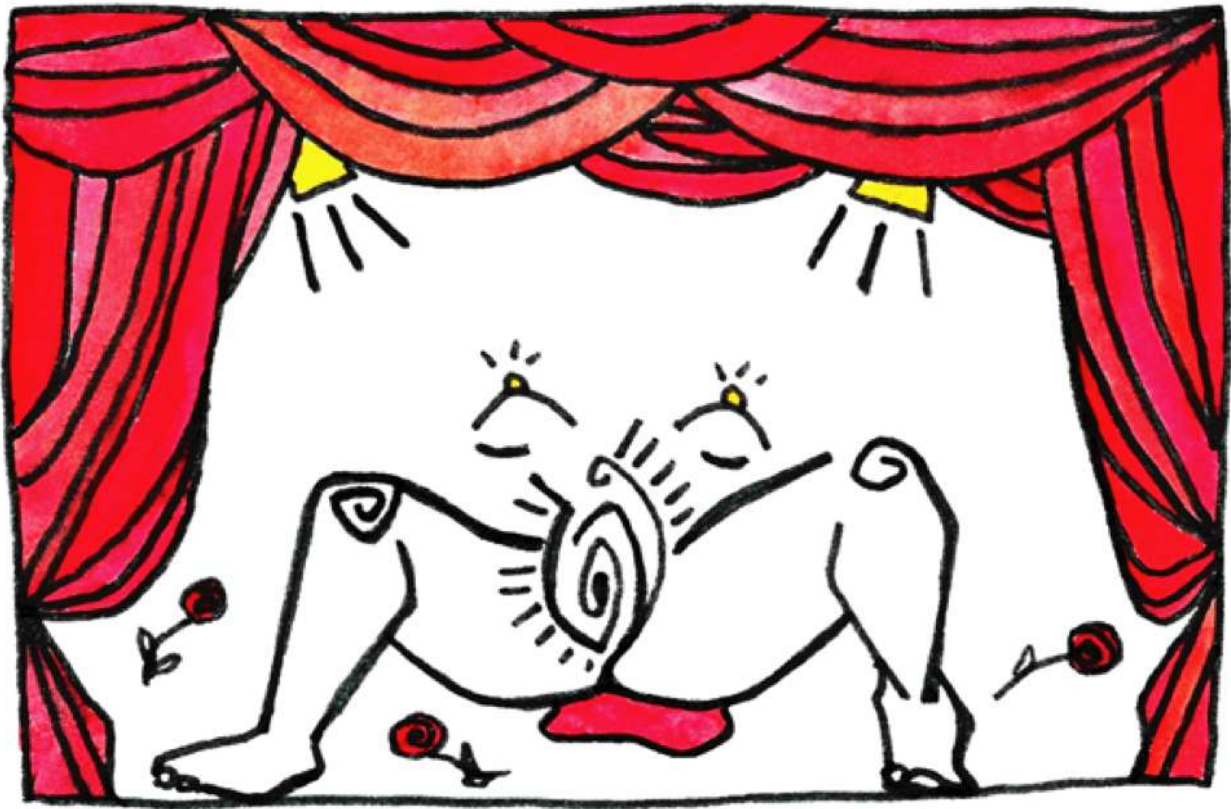


Figure 9: “Ruby Red” (drawing by author)

It is possible that these performances could still be framed within the heterosexual male gaze, as decorative objects to be gazed upon (Berger, 1990). However, I put forward that live performances of female nudity may only be rebellious on the surface, nakedness, especially when reproduced by conventionally attractive white women, only serves to reinforce “western” ideas of feminine beauty, creating a sense of individualised sexual liberation. Nonetheless, my informants exhibited a resistance to conventional feminine norms by producing shows that exposed the sometimes-ugly truths of being a woman, playing with the boundaries of appropriate femininity, including vulgarity, overt sexuality and anger. For me, the simple act of

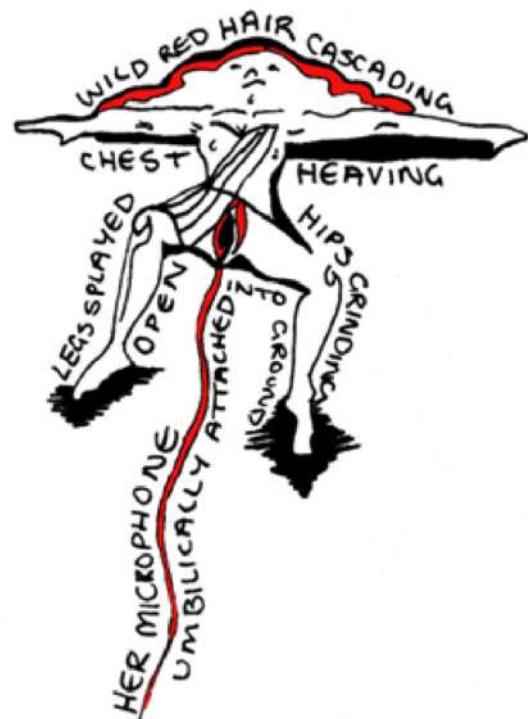


Figure 11: “Cyst-er Act excerpt from Fieldnotes” (drawing by author)



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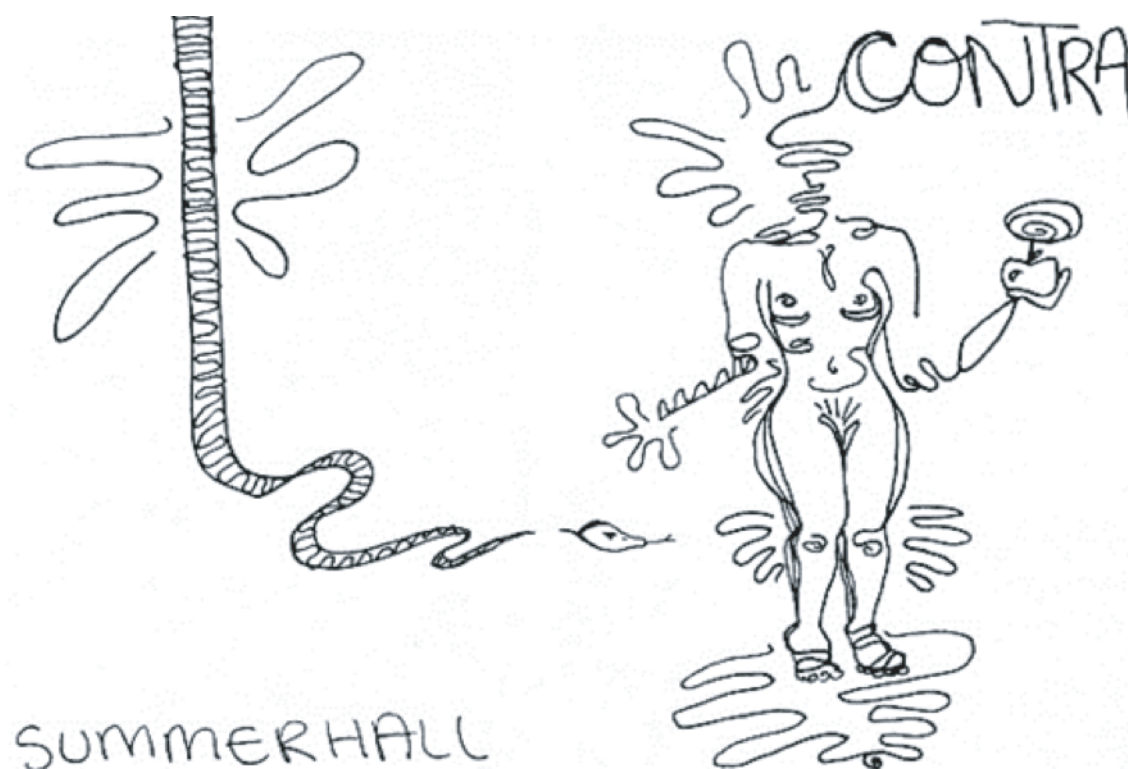


Figure 10: "Contra" (drawing by author)

putting pen to paper afforded me the courage to capture the raw and relatable emotions of women's rage and vulnerability.

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