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4
In Conversation with the Department: Second-year Students' Perspectives on Race and Anthropology



6
Simian Spillovers: Primatology in the Age of Pandemics.

9
Childbirth in the Time of the Coronavirus

10
Liminality and Dreamwork: COVID-19 Healthcare



12
Storytelling Via the Mask

14
The Racialisation of Coronavirus



16
Prognosis of Death in Paediatric Patients: Should We Inform Terminally-ill Children They are Dying?

18
When We Lose Our Elderly, We Will Have No Strength



20
Dead Profiles: Alive Forever?

22
Paddington in Your Purse



24
Transforming Dolphins and Transforming Landscapes

26
Suicide in Non-human Primates? Cognitive Correlates and Evidence

28
An Interview with Sahra Gibbon



30
Embodiment of Experience

32
Footprints amongst the San

34
'See the Capability, Not the Disability': Fieldwork among Visually

Impaired Workers

36
Hand-Poked Tattoo and the Declaration of Identity

38
Cricket as a Commons

40
The Spaces of Anthropology in France and the UK

42
'The People in the Trees': Fiction or Reality? Revisiting Controversy within Anthropological Research

44
Digital Convergence and Divergence

46
Flying Seagulls: A Border Crossing

48
Affect and the Dancing Audience

50
Of Objects and Time

52
In Time

54
In and Out of the Present

Contributors

Helena Bogner, Denisa Botescu, Annamaria Dall'Anese, Andrea Bravo Diaz, Gaia Campanelli, Adela Cebeiro Munin, Elie Danziger, Charlotte Eastwood, Harrison Fillmore, Will Fitter, Camilla French, Sahra Gibbon, Ulysse Ha, Martin Holbraad, Rebecca Irons, Ghazaleh Kadkhoda Zadeh, Katie Li, Francesca McLaren, Cara Michel, Katrine Nohr, Niamh O'Neill, Mai Pedersen, Paulina Pérez-Duarte Mendiola, Lan Shi, George Smith, Volker Sommer, Christina Antoinetta Vasilescu, Amy Vogel, Kelly Winch

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A NOTE OF WELCOME

Welcome to an academic year like no other at UCL Anthropology, and a special welcome to all our new students and staff! The past year was my first as Head of Department, and I think it is fair to say that I got rather more than I had bargained for. By way of introduction to this brilliantly varied and lively issue of *Anthropolitan*, our departmental flagship journal, let me provide a brief overview of the challenges we have faced during the past few months, as well as some of the things to which we can look forward in the coming year.

Looking at it in retrospect, the way we were able as a community to respond to the shock of UCL's closure in March 2020, and the abrupt move to online teaching and remote working that this triggered, was quite astounding. Within days we were all conversant with a host of new technologies (though I know of no-one who doesn't still sometimes forget to unmute on Teams...), finding new ways to stay in touch with each other, and reformatting our daily routines and working practices to suit the new, Covid-world that has been unfolding in front of our eyes ever since. I know I speak for all colleagues in saying that we have been humbled by the enormous good will and understanding of our students, who joined in this collective effort in such a good-natured and supportive way. Online classes, exams replaced by coursework, graduation parties on Teams—difficult, sometimes frustrating, but all taken in our collective stride.

All that, of course, was only a dress-rehearsal for this year. Academics and colleagues in the

office have spent pretty much all summer (nobody has had much of a holiday this year...) preparing for a new level of online teaching, while creating the conditions necessary to allow students to come into the Department and interact face-to-face safely (one way systems, face-masks, sanitizers and the like). So, instead of attending lectures, tutorials and seminars, students this year will be using our online platform 'Moodle' in ever more sophisticated ways, watching videos, logging on to online meetings, and conducting research using a host of fast evolving 'remote' methodologies. If anthropology is partly a matter of charting out new possibilities for living, this year we should all be having an anthropological field day.

Alongside Covid-19, the year's other truly major event has been the call to action that was issued to us by so many of our students this summer, in the wake of the murder of George Floyd, demanding that deep seated and persistent forms of racism and exclusion—in our pedagogies, in the make up of our staff and student bodies, in microaggressions experienced in our classrooms and common rooms—be fully acknowledged and systematically addressed.

Speaking personally, the experience listening to students and staff speak out about these issues and call out our Department for its lack of sufficient action has been chastening, and I am deeply grateful for it. More importantly, this has spurred the Department into much needed and urgent action on a series of fronts,

steered with energy by our newly constituted Anti-Racisms Committee, comprising academics and professional services colleagues from across the Department working closely with students at all levels. Work now is being conducted on a series of fronts: anti-racist pedagogy and decolonisation, putting structures and processes in place to make both our staff and student bodies more representative, instituting more transparent and robust channels of communication between staff and students, and providing bespoke training in actively anti-racist practice across the department. We pledge to make our department an actively anti-racist space—one in which everyone, regardless of background, feels fully welcome and at home. It will take a great deal of work to get there, because the problems we are seeking to address are big and deep, but we are committed to doing just that.

Joining us also in these efforts are a host of new colleagues. As part of instituting Public Anthropology as a new section of our Department, centred on teaching and research in documentary film and creative enterprise, we are delighted to be welcoming as permanent colleagues Marc Isaacs, Richard Alwyn, Chloe White, Dieter Deswarte, Lasse Johansson, Lucy Sandys-Winsch, Diana Vonnak, Laurence Avis and Ripley Parker. Equally, we are delighted to welcome as colleagues Rafael Schacter in our Material and Visual Culture section, Dalia Iskander in our Medical Anthropology section, Emily Emmott and Alex Piel in our Biological Anthropology section, and Helene Neveu Kringelbach and Lewis Daly

in our Social Anthropology section. Finally, our always amazing team at the Departmental office has been majorly enhanced by Matteo Fumagalli, who leads our Education Team, and Anthony Harris, our new undergraduate administrator.

In a department as dynamic and top-notch as ours, there is of course always plenty more to report: a raft of new PhDs awarded; exciting new postdoctoral fellows arriving; colleagues' major new publications coming out, new research projects starting (continuing in our now well-established tradition of attracting major grants, Timothy Carroll, Sahra Gibbon and Lucia Michelutti have each secured large-scale funding in the past year); exciting plans to reform the shape of our undergraduate degree spearheaded by Alison Macdonald, our brilliant Head of Teaching; and even creeping up to 4th place in the QS University rankings (though we take these things with a pinch of salt).

Let me end this note, however, by recording our immense, heartfelt appreciation of two colleagues who have left us this year after decades of service: Volker Sommer, primatologist, tanguero and free thinker extraordinaire, and Sara Randall, demographer, consummate number cruncher, and knitter of the best jumpers ever. Both of them stay with us as 'Emeriti', but their presence in the daily life of our department will be sorely missed.

Here's wishing everyone a fantastic, fulfilling year! Surely there is plenty more in store for us all, but we can just as safely say that, with all the practice we've had, we can handle it, and perhaps even make of it a virtue.

Professor Martin Holbraad
Head of Department



In Conversation with the Department: Second-year Students' Perspectives on Race and Anthropology

Gaia Campanelli and Charlotte Eastwood
3rd Year BSc Anthropology

At the end of last May, after an academic year characterised by strikes, a pandemic and a global lockdown, UCL Anthropology second-year students had already had a lot of food for thought. Us reps, alongside most of our fellow course-mates, found ourselves reflecting a lot on the direction society and the world were heading towards. The murder of George Floyd, the consequent wave of BLM protests, and a renewed awareness about the existence of systemic racism as a consequence of colonialism and white supremacy, all came to define a situation no one could ignore anymore. With mixed feelings of rage, shock, and exasperation,

anthropology students joined millions of people worldwide in the process of further educating themselves on the countless forms of racism embedded in modern society, striving to take real action to finally end them. As most of the world was still in lockdown, social networks came to constitute the discursive counterpart to the action that was taking place in the streets: everyone was talking, sharing, and posting about the matter of race.

Drawing from our personal experience, informal discussions among course-mates, and individual research, many of us felt a responsibility to turn inwards

and examine how these dynamics were replicated even within our small department. We realised that the momentum generated worldwide both online and offline had created an opportunity for change in which the student voice would be heard, and we felt best positioned to highlight improvements in the department based on our lived experiences. For this reason, we organised an online Teams meeting with a group of volunteer second-year students willing to discuss a potential list of issues and in order to address opportunities for change.

We found that there was a mutual feeling among us that anthropology as a discipline inherently focuses on white male voices, and that reading lists weren't doing enough to adequately elevate more diverse writers and perspectives. Whilst the department had taken the positive step in 2019 to implement a Decolonising Anthropology module that was set up by a student-led initiative, this was only available to third and fourth years. As second-year students, we were only meant to encounter issues of colonialism and decolonisation during the last two weeks of the Theoretical Perspectives module—which we missed due to strikes. Unanimously, we felt that only by bringing the Decolonising Anthropology content to every year of our degree, would we gain systematic knowledge about colonial contexts and inequalities that is fundamental for understanding different positionalities within and beyond the discipline.

Embedding an open discussion surrounding these topics from the outset would not only reflect the lived everyday experiences of BAME people, but also create a more inclusive environment within the department that would take into account a variety of different viewpoints. To further elevate diverse voices in the department, in the wait to see new permanent members of staff from a BAME background, we also proposed the inclusion of guest speakers at departmental events. This would widen academic representation whilst

at the same time prevent academics from finding themselves in the situation of 'speaking for others' from their own positionality.

We thought as a group that we shouldn't just talk about the matters impacting the department, but effectively put forward our ideas to staff in order to invoke or inspire change. Drawing from this discussion, we produced a document that summarised our points, which was then brought to the final SSCC meeting. We received very positive feedback from our proposals, and some of them, like inviting guest speakers to the department, have been implemented by the department's new Anti-Racism Committee (ARC)!

Looking forward, our hopes are that the department demonstrates a strong and active commitment to diversifying the department and breaking down the barriers of institutional racism. We hope to see a much more inclusive community that equips the next generation of anthropologists to take a conscious effort to decolonise their learning. The first steps of implementing the Anti-Racism Committee are very promising, and we can't wait to see what role the student community will have in taking part—and hopefully, driving—this fundamental change.



Top left & right: a BLM protest in London

Simian Spillovers: Primatology in the Age of Pandemics.

Volker Sommer
Professor of Evolutionary Anthropology

For those of us tracking gorillas, chimpanzees, bonobos or orangutans in Africa or Asia, the jungle finally comes home. Because wearing surgical masks and respecting social distancing is what we do for a living—and to save lives...

There is no shortage of diseases that spread from animals to people (zoonoses) or from people to animals (anthroponoses), including virus infections causing dengue, smallpox, rabies or influenza. And by now, we all can surely spell 'surivanoroc' backwards. Disregarding devastating consequences for a moment, those inter-species jumps are actually a beautiful illustration of how all organisms are linked through evolution—with transmission more likely between those more closely related.

The Human Touch

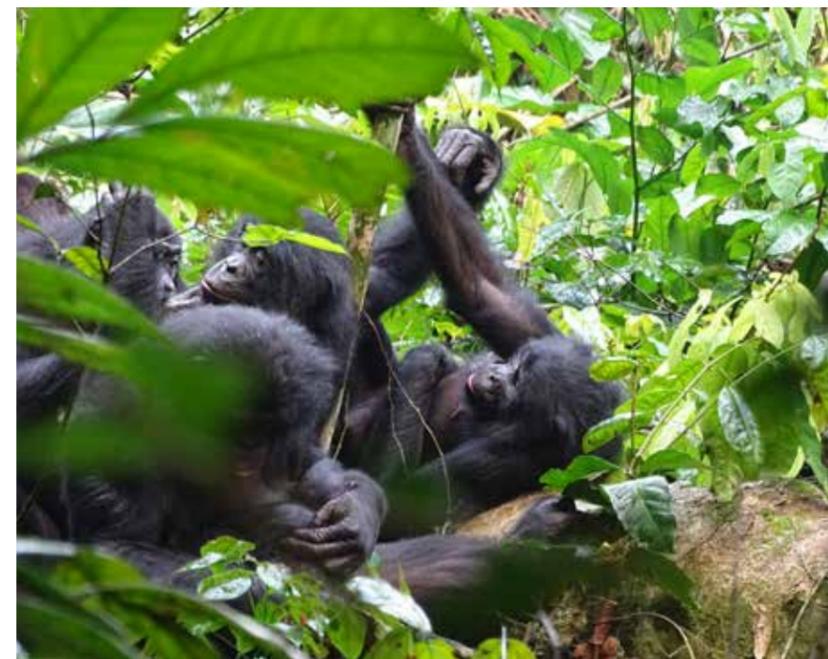
Thoughts about passing on germs were far from the mind when primatological field work entered into its golden age in the mid-1960s. Front pages of *National Geographic* soon displayed images of Jane Goodall, Diane Fossey and Biruté Galdikas in physical contact with wild chimpanzees, gorillas and orangutans. After all, those were truly mystical moments, when pioneering primatologists made first contact and literally held hands with potentially ferocious relatives. After so much investment of blood, sweat and tears (think treacherous thickets, trails, thorns), what could be more rewarding than hugging and playing with increasingly trustful beautiful beasts? The interspecies affair wasn't one-sided at all—gentle

touches or rough-and-tumble were often initiated by the fellow apes themselves.

Alas, those foreign explorers were ignorant that they carried germs against which the tropical inhabitants lacked resistance. Similar to how measles brought by Iberian conquistadores wiped out original populations in the Americas, many non-human apes would die from polio or respiratory infections. (While no consolation to those who passed away, it must be noted that their entire communities would by now have disappeared due to poaching and habitat destruction by humans, had these early primate scientists not soon pushed to create protected areas.)

Since those nonchalant days, procedures changed drastically. Today, anyone wishing to observe great apes in the wild must be vaccinated to prevent contagion of yellow fever, MMR, polio—you name it. Other rules enforce 'social distancing' between human and non-human apes, with 10 meters increasingly recommended. Disposable surgical face masks need to be worn. And upon following a 'call of nature', you have to bury any tangible outcome. Primatologists like myself who serve the Primate Specialist Group (PSG) of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) are constantly updating best-practice guidelines.

The youngest members of the study communities might show little respect for our efforts. Since birth, they grew up with the sight of those intriguing bipedal



beings, feeling perennially tempted to touch them. We aim to deter such intentions, by ignoring the advances or forcefully stamping the ground. This surely goes against inclination. Because, who wouldn't want to cuddle a fluffy gorilla?

Although field researchers try hard to reduce infections, other humans pose considerable risks. East Africa's mountain gorillas sometimes suffer from mange, caused by parasitic mites

spread via domestic animals. In West Africa, apes perish from anthrax, a severe bacterial disease affecting skin and lungs, transmitted by cattle entering forests. Ebola fever has been particularly devastating. An infection kills half of afflicted humans, but three quarters of chimpanzees and 95 percent of gorillas. After an outbreak in jungles of Gabon and the Republic of the Congo, ape populations were practically wiped out.

While the fate of apes generates headlines, succumbing monkeys receive far less attention. Take yellow fever in South-eastern Brazil, which endangers primates in forest islands that persist in a sea of human settlements and land use. Here, because of spatial proximity, more contact occurs—such as when people collect wood for construction or cooking, or when monkeys venture out to feast on crops. Thousands of uncounted marmosets, howler and titi monkeys have already died from the mosquito-transmitted virus. Survivors may be persecuted by fearful locals, albeit such revenge killings worsen the situation as hunters are likely to infect themselves.

Jumping the Lineage

Our field research often pairs up with laboratories. Such 'synthetic primatology' is increasingly concerned with diseases. For this, we collect biological samples from animals, both wild and domestic, and local humans alike—including faeces, urine, food remains, soil from forest floors or fields, flies or trapped mosquitoes. These collections are made accessible to leading labs, such as those at the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) in Berlin or the School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania.

For example, a recent RKI-led study investigated the evolutionary history of herpesviruses found in hominines—the

Far left: Spatially distanced observation of apes. (Photo: LuiKotale / Barbara Fruth)

Left: A bunch of happy bonobos—no humans allowed to join. (Photo: LuiKotale / Barbara Fruth)

Left below: Face-masked primatology in the Congo. (Photo: LuiKotale / Barbara Fruth)

taxonomic group that includes gorillas, chimpanzees, bonobos and humans. The research utilised 675 faecal samples obtained at 20 sites in 11 sub-Saharan countries, covering all 9 species and subspecies of non-human African apes. Samples included rarely studied types of apes, such as the Nigeria-Cameroon chimpanzee (via the Gashaka Primate Project, directed by myself in North-eastern Nigeria) or bonobos (via the LuiKotale project in DR Congo, directed by my colleagues Gottfried Hohmann and Barbara Fruth).

Herpesviridae is a family of large double-stranded DNA viruses that infect many vertebrates, causing harmless to fatal diseases from cutaneous lesions, blisters and genital herpes to chickenpox, shingles or Kaposi's sarcoma. Parasites generally don't benefit from killing their hosts, as this disrupts the chain of transmission. However, newly emerging infective agents (such as coronaviruses) haven't learned that yet and often behave like any 'young and wild' creature, causing havoc. More 'mature' viruses tend to become less harmful for their hosts, while still ensuring diffusion (think kissing, with lip sores the only punishment).

In fact, most mammalian herpes infections remain asymptomatic—indicative of long-term co-evolution with their host. The affected parties have, so to speak, arrived at a stage of mutually beneficial co-existence. Viruses therefore often become host-specific, mutating 'within' their carriers in a process of co-divergence. With this, cross-species transmission should become rarer and rarer.

To reconstruct the evolutionary history of hominine cytomegaloviruses (CMV)

causing herpes, RKI scientists applied a battery of sophisticated methods, including genetic analyses based on PCR (polymerase chain reaction) and probabilistic Bayesian statistics. Results indeed suggest various degrees of co-divergence, but also, interestingly, host switches. Molecular clock computations point to a transmission of the CMV1 virus type as early as 2.2 mya (million years ago) from gorillas to the lineage of panines (the ancestors of chimpanzees and bonobos). A further transmission of the CMV2 virus type from panines to gorillas likely happened 1.2 mya.

Cross-species transmission requires opportunity. Indeed, chimpanzees and gorillas often lived (and live) in sympatry in rainforests. Thus, groups of both species may forage in the same plant food patch. This allows for viral transmission, whether oral-faecal or via contaminated food items including chewed-up and discarded fruit wedges.

Bonobos, however, occur only South of the Congo River, spatially separated from their close chimpanzee relatives and gorillas. This segregation occurred

0.87 mya—a timeline established by molecular and anatomical comparisons. Interestingly, the data confirm that bonobo and chimpanzee CMV1 and CMV2 virus variants separated in almost perfect synchrony with the divergence of the two ape hosts, at 0.82 mya.

Probing for Cures

We already know of other cross-hominine transmission events, notably of the malaria agent *Plasmodium falciparum* which switched from gorillas to humans, and the HIV-1 agent which switched from chimpanzees to humans. Importantly, while offering fascinating academic insights, such research also holds promise for cures.

Thus, virologists at the University of Pennsylvania studied how human and simian immunodeficiency viruses (HIV/SIVs) use the primary receptor CD4 to enter target cells. Utilising chimpanzee samples from the Gashaka region in Nigeria and elsewhere, the lab identified coding variants of the receptor that provide antiviral protection—a discovery that may improve treatment. In the

same vein, researchers at St. Andrews University aim to understand malaria in humans and chimpanzees inhabiting Nigerian forests—and potentially identify genetic markers associated with increased immunity.

While we are busy in forests and labs, one thing is sure: evolution won't stop. It is only a matter of time, until the next disease agent discovers that its replication is best served by latching on to that perfect host: humans. Not only are humans extremely sociable apes, complete with touchy-feely desires. They also criss-cross the globe, whether driven by famine, war, holidaying or exploration.

Perhaps one day, the vision of the latest *Planet of the Apes* movies will become reality. According to that narrative, a superbug will exterminate humanity, while rendering infected non-human apes more intelligent. Which they won't be for long—unless they become better virologists than we currently are.

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Close relatives in a tangle... Physical contact, such as this interaction with the author, is tabooed in the jungle. However, for orphaned bonobos at the Lola-ya-Bonobo sanctuary, play with humans is a mental life-line. (Photo: Volker Sommer)



Childbirth in the Time of the Coronavirus

Katrine Nohr
PhD Anthropology

We have all experienced immense changes to our lives due to the coronavirus—and have without doubt been anxious about how it all might affect our loved ones. This must certainly also be the case for pregnant women and mothers in childbirth.

After doing PhD fieldwork in Tanzania, where I interviewed mothers about their pregnancy and childbirth experiences, I returned to the UK to do focus groups with mothers here. To my surprise, a lot of the mothers in the UK had faced many of the same issues as mothers in Tanzania. Many told me about their emotional traumas, others told me about their newborn babies who had suffered brain damage or even passed away due to the lack of resources and overworked hospital staff.

I feel for pregnant women in this time of the coronavirus, as they must be very anxious and worried about what might happen. Even though the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (2020) state that pregnant women are still no more likely to contract the infection than the general population, mothers are very vulnerable in childbirth. It is something that I experienced when giving birth—I was overwhelmed by my own vulnerability along

with the paralysing fear that my newborn baby would not recover.

Mothers informed me how important personal support, eye contact and even a small smile are during childbirth, but now some women might face hospital staff in personal protective equipment (if the health staff are lucky enough to have access to it), perhaps feeling isolated and alienated from them. As we know, Foucault (1963) coined the term 'medical gaze' (1963) to denote the dehumanising medical separation of the patient's body from the patient's person. The coronavirus has probably taken mothers' experiences of the 'medical gaze' during childbirth to a whole new level.

Mothers told me how the lack of resources and overworked staff in hospitals negatively affected their childbirth experiences, as the staff were tired, emotionally drained and sometimes simply just lacked the necessary resources. We can only imagine nightmare situation the hospital staff are facing at the moment, let alone the frustration about the lack of personal protective equipment.

The coronavirus has turned all our lives upside down, not least my research on childbirth



Above: Mother with her ill baby in maternity ward & My newborn son Peter, who was born by emergency caesarean section due to fetal distress.

experiences, as my conclusion somehow seems so irrelevant now—but perhaps it is even more important than ever. I will echo what other medical anthropologists, such as Napier (2014) have said before me. We need well-resourced public health systems to provide people-centred healthcare to all of us, and not just to a privileged few. This is as important for the individual mother in childbirth, as it is for societies, and the world at large.

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Liminality and Dreamwork: COVID-19 Healthcare

Francesca McLaren
4th Year BSc Anthropology with a Year Abroad

The COVID-19 pandemic has unravelled healthcare systems across the world. Ultimately, it has facilitated a confrontation with structural violence, forcing us to reimagine both our present and our futures. Along with my classmates at the University of California, I began exploring how this 'reimagination' has materialised in many forms of dreamwork for healthcare workers.¹ However, whereas my American classmates' fieldwork revealed that this new confrontation with structural violence has aroused a profound sense of hope and pragmatism to reconfigure unjust systems, my own explorations of British NHS workers' pandemic experiences revealed poignantly different 'reimaginings' of the future.

The UK is on track for the highest number of health worker deaths in Europe. My interviews with NHS physicians revealed how COVID-19 healthcare has been characterised by feelings of uncertainty and liminality. In light of this, classic anthropological 'rites of passage' theory can offer valuable insight into the experiences of NHS doctors during COVID-19, as well as the pandemic's impact on healthcare professionals'

'imaginings' of a 'post-COVID' world.

As famously posited by Victor Turner (1969), rites of passage can be segregated into three-stages: pre-liminal rites, 'transitional' liminal rites, and post-liminal rites. The liminal rites are characterised by experiences of ambiguity, the subversion of hierarchies, processes of 'radical equalisation' and the formation of strong social bonds. My conversations with NHS doctors suggested that the 'liminality' they experienced is primarily invoked by the pandemic's subversion of the standard patient/doctor status roles. A 'normal' doctor/patient relationship would be one of dependency, with the patient assuming almost all of the risk; however, the COVID-19 pandemic has unsettled this dynamic. This has been affirmed by the deaths- of over 500 health and social care workers, with 70 of those being NHS workers. Physicians have been placed on a novel threshold between providing protection to the vulnerable and becoming the most vulnerable.

Doctors have also been left feeling 'betwixt and between' (Turner 1969), with COVID-19 hospital policy hampering

their ability to fulfil their previous understandings of 'standard' patient care. As a consultant surgeon working in the NHS reflected, 'Our responsibility is now to ourselves, to our co-workers and to the patient—explicitly in that order. There's certainly no jumping up and down on patients' chests generating virus-laden aerosols,' referring to new protocol whereby if a patient arrests, instead of starting compressions, doctors must work against instinct and training and wait for a specific COVID-19 arrest team to be called.

Feelings of uncertainty can similarly be attributed to the novel professional relationships COVID-19 has brought to NHS wards. One of the 7,500 former 'retired and returned' clinicians re-joining the NHS in the wake of the pandemic described how senior specialist physicians like himself have been re-trained to do 'simple' tasks in order to support nursing staff, upturning the commonly strained relationship and perceived status difference between nurses and doctors. Such disbandment of hierarchies and 'radical equalisation' (Turner 1969) further contributes to the liminality experienced by COVID-19 NHS doctors.

Rites of passage theory also associates liminality with the formation of stronger social bonds, a phenomenon Turner described as *communitas*. The pandemic has seen powerful outpourings of social solidarity, evident in NHS doctors' affirmations of a greater sense of 'comradery', 'team spirit' and increased respect for their colleagues as they struggle through the challenging circumstances together. This feels particularly poignant when considered alongside clinicians' reports of the significant physical and emotional strain of 'COVID shifts', including sores from public-donated PPE masks. These sores represent an embodiment of the structural failings of the government to provide adequate PPE in the wake of the pandemic, an embodiment of what Paul Farmer (2006) has termed 'structural violence'—the affliction embedded in large-scale social structures.

Solidarity has similarly been in abundance on a national scale. Propelled by the government, the British media has manufactured a powerful 'physicians as heroes' narrative, praising NHS workers for their 'superhuman' resilience during the pandemic and kickstarting initiatives like the weekly 'Clap for Carers'. However, throughout the last decade, the NHS has been scrutinised by the British media and severely underfunded by the government, meaning the pandemic has in fact only exacerbated NHS workers suffering and vulnerability. As a result, the British government's sudden change in stance has been met with scepticism by some healthcare practitioners:

I hope it [NHS appreciation] is not forgotten when this is over... this complaint isn't for monetary reward, but simply for better resources to perform our jobs to the best standard, and a work environment that cherishes its employees and facilitates healthy lifestyles for those working in a healthcare system... I don't want a clap after this; I want a better work environment.

The British media's 180-degree turn has exacerbated the ambiguity felt by NHS workers, but the intense 'heroes' rhetoric also obscures acknowledgement of the large structural forces at play, which are deemed detrimental to healthcare

workers safety in this time. The prevailing media narrative normalises the structural violence which has led to the UK's elevated death toll for healthcare workers in comparison to its European neighbours, and thus can be considered a unique manifestation of the phenomenon Pierre Bourdieu termed 'symbolic violence' (1992). While the act of government officials gathering outside 10 Downing Street to praise the NHS seems inherently un-violent, the concealing of government responsibility for the structural flaws which have exacerbated the vulnerability of NHS doctors at this time, *through* applause and praise, is arguably more violent than direct attack. Of course, the support for the NHS is well-deserved, but it obscures criticism of an organisation which is in great need of some constructive criticism.

If working in the time of the pandemic becomes the 'liminal rite' of NHS doctors, the symbolic violence of the 'heroes' narrative directly impinges on how healthcare workers envision their 'post-liminal rights' and 'new world'. In a rite of passage, the *communitas* bond is said to transcend social structures, forming an 'anti-structure' which enables new possibilities for social change once the rite of passage is complete. The instances of solidarity and *communitas* seen between NHS professionals are manifestations of what sociologist Wendy Brown has called 'dreamwork', the idea that 'social change requires novel fictions that reimagine and rework all that is taken for granted about the current structure of society' (2006: 22). Whereas my American classmates' research on U.S. healthcare workers uncovered an abundance of dreamwork and positive re-imaginings for large structural change in response to the pandemic, conversations with NHS doctors revealed an overall scepticism and absence of hopeful explorations of future possibilities for the NHS. The *communitas* forged between NHS doctors appears to struggle to 'transcend larger social structures' (Turner 1969). It seems the 'heroes' rhetoric and resultant distrust of the British media has taken up the space for hope of future reform of the healthcare system, hampering our healthcare workers' abilities to dream of a better NHS.

As they navigate a sudden confrontation with the violence embedded within the

structures of our society, the pandemic has provoked experiences of uncertainty and liminality for British healthcare workers. However, whether or not the national solidarity and collective resilience in the NHS will endure and enable positive social change in the 'post-liminal'—or post-COVID—world remains to be seen.

¹ Original research for a class at the University of California, Berkeley.

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Top left: Government public health campaign posters (Source: [Wikimedia](#)).
Below: NHS Nurse wearing PPE (Source: [Unsplash](#)).



Storytelling via the Mask: Reflection, Rationalisation, and the Process of Embedding Oneself in the World

Harrison Fillmore
MSc Biosocial Medical Anthropology

I began my interviews the same way every time: 'Do you wear a mask?'

Although this question can only be answered in two ways, responses were never quite the same:

'I don't wear one at all.'

'First I look at the weather report; then I decide whether or not to wear one.'

'Only if I don't want to put on makeup.'

'Where I'm from, you don't really have to wear masks.'

'If I'm sick, or if it's really cold, then maybe.'

The mask works well in China. Its use,

having been re-rationalised several times throughout Chinese history, has become entangled in several different connotations in the China of today. My research traces the reiterations of mask use in China and offers a possible framework for how mask use has influenced Chinese culture.

The advent of the mask's popular use, although far from smooth—in that several naysayers died before masks were taken seriously—was due mostly to its effectiveness against transmission of the First Manchurian Plague in 1911. Not a decade after, Spanish influenza forced masks on people worldwide. Mid-20th century Chinese news periodicals show that even in the absence of a deadly contagious pandemic, mask use remained popular in China through the rest of the century. In 2003, the

SARS epidemic transformed the mask yet again. Geopolitically, SARS put China's newfound political and economic openness at stake. Mask use within China was a reflection of collective effort for public health, but at the same time, mask use was reminiscent of Mao-era curtailment of free speech. In 2015, the mask became entangled in yet another context: *Under the Dome*, a documentary about smog in China produced by activist Chai Jing, was published online. Before COVID-19, smog was the most recent addition to the list of popular reasons people in China choose to wear masks. It is the topic around which most interviews revolve, even if only indirectly:

'I don't wear a mask, at least not here [in the United States]. The air is much better here.'

'I remember everyone was wearing a mask when Under the Dome came out, but not so much anymore.'

'I look outside and if it's hazy, then I'll check my phone—if it says the air is hazardous, I'll wear a mask.'

However, recognition of airborne particulate hazards was not always related to mask use, as was the case with Chuan, from Shanxi province:

'In my hometown, you can only see the blue sky sixty days out of the year. Most of the time, the sky is just white, and you can't really tell if it's coal, or fog, or haze, or dust.'

When I asked him: 'So do you wear a mask?' He had this to say:

'Actually, no. If you want my analysis on what kind of people wear masks, maybe some business people or students, like art students—people who care about their appearance, they will wear masks... In fact, I see a lot of people just wear masks to take selfies and put them on social media. I think this trend might have started from people seeing celebrities wearing masks—when they go to the airport or whatever, they have to wear sunglasses and masks [to be anonymous].'

In every interview, I asked the question: 'Will the mask always be used in China?'

The younger, perhaps more optimistic, perhaps more environmentally conscious people usually commented that no, of course not: sometime in the future the air quality in China will be better. Some of the older interviewees (one especially comes to mind: a doctor who now works as a hospital administrator in Shanghai) commented that:

'Oh, well that doesn't matter—there will always be times when China is cold, so of course people will still wear masks.'

For her, mask use in China was only marginally about protection from smog (and certainly not about being fashionable, as Chuan suspects); wearing a face mask outside for her was mostly about *yuhan baonuan* (御寒保暖), or 'keeping out the cold and keeping in the



Masks worn during experiments with plague. National Museum of Health and Medicine CCO image.

warm', a reflection of the hot-cold etiology prevalent in China.

What happens when a physical device is at the intersection of health-making habits, medical theories, environmental, social, and political pressures, societal and folkloric assumptions, and personal narratives? What sorts of questions does this intersection pose to those who choose to wear a mask, or not?

Is addressing smog the responsibility of the government or the individual? Is it merely fashionable to appear environmentally conscious, or is smog actually damaging to health? Is cold air pathogenic? What is the air? Is it dust, pathogens, gaseous elements, temperature, or does it merely carry these things? Where do the wind and air end, and where does breath begin? The ideas that the mask brings into question don't stop there.

The mask, and mask-wearing itself, is a type of a narrative. Foremost, the mask is visible—it covers much of your face and casts you in a different light to passersby and onlookers (whatever that light may be). Second, mask-wearing is a choice. It requires the wearer to form a personal rationalisation for putting the mask on (and for keeping it on, despite it oftentimes being uncomfortable). It requires them to place themselves within the larger narrative of their environment. Moreover, it forces people who see the mask-wearer to reflect: 'Why are they wearing a mask? Should I be wearing a mask?' Without a word spoken, the mask can mediate the communication of ideas between its users and non-users. The mask has acted as a medium through

which ideas have been developed and dispersed—even if only by being a topic of discussion. The mask's visibility, its comfortability, convenience, style (or lack thereof), price, and its efficacy have all played into the influence it has brought on its wearers and non-wearers alike.

Most presently, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the mask has been recast worldwide as a tool for public health—a medical device—but as the case of mask use in China illustrates, medicine is connected with seemingly unrelated disciplines. In addition, the mask illustrates the power of any person to contribute to a narrative, be it personal, cultural, national, or global. As evinced by its long history and continually re-rationalised use, the mask is here to stay. It is (literally) an in-your-face narrative that has had the power to delineate illnesses from metaphor and the unknown, has played a role in the formation of the identities of the ill, the health-conscious, and the environmentally savvy in China, and has served as a medium through which ideas are formed, communicated, and reflected upon.

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Red Cross Motor Corps on duty during influenza pandemic of 1918. Library of Congress CCO image.



Chinese farmer in Inner Mongolia

THE RACIALISATION OF CORONAVIRUS: ILLNESS AS METAPHORS

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In the wake of the coronavirus epidemic, our countries have been thrown into a game of blame and finger-pointing by the novel, invisible enemy. We're seeing an influx of viral videos of Asian people being kicked, punched, spat on. In New York, an Asian woman was assaulted after being shouted at 'You've got coronavirus!'. In Texas, a Burmese American family was cut and stabbed while strolling through the supermarket Sam's Club. Anti-Asian hate crimes are evidently on the rise. I, myself, began to feel nervous when the Coronavirus reached London.

I stood out because of two factors: I am a Chinese person who wears a facemask.

The race factor brings visibility I've never felt before. Strolling in the city, I felt eyes fixated on me with dirty looks. Two teenage boys walked past me screaming 'Ewww!'

It was a peculiar feeling: the anxiety of a Chinese person wearing a facemask. I wanted to be protected without feeling like the infected and contagious. It was a vulnerability, an almost nakedness that you can't get away from. It is the colour of your skin that somehow warrants violence.

These racial tensions are not new. They can be traced back to three particular historical periods of Chinese identity:

Orientalism, the Yellow Peril, and the Red Scare.

Orientalism began in the late 18th century when colonial outposts essentialised people in the 'East' into dirty and uncivil unhuman subjects. Later on, when Asian workers began to migrate in the 19th century, their eagerness to take on lower wage jobs provoked racist backlash. The 'Yellow Peril' painted the Chinese as evil dangerous threats that frightened the more civilised Occidental world. In the late 1940s, the United States' anti-communist agenda, the 'Red Scare', further pushed this menace-like portrayal of Communist China.

Today, it is the culmination of the three that conveys the Chinese as vaguely ominous, dangerous conceptions. The Chinese are considered dirty, evil, uncivilised communists. They were the primitive Other. The coronavirus is simply an opportunity for these racial stereotypes to progress and resurface.

In Susan Sontag's seminal work on Aids and its Metaphors, she stresses that 'there is a link between imagining disease and imagining foreignness' to escape blame (1989: 47-48).

In the case of Covid-19, it is 'foreign' eating practices that become the scapegoat. Images of old stereotypes resurface to justify why Chinese people are to be blamed. They portray images of primal uncivility and perpetrate the existential fear that existed in the backdrop from years before.

Wet markets are particular symbols of Chinese foreignness. They reflect primitive Chinese eating habits. Lynteris and Fearnley (2020), two anthropologists researching zoonotic diseases in China, point to sensationalised wet markets as evidence of racist sentiment:

In Western media, 'wet markets' are portrayed as emblems of Chinese otherness: chaotic versions of oriental bazaars, lawless areas where animals that should not be eaten are sold as food, and where what should not be mingled comes together (seafood and poultry, serpents and cattle).

Politicians use these primitive eating habits as reasons to blame the 'Chinese'. For example, Trump's labelling of Covid-19 as the 'Chinese Virus' and Senator John Coryn's finger-pointing at China 'because the[ir] culture [...] eat[s] bats and snakes and dogs.' Other digital, more contemporary examples include artists and comedians employing old stereotypes of Chinese people eating dogs and kissing bats.

Whether the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) should have been more transparent or with better regulated wildlife are all questions of which concerns medical and political arenas. The blame, however,

no longer points directly at a political party but at real, human beings and their cultural practices. Should wet markets with wildlife be properly regulated? Probably. Should we use this as a justification of how 'dirty' and 'uncivilised' Chinese people are? Definitely not.

Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor* (1978) theorises that illnesses are imagined into metaphors that reflect and blame the patients. For example, cancer is imagined as a disease of repression and lessened 'passion'. In this logic, cancer patients then got cancer due to their insufficient passion. Sontag argues that these metaphors blame the patients and obscure the nature of the illnesses. She emphasises how using illness as metaphor detracts from the treatment of the literal illness.

We can apply this framework to better understand how geopolitics are hindering the treatment of the virus and distorting the ideas of people and culture.

Rather than applying imagined metaphors to the patients, disease metaphors are now reflective of an entire culture. Covid-19 is reflective of China and the Chinese.

When Trump calls the Coronavirus the 'Chinese Virus', the blame is with the 'Chinese'. All depictions of the illness as a powerful, deadly, invisible monster whose origins are primal and dirty are metaphors for the Chinese people. The narrative points to 'China' and the 'Chinese' as a vague, ominous, and dangerous power. They encourage racist harassment while creating a false sense that those who are not part of this race are safe.

Geopolitics between China and the 'West' tends to focus on the game of power without awareness of its consequences to real, human lives. The blame game's true collateral damage is the accelerated violence suffered by Asian communities. The phrase 'Chinese' unjustly conflates communities of various ethnicities into a group of local-born Asian-looking people. The 'Chinese' living in China are grouped into a cultural trope without real acknowledgment of their culture and traditions.

Whether you may agree or disagree with

their political party, there is more to these people's lives than communist ideologies and racial imaginaries. The 'Chinese' and China are simply a placeholder for a word, dehumanised and demonised.

The truth is that I am not here to point fingers at who is to blame. The problem is that politics are bleeding into real, human lives. The heightened levels of Sinophobia and fearmongering allow old, racist stereotypes to build, an entire race to be demonised, and misinformed blaming to be justified. The trajectory towards an ominous, dark 'Chinese-ness' is becoming much more problematic.

What we need is a reminder that this is not a blame game, not geopolitics. We are talking about real human lives in the face of violence and aggression.

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Chinese farmer in Xiamen



Prognosis of Death in Paediatric Patients: Should We Inform Terminally-ill Children They are Dying?

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A personal desire to find an answer to the specific question in this article's title originated during years of professional experience as a Paediatrician. In my search, I received a wide range of reactions and was even asked once to hide my 'obscure' books from the sight of others. Talking about dying children is not easy and tends to be a taboo subject. While posing myself the question: 'Should we inform terminally-ill children they are dying?' I found myself on an eye-opening path that redirected me to: 'What do terminally-ill children have to say about their own death?'

My investigation focused on children diagnosed with life-threatening illnesses, who experience a long trajectory toward imminent death, otherwise known as terminally-ill patients, in societies where dying 'young' is rare and unacceptable by social and cultural norms. Hence, it tends to become taboo. A fatal prognosis shatters a child's future outlook; they are no longer becoming 'someone' in the future, and this leads towards a disruption of 'social order'. In this context, 'social order' comprises three main stakeholders: (1) *parents*, who protect their children from harm; (2) *healthcare professionals*; responsible for curing the ill; and (3) *children*; a work-in-progress on their way to becoming an adult someday.

In addition to this challenging predicament, children have diverse age-related vulnerabilities, such as their lack of power in the decision-making process, variance in neurodevelopmental understanding and a tendency to be objectified as 'property' or viewed as passive victims by caregivers. Furthermore, when a life-threatening condition emerges, families and caregivers are placed in a unique and difficult position

of balancing their own emotional needs with the physical and emotional needs of their children, as well as being forced to make difficult decisions.

Bluebond-Langner (1978) conducted research in a paediatric hospital and analysed the behaviour of children with life-threatening oncological diagnoses. In observing and analysing data from the talk, behaviour and play of children, she developed a theory regarding how children acknowledge their upcoming death. She discovered that children began to recognise the seriousness of their particular disease and comprehended that improvement directly correlated with the number of 'good' or 'bad' moments they experienced—the final realisation being that continual 'bad' moments translate to inevitable death. She also noted that children, with an understanding of their fate, acquired the notion of death being taboo from surrounding adults. Even when all parties understood the predicament, they hid this acknowledgement from each other in order to 'protect' one another and maintain 'social order'.

Fredman (1997) found that some parents and healthcare practitioners strongly believe that 'not telling, equals protection', thus, not speaking-up will shelter children from even greater suffering. Much of the thinking and decision-making in these situations is deeply rooted in one's individual belief system. Adults often overlook children and regard them as incapable of knowing what is occurring around them. Children, however, according to their cognitive capacity, understand more than we usually perceive. In these instances, children use complex communication methods such as play, drawing, imaginary friends and made-up

stories. Dell Clark (2003) describes these behaviours as 'imaginal coping'. Children engage in these activities to address problematic situations that accompany diagnoses and painful treatments.

The uniqueness of each dying child's experience needs to be scrutinised through multiple lenses, with significant consideration for factors such as culture, religion, race, class and gender. It is vital carers have the capacity to listen to children, regardless of the different methods they may utilise to express themselves, as well as respond to 'what children want to know about their own death' with answers specifically related to 'what they are asking'. Addressing children on their terms, as well as being unconditionally respectful, are extremely important considerations. In these types of situations, parents and healthcare professionals are co-dependent; the latter need the former's consent to engage in these discussions, while parents require professional guidance to achieve the same end.

Children need to be able to talk freely about their preoccupations, while adults have to be comfortable not knowing all the answers. Some authors suggest that an openly known and discussed prognosis provides a greater chance of closure, increases closeness within affected families and enables them to come-to-terms with life following their child's death. Nevertheless, and this is important, it is mandatory that each case is evaluated with an individual approach based on its unique context. We are allowed to be extremely emotional about it, withal, we need to talk about it. 'Death' literacy, within professional and social communities, needs to be increased. This has enormous



Some of my 'obscure' books, which I had to hide from the sight of others.

potential to generate opportunities for compassionate conversations about 'death' and 'dying', cross-culturally.

All stakeholders bring something to this context and have a role to play. Children, in these scenarios, are confronted with challenging burdens, such as constructing a concept of 'death', as well as acknowledging their own imminent mortality. Despite the choices made by adults around them, children are active and socially-aware individuals capable of complex functioning. Parents and caregivers bring their own personal beliefs and experiences, which can have an effect on the situation and their children. Yet they too should not be ignored, as there are far-reaching implications for their emotional well-being. Healthcare professionals are charged with maintaining their professionalism, ensuring they have the necessary training to perform in these complex situations and are constantly building upon their 'death' literacy.

Assisting a dying child to have a 'peaceful

death', with all its pervading philosophical and cultural implications, equates to dying without distress or pain, surrounded by the people they love, who readily understand the process they are going through. While having the 'death talk' and being open and honest is beneficial, there are a number of important factors to consider when deciding whether to engage in these types of conversations and how this might be achieved in a meaningful way—parental consent; neurodevelopment of the child; the extent of professional training for healthcare professionals; the personalities, experiences and backgrounds of all key parties; amongst others.

Lessons can be drawn from each and every research study made. These ethnographies have taught me that healthcare professionals—in this case, child-healthcare professionals—have to be 'highly qualified', not just empirically trained, to guide each step taken by terminally-ill patients and their families. As such, healthcare professionals may not be required to explain every detail

regarding how to inform terminally-ill children they are dying or the appropriate means of achieving this, according to the uniqueness of each case, however, they could advocate that children should no longer be overlooked and seen as passive in this process. As anthropologists have found, children have their own ideas and it would be something positive if we stop and listen when the following question is asked: 'What do terminally-ill children have to say about their own death?'

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When We Lose Our Elderly, We Will Have No Strength¹

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I had been under quarantine for two months in a scientific station in the Ecuadorian Amazon when Ongai, a Waorani friend, visited me to check how I was doing. We were both adjusting to the new rules of social distancing. She attempted to shake my hand, I replied 'coronavirus', she smiled, and few minutes later we were both wearing masks and talking about the virus. In this conversation Ongai mentioned 'when we lose our elderly, we will have no strength.' I have spent the past four years researching and writing a doctoral thesis, trying to understand what it means to 'live well' for the Waorani people, a notion that includes peace, happiness and strength. This essay addresses the latter in relation to the pandemic.

In March 2020, when the Ecuadorian lockdown started, several elderly Waorani decided to isolate themselves in the forest, far from village settlements. Other Waorani living in the city went back to their villages and still remain there²—as do most young Waorani—trying to make sense of coronavirus news which they access mainly through social media. Differentiating between real and fake news is particularly challenging. In the process of getting to know the virus, the Waorani—and everybody else—adjust the way in which they understand the pandemic as more information becomes available.

One of the first Waorani strategies for dealing with the virus was recalling stories of past epidemics, particularly the polio epidemic which happened in the late 1960s, a few years after they accepted peaceful contact. Another strategy is to maintain one's strength by drinking specific forest plants as preventive medicine. While some of those plants are traditionally used for treating fever, the

plants that the Waorani are consuming during the pandemic have something in common: they are used for gaining or re-establishing one's vitality. Strength or vitality, which is called *piñe* or *piñte*, is contained in the bodies of strong people (*teemo piyengue*). The Waorani perform a variety of daily caring practices as well as rites that allow for the intergenerational sharing of vitality, which is also maintained through certain ecological practices.

While being *teemo piyengue* is synonymous with being healthy, it is often expressed in terms of people's skills and knowledge. In other words, a skilful person—such as a good hunter or a good *chambira* weaver—is considered to have embodied knowledge (High 2015) that can be shared somatically with children, for example, by ritually rubbing their sweat. Demanding activities—such as sowing or hunting—make people sweat and this work-related³ sweat is considered to contain vitality and embodied knowledge, which are ritually shared between grandparents and young children. In this way, knowledge and vitality are replenished throughout generations.

When Ongai reflected about what it would mean for the Waorani to lose their elders, she gave several examples of how their society might grow weaker without their elders. She suggested that, 'as a society', the Waorani are still making sense of contact with outsiders and as such rely on their elders, who 'speak loud', to identify the best response in the face of potential dangers. This means that elderly people are not only at the core of social reproduction—ensuring a replenishment of vitality and knowledge—but that they are also more knowledgeable in identifying the dangers of outsiders, even when peaceful mediation with outsiders

is developed mainly by younger bilingual Waorani. It requires the sensibility and experience of skilful adults and elders to protect the hunter-gatherer society as a whole from these dangers. This is how the Waorani survived colonial threats and incursions while protecting themselves in inter-riverine territories (Rival 2002).

Young people, on the other hand, gather information about the pandemic and then share it broadly. In this process of collective interpretation of the pandemic, elderly people tirelessly repeat the stories of the polio epidemic and then recommend that their children build huts in the deep forest, and drink certain forest plants. While official records only detail 16 Waorani deaths, Waorani elders recall the polio epidemic as if it were in the hundreds. When I recently mentioned that the records say just 16, some young people replied: 'have you not seen how they do not say the truth about coronavirus? It was the same with us.'

While some elderly people are already self-isolating in the forest, most Waorani remain in the villages. The villages are facing shortages of food, particularly those settlements where the forest of plenty is getting farther and Waorani feel the need to supplement their diet with outsiders' products—most commonly, sugar, salt and rice. The Waorani have closed their communities to outsiders, but this might not be enough to protect them. During the pandemic I know of at least three cases in which, after experiencing a severe illness, a Waorani person was taken to a hospital in the nearest Amazonian city which already had 30 cases of coronavirus. A Waorani friend shared pictures of his family in the hospital, expressing his concern for the lack of protective equipment as well as the money needed to sustain

themselves. In Ecuador, the pandemic has overwhelmed the health system, and as a result only severe cases are provided with a test, whereas those with mild cases have to pay up to 120 dollars to be tested. This shortage of tests has meant that some indigenous people in Amazonia have had no access to proper attention. Not far from the Waorani, the Siekopai people have had to wait two weeks for test results, while two of their elders have already died.

Perhaps if we understood the deep significance of elderly people for Amazonian societies, we would not let them die.⁴

¹ These notes were taken during the first two months of the Ecuadorian lockdown, and its analysis, which was finished in May, draws on doctoral research approved by the UCL Anthropology Department in April 2020. We know now that the Waorani have already dealt with a first wave of COVID-19 in most villages.

² This was the case until May, more up-to-date analysis is pending regarding the mobility of Waorani people back to the cities after the first wave of coronavirus.

³ The Waorani refer to physically demanding activities partaken in the forest as *ome keki* ('to do the forest') but when bilingual Waorani attempt a translation of this notion, they choose the Spanish word for 'work' (*trabajo*). However, Waorani and Western work ethics are significantly different, particularly in relation to resting time which the Waorani consider to be as essential as the working time for the maintenance of health.

⁴ In October 26, the Amazonian indigenous organisation CONFENIAE reported a total 367 confirmed cases of COVID-19 among the Waorani during the pandemic. One young Waorani died with a COVID-19 diagnosis, and two other deaths are suspected to be due to the virus.

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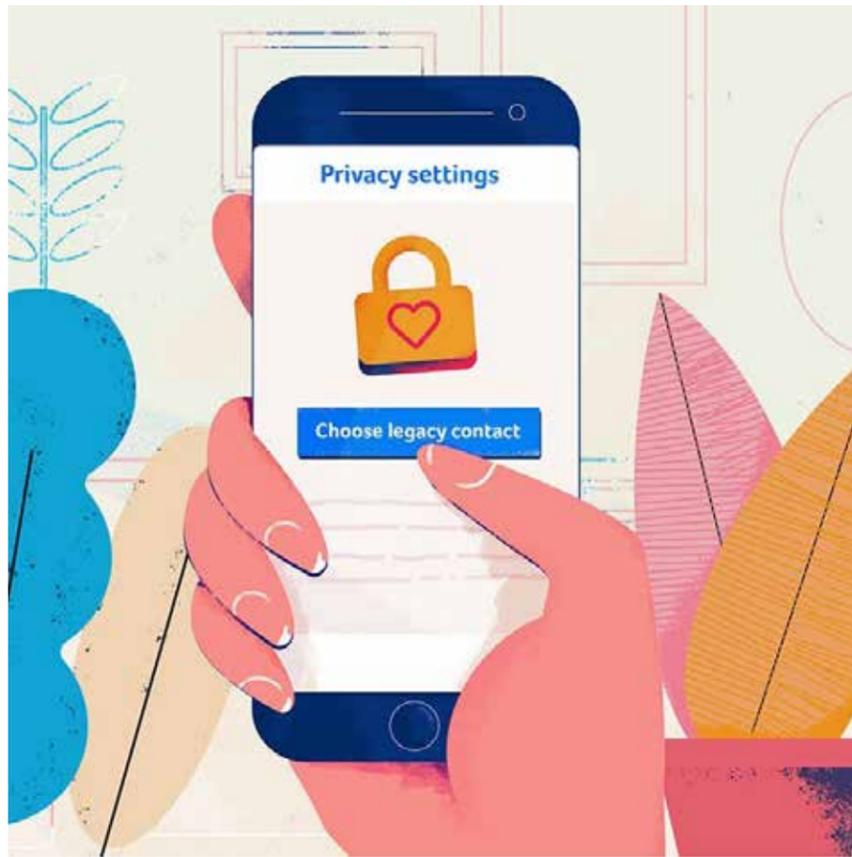
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Above: Ongai Ahua, Waorani leader from the Yasuni.
Adapting to the pandemic in an Amazonian town.
(Photos by author)

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Assigning a legacy contact on Facebook. Credit: James Swabey/Marie Curie.

death in some cases. This technological development blurred the lines for what we can consider a 'true' biological death. If the bodily presence of a person is kept alive in a liminal state of being when can we truly determine someone is dead? This is a problem that becomes even more blurred with the increase of the presence of the dead online. Facebook has acknowledged this increasing complication in the creation of 'legacy contacts', seeming to acknowledge that digital identities are significant enough to need taking care of after death.

Legacy contacts are assigned by users before they die with responsibilities such as, writing a final message, updating profile pictures and cover photos and, perhaps most significantly, requesting the removal of your account. In this sense, legacy contacts seem to act as a sort of virtual life support in the same way that a ventilator keeps a brain dead person breathing. They are the person who decides when your digital presence has come to an end. Thus, it seems clear that whilst technology allows dead people to 'live on', it is not the dead themselves who are living but their identity built by those who knew them.

This is similar to Pixar's film *Coco* (2017)—as long as the living keep their deceased family's photos up, their soul will live on in the afterlife. In keeping up the profiles of the dead—including their photos and comments—they become memorialised online.

Coco's concept takes inspiration from traditional Mexican ideas of 'three deaths': the first, physical death of the body; the second, the body being laid to rest in the earth; and third, the moment your memory fades from the minds of the living. Digital death is perfectly demonstrated in these three stages. Firstly, there is the physical death of the biological body in which everyone can acknowledge that the person is no longer there. Secondly there is the ritual process of grieving through laying the body to rest; and finally, the remnants of your existence left behind. This can be material possessions that people cling on to such as a necklace. Or less tangibly, it can be how you linger in people's minds—such as an unreachable cluster of pixels in a computer screen.

In some cultures, the death of an individual is followed by a complete erasure of their material footprint. In Amazonian Wari, people engage in compassionate cannibalism to help with grieving by loosening the ties between the living and the dead. In erasing the body through consuming it, people transform their connection with the dead (Conklin 2001). In contrast, burial practices in London show that the social existence of the deceased is maintained at the graveside (Francis et al. 2000). In these practices, the living believe there is some lingering 'spirit' to be honoured or processed in some way beyond the physical cessation of the body in the social world. Shifting social ties bond the living and the dead, which are being ever-extended by social networking sites.

This bond is close and significant, which can be seen in platforms beyond just Facebook. Twitter revealed in November 2019 that they would be deleting accounts of users who had been inactive for 6 months or more. However, this generated panic as it left the memorialised accounts of the dead vulnerable to being deleted. Living friends and family begged for the digital footprints of the deceased to not be erased. This instance demonstrates the large role the living have to play in keeping alive

the memory of the dead. For Twitter, the inactive profiles were just possible spam or abandoned accounts. However, users defended their deceased relatives' rights to exist online. Twitter has now vowed to find a way to memorialise accounts before implementing their clear up, paving the way for the platform to take on a new social responsibility—one of memorialisation.

In exploring the ways technology is allowing us to memorialise the accounts of the dead, we can clearly see a shift to much more blurred definitions of living and dying. This first came about in the form of life support machines, able to keep brain dead people breathing. Now, with an increase in demands of rights for profiles of the dead, we see an extension of people's digital identities. Legacy contacts are given powers over profiles, deciding when the grieving process has finished and an account can be permanently removed. Profiles become digital gravestones, where the living can 'speak' to those who have passed. Finally, we see a new fight emerging for the continued existence of the deceased, with social networking sites becoming a liminal space where that person's identity and memory are suspended in time and space—beyond their physical resting place.

What lies in the future of online memorialisation? Will this concept of an online graveyard materialise on Facebook as a new tab alongside Marketplace and Notifications, with yearly notifications to send messages on the anniversary of someone's death? With a study predicting that dead will outnumber the living on Facebook within the next 50 years (Öhman and Watson 2019), it seems that the concerns surrounding preservation of digital presence and management will become a growing focus for social media companies in the coming years.

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DEAD PROFILES: ALIVE FOREVER?

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Building online profiles to represent our identities is done through the performance of the body, in a disembodied way. Online spaces allow our digital identity to be linked to an offline presence through making oneself visible in an enactment of self. With the invention of smartphones, we can now bring that identity with us, allowing a connection of self through the device.

A medical prosthesis is an artificial replacement of a part of the body, such as a tooth, a facial bone, the palate, or a joint. A prosthesis may be removable, for example, prosthetic legs. Arguably, the smartphone fills this category as

something artificial yet removable. Whilst it does not 'replace' the body, it certainly extends its abilities and engagement with the world. With such a heavy reliance on technology, what happens to our digital identities after death? How are we memorialised online? And with the dead maintaining a social existence online, what rights do they have?

Biomedical technology in recent years has shown that there are many ways to die. In this sense, I am referring to people who have been declared brain dead yet are kept 'alive' and breathing, maintaining a physical presence in this world—suggesting that brain death is not the final



An ofrenda (altar) with offerings for the dead in *Coco*.

PADDINGTON IN YOUR PURSE

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Paddington Bear is a curious character. Born in 'deepest, darkest Peru', and inexplicably choosing the rain-battered shores of Great Britain for his sojourns in a foreign land, I have been asked more than once if I'm 'off to see Paddington' when I return to Peru for fieldwork. Eye-rolling over with, the answer could indeed be in the affirmative. One can see Paddington bear in Peru (the actual character, and not just the Andean spectacled bear whose species he belongs to). There is a statue of him in Lima, in fact. However, for *Limeños*, Paddington is demonstrably not Peruvian. Although a quaint head-nod to Michael Bond's fluffy character, the Lima Paddington statue shows the famous bear kitted out in a union *jack* rain mac (note: Lima is a desert, it never rains unlike somewhere else), suitcase in hand, and his back towards the ocean as though he has just arrived in Peru from foreign lands. His statue stands in Miraflores neighbourhood, the most expat-dense part of the entire city (and country). For Peruvians, Paddington is a Brit.

But why talk about Paddington now, if at all?

Because this bear, long a representative of 'anti-racism', 'foreigners', and approaches to 'the other' in the UK (Smith 2006), got minted onto his own 50 pence coin last year. Tilting his hat like a true gent outside of St Pauls Cathedral, or chomping on a marmalade sandwich in front of the Tower of London, Paddington's famous little face graced a batch of circulated half-sterlings (you can even buy yourself a gold one for a grand, if you're so inclined).

Incidentally, this happened at the same

time that Britain has been dealing publicly with Brexit and its associated animosity towards 'foreigners'. Peruvian-foreigner Paddington was not completely spared this rhetoric, his Latin American roots thrust into consciousness by virtue of his audacity to appear on good old British currency. For example, satire 'news' outlet Newsthump jibed, 'Daily Mail readers outraged as Peruvian illegal immigrant appears on new 50p coin'. In another example, a spoof of the original 50 pence coin shows a miffed-looking Paddington sat on his suitcase in front of one of Cameron's 2013 'Go Home' campaign vans that threatened illegal immigrants to 'go home or face arrest'. Such mockery of a fictional character could be taken in jest, were it not true that anti-immigrant sentiments have already caused xenophobia-fuelled attacks on migrants and have been further compounded by the nationalistic campaigning of pro-Brexit supporters these last years.

However, whilst Paddington may serve to promote anti-racist attitudes to children, Smith argues that he also affirms the superior status of the host nation (2006: 35). Indeed, it has been stated that as a 'high profile migrant', the bear has acted 'as a performative conduit of English (national) identity as liberal, tolerant and caring' (Grayson 2012: 379). Through Paddington, British children (and others) have been able to explore 'otherness' without any real challenge to perception of self and wider issues of structural racism and anti-immigrant sentiment that are present in society, and have been assured of British tolerance and superiority in the meantime.

But here is the important point—Paddington, the Peruvian foreigner, is



not actually foreign at all. He is a British creation. For all the references to his origins in 'darkest Peru' and the implied negative associations that may come with that (of the 'heart of darkness' variety—wording similarity not to be overlooked), Paddington is not a Peruvian invention, but was born in the mind of an Englishman who had never been to



Top left: Paddington statue in Miraflores, Lima Peru.
Left: UK illegal immigrant van, 2013 (Source: theguardian.com).
Top above: Paddington 50p Coin, 2019.
Above: Spoof Paddington 'illegal immigrant' 50p coin (Source: Facebook, artist unknown).

Peru. In all ways, he is a *British creation of foreignness* to teach ourselves about immigrants, who has become emblematic of otherness in popular culture, all whilst having *absolutely* zero input from the very group of people he is supposed to represent. As a representative of the 'other', he is then wheeled out to satire when politics turns to anti-immigrant

sentiments. Yet, as Paddington is but a misinformed invention of an 'other', so too are dominant immigration sentiments that had been doing the Brexit-rounds. Furthermore, it could be suggested that Paddington points to an ongoing problem of coloniality present in wider culture, but also very much within academia (and anthropology especially). In this sense,

Paddington is arguably a literary-version of a colonial-anthropologists 'primitive natives'. He is a very British view of a foreigner, about whom those foreigners were not consulted and who they do not identify with, yet who has become emblematic of them, nonetheless.

I am not suggesting that we become anti-Paddington. However, reactions over his 50p minting, even in 'jest', act as a window to the current political climate and perceptions of an 'other' that has been constructed entirely independent of their truths or realities.

Safe to say, that Peruvians have not assimilated a British view of themselves through this character. We put a (British) Peruvian Paddington on our coin; they put the real-deal spectacled bear on theirs, oblivious to our perceptions of the same. They concern themselves with the real thing, while we ruminate over a species we borrowed and anthropomorphised to allow us to comment on 'the other'.

Allow me to end this discussion with a pertinent memory. One day in Lima, musing over the statue of Paddington, I asked my *Limeña* friend what she thought about Paddington being a Peruvian bear:

'Oh, does he come from Peru? I thought he was just in Miraflores to keep all the foreign tourists that go there happy.'

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Transforming Dolphins and Transforming Landscapes: An Ethnography of Contemporary Myth-Telling in the Colombian Amazon

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MSc Social and Cultural Anthropology 2019

'Everyone wants to know about the dolphins. The truth is they are people. We are told to be wary of them because they are beings that seek out relations with us. When a woman goes to the river with her period, they say the smell of blood affects them, they don't like it and one of them might send a dart with an illness to that person.'

I am sitting across from Alba-Lucia, a Tikuna elder known as the community 'library' for her vast knowledge of local mythology. Her hands are dyed indigo from the genipa fruit and she is stretching out *chambira* plant threads over her legs to make bracelets. We are in Puerto Nariño, a small town located 87km from Leticia, the capital of Colombia's Amazon region. Located along the Loretoyacu river, a tributary of the Amazon, pink river dolphins (*Inia geoffrensis*)—or *bufeos* in Spanish—are a familiar presence for residents here, seen migrating every day

between their favoured feeding grounds. Conversations about the dolphin, and its mythical figure the *yakuruna*, are part of daily life. In Tikuna cosmology *bufeos* are regarded as evil spirits, guardians of the subaquatic domain and mischievous seducers. The most common *yakuruna* myth tells of a dolphin that transforms into a handsome white man. He has a stingray for a hat, a crab for a watch, a boa for a belt and *cucha* fish for shoes. After dancing and drinking all night at the *pelazon*, a young girl's puberty ritual, he will seduce an unsuspecting victim, stealing her away to an enchanted world beneath the river.

Similar stories are found across Amazonia, but in Puerto Nariño the *yakuruna* myth has slowly become appropriated by the community, painted into colourful murals, told by local conservationists in educational workshops, performed at dances, and whispered by guides as they accompany

tourists dolphin spotting on Tarapoto lake. I had come to Puerto Nariño to explore the multi-dimensional relationship between the community, the dolphin and its myth, which seemed to be at one and the same time cosmological, ecological and economic.

When I confessed to Alba-Lucia that I had been out on the river with my period, she insisted on making me a lucky plant-charm (*piri-piri*) to ward off the *yakuruna*. 'People used to wear *piri-piri*,' she told me, 'but now people use garlic from the shop or resin from the *copal* tree for protection.' She showed me a small sticky substance which had a pungent smell, 'I'm going to give you some, the *bufeos* are afraid of it.'

While some older residents remain cautious about pink dolphins, many younger Tikuna see the myth as a tool for conservation. In the Natutama centre, volunteers use mythology and



Don Ruperto's carvings in Natutama.

conservation activities to educate children about local species. The dolphin, which for so long had been seen as a predator, is now also portrayed as a victim.

I joined Marelvi during one of her classes which formed part of the 'Yakuruna Diploma', an initiative set up by Natutama to raise awareness about the pink river dolphin, an endangered species according to IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature). We were sitting in front of two carvings inspired by the *yakuruna* myth, made by local Cocama elder Don Ruperto.

'*Yakurunas* have even been known to father dolphin children,' Marelvi told the room of wide-eyed boys and girls. 'Can these children survive? Who knows, but lots of girls wash their clothes in the river and suddenly a man appears, tall, white, with blue eyes, who falls in love with the girls and the babies look like this'—Marelvi pointed at the carving and all the children

laughed. 'There is a *pelazon* party taking place in San Martin this Saturday, maybe a *yakuruna* will show up!'

Out on Tarapoto Lake I listened as Obsimar, a local Tikuna guide, told stories about the *yakuruna* to a group of tourists as his French wife Gaelle translated. Obsimar let out a long whistle while everyone kept silent. A short while later, a pink dolphin appeared close to the boat. '*C'est incroyable!*' the man sitting next to me said, referring to Obsimar's ability to 'communicate' with dolphins.

Although tourism is creating a space for local myths to be revived, the problem seems to be the economic aspect. As Rocio, the head of tourism in Puerto Nariño explained to me: 'Children might be learning about these stories in school and go to the elders for more information. They'll say only if you pay me so and so. It's become a business which has cut the transmission of knowledge.'

I encountered a 'corrupt grandparent', as they are known locally, when I asked Don Mauricio, a Tikuna elder, to tell me some stories. '50,000 pesos an hour,' he replied, in a very business-like manner. As if to compensate for the large sum, he added, 'this knowledge is being lost, hardly anyone knows these stories anymore—I am the only one here who knows and has experience of these things.'

'There are two types of yakuruna, the good and the bad. The good one is the one that takes care of the fish, and the bad one is the one that entraps people. But it doesn't kill the person, it enchants them. So it may appear that someone has drowned

but in fact that creature has taken them. They say that when a person eats some food from the other world, they will slowly begin to adapt to life there and remain there forever, underneath the water, but alive.'

The only way to escape this other world, he explained, was to contract a shaman. 'But those shamans don't exist here anymore; they are only found in Peru. They are *Cocamas*, they will tell you that the water is a blanket, and if you lift it up there is a whole different world underneath.'

In Puerto Nariño the dolphin is a constant fixture on the riverscape—a mythical figure and endangered species who slips in and out of his role just as he appears and then disappears beneath the surface of the water. The myth is both a historical object that connects the listener to Tikuna cosmology and an educational tool and cultural device that has found its way into a public space. Moreover, it is a means for economic survival, navigating a shifting landscape undergoing sociocultural transformation. These contemporary mythic narratives show us that there has been a profound shift in local perceptions of the dolphin, a being whose life is inextricably linked with the community. Claude Lévi-Strauss (1981) argued that myths ceaselessly transform to obliterate time. I would argue that in Puerto Nariño however, the *yakuruna* myth is being used to shape the future.

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Alba Lucia rolling *chambira* threads.



A painted house depicting a boy and a dolphin.



Puerto Nariño's port in the rainy season.



Tarsiers (*Tarsiidae*) are a haplorrhine family inhabiting in Southeast Asian jungles.

Suicide in Non-human Primates? Cognitive Correlates and Evidence

Adela Cebeiro Munín
3rd Year BA Archaeology and Anthropology

Suicide—An evolutionary paradox?

Accounts of animals taking their life have been reported since Antiquity by thinkers such as Aristotle, who believed that a stallion threw himself into an abyss because he had unconsciously mated with his mother. In Victorian England news articles reported cases such as a dog or a duck trying to drown themselves. However, are these suicide attempts or are we just looking at anthropomorphic fables naively built upon animals? It seems that humans need to reflect their social maladies as well as try to decipher their surrounding enigmas

through analogies inferred from the natural world. But, if an animal actually took its own life—how could we possibly reconcile such an event with evolutionary theory, as one of its central principles defends the idea that organisms are designed to maximise their reproduction? Clearly, suicide violates this precept. However, suicide amongst humans is not rare as the WHO declares that around 800,000 people die by suicide every year. If we want to discover the possible reasons and roots of suicidal behaviour, looking at potential evidence amongst our closest relatives might be a good idea.

Reports of non-human primates actually *ending their lives* have never been described, but there are some cases which can allow us to create certain analogies. For example, specimens of rhesus macaques reared in isolation as well as being exposed to laboratory experiments have shown examples of self-injurious behaviour (SIB). SIB can take the form of head-banging, slapping and most commonly self-biting, reactions that can end up in severe tissue damage and mutilation. Stress and isolation are key factors triggering SIB, and it seems that this type of behaviour has never been encountered in the wild. In fact, isolation

can also be an important factor in suicide and suicide attempts amongst humans.

A more common example used to claim the existence of suicide in non-human primates are the tarsiers. However, the only reports we can find are highly anecdotal and mostly based on specimens banging their heads against cages whilst being in captivity. Tarsiers have a very thin cranial vault, thus cranial fissures and death are possible outcomes of head-banging. Moreover, like in rhesus macaques, this taxon is very sensitive to stressful situations.

Cognitive correlates and mechanisms

To take one's own life requires certain cognitive abilities which we assume are behind human suicide—such as self-recognition, an understanding of death and especially the *intent* to die (Peña-Guzmán 2017). Tracing the existence of these abilities is complicated as we can never know for certain what is going on inside the minds of others, but we can rely on indirect evidence.

It is argued that to be able to end its life, an individual must have reflexive subjectivity. To be aware of oneself means to have a clear concept of self-identity, understanding your position within the rest of the world as an individual entity. Nowadays, the debate about whether animals have self-awareness is still not settled. One of the most common approaches to test the existence of this cognitive trait is the 'mirror test' which



consists of the assessment of whether or not an animal recognises himself/herself in a mirror.

Former results seem to reveal that, in addition to humans, only chimpanzees, orangutans and possibly gorillas present this ability (Parker *et al.* 1994). Rhesus macaques are not considered to have a notion of the self, but they *do* present self-agency as they are capable of distinguishing actions which have been controlled by them. It might be that the absence of self-identity in certain animals is just due to the inadequacy of the models and methodologies being used. Maybe self-awareness is a matter of degree rather than kind (Peña-Guzmán 2017).

Another argument presented against animal suicide is that the agent must intend to achieve its own death and because animals do not seem to conceptualise death in the first place, then they will not be capable of doing this. However, there have been examples of chimpanzees reflecting grief after the death of loved ones. For example, in one chimpanzee group the death of an elderly female provoked interesting behaviours amongst other members such as avoiding the place where she died for several days and the fact that her daughter stayed by her side the whole night (Anderson *et al.* 2010). It is possible that the awareness of death in chimpanzees could have been previously underestimated.

One of the major traits defining suicide is not only the projection and understanding of one's own death, but most importantly the *intent* to take one's life. The individual actually wants to die when undergoing self-harming attempts. Even though this characteristic is central for the definition and consequent understanding of suicidal behaviour, there have been almost no studies devoted to this topic. However, when considering the previous examples of animals, the existence of actual *intent* seems unlikely. Tarsiers banging their heads against their cages do not actually *want* to die, they are just reacting against a stressful situation. The fact that they die

is due to their physiological characteristic of having a very fragile cranium, a reasoning that can equally be applied to SIB in rhesus macaques.

Are humans exceptional?

Examples of non-human animals dying by *suicide* are very scarce as well as highly romanticised. Surely, animals can feel anxiety and also experience stress, central factors for enacting self-injurious behaviour. Moreover, there is the possibility of formulating an argument in favour of an evolutionary continuity between non-human primates and humans in certain cognitive abilities such as the awareness of death and the notion of the self.

However, it is vital to understand that individuals can also differ enormously in their behaviour and not even a generalisation across suicide in humans has been attained to this day. Conclusively, the idea of 'suicide' emerges as an ultimate intent to claim self-sovereignty in a culture worshipping individualism as well as another argument in favour of human exceptionalism. It is a complex phenomenon rooted in a very pessimistic way of framing our own existence. It is another anthropocentric illusion we need to reflect in other beings to find a proper legitimisation of the term.

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Left: Rhesus macaques (*Macaca mulatta*), one of the best-known species of monkeys, are native to South, Central, and Southeast Asia.

An Interview with Sahra Gibbon



How did you become an anthropologist? Tell us a bit about your career so far?

I can't say that being an anthropologist was ever part of an early game plan as a young adult, rather this emerged from and intersected with different interests and experiences in my life. I feel very fortunate as a result now to have ended up becoming an anthropologist working in one of the most exciting departments in the UK with such fantastic colleagues and inspiring students.

As an undergraduate student at Edinburgh University in the early 1990s' I took anthropology as an 'outside' subject in my first year thinking it would complement what I thought was my primary focus on history. Anthropology soon eclipsed everything else that I was studying and I was drawn in by great lecturers, readings and discussions from phenomenology to gender to cosmology that made my brain buzz and which offered the tantalising prospect of studying a subject where I could do something called fieldwork. I was hooked and changed my degree registration from history to anthropology. That plan was somewhat put on hold as I was diagnosed with cancer in my early 20s and spent two years immersed in a very different world of hospital treatments and recovery. Of course on reflection

living in the 'land of illness', as Arthur Frank puts it, was also pretty good training, especially given that medical anthropology is now my sub-disciplinary home. By way of detour, after returning to university to complete my undergraduate degree I undertook research in a rural village in Hungary, 5 years after the collapse of the communist government exploring the meaning of small hold gardening and vegetable cultivation for identity and community. It was a wonderful immersion into ethnographic research and writing, plus I learnt a lot about vegetable growing!

After graduating and a year of doing some very eye opening voluntary work at a drug support centre in Edinburgh I was drawn back into anthropology and a desire to apply that disciplinary lens in a much more focused way on medicine, health, illness and the body. UCL beckoned and I began my journey into medical anthropology, first completing the MSc and then a PhD in the department.

I was lucky to work with one of the founders of and key figures of medical anthropology in the UK Murray Last and also with Nanneke Redclift, another central figure in the department. Both were inspirational mentors. Looking back now it seems to me my career took shape at a time of exponential growth in medical anthropology, particularly at the

interface between Gender Studies and STS (Science and Technology Studies) which was at the time really widening the terrain for and scope of the discipline. My PhD research was directly inspired by that dialogue, taking its cue from the work of Sarah Franklin, Rayna Rapp and Margaret Lock to examine how developments in genetic technologies and knowledge linked to increased breast cancer risk were being incorporated into clinical practice in the UK at the interface with gendered health activism. Questions about agency, structure, power and identity were central to this work and propelled me in my post-doctoral research to think about the comparative arenas in which developments in genomics were unfolding.

Working in Cuba and Brazil as part of several long term post-doctoral research projects set me off on different research paths looking at how Cuban community genetics confronts the promise of so called 'personalised' medicine, as well as how in Brazil health inequalities or notions of 'race' and regional identity shape clinical practices and the experience of embodied risk.

What have you done, and are you currently doing, research-wise?

I have a number of ongoing research projects in Brazil, linked most recently to

rare genetic disease and public policy. I'm also very pleased to be involved in collaborative work with colleagues in Mexico, Brazil and also here at UCL aimed at bringing the histories, concepts and methodologies around medical anthropology in Latin America to a wider audience. I'm immensely proud to have been involved as an author and co-editor in a recently completed open access edited collection with UCL Press '*Critical Medical Anthropology: Perspectives in/ from Latin America*'. There is an incredibly rich tradition of anthropology in this region which is simply not known about in the anglophone world so making sure that at least some of that work is being made more widely available is hugely gratifying. I'm also very pleased to say that it's the first publication in the UCL book series on 'Embodied Inequalities' that I edit with Jennie Gamlin that will I hope be a resource for the sub-discipline as a whole.

It's hard at this moment to not reflect and (at least for me) not act upon the current global health pandemic we are all living through. It's quite a time to be an anthropologist and perhaps especially a medical anthropologist, in turns both fascinating but also somewhat overwhelming when everything seems related and relevant to how you think, teach and research! I've no doubt that Covid-19 will be a phenomena that will resonate and shape medical anthropology for years to come, although the numerous uncertainties of the present moment also make it difficult to know exactly how that will happen. For now I'm very pleased to be involved with other colleagues in a number of Covid-19 related collaborations. This includes helping to co-ordinate the two covid related series on the UCL Medical Anthropology Blog. With nearly 100 submissions over the last two and half months the response has been incredible, underlining for me the essential value of anthropology for understanding these strange times we are in.

This moment also has made it clear to me the importance of cross-disciplinary dialogue, something I have in fact pursued throughout my research whether that's working with clinicians, bioethicists or geneticists. While being a medical anthropologist means I think always being orientated to or in conversation

with different disciplines, I've become increasingly committed to extending that dialogue in my research and teaching.

Establishing the MSc in Biosocial Medical Anthropology in the department, the first of its kind in the UK, is very much part of that commitment and a growing conviction that some of the most entrenched and intractable global health care challenges can only be addressed through better and more effective exchange between medical anthropology, human ecology and biological anthropology. Whether addressing the Covid-19 pandemic, the clearly related wider health consequences of climate change, pollution or increased environmental degradation in the era of the Anthropocene, as well as the global rise in chronic disease, it seems to me that medical anthropology has a unique opportunity to extend the scope and reach of its disciplinary focus. Of course building meaningful cross-disciplinary exchange takes time and energy. But the 'journey' towards this goal is both exciting, engaging and challenging and I'm very pleased to be part of helping to make this happen at UCL in our department

What is next?

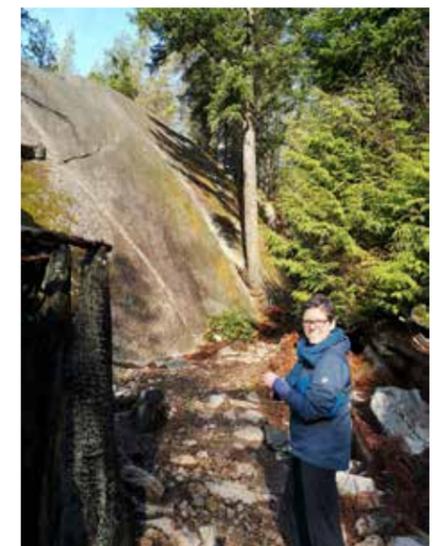
Linked in part to the establishment of the MSc in Biosocial Medical Anthropology at UCL, I'm very fortunate that I now have a number of research projects on the go that enable me explore these cross and inter disciplinary interfaces in really fascinating and, what I hope, will be productive ways.

Mapping the changing terrain of post-genomic science has made it increasingly evident that a focus on social environments are as important, if not perhaps more important for understanding health and health outcomes. This is really generating some truly exciting work, I think, in the discipline, as anthropologists and others grapple with what it means for the doing of social science that whole terrains of science, from epigenetics to neuroscience to microbiome research are now examining what the social is and how it shapes the biological.

One arena where that science is unfolding is longitudinal birth cohorts—studies

that follow participants (often mothers and children) across their lives collecting, social and biological information at different time point, with many studies now having multiple generations recruited. Birth cohorts are an essential context, tool and 'technology' for emerging forms of biosocial sciences but very much underexamined and also underutilised by anthropologists. I'm delighted to have received an Investigator Award earlier this year from the Wellcome Trust to comparatively examine what I describe as the 'Biosocial Lives of Birth Cohorts' in the UK, Portugal, the Netherlands and Brazil. This four year project will provide I hope a really exciting opportunity to examine some of the pressing questions around post-genomics for social scientists. This includes the methodological challenge of doing ethnography in the context of longitudinal cohort studies in ways that can not only provide an account of emerging biosocial science but also intervene to help shape how that knowledge and science is done.

I have recently started some pilot work in the UK exploring the meaning of intergenerational participation in a regional birth cohort study and established an international cross-disciplinary research network of epidemiologists, geneticists and social scientists involved in and working with birth cohorts. Both these initiatives are already generating some exciting results that I hope to deepen and extend in the wider project that will start later in the year.



What current projects are your students working on?

Supervising masters students and doctoral students really does provide you with the means to 'travel with' and be immersed in worlds and cultures that you can't because of your own research commitments or teaching obligations. So I do love supervision for all this vicarious immersion it provides. I'm lucky to have doctoral students who work in very diverse regions in the UK, Europe, Middle East, New Zealand and across Latin America examining topics from cancer and cancer genetics in London to the natural birth movement in Brazil or contraception use in Peru. I'm particularly pleased to be supervising students who are I think forging new ground in their work on environments and health in projects looking at embodied risk and pollution in Brazil and water infrastructure and care in Jerusalem. This work is really exciting and I think for me opening up new avenues of thinking about the scope of anthropological and medical anthropological engagement with the Anthropocene that I really hope to develop further in collaborations within UCL and beyond in the near future.

Are you only an anthropologist?

Working in the UCL anthropology department and all the activities that this entails keep me pretty busy a lot of the time. But I also very much need to cut off from being at my desk and computer (more important than ever at the moment) to recharge as it were.

In 'normal' times living in London is like having a smorgasbord of cultural options:



so I do like making the most of that when I can. More simply, I love just getting on my bike and buzzing into or home from work or getting out into nearby Kent at the weekend which is also a delight. I'm also a bit of a dedicated outdoor swimmer, mostly in a local lido. However having recently now sampled open water swimming in a newly opened nearby swimming lake this might (when it becomes possible again) become my new hobby! For the last four years I've also been part of a local community choir. There is something about the visceral and collective experience of singing amazing harmonies from a global repertoire of music with a group of local people, which gives me a weekly injection of energy that I can't now imagine being without. Doing this online with my choir in 'lockdown' has seemed more essential than ever—even if that means ostensibly solitary warbling with headphones on in the bedroom!

I think it's probably also true to say that I'm bit of an obsessive gardener and can easily spend hours at the weekend immersed in that space. There is *always* at least one garden project on the go while the local allotment that I cultivate with my partner keeps us both busy and happy. I find the annual rhythm of sowing seeds, planting and harvesting immensely rewarding, and satisfying. That many these activities are quite literally 'rooted' in the local community in Catford where I live has become increasingly important, providing the perfect counterbalance to my academic focused work.



Sweat. Body. Friendship. Each of us was asked in three words to express how our experience at the Earth Spirit Centre had been. The words were many and diverse, but these specific ones were repeated quite a few times as they so accurately encapsulated key parts of our trip. But what met us at first upon arrival was crisp, clean air, so refreshingly different from the questionable London smog. And as it turned out to be, the elements came to play a major role in our stay.

Each of us was assigned one of the four elements and built the part of the sweat lodge belonging to that specific one. In a way, we created the earth, wind, water, and fire that night. It became embodied within us, through our bodies, as we used them to build, to create, to experience the sweat lodge ritual. And while future students will visit the Earth Spirit Centre and (in theory) undergo the same experiences, they will not be the same. Because what we



Embodiment of Experience

Mai Pedersen & Christina Antoinetta Vasilescu
2nd Year BSc Anthropology

created on this journey is only ours and it highlights the importance of subjective perspective and awareness of difference in experiences when doing anthropological fieldwork. Taking a step into the cultural unknown and facing one's fears was a challenging yet an enlightening experience that expanded our comfort zones while feeding our anthropological curiosity. Thus, being key in participant observation, we initiated our lifelong journey as anthropologists as we were taught the importance of incorporating bodily movement and experience in ethnographic research.

The importance of the elements were highlighted consistently throughout the trip: for example, through a dance in which we imitated the shifting shapes of earth, wind, fire, and water, we all shared a transformative moment in which we learned that the people of Earth are equally everchanging and only truly

comprehensible if you immerse yourself in their ways of living. Even though magic is a highly debated anthropological subject, you may say that a little magic occurred as a simple result of us sharing such rather intimate moments of self-expression in our pursuit of understanding social phenomena.

Everyone laughed when 'sweat' was uttered the first time when recalling their memories, but no one could have predicted the journey we had been about to embark on that night. The feeling of it dripping off our bodies, the burning of our lungs from the hot and humid air, and the echo of Grandfather Jem's guiding voice will stay forever with us as a reminiscence of our ever-mysterious sweat lodge ceremony. It was on this final night that we in some way felt slightly more part of the society we ever so generously were invited to take part in.

To highlight everything we saw, learned, and experienced might very well be impossible, but it enhances in a very real way the many thoughts and experiences that lie beyond writing an ethnography as well as the difficulty in expressing them all. On top of that, we were 60 newly hatched anthropologists, each with our own perception, sharing this journey. We danced with the elements, we sang at the top of our lungs, feeling the difference in our bodies and the importance of the words we chanted. We laughed, we ate until our stomachs might have burst, we cried, and we shared. We were Ba and Li, maybe a bit confused, but learning. And maybe most significantly, we learned the importance of good footwear. Embodied in the mud on our boots, we all took home a reminder of this spiritual journey.

Photos: Christina Antoinetta Vasilescu

Footprints amongst the San: Running, Sensation and Multispecies Relations

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Beneath the midday sun of the Kalahari Desert a San hunter is running, his feet pacing across the red earth. He is also tracking a Kudu bull, practising a form of hunting that anthropologists have proposed is the oldest amongst hominins, and one that has remarkably influenced the evolution of our species. During a persistence hunt, a hunter chases prey in a pursuit that can cover 25 miles and last several hours until, exhausted, the prey collapses on its feet. Despite numerous sophisticated hunting technologies that *Homo sapiens* have developed, persistence hunting has historically endured. It has been recorded amongst the Rarámuri, Hupa and several other indigenous North American peoples as well as Australian Aborigines (Nabokov 1981). Amongst a handful of San peoples, hunter-gatherers of southern Africa, it is still sometimes practised today.

In October last year and eight thousand miles away in Vienna, Austria, Eliud Kipchoge became the first person to run a sub two-hour marathon. On his feet were a pair of Nike *Alphafly* trainers, the latest technology to improve running efficiency. Complex arrays of foam and carbon fibre plating have been incorporated into the shoe's base, so the foot sits 40mm off the ground. They are said to improve running efficiency by 4%. So advanced is the *Alphafly* that it was recently banned from professional competitions and a new model, less transformational, has been introduced.

But why I am talking about an ancient hunting method and recent developments in sport technology? I do so to pose a question that provides a route to thinking

about a number of related concepts concerning running, sensation and multi-species relations amongst indigenous peoples. The question is this. Would a San hunter, if offered, don a pair of *Alphafly*s before starting a persistence hunt? Perhaps the answer might appear obvious. Surely an opportunity to gain such an advantage over their quarry would be jumped at? However, perhaps not.

Matthias Guenther (2017) describes the relationship between any San hunter and his prey as a somatically-based dialogue, known as *n!ow*. *n!ow* connects a person to all manner of beings and during a hunt, this connection is felt as 'tappings' on the body. These sensations allow the hunter to know the animal he is pursuing, to understand its movements and feelings. During a persistence hunt, however, this 'dialogue' is far more intense and protracted. Over several hours, the bodies of runner and prey, mutually exhausted, merge and their subjectivities blur. A hunter is said to take the animal into their eyes and see through their perspective. This blurring is likened to a San shaman entering a lion's subjectivity during ecstatic trance dance.

The *Alphafly* separates the foot from the ground with 40mm of synthetic material. Measure that: it's no small amount. The foot no longer *feels* the ground beneath. Kipchoge himself says 'it feels like running on trampolines' whilst Nike advertises them as 'shoes to make you fly'. To runners of the increasingly popular barefoot and minimalist communities, however, such trainers are heretical. They are seen as injury-inducing, as the foot smashes down haphazardly

rather than responding intuitively to the surface beneath. 'Barefooters' also describe their own modality as 'running without earplugs' as the foot becomes alive, actively negotiating the ceaseless variation in texture and topography of the earth.

For Tim Ingold, the ground is the most active of surfaces, 'knotting the lives and minds of humans and non-humans' (2015: 49). Spreading through soil, rock and earth it rises up into the roots of plants and the limbs of animals. Moreover, knowledge is experiential: the wise aren't distinguishable by great factual recall but by possessing 'greater sensitivity to environmental cues' (*ibid.*: 48). Moving kinaesthetically through the environment is to experience this unfolding knowledge. Tracking epitomises such knowledge – a social knowledge connecting beings through the medium of the earth. However, we have distanced ourselves from the ground and life itself through artificial surfaces: we live *on* rather than *in* our environment. The *Alphafly*, then, appears another step in the direction toward groundlessness.

Let us think about the foot itself. For the Cashinahua people, Amazonian hunter-horticulturists from the borderlands of Peru and Brazil, there is no mind-body dualism, as separate body parts possess separate knowledges. For example, 'skin-knowledge' denotes the ability to feel animals' presence nearby. Without homogenising indigenous thought, I think it is acceptable to draw parallels between cultures emphasising the somatic relationality of hunting. And since all bodies are mindful, expressive and intentional, why limit such

understandings to 'the other'? What then, of the knowledge of a runner's foot? A unique piece of anatomy with a suite of specialised adaptations for bipedal endurance running and packed with nerve endings—ever reaching down, feeling, stretching, flexing and responding with the intuition of 1.5 million years of evolution and a lifetime of practice. What might insulating them with 40mm of protective foam mean for their capacity, not merely to react, but to know?

Running and knowledge appear to be co-constituted in myriad ways. The Yurok hunter-gatherers of California spoke of 'true running', a technique to develop spiritual knowledge and 'engage with unseen forces' (Nabokov 1981: 144). Yurok runners developed an extrasensory relationship with the trail and were said to be able to run with eyes closed, speaking of true running as an effortless gliding or skimming.

But let us return to the San. Guenther (2017) mentions that the pleasurable neuro-physiological changes of endurance running, the colloquial 'runner's high', may elicit pathways to inter-species blurring. I'll explore this a little further. Anecdotally, the runner's high ranges from mild calming feelings to significantly altered states of consciousness. Contributory mechanisms include endorphin release, activating opioid receptors and endocannabinoids enhancing dopamine and serotonin expression, with the rhythmic coordination of locomotion and respiration augmenting these. Reminding us of Ingold's (2015) immersive diffusion of life connectivity, we could conceive of how for a San hunter, absorbed in the flow of running-tracking, this cocktail of pleasure and connectivity-



Above: Kipchoge and the *Alphafly* (Source: [Believe In The Run](#)).
Top left: San persistence hunters (Source: [BBC](#)).
Top right: The Rarámuri are outstanding athletes (Source: [Expert Vagabond](#)).

inducing chemicals allows a dispersing of consciousness. One that fills his body, spreads through each foot, into the earth and the environment beyond. With mind, body and breath absorbed in focus on his quarry, he connects with *n!ow* and becomes the Kudu.

And perhaps the breath, so important for any runner, deserves special attention. Indeed for the Rarámuri, horticulturists of Mexico's Sierra Madre who regularly run ritualised races of extreme distance, the concept of *iwi* is central to their animistic cosmology (Salmón 2000). *Iwi* means breath, soul and to bind (or tie). Rarámuri anthropologist Enrique Salmón intimately describes how breath is the crucial concept in the land management practices of their crops and domesticated plants.

I conclude with the words of one San persistence hunter— 'tracking is like

dancing—your body is happy... you are talking with god' (Guenther 2017: 5).

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‘See the Capability, Not the Disability’: Fieldwork among Visually Impaired Workers

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During the recent crisis caused by Covid-19, some of us will have missed not only the professional but also the social side of being at work. Lack of the obligation to commute must have done little to appease the need for human relationships that the workplace satisfies. In fact, a few weeks after the onset of the pandemic we were already setting up blogs, planning online meetings, and finding alternative ways of feeling connected.

In the research I conducted as part of my doctoral project, which focussed on how visually impaired people meaningfully reframe their life narratives in the face of sight loss, work emerged as an important concept. Carrying out fieldwork allowed me to explore work as a pillar on which people try to construct a sense of self when challenged by a congenital or acquired ophthalmological condition.

Spring¹, a factory located on the outskirts of a busy English metropolis, was one of my fieldsites. It was initially established to employ people with sight loss, and then started hiring also people with other types of physical or mental impairments. It catered both for those who wished to go on to other professional positions at other companies and for those who had been unable to make that transition.

The problems faced by most of my visually impaired participants, at Spring and beyond, were twofold: not only was their employability jeopardised, but also their social participation was made more difficult by physical and social barriers. Spring’s mission was to tackle both issues by providing its employees with

a welcoming environment where they could make the best of their skills while informally enjoying the camaraderie of the shop floor.

During my time at Spring, I had the opportunity to become acquainted with the personal histories of its employees. Jim, whom we see depicted with his guide dog, was particularly keen on sharing his: after leaving school at the age of 15 he held various jobs with different companies. He was proud that he had pursued various opportunities to undergo professional training, in particular at a time in his mid-career when he was made redundant. After a work placement and a job search full of obstacles, Jim secured a job at Spring, where he remained for over two decades. Education stood out as a treasured personal value, as did his commitment to work.

Most of Spring’s employees had to travel from far away to reach the factory, and in my thesis, I present their long commutes as a token of the significance of work in their lives. Financial retribution, which may be obtained through other means such as benefits, is only part of the reward of a job as, incidentally, some of us have learnt recently through extended periods of self-isolation. In my thesis, I argue that being professionally employed fulfilled the workers’ ‘need to be needed’. This was identified as crucial by the founders of the Fountain House in New York, an organisation for people with mental illnesses. Its model was emulated around the world by different programmes aimed at reintroducing their users into society through employment (Doyle, Lanoil & Dudek 2013).

I argue also for a more diverse range of employment settings for people with disabilities. Supported businesses like Spring, i.e. companies where over 50% of the workforce has a disability, are ever fewer. In fact, many such places in Britain have been shut down over the last decade. The rationale behind the closure of these institutions, whose history has its roots in the ‘blind workshops’ of the past (Phillips 2004), is that such ‘ghettos’ should be superseded by jobs in mainstream companies (O’Hara 2017). At the time of writing, the future of Spring itself appears in danger.

The demise of sheltered workplaces situates itself within a broader political, economic and social context that promotes the integration of disabled people into the mainstream workforce. Although the intent of this policy is noble, its uncritical roll-out may hurt people



who, like some of my participants at Spring, have always worked in supported environments. Their skill set may not match the one required by today’s job market, in particular regarding IT proficiency. More importantly, mainstream employers may not be open to hiring a person with a disability, counter to what the rhetoric of inclusivity that is dominant in contemporary Britain may suggest. In the long term, we should undoubtedly aspire to integration in all domains of life. However, I believe that the current climate warrants the existence of organisations like Spring, whose ethos is to prove that in our society there is space for people of all abilities.

After 21 years with the company, Jim has now retired, and so has his guide dog, which, at the end of its own career, did six months of overtime to accompany Jim to and from the factory until his last day of work. His new guide dog, which we see in the pictures, has the role of helping

him navigate space as he goes about his day. A job may end at the factory door, but work continues: errands, family commitments, hospital appointments... Old age, compounded with impaired sight, makes many tasks more difficult and time-consuming. The years Jim has lived through, though, have not deprived him of his sense of humour, nor of his belief in the importance of making employers reconsider the prejudices they may have: ‘The Government should be educating outside employers [i.e. at mainstream companies, not supported businesses] that you see the disability, but look beyond it. See the capability, not the disability.’ Let’s hope that the recent crisis, which has, in many forms, subverted the way we relate to our jobs, will also give us the time to reflect on Jim’s words, as well as on our own ‘need to be needed’.

¹ Spring, as well as Jim, are pseudonyms I use to protect the identity of the organisation and of my participant.

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Photographs by Annamaria Dall’Anese

Jim with his new guide dog



Hand-poked Tattoo and the Declaration of Identity: East London's Utilisation of Hand-poked Tattoo Methods

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In January 2019, I began researching hand-poked tattoo for my undergraduate dissertation. I wanted to learn more about this fascinating trend, so I spoke to, and got tattooed by, two British hand-poke tattoo artists. Tim from Prison Style Tattoo (Instagram: @prisonstyletattoo) and Rebecca from Poke Rituals (Instagram: @pokerituals). But what is a hand-poked tattoo, I hear you ask? At its most basic, it is the act of puncturing the skin and inserting ink to produce a permanent mark on the skin. Hand-poked tattooing involves little more than a needle (or sharp point) and some ink; the needle is dipped into the ink before penetrating approximately 2mm into the skin. An image is slowly formed through the repetitive insertion of pigment.

Tim's tattoo career could be described as nomadic. He travels the world filling guest spots in various tattoo studios, although he does spend most of his time in and around London. I first met Tim on a drizzly January morning and compared with the businessmen in their grey suits who are the usual occupants of the City streets, Tim's bright pink trousers, bleach blonde hair and yellow tinted glasses instantly drew my eye. We met several times in cafes in East London and at 'Good Times Tattoo' in Shoreditch to discuss his work. Tim's hand-poke tattooing did not become a profession until 5 years ago, when a suspected heart attack pushed him to pursue his ideal career. In contrast, Rebecca's tattoo career operates from her bedroom near Limehouse, London. When tattooing Rebecca fills the room with the gorgeous aroma of burning

sage and Palo Santo, used to cleanse the air and create a safe, transformative space for both herself and the client. As Rebecca uses such a personal space whilst tattooing, this cleansing was a key part of her ritual. Rebecca works as a full-time Chef in London and so can only devote herself to her tattooing part-time.

As my experience of hand-poked tattoo with Tim differed quite dramatically from that of Rebecca's, I assumed the discussions we had would also differ. However, from our conversations, it became instantly clear that identity was key to both artists. This link between tattoo and identity was echoed in Makiko Kuwahara of Kinjo Gakuin University exploration of tattoo; *'Tattooing...is thus the embodiment and representation of identities and relationships resulting from the objectification of one's own body, and others', in a shared time and space.'* (Kuwahara 2005: 171). Rebecca spoke of an incredibly important tattoo she had previously done on her transgender friend. This individual decided to have the symbols for androgyny, femininity and masculinity tattooed as a reminder of the flexible nature of gender and how these terms alone define their gender identity. This individual previously felt as though they must conform to strict gender norms in order to be accepted. It was through tattoo, however, that they took ownership of their feminine and masculine traits, emphasising that they embody all gender traits and will not be defined by negative connotations or ideals. This aligns with Rebecca's idea that tattoo is a transformative process, that the

technology of tattooing, alongside the client's interpretation of the imagery, creates a transformation within the individual.

As many of us know, our past traumas often become part of who we are in a massive way. Tattoo is just one technique an individual may select to deal with the emotions of past trauma. They allow for past traumas to be meaningfully represented on the skin, without letting them break through the surface of the skin in unacceptable ways. Or as Sanecki excellently puts it; *'...repeat the trauma in some new, creative setting that will allow for a different, life-affirming signification of the event while still bearing witness*

to it.' (Sarnecki 2001: 37). 'Xena' (name changed for anonymity) suffers with mental health issues and has previously used self-harm to cope with her emotions. As a result of this repetitive self-harm (typically to the tops of her arms), she is very self-conscious about the appearance of her scars. Because of this, she never wears any clothing which may reveal said scars e.g. sleeveless tops.

'Xena' decided to begin covering her scars with tattoos as a method of transforming an area of her body she perceives as ugly into something beautiful. She decided to get a hand-poked tattoo from Tim as she wanted it to look hand-

crafted, an element she admires about hand-poking. The horseshoe has personal meaning to her as she associates it with luck, a common theme amongst her predominantly Irish family. The tattoo acts as a type of magical armour, covering the body and preventing further injury. Any time 'Xena' feels as though she wants to self-harm, the tattoo is there as a visual representation of her battle, aiding in the prevention of further harm. Over time 'Xena' feels as though the tattoo has become a part of her, slowly fading into her skin and personhood. She reported that now she feels confident enough to wear sleeveless tops. For Tim, this tattoo was 'an honour' as well as a challenge professionally as tattooing over scarred skin is more difficult than unharmed skin. 'Xena' used the tattoo to prevent further harm, reminding her to be diligent in her efforts to control her self-destructive urges. Tattoo, for 'Xena', formed a magical armour preventing the gaze of others whilst simultaneously protecting it from herself.

As I hope is now clear, within my small-scale study of hand-poke tattooing the recurrent theme is one of identity. As we travel through life, interacting with others, our individual tastes, dislikes, and wants become individualised and unique. These differentiations decide who we are as a person, and tattoo allows for those distinctions to become visible. In a world of excess that often conceals more

than it delivers, tattoos communicate, allowing others to know who they are. However, tattoos also allow for personal reflection and interpretation. The use of seemingly mundane images which are significant to the individual alone, make the interpretation by outsiders impossible. Consequently, the tattooed subject is able to filter meaning on the skin, deciding which imagery to show the other, and which to act as a private communication with the self.

Technologies of change within the tattoo industry permit the individual to alter the tattoo as their identity changes. Images which are no longer wanted may be covered, removed or reinterpreted, making tattoo animate. Tattoo also has the power to encapsulate one's personal trauma, allowing the subject to relive a past trauma in a controlled and therapeutic setting by, marking the trauma on a special site on the body. This instance of tattooing is a truly life-affirming event, permitting the person to properly process the event whilst armouring the site of the trauma with tattoo.

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Left above: The completed hand-poked tattoo on my hand, from Tim.
Far left: Tim (left) from Prison Style Tattoo
Left: Tim's tattoo on 'Xena'

CRICKET AS A COMMONS

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Last summer, whilst writing up my dissertation on ‘the commons’ in rural France, I had one blissful source of distraction: following the cricket. Aside from offering a welcome diversion from the agonies of writing, following the cricket whilst thinking about the commons turned out to be a fortunate combination of events for another reason. It allowed me to understand the game in a new and even more fascinating light: that cricket itself was a commons.

To explore this unlikely comparison, let’s first outline what a commons actually is:

1. Any commons must revolve around some kind of resource. Traditionally, the resources of a commons would be something like a forest, a fishery or a pasture—physical resources that can be exhausted if over-used. However, the resources in a commons can also be immaterial, like knowledge, or a cultural practice. It’s within this latter sense that we might understand cricket: as an immaterial resource. The game is not something you can touch; instead its value as a resource is found in the endless

enjoyment, entertainment, and fascination that it brings to those who participate in the game.

2. Commons are not just resources; they require communities to manage, sustain, and thus benefit from those resources. The best-known scholar to recognise this was Elinor Ostrom (1990), who spent her career demonstrating how communities could successfully manage shared resources. Cricket is no different—it necessitates a community that shares and preserves the game itself. Indeed, without its fans keenly following the success of their team, or without local groups organising Sunday matches on a village green, the game would cease to exist.

The commons is not just an institution or a ‘thing’, but an ongoing *process* involving the relationships between a community and its shared resources. This idea is evoked by historian Peter Linebaugh (2008) when he suggests that we might better understand the commons by using the verb, ‘to common’, or the gerund, ‘commoning’. It reminds us that what is shared in a commons is not merely its

resources, but specific forms of sociality—ways of being in the world that depend upon values of sharing, cooperation, and respect.

This idea of commoning is at the heart of cricket. Since the late 16th century, the evolution of the game—its rules, customs, and institutions—has been slowly shaped by generations of enthusiasts. Crucially, these enthusiasts didn’t withhold their ideas for the game; they contributed towards it freely, implicitly understanding that the greater number of people that could be introduced to the game, to share in its joy, the better. The same is true today. No one owns the game; we are merely its custodians who have a responsibility to pass it on to the next generation. This is how cricket develops and is kept alive.

In another sense, the very process of participating in cricket engenders key values. In Moeen Ali’s recent autobiography, the England cricketer admits how playing street cricket in Birmingham as a child saved him from ‘a life of drugs and crime’ (2018: 54). It



Above: Ben Stokes’ century leads England to Ashes-saving win at Headingley, 2019 (Source: [BBC](#)).
Left: Moeen Ali (Source: [The Guardian](#)).

offered a way into a community with a shared joy and passion for the game, whilst also enabling him to develop his skills and a sense of fairness and respect for others. As Moeen himself admits, the life skills he developed playing cricket in the streets of Birmingham have been an integral part of his life:

‘I continue to come back because I am still part of the community... That time in my life, those days were so special... in my mind I have never left this area. I shall always belong to Stoney Lane’ (Ali 2018: 35).

Analysing cricket in this way—as a commons—allows us to understand more clearly where its value is derived, and how this value is reproduced. As a source of joy, entertainment, intrigue, and fascination, cricket is *shared* by a community of cricket lovers from an array of different backgrounds. In so doing, this community is committed to protecting the game for future generations who might also be able to share in some of these endless joys and fascinations of the game.

However, like other commons, the cricketing commons is susceptible to enclosure—the privatisation of a shared resource for the pursuit of profit. As capital expands, it needs to appropriate new spaces of shared wealth. It is in this regard that we might analyse Sky’s exclusive broadcasting rights to the game in the UK—as an enclosure of the commons.

Once available on free-to-view television,

watching televised cricket is now preserved for paying Sky customers. This is ethically problematic. Cricket’s value is generated communally; the joy and thrill it brings to the cricketing community is essentially a gift from previous generations. For a private corporation like Sky to appropriate that gift is wrong. Not only are they appropriating the gift of previous generations, they are profiting from the joy and sense of connection cricket brings to its community of followers.

The enclosure of the cricket commons is also visibly damaging the health of the game. When cricket was last on terrestrial television in 2005, peak viewing figures in the UK was 8.4 million viewers. The equivalent Test Match last summer—2019—had only 2.1 million viewers.

Unsurprisingly, participation figures reflect this decline in viewing figures. In 2007/08 there were 419,500 people participating in cricket in England. In 2019 there were only 291,200. In short, there seems to be a direct correlation between the number of people participating in the game and those watching the game on television. Sky’s enclosure of the cricket commons certainly plays a role in this. Ultimately, the privatisation of the sport is restricting the spirit of ‘the gift’ with which the game must be openly shared and passed on to new people.

Cricket remains a much-loved game around the world, but we should understand why this is so and the

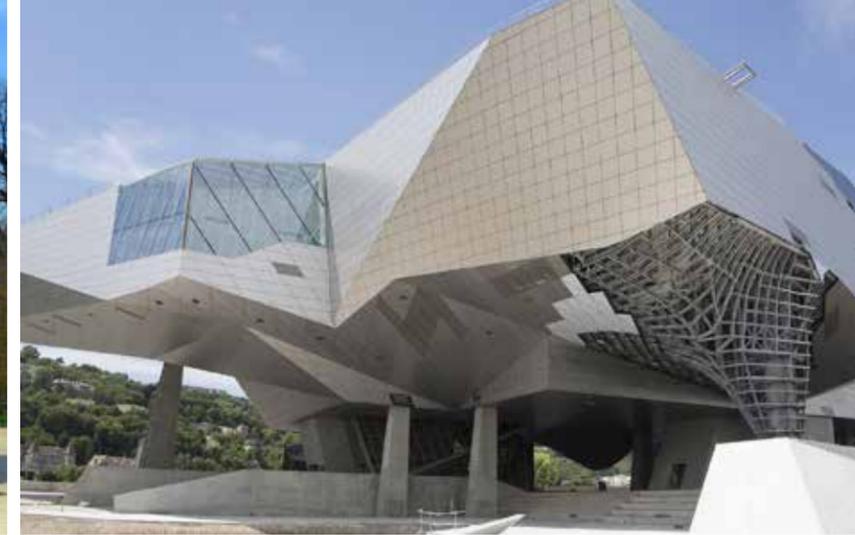
threats it is likely to face in a society increasingly driven by economic imperatives that necessitate the enclosure of commonwealth. For a community of cricket-lovers, the game represents an opportunity for genuine human connection—just watch some videos of English fans celebrating last summer’s World Cup Final victory or the third Ashes test (above), or imagine the numerous scenes of children playing cricket in urban centres across the world, from Birmingham to Mumbai, Dhaka to Kingston. Enthusiasts of cricket have passed down the game to us with a generosity of spirit and a hope that the game might bring joy and connection to as many people as possible. It is our responsibility to pass it on in the same spirit.

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Below: England versus South Africa, 2005 (Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)) & Village cricket being played in Bearsted, Kent (Source: [Stuart Tree](#))





The Spaces of Anthropology in France and the UK

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20th of June, 2018 was a meaningful day at the Musée de l'Homme, the Museum of Mankind in Paris. Exactly 80 years earlier, the Musée was born, on the dawn of a world war during which it would host a famous Résistance network. Ideas of universal human rights materialised ten years later when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed at the Palais de Chaillot, the very building hosting the Musée. On the occasion of this 80th birthday, a symposium titled *Spaces to Think: Museums, Theatres, Libraries* was held, spurring a reflection on the nature of a space that communicates knowledge about humanity, i.e. anthropology. As part of this symposium, Chris Dercon, former director of the Tate Modern, gave a talk stressing the need for more 'ritual' spaces—a call which bears a rather different sense in the words of an Englishman compared to French approaches to religion. Altogether, this event is indexical of the contrast in what a ritual space means for the display of anthropological knowledge in France versus the UK.

Britain: Physical separation, interdisciplinary dialogue

The UK is a country of multiculturalism, where human biology and social

anthropology seem to inhabit different spaces while being in dialogue. In Oxford, the Pitt Rivers Museum offers an eclectic collection of ethnographic objects, side to side with the University's Natural History Museum. The former can only be accessed through the latter, via a small door, but the two museums remain separate yet conjoined entities. In London, there is no dedicated ethnographic museum since the closure of the Museum of Mankind in 1997. Ethnographic objects belong to the British Museum in Bloomsbury, which is even more distanced from the capital's Natural History Museum—three miles away in South Kensington.

These natural history and ethnography museums thus appear as distinct ritual spaces, each with their own epistemological traditions—a diversity that Britain likes to celebrate. Like different communities in the UK, they are separated but still conceived side by side with one another. Much intercultural dialogue takes place between these spaces, generally facilitated by charities like the Wellcome Trust with its interdisciplinary projects. However, without the action of such private entities, there is nothing guaranteeing that dialogue will occur between the separate

communities from a public, institutional point of view.

Parisian Ambiguities

France is a country of universalism. Historically, the exhibition of knowledge about humanity was the realm of the Musée de l'Homme, itself the successor of the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro. The Musée explored humanity from the standpoints of prehistory, biological unity, and cultural diversity, all under the same roof. It has always been a public space under the supervision of the Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche. Described today on its website as a 'citizen agora', located close to the massive public spaces of the Champs de Mars, the Musée perpetuates the humanistic spirit that characterised its resistance network against Nazism in the 1940s. The Musée de l'Homme has thus been the symbol of the *Res-Publica*, a secular ritual space illustrating how the concept of *laïcité*—the French approach to secularism—is made to protect citizens of any religious affiliation against discrimination in public space. A unitary and universal approach to 'mankind' was thus developed there.

Recently, however, things have become

more ambiguous. Since the opening of the nearby Musée du Quai Branly, dedicated to 'extra-European art', in 2006 (also on the 20th of June), the Musée de l'Homme has lost most of its focus on culture and ethnology, and now concentrates more on human evolution. In this context, the Musée de l'Homme is less unique and universal in its message, with its position as a secondary site of the National Museum of Natural History (MNHN, in French) being emphasised more than before. Besides, the MNHN's main site, the Jardin des Plantes, used to be the Royal Botanical Gardens in the 17th century—it was here the disciplines of botany and natural history developed in a not-so-republican context.

However, the Parisian anthropological landscape is not akin to the British dichotomy, tainted by the royalist heritage of natural history. Interestingly indeed, the MNHN itself claims a universalistic approach derived from the Enlightenment and rational thinking about humanity and its environment. And its approach to natural history contrasts quite significantly with Britain: in the Jardin des Plantes stands a magnificent statue of (French) Jean-Baptiste de Lamarck, the proponent of the theory against which (British) Darwin's natural selection is defined. At the MNHN, the role of Darwin himself is highlighted less than the broader concept of evolution. In comparison, Darwin is omnipresent in British natural history museums. A statue of Darwin famously stands on the main staircase at London's Natural History Museum, and one of the

cafeterias of the London Museum is even called the Darwin Café. The French went further: The Rue Lamarck is one of the longest in Paris's 18th arrondissement, with several bus stops and a Metro station named accordingly, but few people know that perpendicular is the tiny Rue Darwin, juxtaposed there almost as if to ridicule the British thinker. Overall, the Musée de l'Homme's strengthened affiliation with the MNHN spurs ambiguities as to its universalist vocation, yet in a complex manner that negates the parallel with the British version of natural history.

Anthropological Confluences

As the Musée de l'Homme has been losing its clear humanistic symbolism to the benefit of an ambiguous version of natural history, another promising space has emerged in the French anthropological landscape. In 2007—just after the opening of the Musée du Quai Branly and the closing of the old Musée de l'Homme for refurbishing in accordance with its new intellectual line—the Musée d'Histoire naturelle-Guimet in Lyon also closed its doors in the midst of plans to construct a grand, new building rebranded as the Musée des Confluences. This rebranding explicitly rejected using the term 'natural history'. Instead, the museum's location at the confluence of the Rhône and Saône rivers symbolises the intersection of various sets of knowledge about humans, namely natural history and anthropology. Indeed, the first part of the permanent exhibition

Above from left to right: Galerie de l'Homme at the Musée de l'Homme, Paris (Source: [Musée de l'Homme](#)). The Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, a collection of eclectic ethnographic objects from all over the world (Source: [Wikipedia](#)). Statue of Jean-Baptiste de Lamarck at the Jardin des Plantes, main site of the Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle de Paris (Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

The Musée des Confluences in Lyon, designed by Coop HIMME(l)blau (Source: [Terrésens](#)).

trail, *Origins: Stories of the World*, shows the trajectory of human evolution from our common ancestor with primates side by side with origin myths in Amazonian and Buddhist cultures. The second part, *Species: The Web of Life*, highlights both scientific and indigenous ontologies and taxonomies of the natural world.

Overall, with its deconstructivist architectural design said to resemble a floating crystal cloud of stainless steel and glass, the Musée des Confluences embodies a holistic understanding of humankind in a single public space. Better than the 'Enlightened' Musée de l'Homme-MNHN, it supports the inclusion of various voices, indexing in parallel the process of de-centralisation initiated by Charles de Gaulle to distribute cultural power outside of the almighty capital. The same Charles de Gaulle who, like the Musée de l'Homme, fought Nazism during World War II, but led the Résistance not from France but from the UK—a country more open to the coexistence of voices, but which certainly lacks the tradition of public agora of post-revolutionary France. As an illustration of French republicanism, the Musée des Confluences thus shows how *laïcité* both acknowledges and protects cultural diversity while building a common ritual space for all those who identify as French, and in this case, as humans.

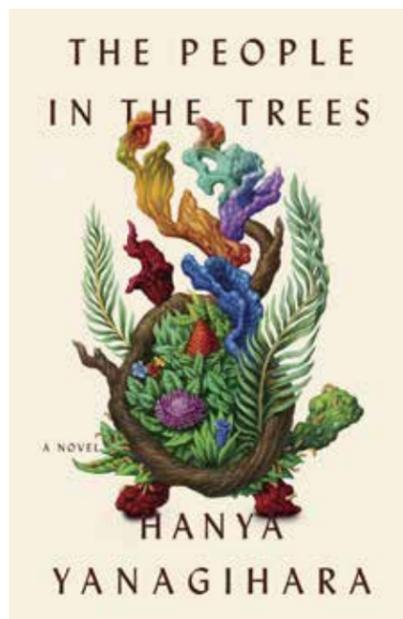
‘The People in the Trees’: Fiction or Reality? Revisiting Controversy within Anthropological Research

Niamh O’Neill
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Hanya Yanagihara, in her debut novel *The People in the Trees* (2013), utilises a powerful evocation of emotion and a realism that carries the reader deep into her world of the fictional island of Ivu’Ivu, to create a novel so provocative that it could just be that it reflects reality. But does it? Or is it an entirely fictitious storyline, designed to thrill and sensationalise but with no truth mirrored in the anthropological world?

Daniel Carleton Gajdusek was a scientist, researcher, Nobel prize winner—and child molester. Gajdusek—who provides the inspiration for the protagonist and anti-hero Norton Perina in *The People in the Trees*—travelled to Papua New Guinea to investigate a rare and incurable disease amongst the Fore people who lived there. According to Gajdusek, the neurodegenerative disease—Kuru—caused a form of madness, which meant sufferers could be heard shrieking and twitching into the night. His ground-breaking research and academic career aside, the real horrors are found in Gajdusek’s child molestation: he brought back a total of fifty-six children from New Guinea to the States. Years later, it was discovered that Gajdusek had performed sexual acts with his adopted children. In an interview with *Vogue* in 2013, Yanagihara asked, ‘If we call someone a genius, and then they become a monster, are they still a genius?’

In the novel, Norton Perina perfectly mirrors the real-life Einstein-turned-paedophile character of Gajdusek. He too, embarks on a mysterious anthropological expedition in search



of a lost tribe who seemingly hold the secret to a form of immortality. The characters’ adventure and obsession with an undiscovered tribe certainly reflects the preoccupation of anthropologists in the last century of finding and fetishising undocumented peoples.

The rest of the novel takes the reader on a tumultuous journey of colonisation and ecological disruption, all the while maintaining a distressing undertone of Westernisation. We watch disaster ensue on the island as the traditions and cultures of the local inhabitants erode, all in the name of scientific research and anthropological investigation.

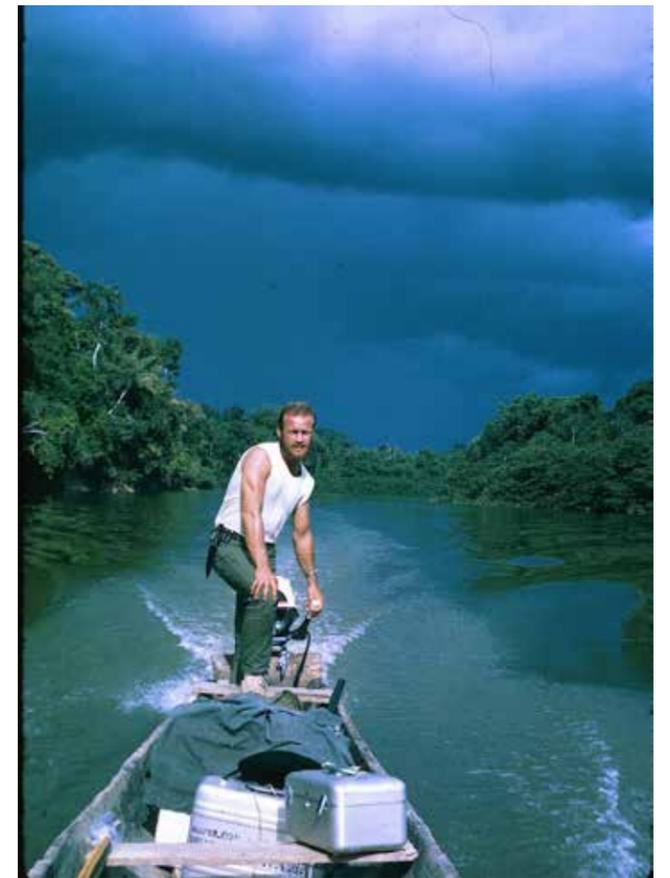
Obviously, fiction is fiction, and the book’s narrative contains many fantastical elements that remind us throughout

just how fictional the story is. But what remains striking is how well Yanagihara expresses the potential capabilities to disrupt and destroy a civilisation that come with scientific and anthropological research. Napoleon Chagnon, Kenneth Good, and Jacques Lizot are all textbook names that provide horror story examples when searching for Yanagihara’s fictive ethics and moral deviations in the world of research and participant observation.

Since the 1980s, postmodernist critique has challenged the authority and veracity of many anthropological studies previously considered to be classics. The nature of ethnographic research itself, including the agency of anthropologists, their intimacy with their subjects, and their isolation means that the work can easily become controversial. American anthropologist and infamous ethnographer of the Yanomami Napoleon Chagnon undoubtedly pushed the boundaries of anthropological ethics. Many parallels can be drawn between Chagnon and Perina, the protagonist of *The People in the Trees*—not least relating to their respective disturbances in the Amazon and Ivu’Ivu.

Chagnon wrote one of the best-selling ethnographies of all time: *Yanomamö: The Fierce People* (1968). Whereas some people hold him as a pioneer of ethnographic research and sociobiological theory, others, including *The New York Times*, have deemed him America’s ‘most controversial anthropologist’ (2013). According to his chief critic journalist Patrick Tierney in his book *Darkness in El Dorado* (2001), Chagnon and geneticist

Napoleon Chagnon in an undated photo—most likely late 1960s, Venezuela (Source: [The New York Times](#)).



James Neel unethically collected blood samples from Yanomami people for scientific purposes. Furthermore, they administered a measles vaccine after discovering that the population had no antibodies for the disease. Tierney alleges that, as a consequence of these unethical acts, the two scientists inadvertently caused a deadly measles outbreak amongst the Yanomami.

Tierney’s second most damaging charge against Chagnon was his infamous portrayal of the Yanomami as ‘the fierce people.’ Anthropologists’ representations of a society risk causing harm to them, and in some situations may put their future and the preservation of their culture in danger. The Brazilian Anthropological Association warned that Chagnon’s depiction of the Yanomami as inherently violent was being used by a powerful lobby of mining interests to justify the invasion of Yanomami land. Chagnon, however, once said, ‘a scientist doesn’t think of such things [as aiding sick people]. A scientist just thinks of studying the people... We didn’t come to save the Indians; we came to study them’ (Coronil 2001). Chagnon maintained that to be an anthropologist is to be passive, yet today an increasing number of anthropologists argue that it is possible to be a social activist as well as an anthropologist.

The other names mentioned above include Kenneth Good, who also worked with the Yanomami in the 1970s. Whilst living with the group, Good married a Yanomami teenager called Yarima who later left the Amazon to live with him in the States. After having three children together, Yarima left, having found urban living too difficult, choosing instead to return to the Amazon. The other anthropologist, Jacques Lizot, found notoriety in the purported sexual exploitation of young boys. According to Tierney, during his time with the Yanomami Lizot traded shotguns and other Western commodities in return for sexual favours.

Whilst participant observation more often than not creates rich, detailed and meaningful studies, the intimacy of the researcher with their hosts—as well as the distance between them and their home culture—can create a space like that imagined by Yanagihara in her book. Perhaps with a far less fatalistic outcome, but the ingredients for disaster are there, all the same.

It is arguably less important to determine whether these claims are true or not, and more important to look at these examples, alongside Yanagihara’s devastating fiction, to consider important questions about the innate character of anthropological research. For one, how it

creates circumstances that can easily cross the boundary from intimacy to exploitation. Although many things have changed in the last few decades—not least that we now live in a more globalised and interconnected world in which the cases such as those mentioned may be less likely to occur—we must continue to recognise and confront these unequal power dynamics. The nature of research is inherently violent and its inability to be extricated from its political context must also continue to be examined, such that scenarios like the one described in Yanagihara’s *People in the Trees* do not become a reality.

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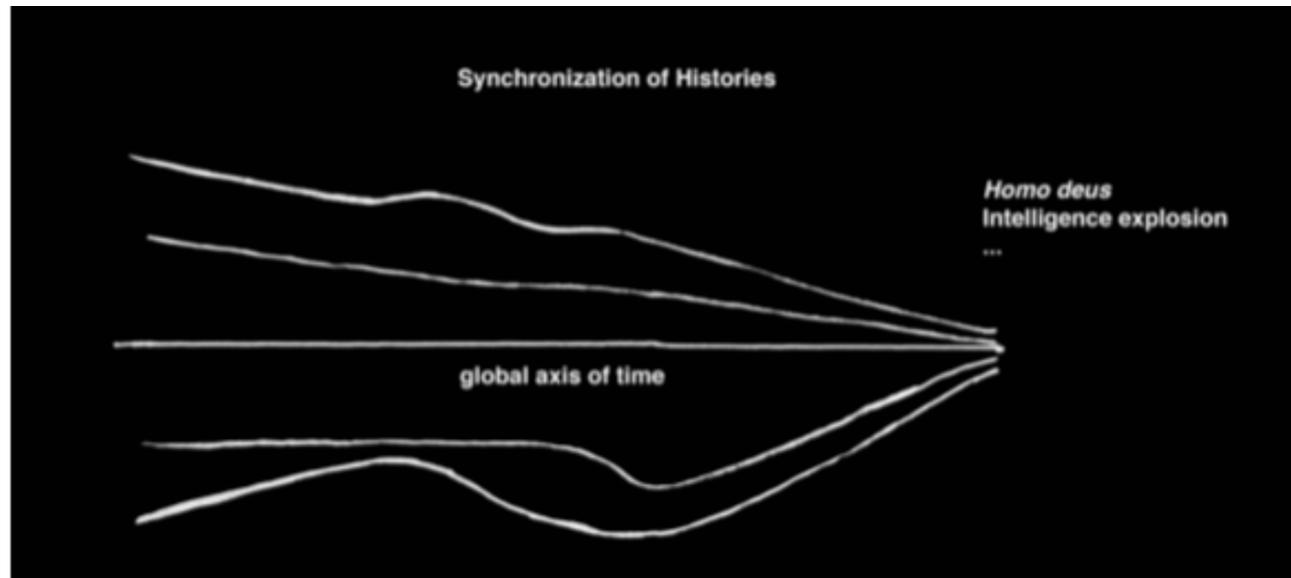
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DIGITAL CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE

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Convergence of human history a.k.a globalisation from 'What Begins After the End of the Enlightenment?' by Yuk Hui, 2019.

With our heavy reliance on communication software, electronic devices, and their associated infrastructure, is it still useful or even possible to distinguish virtual life from 'real' life? More importantly, as opposed to (or in addition to) facilitating the orthodox narrative of peaceful co-existence, how might this fusion help stir the undercurrents of resentment and provoke conflicts between peoples?

Beginning with the spread of colonialism and transitioning through various stages of nation-building and the rise of international governance, the past centuries have led humanity to a historical movement of convergence. Modern European ideals, such as 'sovereignty', 'representation', 'freedom', 'rights' as well as the master concept of 'democracy', are now widely recognised as universal values that undergird our contemporary political consensus. This ideological landscape of universalism has been the distinctive background of my generation, especially for those with a privileged cosmopolitan exposure.

This convergence of values, however,

now provides a new context for conflicts through a parallel convergence of 'technological development'. Ideological manoeuvres and clashes are surely nothing new. What is new, is the digital transformation of conventional ideological media into something more extended and diffused—'infospheres' (Hui 2020); like Twitter, where every seemingly innocuous tweet could be a deliberate construct.

We may look at this through the peculiar concept of 'netizens' (whatever that means). Earlier this year, an 'Internet war' between 'netizens' from China and 'netizens' from Thailand, Taiwan, and Hong Kong broke out (keywords: milk tea alliance/ Thailand China meme war). Deeply politicised memes as well as hateful posts and comments in Chinese, Thai, and English characterised this regional clash on Twitter. At one point, the war even spread to Weibo—a Chinese microblogging platform, where related hashtags had over 4.64 billion views and 1.44million posts.

It all began when a Thai TV star Vachirawit Chivaree re-tweeted four photos to which he referred as 'four different countries'. It

did not take long until his active Chinese fanbase spotted that the photos included Hong Kong—a city perhaps best known recently for its ongoing democracy movement—and immediately questioned Chivaree's motivation. Although Chivaree soon apologised, a collective of mainland Chinese 'netizens' moved on to dig up posts from the Instagram account of Chivaree's girlfriend—Weeraya Sukaram and found that in a 2017 post, Sukaram specified her style as 'Taiwanese'. Taken as evidence of disrespect towards China's territorial integrity, the Chinese fans decided to escalate their operation, prompting Thai netizens and fans to push back. This series of events eventually and quickly spiralled into a Twitter war following #nnevy and #milkteaallince.

State presence loomed large even in this seemingly insignificant grass-root 'war'. The Chinese embassy in Bangkok posted on Twitter to insist the 'One China Principle' (China, Taiwan and Hong Kong as one 'China'), as the incident triggered sensitive elements of regional politics, with 'netizens' from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Thailand soon joining forces. Arguably, the turning point was

the expression of solidarity of Joshua Wong (a well-known activist from Hong Kong and a key advocate for the ongoing democracy movement) with the Thai and in opposition to the Chinese.

In reality, the black-boxed term 'netizens' tells us little about anything, as though a human being would simply morph into a 'netizen' when an electronic screen lights up. While it may be said that netizens are obviously people—are 'people' ever just 'people'? The example of 'Wu Mao' may tell us a thing or two. *Wu Mao* refers to 'internet commentators' hired by the Chinese state to produce pseudonymous and deceptive writings disguised as the opinions of ordinary people. These hired guns play a pervasive role in managing public opinion by attacking government critics or anyone deemed a threat to the 'public order'. It is estimated there are as many as two million *Wu Mao*, producing 448 million posts every year. The *Wu Mao* are often indistinguishable from those who voluntarily attack opponents of the regime online, known as the 'volunteer *Wu Mao*' and 'little pinks'—millennials with intense chauvinistic sentiments (King, Pan & Roberts 2017).

While an anthropological truism dictates that our perception is necessarily mediated, the pervasiveness, hypersensitivity and unpredictability of these 'internet wars' challenge directly our ability to make sense of what is 'real' in everyday life—now that we know such spectacles could indeed be organised theatrics. Meanwhile, to what extent can we interpret the apparently voluntary aggression on the Internet, like a history

textbook might, as a top-down product of official rhetoric and ideologies?

I don't have an answer, nor am I sure whether that's the right question to ask. However, it does exemplify the (unintended) consequences of cross-cultural interaction afforded by 'communication technologies'. The ongoing pandemic has rendered visible the otherwise intangible 'infospheres' that have been meticulously constructed over the past decades (Hui 2020). If anything, we have already witnessed how information circulation remains fluid despite our restrained mobility.

These intangible digital spaces enable a new type of human conflict, 'infowar'—a type of conflict with no boundaries, physical or otherwise. On the one hand, infospheres are de-territorialised, as they move beyond physical borders and blur the boundaries between the local and the global (Hui 2020). On the other hand, the state simply ceases to be a meaningful unit for us to understand the ideological proxy wars that dominate our Twitter newsfeed. The phenomenon of 'Twitter diplomacy' is a prime example, as traditional figures of authority and official representation now effectively yell at each other when and wherever they want.

The parallel convergence of value systems and 'technology' thus presents a peculiar dilemma. Whereas keywords such as 'humanity', 'representation' and 'sovereignty' constitute a common language that enables exchanges between modern peoples, the same narrative is also the context in which

ideological clashes take place, amplified by competing regional and global infospheres.

The benefits of enhanced connectivity, swift accessibility and real-time exchanges offered by 'communication technologies' have been much celebrated, but to what end? It is not my intent to explore whether digitised communication is more or less 'authentic', but to question how increased connectivity erects barriers. Underneath the harmonious picture of a unified humanity, hidden wells of resentment are being released and channelled through various infospheres. Have we entered a time where virtually ubiquitous and meticulously orchestrated propaganda is fused with 'democratised' trash talk? If globalisation is indeed rolling back, it may not require official constraints. We might already be too busy yelling at each other behind glass doors, no longer with any desire to travel between rooms.

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Left and below: Hu Xijin is the editor-in-chief of Global Times (a major Chinese state-owned media). Solomon Yue is a senior American-Chinese member of the republican party. (Twitter)



Flying Seagulls: A Border Crossing

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MSc Social and Cultural Anthropology

I am in a cafe on top of a hill, with a view of the clear, calm, undeniably beautiful Ionian Sea. It is speckled with sailing boats, and the odd yacht creeps across the perfectly blue horizon. I'm drinking my first coffee for over 2 months, and it's better than I imagined. I'm hovering at seagull height but I begin to feel heavy. The ache, I realise, is the weight of my guilt. I'm wondering how it will be possible to return home to mornings in the gym and recurring intervals spent on trains, shooting through underground wind tunnels. I have been working with the charity Flying Seagull Project, in refugee camps and squats across Greece. A larger-than-life-most-magical charity of travelling clowns dedicated to creating theatre, laughter, music and magic, by hook or by crook to thousands of refugee children every year. In places where children still wear the same torn dresses that they were hurriedly dressed in deep in the safety of darkness, and the wind echoes through endless rows of ripped tents that look like the sails of a boat. In my privilege, I am clutching at my passport and soaring through countries as if borders didn't exist.

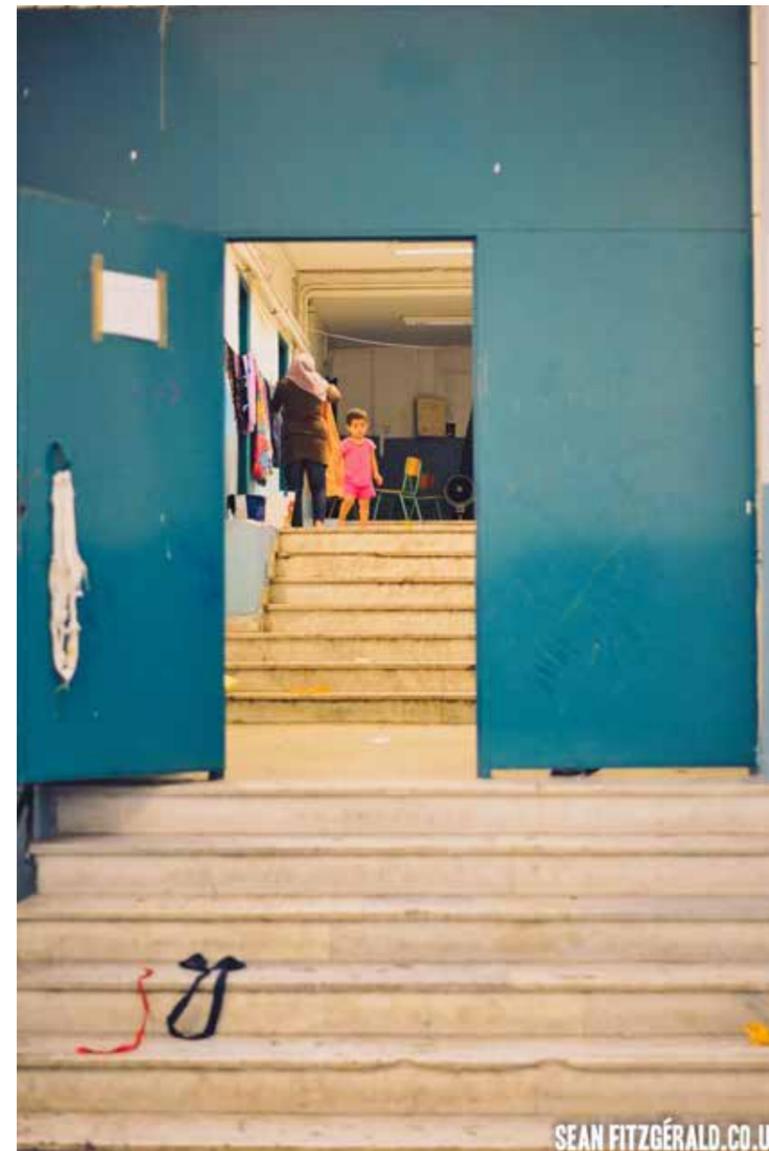
How do I go back when the children I have shared the universal language of laughter with stay behind, as if their lives are somehow worth less than my own. After looking into the eyes of children of war, children still young enough to rebuild themselves, to fall in love, to make homes, and dream such dreams that we take for granted in our rush to have more, am I to go home and act as if life can ever be the same?

In the cafe, tourists start arriving for dinner, and I am surrounded by women unsatisfied by their tan lines, and men drinking cold Pilsner in blue linen shirts. The contrast of worlds seems too much,

and finally the tears come. I am weeping with love for young wives who have lost their husbands in the blast of someone else's battle. Their precious family photographs and heirlooms passed down from faintly remembered relatives now lay amongst the ruins of their homes, which once chimed with bells and laughter and devout whispers of lovers in early years of romance. Never did these women dream of adulthood in ripped tents so far from home, far from a recognisable landscape and a well-earned peaceful sleep. Now their men smile so rarely, their children struggle to recognise them when they do. They don't play football with their boys or take them fishing. They have stopped dreaming of sons who will become doctors, or the richness of many grandchildren running around at their feet. They left these thoughts behind when they hurriedly packed a bag and crept into the safety of darkness, squeezing their children's small hands in reassurance, and gripping the sides of a little boat with only the stars to guide them to a new world.

Together they prayed that the ocean would be kind to them and that her tides would bring them quickly to land. These are the lucky ones, whose prayers were answered. A father of 3, in an abandoned secondary school squat in Athens tells me 'We kissed the ground under our feet and sank our fingers into the Greek sand when we arrived.' His wife cradles a newborn baby and their other children play on a broken swing.

In the camps, hours turn to days, and days turn to weeks as men sit on the dusty ground in the shade of the only tree in the old chalk quarry that over 400 people now call home. Their children do not go to school and they question if their prayers really were answered when they



Above: A refugee camp in a disused chalk quarry in Eastern Greece.
Left above: A mother and daughter hanging washing to dry in a disused school in Athens.
Top above: Seagulls performing an evening show to refugees on the streets of central Athens.
Photo credit: Sean Fitzgerald Photography

felt Europe under their feet, or if they have mistakenly led their families away from one dog and into the jaws of another. There are no blasts here to wake them at night, but now their humanity has been replaced by a number on a computer.

Yara tells me that she dreams of being a bird. Free of wars, politics, weapons, where children aren't killed in their classrooms—because for birds, there are no rooms, no walls at all, no limits of freedom. In her dreams, children don't grow up with battle scars; little dot-to-dot markings reminding them of a home they've run from.

In united thought, the refugee community in the chalk quarry begin to realise that this endless waiting has become

permanent. This is the new life. And in the dry earth outside their cabins and tents, they start to grow tomato plants, and a neighbour hangs a line for clothes to dry in the hot Greek sun.

They've been washed up and spat out by a ferocious ocean, moved from camp to camp, some better, some worse, but they're all blending into one. They feel the wrinkles around their eyes grow heavy with worry as their children grow quickly,

and over time they forget their chanting of traditional songs.

I finish my coffee and check my watch. While they dream of freedom, I order a taxi to Corfu airport, and again, I feel the ache of guilt.

While their children grow and harden against the world, I board my plane, and again, I feel the ache of guilt.

I come home and slowly resettle into a rhythm. We are shown photos of children washed up on beaches and again, we are guilty.

I wonder how many times we will need to feel the ache of guilt before anything changes.



Royal Opera House, London.

AFFECT AND THE DANCING AUDIENCE

Helena Bogner
3rd Year BSc Anthropology

The idea of this article was inspired by the performance of 'The Cellist' by the Royal Opera House, for which I secured a last-minute student ticket at the box office. It was the story of the famous cellist Jacqueline du Pre and her relation to her instrument—the cello—and the intensity of that relation. It was a story of great affect and intensity, and the way it incorporated me as an observer into that affect made me think of dance in the Western context: of an aesthetic that, as a lived and embodied experience, goes beyond spectacle. It made me question what role affect plays in the relationship between dancers and the audience, and how 'watching' dance has the potential to be an observational experience that is simultaneously a form of embodiment. Furthermore, we can ask, what are the implications for object-subject relations blurred by affect that lead us to view dancers not in an objectified way but as

the initiators of embodied experience for the audience?

Essentially, affective responses of the audience transform the gaze into both touch and being touched in a transmission that has the potential to blur and play with subject-object boundaries. In the process, the visual loses its dominance, the dancer is no longer an object. And, rather than the fact of the dancer being copy-pasted onto the observer's gaze, the dancer's experience has to be understood as a template which is filled out with the observer's own experiences. These experiences would of course always be plural, situated and embodied by the observer.

Biologically speaking, what mechanisms exist that could explain why affect has the potential to move us emotionally and physically when observing another? It

is useful here to look at mirror neurons. These neurons have the capacity to be activated both when a person executes an action oneself as well as when an action is observed (Reynolds 2013). Martin argued that 'the sense organs which report movement and postural change are closely connected with that part of the nervous system where emotions are generated.' (Martin 1939: 47). This, then, means that memories of previous experiences can be revived. Because the mirroring occurs through the metabolising and filtering through an observer's past, this mirroring is not reflective of a neutral state of another. This is also why the name 'mirroring' has been said to actually be a misnomer because, rather than mirroring, the mirror system translates and reinterprets. Thus, as Reynolds remarks, the reinterpretation of a work of dance through people's own neural systems and knowledge of

the world occurs where we carry across and embody the dance by 'translating' it into our own embodied experience (Reynolds 2013: 217). Concentrating on affect, therefore, then lets us appreciate the plurality of experiences which can be invoked when watching a dance where, depending on past experiences, we respond to a given scenario in very different ways. Personally, I was surprised to see a lady sitting close to me having a similar reaction to 'The Cellist' as I did, whereas her friend's moody response was completely different.

The relation that emerges between observer and dancer is one which does not solely rely on vision anymore. Through the affective response, an embodied relationality is found. Reynolds notes that affect is highly infectious and does not respect individual boundaries (Reynolds 2013: 214). Often, this is also related to touch whereby the objectification of the gaze turns into a 'haptic visuality' (Reynolds 2013: 214), making space tactile and allowing the eyes to touch as well as see.

What also becomes apparent is the two-way experience whereby the observer is actively involved within the meanings that emerge, rather than the choreographer being the sole positioner of meaning in the dance. As a consequence, we find a space that hosts an unlisted and un-prescribed play of meanings, aesthetically extended to the embodiment of different audience experiences.

The idea that there is no neutral reflection of the state of others echoes post-structural rejections of an objective reality to be signified. Rather than a meaning that can be pinned down through signifier and signified, as traceable through the intentions of an authorial choreographer, meaning is plural and connected to a variety of experiences. In fact, it is useful to move away from modernist legacies of the author and his work, characteristic of an asymmetry between subject and object, whereby the choreographer has the transcendental power to fix the meaning of a dance once and for all. As Roland Barthes (1977/1988) notes 'To give a text an author is to impose a

limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing' (1977/1988: 171). This applies also to choreographers as writers who cannot fix meanings. What affect produces are experiences which stand in relation to each other and meanings which cannot be reduced to one singular entity, who's ultimate and essential meaning is always deferred.



Right: UCL 'Transcendence' Competition, UCL Dance Society.
Below left: Royal Opera House, The Cellist.
Below right: Bayerisches Staatsballett, Munich.



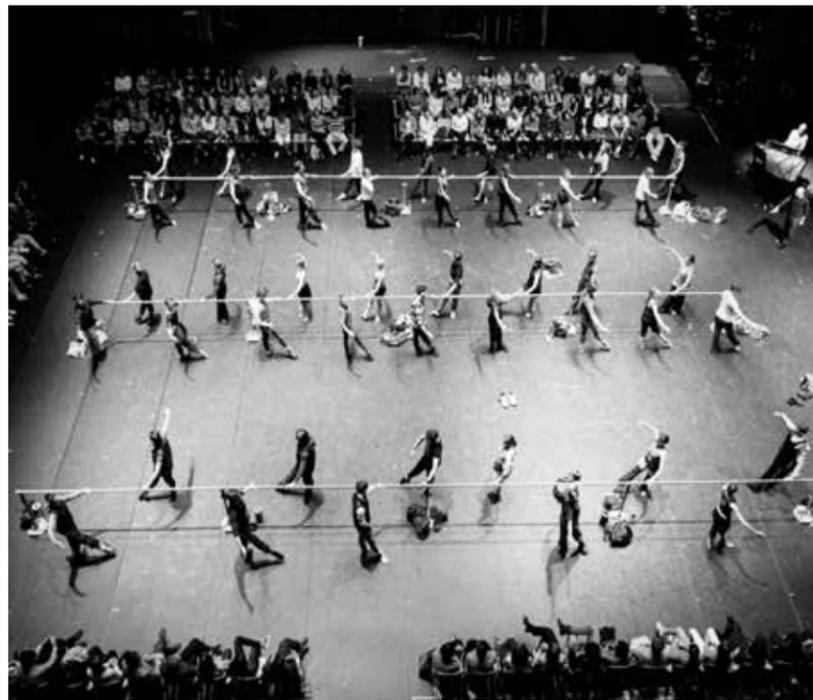
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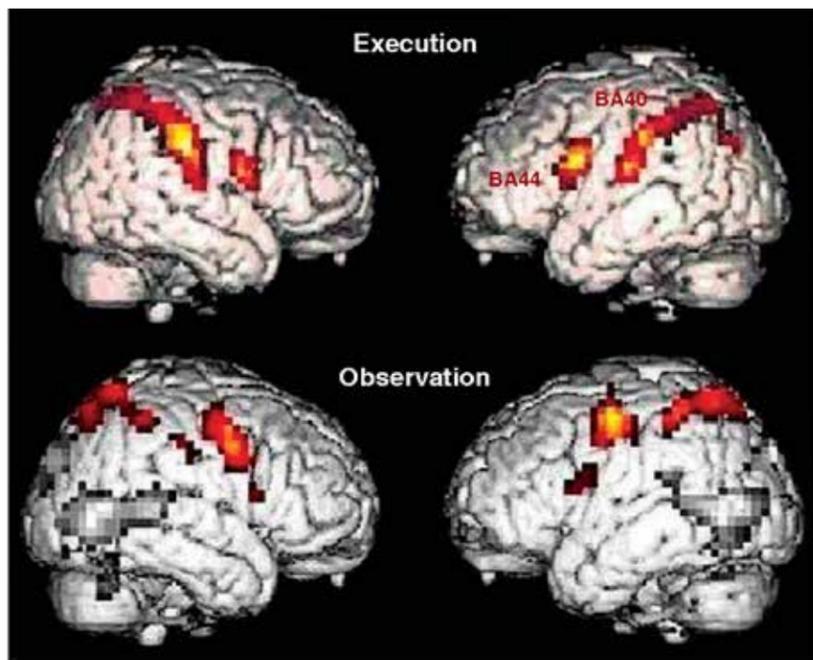
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Above: What a view—training on stage, *Sa 30 March* from above (Source: [Instagram of bay staatsballett](#)).
Below: The human mirror system (Source: [Mirror Neurons Image 3](#)).



Excavating potential metal slabs, 2019.

Have you ever wondered what ‘time’ is and what kind of relationship we have with it? In the Western tradition, History belongs to the past and remains disconnected from the present, leading to the construction of a linear and chronological historicity. Along these lines, historians decipher the past textually in written and oral records, whilst archaeologists excavate the material remains of the past in order to illuminate the social life of objects. However, whilst the relationship between Archaeology and History has been extremely complex, Archaeology has still been characteristically subordinate to History, tying objects to specific periods in the past. The lives of objects in the present, and the effect they have on us today, are usually not taken into account.

However, objects can lead us to another kind of historicity, one that embodies experiential time and, in that way, bring about social and personal connections with the past. While History is seeking for a singular truth, objects show us ‘histories’ (Gell 1992), encompassing non-linear temporalities that do not exclusively belong to a specific time in the past. From this perspective, objects can be recycled, and they can have a continuing social afterlife. Steampunk and clockpunk are both aesthetic examples of object-use that obscure western historicity, experimenting with the notion of time by reviving the recent past (Dawdy 2010). For example, inspired by H.G. Wells’ alternative utopia of de-growth, Steampunk often involves DIY

OF OBJECTS AND TIME

Lan Shi BA Archaeology and Anthropology 2020

hybrids of modern and historical objects such as a computer with mechanical keyboard or a robot that fits within the Victorian aesthetic of steam-power.

Objects also contain personal relations with the past (Hirsch and Stewart 2005). In the anthropological approach to historicity, the past may assume a ‘present form’, capturing ‘the mutual conditioning between objects and subjects’ (ibid., 262). Therefore, the history of a person and an object can be seen as interwoven and inalienable. Looking around your home, can you perhaps find pebbles that you picked up from a beach during your family vacation or a book gifted by an old friend? In 2009, when I first left home to study in England, I took my late grandfather’s old English dictionary from his bookshelf. The dictionary was breaking apart and contained handwritten notes on many pages, intertwining the biography of the dictionary with the life-story of one who belonged to the first generation to attend university in China: it was a ‘dividual’ of my grandfather. I chose to bring the object to England not because it would be a useful tool, but as an embodiment of my grandfather’s aspirations. And, by bringing it abroad as part of my own life-history, another layer of time has been added to the object.

Objects can emit ‘affect’ on people who encounter them, transmitting history through the senses. Being an archaeologist, I have had many personal encounters with objects from the past. While excavating in Georgia, I found a pot containing burnt seeds, as well as a broken knife handle in the same area, dated to 5th–4th Century BC. These objects had an emotional impact on me, and they made me feel that people had abandoned them in a hurry. Later, in an area close by, I found what were likely to be slabs of metal waiting to be forged, which made me feel sad in some way. In one way or another, the personal

as well as intellectual engagement we have with objects adds to our historic consciousness, allowing alternative, bottom-up affective interpretations of history.

To conclude, History can be personal as well as objective, because we have emotional encounters with objects from the past, whether it is an heirloom or something we find on a beach. Histories of objects consist of our very own historical consciousness that allow us to engage with the past in an alternative manner that is not only concerned with objective truth, but also with the emotional and personal layers of history embodied by the objects.

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A Steampunk robot at London MCM, 2019.





Street art in the Barracas neighbourhood of Buenos Aires (Source: Kaja Seruga).

IN TIME

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'Time is the substance of which I am made. Time is a river which sweeps me along, but I am the river; it is a tiger which mangles me, but I am the tiger; it is a fire which consumes me, but I am the fire.'

(J.L. Borges, A New Refutation of Time, 1947: 64)

When I was eighteen... I mean, when I had been alive on this planet for eighteen years... or do you better understand 216 months of the Gregorian calendar? After having been alive for 6570 days, which you could also say 'having seen the sun rise 6570 times'? Maybe if I don't relate it to myself you will understand better. Here we go: in the summer of 2015... I mean, it was in a time when it was very warm compared to other times and when it had been 2015 years since... Ah. At a moment in my life right after the Romanian legal system had considered I had the necessary maturity to leave the country by

myself, I decided to go on a solo bike-tour from Romania to Spain.

After almost a week... I mean, after having cycled for almost 7 days, 7 sunrises, 604800 seconds, 60480000 moments of blinking, of *presentness* that had passed, I arrived in Hortobágyi, a Natural Park in the east of Hungary. It is one of the flattest areas in eastern Europe, which means that you can cycle for a long time... a lot of miles, a lot of repeated rotation of your pedals, of your foot touching the same point of the circumference made by the pedal for many repeated instances, without seeing any land formation around you, it is just you, the road under your wheels and the sky. I got very sunburned, lonely, hungry and lost, but above all, what happened is that after two days of cycling in that infinite nothingness, I started losing track of time. I could not tell if I was here or there, now or then, today or yesterday, if my thoughts had passed

or are still happening now. Of course, I was progressing, moving, passing, being, but I could not tell. Besides my memories and my watch, I had no index, no trace, no external way of seeing that passage. My watch was irrelevant, because the only helpful thing it did was tell me that time had indeed passed outside my self, and my memories were getting so deeply confused that they were no longer a reliable source of chronology, of the *logos* of time, of the discourse, the understanding of time. Time per se had disintegrated for me.

Such disintegration is what Jorge Luis Borges is attempting in his 1944/46 article 'A New Refutation of Time,' from which this article's epigraph is taken. The originality of his refutation resides in a fundamental negation of *change* as the quintessential criterion for the succession of time, and so for the existence of time. Borges argues that for this refutation to

be possible what is needed is a moment of abstraction where one can be in front of two houses at once, or when a day is exactly the same as the other, when the dates and the clocks are empty, when we are 'locked up' in the same room *everyday* while society has stagnated in a global pandemic. When these external punctuations dissipate, what happens to *change*, to the sui generis aspect of time? What if I am cycling in a space of nothingness, a plain in Hortobágyi? What if Borges is walking on a street in Barracas and passes in front of the wall that he had seen yesterday and has the exact same thought as he had yesterday? What makes it a *now*, different from a *then*? 'If we can intuit that identity, time is a delusion. The indifference and inseparability of one moment in time's apparent yesterday from another moment in time's apparent today are enough to cause time's disintegration' (Borges 1947: 55). This is the same identity that a global lockdown might enforce. When rhythm is cancelled and days become a continuous strand of events, when everyday feels like a Sunday, when the change that social structure seems to have so well supported dissipates—time gets naked, its clothed existence appears a mere illusion.

'And yet, and yet... Time is the substance of which I am made' (Borges 1947: 64). Borges' refutation of time remains 'confined, in confessed irresolution, to [his] sheet of paper' (ibid.: 56). The moment I tried narrating my experience of atemporality in an atemporal form, I realised it was impossible. Even without change in the succession of my cycle, of my days, of my life; I am still in time, I am still real, I am still Being. It is only in time that I can re-member a moment of an absence of time, of change, when I was eighteen and was 'thrown' into the world, or when the world itself was 'thrown' into

the void of a crisis. As Heidegger wrote, '[w]hen Dasein tacitly understands something like Being, it does so with 'time' as its standpoint' (1927: 39). Dasein ('being-there') as the being for whom 'in its very Being, that Being is an "issue" for it' (ibid.: 32) is the river, the tiger or the fire that both generates and consumes itself perpetually.

Borges himself refutes his own new refutation of time at the end of both versions of the essay: time *is* real, and he *is* Borges. However, I find his courageous attempt not to have been in vain; despite time still standing, it has now been found at a fundamentally ontological level. Unwillingly or not, Borges might have performed a phenomenological reduction (*epoché*). More straightforwardly put, he might have seen time beyond external events that account for change; beyond subjective and objective perception of continuity and everydayness, he seems to have found time as the field of Being. 'Live as if you were to live forever, live as if you were to die tomorrow' (Bourdieu 1963: 63) is a saying of the Algerian Kabyle, who in Bourdieu's eyes are indifferent to time, to dated time. I see them not merely as indifferent to dates; what I read in their saying is an urge to Live, to Be, beyond time and its however-many-days, because whatever the *ontical* form of that Being, it will always be, ontologically, in time, like you reading this *now*, like me writing this *now*. We both *are the river, in time*.

References

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Right: Salvador Dalí—*The Persistence of Memory* (1931) (Source: [MoMA](#)).

Right above: A field in Hortobágy (Source: [FreeNatureImages](#)).

IN AND OUT OF THE PRESENT

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Recently—induced by a large change in my way of living that I believe I do not have to name—I had to reconsider my relationship with my self. More sudden than I expected, after years of worrying about never landing a job post-graduation, I was faced with a new condition: anxiety about the present. In lack of the schizophrenic co-presence of my self and all the distractive practices I had assembled over the last few years, I am forced to ask myself: what even is the present? Has it always felt this acute?

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the present is a period of time that is happening now, not in the past, nor in the future (Present, n.d.). Indeed, this definition is one of many that proves obsolete when faced with anthropological understandings of time. It may be more apt to conceptualise the present as a *period* of time to challenge the dictionary definition's exclusion of, and contrast between, the present against the past and future by proposing that the present is always a synthesis of past experiences as well as future considerations. To do so, let us travel back into another present—perhaps one less acutely perpetuated by crisis—through a vignette, taken from my experience:

Returning from a past trip to Marseille, I find myself on the phone to my grandmother. Although I am aware her roots were in France, she tells me a story I had never heard before. With a hushed excitement in her voice, she recounts her experience of being in Marseille herself, before and after a camping trip of her school. She was barely nineteen at that point. What strikes me, however, is our corresponding experiences of a particular train station. Their contents were so very different: I swooped into and out of the station, having pre-booked my journey online; whereas she

had undergone a whole Odyssey of trying to get back to her hometown, Saarbrücken, without money, without a phone. Crucially, in her words, while more difficult at times, everything felt 'slower, in a good way'. A feeling of nostalgia infects us both.

What did we witness here—was my understanding of her experience a projection of sorts, out of touch with the present? Schwartz-Wentzer's theory of historicity might come to help here. In his analysis of the retelling of a crisis event—seeing 'Königsberg burning' (Schwartz-Wentzer 2014: 32)—he posits that historicity can be understood through an anthropology of experience that defends the authority of the experiencing subject, however modified a story might be told and re-told (ibid.). More so, Schwartz-Wentzer speaks of experience being 'diachronically distributed' (ibid. p. 35), across different agents, entities and even generations. By listening to a retold historical experience—that, by necessity, is not just a singular event but bears larger historical importance—one actively partakes in that experience, understanding oneself and the other in light of it.

The existential co-presence shared with my grandmother, then, served not just for her to narrate her self as a young woman—her own history, so to speak. More so, our participations in each other's temporalities—i.e., in grossly simplified terms, time-sequence concepts—enabled an engagement with my own history as well as with our respective generation-wide historicities. The resulting shifts in temporal consciousness are something that many of us will know well, whether discursively through talk or in other practices such as the lengthy process of analogue photography. These understandings, conversely, find their way into the present moment as well as the future: they are formative of the self,

historicity and ideas about time more generally. Thus, this vignette might open up a discussion of historicity arising not through an event and its legacy, but through an intersubjective alignment of historically constituted temporalities that correspond dynamically to the present as a period, defined by its system of values as much as by its embeddedness in other sequences of moments. In the case of my grandmother, inter-generational affect such as nostalgia arose as a response to the experience of time periods changing. My own temporal experience in particular was contextualised through the insight into the existential, everyday life in the past.

To circle back to the big C—how come my current present has acquired this new emphasis, why does it feel so deeply difficult to deal with? The present appears as an unfolding period in time that, while always synthetic to varying degrees in its phenomenological lodging between past and future, may be engaged with in different idiosyncratic ways on societal, generational or individual levels. Understood intersubjectively across different, existential time axes, the becoming of history goes hand in hand with the becoming of the present. Someone that engages in meditation or other consciousness-altering practices might experience small pockets of the present as isolated, in other words as a distilled experience of vivid presence. Another person might fall out of touch with the present through living in an extended state of trauma, in which the experience of ongoing crisis supersedes and inhibits a sufficient synthesis of past and future into a productive flux. This phenomenon, theorised as a 'crisis of presence' by Italian ethnologist Ernesto de Martino, implies a 'dehistoricification' of the subject that experiences itself outside of the ordinary flux of time (De Martino 2012).

De Martino may help us to understand elements of our contemporary quotidian life. In today's time, what we may experience is a disconnect of past, present and future, a suspension of the accustomed trajectories of life. The catch is that, rather than only worrying about a projective future through dwelling in capitalist time, what arises most prominently is a renewed relationship with the unfolding of the acute—a crisis of presence akin to that de Martino observed. Rather than letting that take the wind out of our sails, we—as anthropologists as much as wishful agents for social change—could find that through a quasi-simultaneity with inhabitants of different temporalities such as my (or, in fact, your) grandmother, achieved through alternative, frugal practices, we come closer to a new,

visionary synthesis of our temporal trajectories. Would it be too far-fetched to call it a revolution? The paradigms of this hypothetical revolution have the potential of turning the hardy progress narrative inside out, upside down, and finally scatter it all over our backyards where it will come to help as fertilising soil. As every optimistic self-help guide will currently proclaim, now you have the time to do the thing you wanted to do for so long. Is it planting tomatoes in your backyard, or learning to develop your own analogue photos? There is a chance your grandmother can help you with either. As a theorist of de-growth Ted Trainer asserted elsewhere: the 'frontier for this revolution is not international or even national. It is suburban.' (Trainer 2012: 598).

References

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Photograph on analogue film of the world on its head (by author).



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