Trust the food chain, trust the blockchain

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Using blockchain as a thread, IBM Food Trust tries to stitch the wounds in the global, decentralised food supply chain. The creation of trust through traceability should induce the healing. A text about trust as a commodity.

Today's food systems are increasingly complex and globalised. This complexity leads to a number of concerns – about food safety along the chain or environmental health during the production processes. The consumers and their

food are in a trust crisis. Blockchain is supposed to help build back this trust by maximising traceability, transparency and certainty. The tech company IBM recognised the need for trust in food, and the trust-building superpower of blockchain by launching IBM Food Trust in 2016. Food Trust is a software service to collect and link data from various participants on a food chain. By investigating how trust emerges in the discourse of IBM, I am interested in how trust is commercialised as a product of IBM's software.

The trust crisis

IBM Food Trust portrays consumer mistrust in food as one of the major problems in the food industry today (Figure 1) – and presents itself as a solution. Next to consumer mistrust, another layer of mistrust occurs between different entities such as producers and traders within the supply chain. The mistrust is based on concerns about food safety, but also doubts about the truthfulness of sustainability and provenance claims of products. Food scandals and mislabelling aggravate the apprehension – in [one promotional video](), it is mentioned how 20% of seafood sold worldwide is mislabelled – and a lack of transparency in the whole system is seen as the root problem. Mistrust also arises because consumers lack information. Consumers might, for instance, seek sustainable products, but not know enough about how foods are produced to judge their sustainability. Alf-Gøran Knutsen, a customer of IBM Food Trust mentions that "[some of the challenges we have in the industry in Norway is all of those old myths on the way we produce the salmon. Kavory Arctic is one of the most sustainable farms in the world for Atlantic salmon]()".
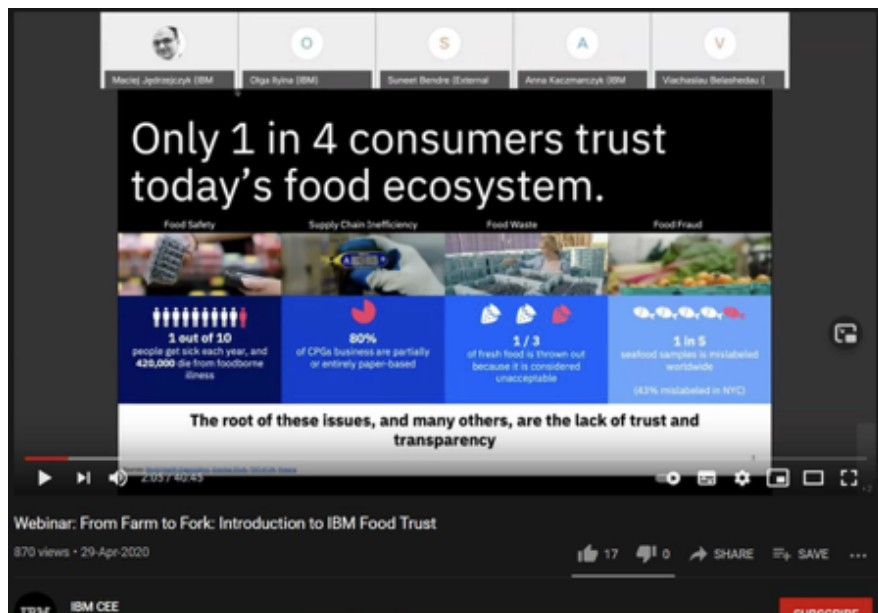
Figure 1. Webinar slide by IBM introducing the importance of Food Trust.

The growing consumer demand for safety, sustainability and provenance, as well as authenticity, sets high standards foods need to fulfil for consumers to feel comfortable with them, or trusting them, and thus purchasing them. As Scott Hutchens from the company Raw Seafood states: "I think one of the biggest hesitations with a lot of consumers in buying seafood is a lack of trust". Consumer trust is the foundation of commercial success in the food industry. Cherie France, a blueberry farmer states: "The consumer expects to be able to trust their food. It's what we build our company on. It's how we thrive in the industry". Consumers do not just include end-consumers but also retailers and packers: "Rolar de Cuyo's objective in using blockchain technology is to ensure olive oil packers worldwide trust us and choose us".

Trust – through confidence and traceability – is portrayed as the final value created by Food Trust (Figure 2). Food Trust consciously mobilises its customers through the notion of trust. Trust, as an emotion, becomes the commodity. However, this rhetoric is misleading. The final value created by Food Trust for the companies in the supply chain is not trust itself. Rather, trust is valuable insofar as it creates profit for Food Trust users. More on that later.

Figure 2. [IBM Food Trust website excerpt](#), advocating the value of Food Trust through videos.

IBM's manual for building trust in food

In Food Trust, trust is conceptualised as being created through increased knowledge, transparency and traceability in the food chain. Consumers demand knowledge about their food because it gives them assurance; "[Consumers, they want to know more where their food comes from, they want to know everything about it. It gives them a sense of confidence and trust](#)" (Paul Lightdoos, President and Founder BrightFarms[)](#). Transparency is believed to create trust by lowering the likelihood of food scandals [(IBM UK & Ireland 2019)](#). Visibility and traceability overcome the obscurity in the food system; "[With blockchain our consumers can see that we are sustainable](#)" (Ana María Donneys, Owner of El Porvenir Coffee Farm[)](#). It is a visibility that can be trusted because of the technology used. Bob Wolpert from Golden State Foods explains that "[now you have higher visibility to your supply chain and digital records confirming that that should be trusted](#)". The blockchain technology creates a backed-up trust, a

'meaningful' trust: "[People want to know, quite rightly, where ingredients they give to their baby have come from. We wanted a product in which trust meant something](.)" (Chris Tyas, Nestlé).

The blockchain technology creates a backed-up trust, a 'meaningful' trust.

In the manual for trust building by Food Trust, blockchain forms all the sturdy and connective parts. Imagine a self-build shelf from IKEA: Blockchain is both the screws and the poles. The blockchain technology creates the fundamental structure of trust in the supply chain. According to Bob Wolpert "[the] bottom line of technology today in the food space is that [it] enables us to have a visibility and trust level that was unaccomplishable previously". Blockchain enables "trusted exchange" (Natalie Dyenson, Vice President, Food Safety & Quality, Dole Food Company), providing "instant, trustworthy and secure" information and "instant access to records that we can have faith in". Blockchains function as a shared digital ledger, in which data is stored in blocks that are thereafter immutable. The IBM Food Trust blockchain is a private permissioned system, meaning that only verified participants can access the chain. The main advantage of the IBM Food Trust blockchain seems to be that the various data – food safety certificates, provenance data, time of harvest, warehouse temperature – of the numerous entities in the supply chain can be gathered in a single, secure, and accessible system.

Data can be put into the system manually or automatically. Salmon farmer Alf-Gøran Knutsen, relying on automated sensor data, stresses that "it's not like we can go into the system and just push in the numbers, it's all data gathered straight from the system. That gives the trust to the consumer". Trust, here, is created by the maximal eradication of the possibility of human error or deliberate manipulation. Trust arises from the trustworthiness not of people, but of the blockchain technology as an apparently nonhuman system. However, a lack of consumer understanding of blockchain poses a limit to blockchain's trust creation ability. Paul Lightdoos, a salad grower connected to the Food Trust system, hopes

that as consumers understand blockchain more, they also "get more confidence in the technology". What is overlooked here is that even if all the blockchain entries and exchanges go fluidly, lowering the possibility of human error in information exchange, it does not eradicate flaws in the physical processes. 'Flaws' may arise from human action, but can also be related to systems of nature that cannot be made fit 100% into technical standards and formats. Can we really stop worms from hiding in salads? Should we want that?

While trust between the different participants in the supply chain is conceptualised as being built through blockchain technology, it also requires trust in the technology and the data itself.

Blockchain is furthermore related to trust within Food Trust through the process of sharing information and connecting distant entities on the supply chain: "Sharing data does mean more trust" (Suzanna Livingstone, Director of Offerings Food Trust and IBM Blockchain Transparent Supply). While trust between the different participants in the supply chain is conceptualised as being built through blockchain technology, it also requires trust in the technology and the data itself.

A further step in the manual for building trust by Food Trust is connectivity. This is reflected in the following quote: "The key to the transformative power of IBM Food Trust is in the name: Trust. Meaning that everyone, from grower to wholesaler to retailer is included and connected in a way they've never been before". The complexity and geographical stratification of the global food system contributes to food having become "more anonymous, more obscure". Food Trust helps in connecting coffee growers with consumers through information, creating as much as a "community of food". One application of Food Trust includes the service for customers to scan QR codes and access information about the foods' journeys through the supply chain. It creates a closeness not only to the producers but the food itself. Establishing this connection with food, through trust, becomes a moral endeavour: "For us, Food Trust is a movement. It's really about helping people – our consumers – understand the food that we eat and have

[a connection back to where our food comes from](#)" (Nigel Gopie, Director, Head of global marketing, IBM Blockchain). Instead of promoting shorter food chains, Food Trust attempts to compress globalised food chains – not in its physical sense, but in the way information moves.

The trust brand

The moral, virtuous connotation of trust makes Food Trust not just a product but a brand with emotional appeal, although some of the main potential benefits of Food Trust for producers do not have much to do with trust. For instance, the data that can be connected and analysed through the technology enables producers to minimise their inputs and waste, increase the efficiency and thus increase price-competitiveness. These benefits, also listed in Figure 4, are mentioned as widely in the promotional material, if not more, as the functions related to trust.
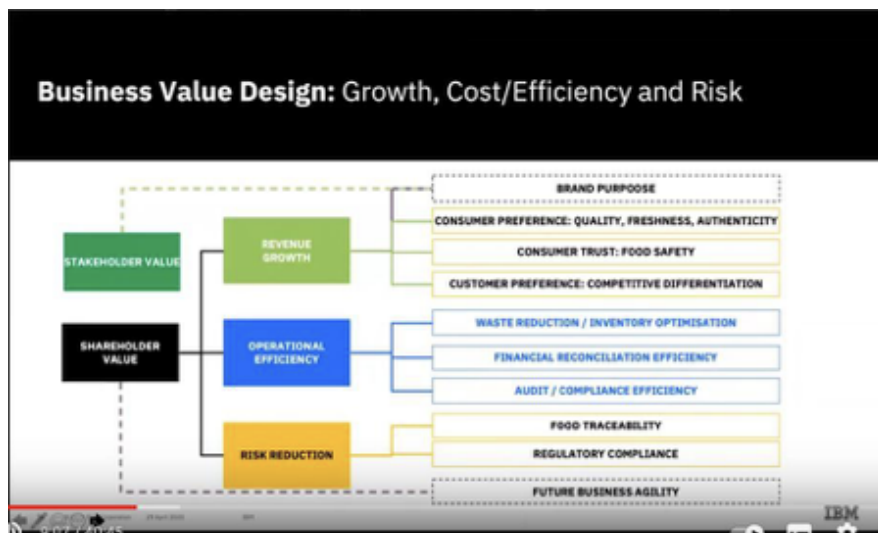

Figure 3. Consumer trust is only one of the factors through which IBM Food Trust creates value [(IBM CEE 2020)](#).

Even if efficiency gains are important for businesses, it is through trust that IBM mobilises because it has a positive, even moralistic, connotation. It is this

emotional value that in turn creates a strong brand and thus also monetary value. The choice of using trust is indicative of the appeal the concept has to the actors that are entangled in the complex modern food supply chain. Trust sells.

Transparency beyond trust: corporate, marketized trust

IBM presents trust itself as the commodity. Are we still talking about trust when traceability and visibility are maximised? Timothy Guinnane (2005) criticises that it is not really trust, here by the consumer, that renders entities more ready to engage in transactions. Rather, it is the possibility for sanction when misconduct has arisen. The importance of trust for the functioning of commodity markets is therefore inflated in the literature. Indeed, through faster traceability in the supply chain, Food Trust facilitates finding the origin of food safety issues and sanctioning the responsible actors. However, in Food Trust, this possibility for tracing and sanctioning is not conceptualised as replacing trust but creating trust.

For Alberto Jiménez (2005), the conceptualization of trust, or trustworthiness, as being created through maximum transparency and information is an encroachment of market ideology in a time of economic disintegration. Corporations increasingly operating through outsourcing and subcontracting replace their own responsibility, which had been the basis of a more personal consumer trust, with verification and certification of the sub-parties through transparency. The consumer is made to believe that it is transparency of the supply chain, confused with knowledge and certainty, that makes corporations or products trustworthy. However, for trust to remain meaningful, it requires a "realm of after trust", it requires the awareness of the obscure and that not everything can be made knowable despite corporate claims.

Consumers should remain aware that not everything can be visible to them.

Does Food Trust appropriate, or even overwrite, a more popular version of trust that is founded on social relationships and an awareness of not being able to

know it all, an awareness of people's contingent nature? Blockchain technology reduces uncertainty, without eradicating it. Consumers should remain aware that not everything can be visible to them, especially not in the complex economy of today – this would be quite overwhelming in fact.

Investigating trust as it emerges in the Food Trust promotional material provides hints on how trust is conceptualised in the global corporate food system. It is a trust that is created through the quest for maximised knowledge, traceability, and thus also safety across the food supply chain. Food Trust mobilises consumers around the emotions of trust, turning trust into a commodity. While it aims to create a certainty that may eradicate the need for trust, the complex nature of the global food system does not cease to provide reasons for distrust.

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Featured image by *Eva Lewitus*, *courtesy of* *Flickr.com*.

Trust, truth, and the blockchain

Anna Weichselbraun
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"Less Trust, More Truth" said the black nylon drawstring bag in the cardboard box. I had to have one. No other item of swag at this crypto-conference articulated as boldly what some blockchain advocates imagine the technology to do. It was precisely claims that blockchain, and in particular, Bitcoin, could obviate the need for trust that drew me to take interest in this new buzzy area of technodeterminist fantasy coming out of Silicon Valley in 2018. Bitcoin, the founding white paper claimed, would permit anonymous actors to transact with

one another without needing to trust each other nor some exploitative "third party." Bitcoin—a blockchain built by an ingenious combination of cryptographic protocols and decentralisation—would replace trust with algorithmic mechanisation. Yet, I hadn't encountered the desire for *less trust* coupled with the imperative for *more truth*. Moreover, what did they actually mean with these terms? I had to have one of these bags.

The bag was an item of swag being handed out by employees of Polkadot, a blockchain platform and cryptocurrency designed to permit cross-chain operability.

I elbowed my way across the exhibition space within the Sports Castle, the sprawling venue in Denver's Capitol Hill neighbourhood which hosted the 2022 edition of ETHDenver, a hackathon and conference sponsored by the Ethereum Foundation. The bag was an item of swag being handed out by employees of Polkadot, a blockchain platform and cryptocurrency designed to permit cross-chain operability, which sought to expand the utility and usability of the numerous existing blockchains. The slogan came from an utterance made by one of Polkadot's co-founders, 42-year-old Englishman Gavin Wood, in an interview with [Wired](#) in November 2021. Wood was also a co-founder of Ethereum, the blockchain system—and reigning alternative to Bitcoin—at the heart of the event in Denver. In the interview, Wood was asked to describe web3, a term he coined to describe the supposed next iteration of the Internet based on blockchains and decentralisation. When the interviewer asked Wood to explain his slogan, Wood noted that trust was "bad in itself" as it required individuals to be dependent on "arbitrary authorities" who might abuse their power. Truth, in Wood's understanding, is achieved when you can be certain that your expectations will be met. As a result, blockchain-based systems, Wood proposed, could permit individuals to avoid having to make themselves vulnerable to others, and could provide certainty that the system would work as expected.

In a related effort to proselytise, Emre Surmeli of the web3 Foundation, also

founded by Gavin Wood, [gave a talk](#) titled "Less Trust More Truth" in which he defined truth as "the verifiable state of the network." While this definition, too, seems alien to common understandings of "truth," it at least mobilised the adjective "verifiable." This becomes interesting when we note that there have been other instances outside of blockchain when trust is contrasted against something else, some other quality or practice. In 2015, for example, when President Obama announced the nuclear agreement with Iran he stressed that this agreement was "not built on trust, but on verification." In this speech, verification was posited as something more robust, more certain than mere trust that another party to the agreement would uphold their commitments. Verification—the process of establishing the truth, accuracy, or validity of something, in this case, the state and status of Iranian nuclear technologies and materials— was posited as the rational basis for the agreement.

Obama's phrase was a reference to an earlier moment in nuclear disarmament negotiations in the late Cold War when Ronald Reagan was advised by Suzanne Massie to use the Russian rhyming proverb "trust but verify" (*Doveryay, no proveryay*) in his interactions with Gorbachev. The phrase has been cited and recycled on numerous occasions, most recently by Trump's Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in a 2020 speech at the Richard Nixon presidential library in which he noted that in dealing with China US allies needed to "[distrust and verify](#)." I bring up these sayings that contrast trust against other qualities or practices to suggest that they might display a trajectory from a moment in which trust still has some kind of redeemable role to play in efforts to coordinate actors who ostensibly have no reason to trust each other.

Reagan's use of the proverb acknowledges trust as a necessary quality in the matter of nuclear arms control negotiations, but pairs this quality with practices of verification that create more certainty, if not "truth." Obama's slogan, however—perhaps symptomatic of an increasingly suspicious geopolitical moment and political culture—dispenses with trust altogether, preferring the (presumably) cold hard facts of verification to a situation of vulnerability in which the US might be taken advantage of by villainously treacherous Iranians. Finally, Pompeo's

remixing clearly reflects hawkish hostility towards most foreign nations that in some way threaten US primacy.

Nuclear arms control and nuclear nonproliferation negotiations between nation states might appear only distantly related to the interaction order of an Internet with anonymous participants. But both situations address that distinctly modern condition, how to "cope with the freedom of [unknowable] others," as sociologist Niklas Luhmann (Luhmann 1979) has famously described it. As Luhmann and others have noted, this risk is dealt with through institutions that govern and regulate society in order to render dealings within it more predictable, more knowable. "Systemvertrauen" (system trust) is what Luhmann calls our generalised reliance that things will go on as expected. Trust in established institutions is more difficult to achieve when the issue is a contestation of those established institutions (the nuclear order in the case of nuclear verification, or the extant techno-economic order as in the case of web3). Hence, the desire for verification—for producing a stable, reliable, immutable truth.

The Truth Machine is what journalists Michael J. Casey and Paul Vigna titled their popular book about blockchain's ostensibly revolutionary potential to transform society. From their constructivist perspective, blockchain, as ledgers which were "essentially a digitised, objective rendering of the truth" (Vigna and Casey 2018, 30) would allow for the production of "consensus, a common understanding on what we take to be the truth" (Vigna and Casey 2018, 34). As the decentralised, disintermediated, transparent, and mathematically-verifiable version of double entry bookkeeping, blockchains could be "a tool upon which society can create the common stories it needs to sow even greater trust" and "build social capital" lost with the financial crisis of 2008 (Vigna and Casey 2018, 34).

> *As one of the central normative affects of modernity, trust is hard to dispense with.*

In a context of fake news and science scepticism, the desire for some kind of stable, reliable truth that corresponds to a shared reality is hardly surprising.

What is more difficult to fathom for everyone except a hard core of trustless "maximalists" is the abandonment of trust. Anthropologist Matthew Carey, in his ethnography of mistrust in the Moroccan High Atlas, notes drily that there seems to be "no concept that so federates the disparate caucuses of modernity as trust" (Carey 2017, 1). As one of the central normative affects of modernity, trust is hard to dispense with. Alas, it is more common for scholars such as legal scholar Werbach to argue that far from being "trustless" blockchain was in fact constructing a "new architecture of trust," more robust and more reliable than existing economic and legal institutions as long as it could be productively integrated with existing legal regimes. Scholars more critical of blockchain than Werbach have bemoaned the desire for trustlessness as due to either rabid right-wing politics (Golumbia 2016), as a lamentable form of commodification (Bodó 2021), or as a failure to understand the basis of the semiotic (Weichselbraun 2021) or the social order (Semenzin and Gandini 2021).

Yet, I have come around to my own realisation that when blockchain acolytes claim that the system gets rid of trust, they are not quite right and not quite wrong. Yes, the system does not actually rely on "trust" (understood as an affective situation in which one makes oneself vulnerable to a largely unknown other). Rather, blockchain's algorithmic mechanism produces "confidence"—an expectation in relatively predictable outcomes (see Luhmann 1988 for an attempt to distinguish between confidence and trust). And, this distinction is analytically useful because it avoids "essentializing" trust as an "ontological aspect of social existence" (Seligman 1997, 8) and allows us to be more specific in describing how social coordination is permitted through different kinds of institutions, practices, and technologies without introducing the moral baggage of the term "trust."

In understanding blockchain as a technology to produce confidence, I find convincing legal scholar de Filippi's (De Filippi, Mannan, and Reijers 2020) argument that blockchain is a confidence machine. Confidence, she and her co-authors note following Seligman (Seligman 1997), is the attitude that things will go as expected. It is akin to Luhmann's *Systemvertrauen* and is produced by and through institutions working as they were designed to, producing anticipated

outcomes. Predictability is thus an important quality on which confidence is based. De Filippi et al. note that blockchain produces confidence because it "creates shared expectations with regard to the manner in which it operates, and the procedural correctness of its operations" (De Filippi, Mannan, and Reijers 2020, 2). In the case of Bitcoin, if I participate in "mining" new Bitcoin blocks with sufficient computing power, I can expect to be rewarded with a set amount of Bitcoins.

Predictability is an important quality on which confidence is based.

Web3 is not just Gavin Wood and his sociotechnical imaginary of "fully automated algorithmic governance" (Groos 2020). It is populated by a diverse set of actors, many of whom do realise that even the most technically technical systems are made by humans and are thus subject to human error and vagaries as the website "[Web3 is Going Just Great](#)" chronicles. Nevertheless, we can note that there seems to be a shared enthusiasm for solving perennial problems of human interaction with the assistance of what Lorraine Daston in her new book calls "thin rules": automatic, mechanised, free of human interference, epitomised by the algorithm (Daston 2022). The algorithm's appeal lies in its mechanistic predictability, an appeal which has a relatively short history. Daston argues that the desire for "thin rules" emerges in a society that has become suspicious of judgement and discretion (what Wood seems to identify as "arbitrary authority"). She shows that "thick rules" full of context and caveats, accompanied by the ability to discern have fallen out of fashion.

Over the course of a few days in Denver, thousands of participants—mostly young people in their twenties and early thirties, with dyed hair, in edgy fashions—were feverish with the excitement of a new dawn. Hundreds of concurrent talks and round-tables enunciated the conviction that as part of this technological development they were standing at the precipice of a revolutionary transformation of the existing social, political, and economic order. Groups of hackathon participants sought to solve various technical problems posed by the

challenge of anonymous, decentralised, disintermediated online communication. At the same time as they were building this brave new digital world, the in-person conference (after so many months of Covid confinement) was evidence that any kind of world-building project benefits from the collective effervescence which can be most efficiently generated by the messy analog co-presence of bodies in place—a time-tested means of social coordination.

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Featured image by the author.

Making medicines trustworthy: pharmaceutical technologies of

trust and regulation

Ramah McKay
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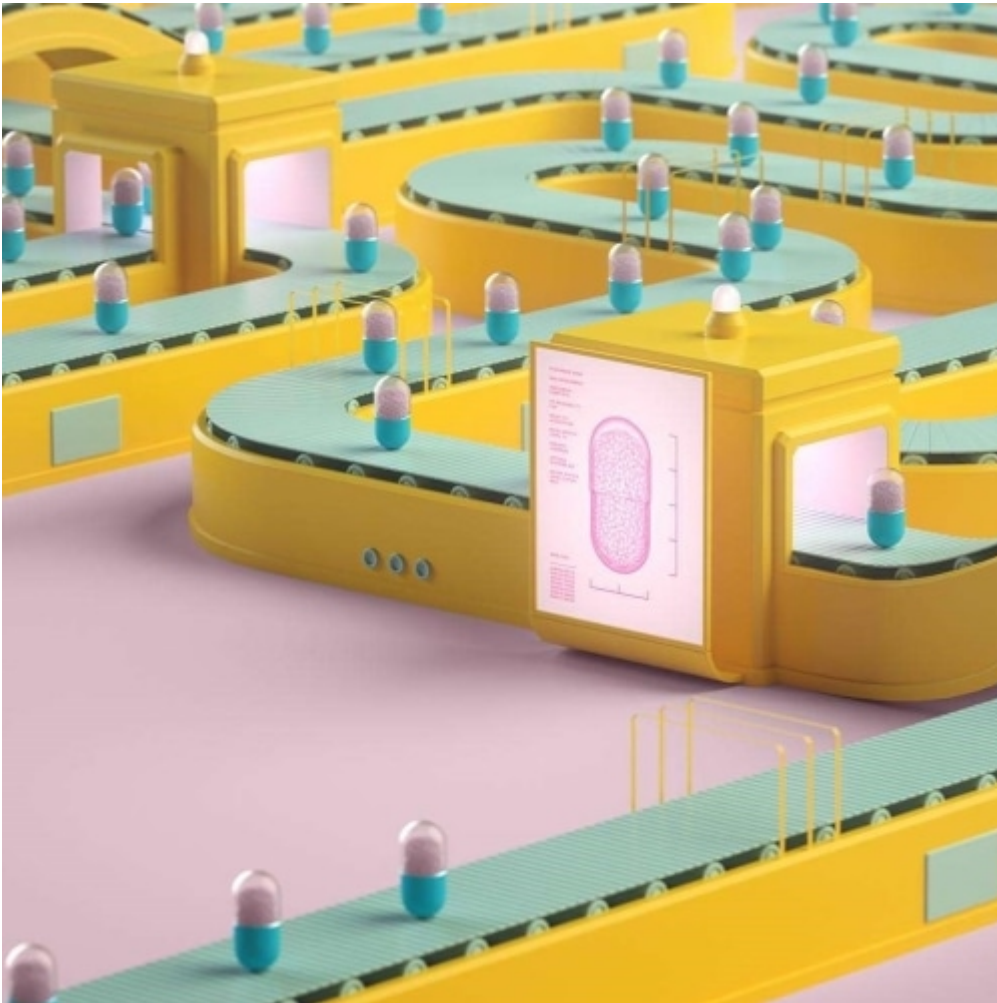
How do globalised health regimes create and shape landscapes of medical regulation and patient safety? This essay asks about the many ways in which patients, consumers, health advocates, and providers relate to pharmaceuticals, and to the regimes of access, trust, and regulation that govern them. To ask this, I draw from ethnographic observation in the US, Mozambique, and India. Bringing ethnographic participation in access to medicine trainings together with ethnographic fieldwork on pharmaceutical production, export, and regulation, it aims to illustrate how multiple human, technological, and political actants – importers and inspectors, laboratory tests and documents, regulations and legal

regimes – facilitate or foreclose what it means to have trust in pharmaceuticals. In so doing, affective and regulatory technologies of pharmaceutical trust work towards a variety of ends – drug safety, access to medicine, and political rights, as well as profit-making, patent-protection, and consumer-marketing.

Earlier this year, I attended an online training on self-managed medication abortion. In response to growing restrictions on abortion access in the United States (Andaya and Mishtal 2017), self-managed medication abortion and abortion-by-mail have become important alternatives to clinic-based services. **[1]** Run by a registered nurse and a group of women's health advocates, the call aimed to provide interested members of the public – from the Zoom boxes, mostly but not only cisgendered women in their 20s, 30s, and 40s – with information, advice, and advocacy tips. During the call, we were taught how medication abortion works, about services available to connect people in need with providers, about the pharmaceuticals used (as well as, a brief discussion of "traditional" therapeutics used in abortion), about the legal landscape and risks associated with abortion-by-mail in the US, and about practical steps we could take to support access to reproductive care.

Partway through the session, a facilitator described how "abortion pills" – mifepristone and misoprostol – are made available online. For people in some US states, she said as she shared her screen to show us a color-coded map of the US, pills are prescribed and mailed by US-based providers. For those living in states with more restrictive abortion laws or telehealth regulations, services based outside the US can write prescriptions that are filled by online pharmacies. In her example, the facilitator described a service that connects patients in the US with India-based pharmacies. "But wherever the pills come from, they're exactly the same thing and they work the same way," she noted.

How are pharmaceutical safety, efficacy, and place of origin configured in this brief moment in a Zoom webinar? I start with this call because it attuned me to

some of the ways in which patients, consumers, advocates, and providers can sit in complex relations to pharmaceuticals, and to the regimes of access, trust, and regulation that govern them (Davis 2019). Since 2018, I have been interested in how global health regimes create landscapes of regulation and patient safety. I have sought to learn more about this by tracing the movement of medicines between producers, exporters, importers and sites of consumption, focusing on routes within and parallel to global health institutions. My starting points for this project have been clinics, factories, pharmacies, and importers in Maputo, Mozambique, where I first conducted pharmaceutical ethnography, and the India-based producers and exporters who were involved in manufacturing and shipping some of the everyday medicines such as aspirin, antibiotics, anti-hypertensives, and vitamins that stock the shelves of Maputo pharmacies.

As pharmaceutical anthropology has shown, claims to pills "working the same way" no matter where they come from – or, conversely, assertions that national origin shapes pharmaceutical efficacy – have been central sites in which ideas, practices, and contestations of trust, trustworthiness, and suspicion have become visible. For instance, pharmacists might describe consumers (including me) as ranking medicines in terms of "trust," and pharmaceutical quality was often colloquially mapped to notions of national identity and industrial origin, such that "European drugs," "Indian generics," and so on, could operate as a short-hand for relations of trust, mistrust, and suspicion located on a sliding scale of confidence. In these conversations, and in much anthropological literature, geography, efficacy, safety, and trust are entangled in the material form of the pharmaceutical itself.

The rich anthropological literature on pharmaceuticals (for a review see Hardon and Sanabria 2017) has shown how, because they bundle together material, epistemological, regulatory, and economic practices, medicines are good to think with. Much of the literature in which I situate this project has emphasised pharmaceutical circuits within the global South, showing how questions of access, therapeutic use, and safety are configured by the international patent regimes that shape pharmaceutical access and price, on the one hand, and global health

institutions, on the other. For instance, in her ethnography of Nigerian pharmaceutical markets, anthropologist Kris Peterson (2014) has demonstrated how "fake" medicines flourished in the wake of structural adjustment programs that eviscerated local manufacturers and in the emergent space produced between expensive imported medicines and global health programs that purchased and distributed low-cost generic anti-retrovirals.

When I began fieldwork, however, I was not particularly focused on questions of real and fake, trustworthiness, or confidence. Instead, I was interested in how pharmaceuticals might make visible multiple forms of historical and transnational connection that make up and exceed global health. Yet, I soon found concern with fake – and conversely – trustworthy medications to be a frequent topic of conversation. Sometimes, it was patient concerns with medication efficacy that raised the question of real, fake, or trustworthy medicines. At other moments, the question of trust emerged not in relation to medicines but my own presumed skepticism – my identity, appearance, accent, and many questions prompting asides from importers or salespeople such as, "now, if you want to know about fraud, of course that happens but that is a different question." And at still others, consumers might express their *own* doubts about medicines, or salespeople might recount moments of mistrust that they had experienced. While, in the words of the webinar, medicines are in many cases "exactly the same thing and work exactly the same" regardless of provenance, making medicines "exactly the same" in all places and contexts takes considerable cultural, chemical, and regulatory work (Hayden 2007).

This work of making medicines trustworthy involves chemists, regulators, manufacturers, marketers, salespeople, and researchers. While discussions of pharmaceutical safety and trust emerged in a variety of research settings – pharmacies and distribution warehouses in Maputo, a manufacturer's office and an inspection site in India – they also appear in public media, policy reports, books, and exposes (Lancet 2012). They entail actors including industry groups, national regulatory agencies such as the US and Indian Food and Drug Administrations (FDA) and their equivalents elsewhere, international institutions

[2], state agencies such as Ministries and Departments of Health, and corporate actors such as the drug certification programs run by major pharmaceutical manufacturers. Increasingly, this field has expanded to incorporate a growing number of actors, institutions and technologies involved in inspecting and certifying pharmaceutical quality, and with tracking and surveilling the movement of medicines around the world.

We can find one example of these new initiatives on a website commissioned by pharmaceutical manufacturer, Merck. Displaying a colorful infographic of the pharmaceutical distribution process, the website presents an illustrated, cartoon-like depiction of pharmaceutical supply chains. "When you pick up a prescription from your pharmacy," reads the text, "it's unlikely you'll think to question the pills or medicine you've been given. The drug markets in most developed countries are highly regulated and a huge amount of care is taken to ensure that the treatments that reach our pharmacies are exactly what they say they are on the packet. However, in less regulated markets – and increasingly even in more highly regulated ones – a dangerous trade in counterfeit drugs is on the rise..." **[3]** It goes on to use falsified malaria drugs as a key example of what can go wrong. In so doing, the website contrasts its readers, consumers who are confident in "our" pharmacies, with those in "less regulated markets," where fraudulent distributors generate falsified or unregistered products. In this narrative, too, trust in medicines adheres in nationally bounded units – "most developed countries" – understood to be sites of regulation and "a huge amount of care". By contrasting this with "less regulated markets," where consumers are less "confident" in their markets and where pharmaceuticals – and those who sell them – may be "dangerous" and fraudulent, the website operates within a field of already-configured spatialised and racialised assumptions about difference.

A similar narrative of regulatory variation was also present in ethnographic interviews I conducted with staff at an India-based, privately-owned pharmaceutical inspection firm. Unlike the top-down vision of the supply chain offered by the Merck website, this firm focused on testing and tracking medicines before they were shipped overseas. Supplementing factory inspections conducted

by large regulators (such as the US and the Indian Food and Drug Administrations), as well as the import inspections conducted by customs officers, companies like this test pharmaceutical samples collected in manufacturing facilities and as pallets of medicines wait for export from warehouses and ports.

Entering the company offices, I expected to find laboratory facilities like the ones I had seen in the quality control departments of pharmaceutical factories. Instead, company staff explained that their key task consisted of generating and recording registration data. Walking me through the office, a staff member told me that the company's first step had been simply to collect statutory information about the companies involved in producing and exporting drugs. They also collected and collated the documents needed for product registration – such as shipment packing lists, registration numbers, and import licenses issued. From all this data, she told me, it's possible to see which exporters are "good" and which face "quality issues". These points of information are then supplemented by chemical analyses of pharmaceutical samples. They also provide a means of checking up on possibly unscrupulous manufacturers, exporters, and distributors. Here, too, trust in pharmaceuticals was narrated together with trustworthy, and untrustworthy, actors and middlemen.

This company is one among many offering pharmaceutical "consumer empowerment" through "digital solutions" that enable "end-to-end transparency and visibility across the entire pharma supply chain," and that use "mobile and web technologies in securing [medical] products against faking, counterfeiting, and diversion". Offering alternatives to what one company referred to as "the 20th Century supply chain," such services sell a technologically-mediated promise of safe medications and attendant affective benefits such as trustworthy goods and "empowered" consumers. As emergent regulatory practices, they show how consumer benefits (such as empowerment, safety, access, and trust) often understood to be made trustworthy in and through public institutions are also enabled by private companies using mobile technologies to supplement or supplant the authority of the state. They do so in part by mobilizing a pre-existing field of "difference" – including racialised national identities and development

hierarchies – that serve to legitimate and necessitate these new technologies of surveillance (Hornberger 2018).

In an article on anthropology's "Terms of Engagement," Marilyn Strathern (2021) asks about the role of trust in shaping ethnographic practice and representation. For Strathern, trust evokes slippery questions of proximity, similarity and difference through which trust is cultivated or lost. Trust emerges out of and requires relations (whether trusting or skeptical), but it is also ambivalent. And crucially, it can also be something of a moving target. For instance, Strathern notes that when anthropology reevaluates "what is important, for and by whom, it must mistrust some terms of engagement in order to underline and urge trust in others" (2021: 285).

Strathern's observation about the moving target of trust illuminates how distrust in some terms of engagement – insufficient regulation, untrustworthy pharmaceutical actors – can urge trust in others – blockchain and the promise that technological transparency will uphold, if tenuously, the distinction between "your" pharmacy and others. Her attention to proximity, distance, and similarity, too, characterise key terms through which medicines are made – and trusted – to "work in exactly the same way" (Hayden 2007).

For this reason, I want to circle back to the Zoom call. In the webinar, I saw how impending state control over reproduction was being met by new geographical and pharmaceutical connections. As abortion rights advocates use online overseas pharmacies to facilitate and support access to care they also evoke the trustworthiness of drugs in ways that entail but also exceed state regulation. In so doing, they illustrate how multiple human, technological, and political actants – importers and inspectors, laboratory tests and documents, regulations and legal regimes – facilitate or foreclose trust in a variety of ways and towards a variety of ends: drug safety, access to medicine, political rights, and consumer goods. The webinar helped me to imagine pharmaceutical regulation and trust as not only bundled into the dense material form of the pharmaceutical, whether "domestically produced" or "imported," "European," or "Indian" medicines.

Rather, it highlighted how pharmaceutical trust emerges out of multiple actors and encounters – involving manufacturers, regulators, and pharmacists to be sure, but also the (inequitably) regulated body of the consumer or patient.

Different kinds of pharmaceutical access, safety, and trust, and different stakes to surveillance and control, emerge as medicines move through and across bodies, legal regimes, economic possibilities, and geographical spaces. Where advertising copy emphasises a risky global supply chain that imperils otherwise safe consumers, the Zoom call brings other forms of pharmaceutical regulation to the fore. It suggests how the disaggregation of state power and medical safety might appear not only as an artefact of neoliberalization, as trust moves from state institutions to privatised technologies of audit and surveillance, but also as a space of manoeuvre, as patients, activists, and consumers imagine trustworthy pharmaceutical access in new ways.

Endnotes:

[1] – Abortion-by-mail is one way of describing scenarios in which pregnant people in need of care can receive abortion pills, along with telephone-provided advice and support, from providers based in the United States or overseas

[2] – For example, the WHO Programme for International Drug Monitoring and the Uppsala Monitoring Centre.

[3]   – https://www.emdgroup.com/en/research/science-space/envisioning-tomorrow/smarter-connected-world/blockchain.html

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Featured [image](#) (cropped) provided by author.

Trust: A Pragmatics of Social Life?

Taylor C. Nelms
September, 2022

Trust exposes and discloses the social. But the heterogeneity and even excessiveness of meaning in the concept—its overdetermination, its multifariousness and multiformity, its downright *fuzziness*—suggests that "the social" revealed by trust itself varies.

An example: Scholarly investigations of trust often separate interpersonal from institutional trust, or indeed, rehearse a story about the transition from the former to the latter in the production of modernity. The former is typically understood as obtaining in narrow circles of familiar relations, the latter in terms

of the diffuse links among acquaintances and strangers in larger collectives.

Famously, there's Simmel:

> "Without the general trust that people have in each other, society itself would disintegrate, for very few relationships are based entirely upon what is known with certainty about another person, and very few relationships would endure if trust were not as strong as, or stronger than, rational proof or personal observation."
> (Simmel 1978: 179)

We can also point to Anthony Giddens and a host of others arguing, following Simmel, that modernity is marked by a shift from personal to impersonal trust. In the modern world, the story goes, trust is objective and formal, fostered not by face-to-face contact but through abstract systems or principles, from technical expertise to bureaucracy to money.

Similarly, Durkheim's moral account of solidarity—that pre- or non-contractual element of mutual trust that positions trust as a function for cementing social cohesion—offers a foundation for both classic sociological treatments of trust and ethnographic accounts of reciprocal relations. For example, the concept of *confianza* figures prominently in Larissa Adler Lomnitz's exploration of social networks in the peri-urban outskirts of late 1960s/early 1970s Mexico City. For Lomnitz, *confianza* is a kind of interpersonal trust that, while not a "residue of pre-modern societies," nonetheless acts as a kind of "cement" or "glue" that "produce[s] cohesion" as a result of "a mutual desire and disposition to initiate and maintain a relationship of reciprocal exchange" (Lomnitz 1977: 198, 134).

The point is that you can unfurl a whole theory of society and sociality from trust, which acts as a dense conceptual centre in these tellings, like a tightly folded piece of origami, which can be unfolded and refolded into new shapes.

Another example: More recently, a more cognitive approach to trust has taken hold in the social sciences. This approach treats trust as solution to information

asymmetry. Trust is a kind of choice we make under conditions of uncertainty to evaluate, as rationally as possible, the interests and predictability of other actors' behaviour. Trustworthiness is simply the effect of one's capacity to assess others' motivations with regard to one's own and estimate their future actions. Here, trust becomes probabilistic, a threshold point on a distribution of expectations about others' behaviour under conditions of ignorance or uncertainty.

This approach to trust has other antecedents outside the narrow confines of rational choice theory, most clearly in the work of Niklas Luhmann. Luhmann argues, for example, that trust obtains in situations where different alternatives present themselves, thus presupposing modern notions of risk. For Luhmann, this is in contradistinction to "confidence," an older notion, that captures a more "normal" kind of trust that we take simply being in and navigating through the world: "you are confident that your expectations will not be disappointed: that politicians will try to avoid war, that cars will not break down or suddenly leave the street and hit you on your Sunday afternoon walk" (Luhmann 1988: 97).

Of course, we might also see this mundane, everyday trust as simply a habit, an accrual of expectation over time, "confidence in the iteration of interaction," as Adam Seligman (1997: 7) puts it. And from here one must only scale up to understand how a "crisis" of trust can emerge in the emptying of expectations regarding institutions of all kinds. Fluctuations in interpersonal trust can be correlated with involvement in civic and political life, the credibility of state institutions, and the fragility or robustness of democracy itself.

Both of these conceptions of trust—the sociological and the cognitive—turn on problems of information and epistemology. They treat trust, Alberto Corsín Jiménez (2011: 178) argues, "as an epiphenomenon of social knowledge: what people's relationships look like after the fact of cognitive re-appraisals." Corsín Jiménez criticises the contemporary proliferation of trust discourses, inside the academy and out, for reducing trust to "information infrastructure" and making the immediacy of information a moral and political imperative (181). This "political epistemology" of trust sees relations as "real and robust" only when

"they are transparent, instantaneous, and point to no context but themselves" (192, 179).

Let's move sideways. There is another approach. In many scholarly stories of trust, we see problems of how to navigate the moral and political dilemmas of everyday social life. Here, trust does not simply deliver information about the future behaviour of others in ways that allow for the *ex nihilo* emergence of solidarity. Instead, trust offers an ideal towards which people strive in and through social difference, conflict, and vulnerability born of layered and morally charged relations of mutual obligation. Here's where we find work on witchcraft and conspiracy theory, frauds and scams and cons, gendered and racialised suspicion and accusation, as well as one of the sturdiest stalwarts of anthropological theory: the Maussian gift! For the gift is all about trusting in its return and, thus, trusting in others different from ourselves.

To live as social and political beings, we must concede trust. We must, as Carlos Vélez-Ibañez (2010: 51) so wonderfully puts it, "trust in the trustworthiness of others." In doing so, interestingly, we might in fact reproduce trust. The obligation we impose on others by our trust in them redounds in our relationships. Diego Gambetta—well-known for analytical examinations of trust based in rational choice, game, and signalling theory—proposes just this. "The concession of trust," he writes, "can generate the very behaviour which might logically seem to be its precondition" (Gambetta 1988: 234).

What is the understanding of the social here? What kinds of relational forms populate this domain of free association, where obligation and liberty intermingle? I must admit that this approach appeals to me, but I can sometimes get uncomfortable with it, too, because "the social" that falls out of this notion of trust can be, at times, alarmingly thin. It's too easy to generate a flattened vision of social life as a kind of easy, unmediated, horizontal relationality as captured in the visual grammar of interlocking chains of hands coming together—a collection of peers without an outside, a community without inequality, hierarchy, or rank.

If trust is, as Gambetta famously proposes, "a device for coping with the freedom of others," then that freedom includes not only the possibility of betraying a relationship, but also the possibility of accepting it, with all the obligations and responsibilities it entailed. The danger of trust, the vulnerability we open ourselves up to in trusting others, is not simply that the trusted other might "disappoint our expectations," but that the trusted other might *not* disappoint us (Gambetta 1988: 218)—that is, not only that the gift of trust might not be returned but that it might be honoured. Relations of trust embroil people and things in dramas of moral rectitude and lapse, even as they also necessitate the navigation of social identities and allegiances, enmities and hostilities. We can see why one might *want* to refuse the gift and obligation of another's trust.

So, two sets of assumptions about trust: trust as a problem of knowledge, a way to deal with the unknowability and uncertainty of other people; and trust as a problem of morality, a way to deal with the freedoms and obligations of our relations. My discomfort with the former is that it evinces an abstract and attenuated understanding of knowledge as a matter of checking and tracking expectations against reality. My discomfort with the latter is that it evinces an abstract, attenuated understanding of sociality, as a more-or-less flattened field of apolitical, back-and-forth reciprocal relations.

The contributions in this collection offer us, I think, a way out of the conceptual trap we've set for ourselves.

In both of these sets of assumptions about trust, *people are the problem*. More specifically, people as mediators of knowledge and relationships are the problem. The desire for trust—or indeed, as one of the other contributions to this collection suggests, the desire to make trust *unnecessary*—is about a desire for direct and unmediated access to the truth of others.

But the relations and institutions of collective life—and the persistence or durability of those relations and institutions—are neither simply knowledge problems (threatened by the knowledge-eroding power of uncertainty) nor simply

moral problems (threatened by the social-eroding power of distrust). They are also and arguably most importantly *practical* problems. "The social" is a representation of collective life and also what we do in living together.

Ultimately, these essays ask us how specific tools and technologies of trust become ways to navigate and manage fraught relationships in social worlds marked by the trouble of knowing and/or relating with other persons. In this, they offer us trust as a kind of pragmatics of social life. Theories of trust offer windows onto diverse theories of the social. But the specificity of the uses to which trust is put, the ways it is practised, and the stuff people mobilise in the process matters for understanding *and* for acting on and in social life. Indeed, perhaps what distinguishes trust as a practical matter is how much work it takes to make and maintain, and thus how fragile and exhausting it can be.

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Abstract

This essay briefly explores how trust exposes and discloses "the social" in its many diverse guises, from the interpersonal to the institutional, cognitive and epistemological to moral and solidaristic.
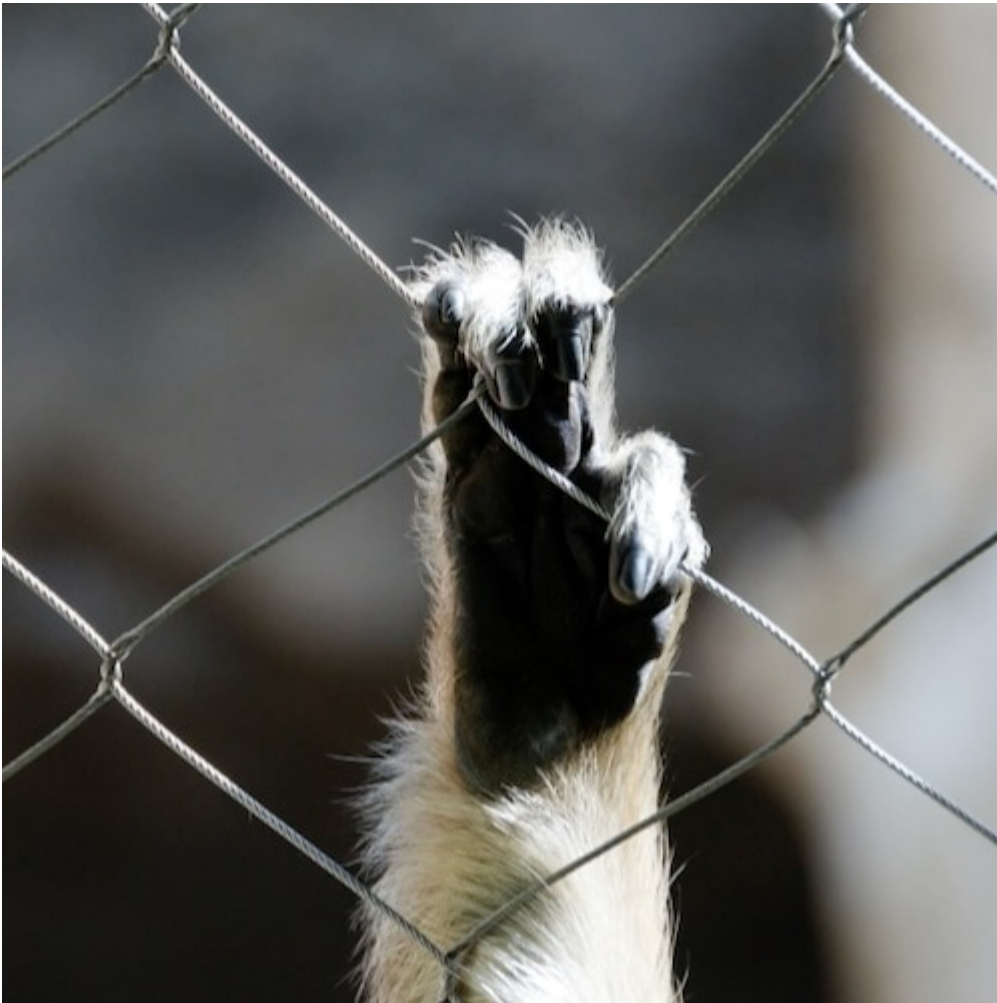
Featured [image](#) by [Елизавета Борзилова](#) (courtesy of [pexels.com](#))

Demonstrating Trust in Jordan

Kate McClellan
September, 2022

This essay considers the role of demonstration as a technique of trust at a wild animal sanctuary in Jordan. I suggest that demonstration is an important technique of trust because of its narrative flexibility in conveying trust to multiple audiences at once.

When they first arrived at Al Ma'wa wildlife sanctuary in northern Jordan, Loz and Sukkar (Arabic for Almonds and Sugar) were withdrawn, wary of people, and cowered in their secluded night rooms every time a car backfired or helicopter flew by. The two Asian Black Bears came to Al Ma'wa in 2017 with a small contingent of eleven other wild animals – lions, hyenas, dogs, and tigers – who were rescued from Magic World Zoo in Aleppo, Syria. These were the lucky thirteen, the sole survivors at a zoo that had sustained years of damage and

neglect during Syria's war; despite the efforts of the zookeeper and several Syrian volunteers, the other two hundred animals had already died of starvation, dehydration, and injuries incurred from stray bullets and bombs.

Yusuf, one of Al Ma'wa's head animal caretakers, came to see the behaviour of Loz and Sukkar as a kind of animal PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) – evidence that the bears were traumatised to their core from the constant gunfire and bombs from Syria's war – and he made it his goal to rehabilitate them and help them learn to trust again. Over the course of two years, Yusuf worked with an animal care team to devise a range of trust-building exercises for the bears that included enrichment activities involving food, puzzles, and novel forms of play. These activities, explained Yusuf, were also designed to help the animals see that this was a new, safe world: "We tried to disconnect them completely from their previous experience, as if they were born the day they came to Al Ma'wa."

But down the road from Al Ma'wa, some humans don't trust these animals. In the small town of Souf, Um Mahmoud, a great-grandmother in her mid-seventies, was sympathetic to the plight of the animals at Al Ma'wa, but, like Loz and Sukkar, she was wary. When I talked with her in her home in 2019, a year after Al Ma'wa had opened to the public, she still hadn't visited and was particularly concerned about the lions and tigers who were now her new neighbours. She told me: "We haven't gone there yet because we're scared. People need to be very cautious, especially if they have small children, right?" Like the other residents of Souf and the nearby city of Jerash, Um Mahmoud was at best ambivalent about the entire enterprise of Al Ma'wa, mistrusting of both the expertise of Al Ma'wa's staff, the security of the site's animals, and the general rationale behind Al Ma'wa's existence. These are top predators, after all, as many of my interlocutors reminded me, and ones who could pose a real threat to humans around them.

The particularities of how trust is materialised in the world – whether through demonstration or other techniques – matter.

To demonstrate the sanctuary's security, Al Ma'wa provided free tours of their

site to local residents. When they got reports of escaped animals and scared neighbours, they invested in drone surveillance equipment and invited local police chiefs, mayors, park rangers, and others in prominent security positions to tour the facilities as well. Local newspaper articles documented these tours and the results of the drone investigations. As Jafar, one of Al Ma'wa's directorial staff, explained to me, this went a long way in helping to create a sense of safety, accountability, and trustworthiness. When Yusuf served as tour guide for visitors from Souf, he recalled their anxiety about the site: "'Is it safe (*āmana*)? Should we go in? Should we trust you (*bniqdar nūthaq fīq*)? During the tour if an animal gets out of its enclosure, can you catch it?' We answered: 'When you take the tour you will find that the design is completely different from what you imagine and then you will understand how safe it is.' And people came." Jafar elaborated: "[They] saw with their own eyes what is here. They feel safe. Safe. And they understand that we have nothing to hide."

How is demonstration a technique of trust? How do demonstrations bring trust forth into the world? A variety of performative acts could be framed as demonstration – for instance, the presentation of medical documents as demonstration of deservingness for asylum (Fassin and D'Halluin 2005), or the museum exhibition as demonstration of colonial triumph (Adedze 2008). But at Al Ma'wa, demonstrations of the site's safety and security more closely mimic the use of demonstration in scientific, technological, and corporate practice: the product 'demos' that routinely accompany the public launch of a new technological product, or the demonstration of a scientific innovation for both lay and expert audiences. These demonstrations are often theatrical (Simakova 2010, Smith 2009) and include a deliberate, step-by-step narrative of the thing in question, a performance that says, "See this? It is here before you; it works, and it is real."

How do demonstrations bring trust forth into the world?

At Al Ma'wa, demonstrations of this sort heavily feature the materiality of the site

itself. This is the case for both the animals who live at Al Ma'wa and the humans, like Um Mahmoud, who live nearby. Yusuf and other caretakers believe that while the high, electrified fences that surround every enclosure (Figure 2) assure humans on the outside, the animals on the inside feel safe not in spite but because of the materials of their captivity – their perimeter fences, their scheduled meals, their enrichment games, and their material engagement with the grass, trees, dirt and rocks that now form their environment. These materials, as Yusuf explained, also convince the animal that it has everything it needs inside of its enclosure, so that it won't escape: "The animal knows that this place where it stays is safe, so there is no need to risk it and go a mysterious place that (it) doesn't know." Caretakers like Yusuf characterise this materiality not as a form of captivity and domination, but rather as producing feelings of safety, security, and life renewed.

With this in mind, staff demonstrate the parameters of the animals' enclosure to them by inducing them to experience it with their bodies and senses. When animals first arrive, the voltage of the electric fences is lowered so that they can slowly come to understand what the fences are meant to do by encountering the (gentle) shock of the electricity with their bodies (McClellan 2021). For the bears, who have an excellent sense of smell, Yusuf sprays women's perfume in the far corners of their enclosure to compel them to explore. Likewise, he puts boxes and other interesting objects in trees for the lions and tigers to encourage them to explore vertically as well. Importantly, these activities continue throughout the years; animals must be shown, again and again, that their homes are safe, and that they can trust in that continued safety.

For people like Um Mahmoud, trust in the site's security also comes from demonstrations of the material infrastructure at Al Ma'wa – the nine-meter-high enclosure fences, triple-locked cages, electrical barriers, and back-up generators that keep the animals in place. When I attended a tour of Al Ma'wa in 2019, several visitors asked about the fences and wondered how staff were so sure the animals couldn't escape. Our tour guide Rashid – also an animal caretaker – launched into an explanation about the voltage of the fences and the back-up generators that work on-site; he had been versed in how to answer these kinds of

questions from the public with the technical language of security. Drones, too, are used to quell these fears in two ways: one, as a measure of response after rumours of lion escapes, which, reflective of the mistrust some residents feel about the site (Carey 2017; West and Sanders 2003), circulate periodically in nearby towns and villages; and two, in promotional footage used on Facebook and other media to provide birds-eye views of the sanctuary's security fences. Referring to a promotional video, one staff member explained: "one of the main targets of the video was to show people the height of the enclosures and the electrical wirings and to show how safe it is" (Figure 3). These technologies of trust have the ability to dazzle those who are unfamiliar with them, with their expense, technology, and looming physical presence.

This dual meaning speaks to the semiotic potential of infrastructure (...) and is what makes it possible for material tools of captivity and capture to also symbolise freedom and safety.

For humans and animals alike, demonstrations of trust are used to communicate the same thing: you are safe here – but also, you are safe from each other. This dual meaning speaks to the semiotic potential of infrastructure – its ability to be designed for multiple audiences, and for multiple, even sometimes opposing, intentions (see also Larkin 2018). This potential is what makes it possible for material tools of captivity and capture to also symbolise freedom and safety. But, at Al Ma'wa, it is also the demonstration of this material trust that is important: demonstration helps to imbue what would otherwise be mundane or generic materials with trustworthiness, and, importantly, the *specificity* of that trustworthiness. Demonstration, in this sense, crafts a particular narrative about particular forms of trust for different audiences. Animals are subject to demonstrations about aspects of their enclosures that do not matter to the humans who visit, and humans are shown aerial images from drone technology – something that does not matter (or is not legible) to the animals in question.

All of this is to say that the particularities of how trust is materialised in the world – whether through demonstration or other techniques – matter. But if we consider the role demonstration plays as a technique of trust, we can also begin to trouble normative treatments of trust as a kind of freedom – something borne of choice, free will, and the right to discern what is trustworthy and what is not. In theory, the point of the demonstration is to allow audiences, whether human or animal, to determine for themselves whether they should or should not trust. One can easily see this as a choice in something like a product launch: the demonstration either works or fails to engender trust in the product. But is trusting in the demonstration or in the technologies of security and safety at Al Ma'wa a choice? What would it mean for Loz and Sukkar to refuse to trust in their own safety in their new home? – in the food provided to them, or the protection of their enclosure, or the good intentions of the humans who care for them? Would it mean a certain kind of death, or a certain kind of curtailed life? And what of the residents of Souf and Sakib, who, by some standards, are held captive by their sudden proximity to wild animals?

How is trust built when refusal to participate is simply not a choice?

One way to think through these questions is to consider how trust is built when refusal to participate is simply not a choice. Matthew Carey makes the point that trust involves "managing the freedom of others" (2017, 10) as well as controlling that freedom; at Al Ma'wa, the freedom of both human and animal audiences to refuse trust is both managed and controlled through crafted narratives and material demonstrations. The way in which trust operates in other war contexts where security infrastructures frame daily life also reveals how trust works when there is no accountability, no confidence, and no other choice – it must work, or everything collapses; or, perhaps everything collapses anyway, you never know (Rubaii 2019). At Al Ma'wa, different iterations of trust are brought into being despite, *and* because of, the fact that Al Ma'wa operates through regimes of captivity. At Al Ma'wa, animals and humans alike are audiences for which trustworthiness is demonstrated by staff to achieve certain goals – namely, happy,

docile animals and cooperative, supportive neighbours. And yet, these formations of trust work within a captive setting, where animals are enclosed in spaces surrounded by high, electrified fencing, and where residents in neighbouring towns may hear lions roaring in the night: there is no choice but to trust in the steel, the data, and promises of safety offered in demonstration itself.

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IMAGE: [Patterns and Textures](#) by [Jonathan Reyes](#), on Flickr (CC BY-2)

We go get lost

Allegra
September, 2022

It's been a busy half year at Allegra Lab, and we are now taking some time off for the summer.

We had some great thematic threads already in 2022, and lots of surprising-charming-intriguing-insightful one-shots, films, poetry even... Content-wise, we are happy; we've been producing a good bit of "catalytic mischief", as a friendly colleague recently summed up his first impressions of Allegra Lab.

Personnel-wise, well, we are *extremely* happy to have brought Jas Kaur [on board](#), who adds a healthy dose of sarcasm to our already sarkiness-rich editorial environment, and on whom we foisted not just editorial responsibilities, but editorial-*in-chief* responsibilities. So expect to receive replies from her and/or Felix when you write to submissions@allegralaboratory.net in the future! Or expect nothing and be surprised.

BUT: While ongoing reviewing processes might continue backstage, fresh correspondence will likely *not* be read until early September, and if we do read it, we'll ideally *not* reply for a little while.

What is still up is the EASA Conference in Belfast! Allegra will be at EASA, embodied by Jon (Schubert), Judith (Beyer) and Felix (Girke). We really want to meet you, get to know you, talk shop and maybe grab a pint or whatever is available in fair Belfast and appropriate for the time of day. So say "hi" when you see us.

If you don't know us in person just yet, look for these buttons.

Some of those buttons go back to the EASA conference in *Tallinn* already. They are *historical*.

Can scholar-led publishers find common cause?

Anne Brackenbury
September, 2022

A couple of months ago, I was trawling Twitter looking for inspiration when I came across a notice that [Libraria](#) – a collective of researchers based in the social sciences – was hiring a Community Convenor. It grabbed my attention because it didn't sound like your average scholarly communications job. Even more startling was the fact that the position did not require scholarly publishing experience (though it was recommended). Instead, the focus was on community organizing skills. It was a job designed to help small, scholar-led, open access (OA) publications in anthropology and adjacent disciplines build a mutual aid network of sorts. *Wow*, I thought. *What a great idea!*

OA wins the day – or does it?

I'm a relative newcomer to OA, having built a career in the non-profit university press world. But I had always kept my eye on new developments (like [Plan S](#) in

Europe and, more recently, Libraria's pilot project with [Berghahn Open Anthro](#), as well as scrappy OA publishers like [Punctum Books](#)), and had started to realize that the writing was on the wall: it was only a matter of time before OA would become the dominant model for scholarly publishing, starting with journals. There has, of course, been a simultaneous push for academic publishers to publish more trade titles – i.e., those that are commissioned, shaped, and marketed to appeal to a much broader book-reading public. I know this market well, as I helped transform many an academic project into more public-facing books, but I also know how many copies you need to sell to cover the extra costs involved in production, marketing, and distribution; only a small proportion of scholarly research fits the bill. University presses know this too, which is why many are balancing the push to trade publishing with experiments in open access. [The MIT Press Direct to Open (D2O) project](#) is a good example of efforts to find synergy between these impulses.

> *There has also been a growing gap between openness and accessibility and the business models that have emerged to support this form of publishing.*

As OA has gained more and more traction, there has also been a growing gap between the values of both openness and accessibility and the business models that have emerged to support this form of publishing. As far as I can tell (and as [this collective of researchers](#) has elegantly articulated and [rearticulated](#)), the big gains in OA publishing in recent years have relied on either article processing charges (APCs) or ["read and publish"](#) deals, neither of which appear to challenge the underlying balance of power in scholarly publishing. As the old saying goes, the more things were changing, the more the inequalities in publishing remained the same: large commercial publishers that owned prestige journals were still doing just fine, thank you very much; university presses were looking for some kind of footing in a quickly changing environment; and small, scholar-led, open-access publications were further relegated to the margins of the scholarly publishing world.

Finding common cause

Enter Libraria's [Cooperate for Open](#) project, an initiative designed to support these intriguingly marginal publications by fostering a sense of collegiality and community, rather than making them over in the familiar image of competition and prestige. In 2021, Libraria hired Kate Herman, now the interim managing editor of *Cultural Anthropology*, to survey a group of [Diamond OA](#) publications in anthropology and adjacent fields. What she found was that these scholar-led journals take on the work of publishing not primarily to boost their editors' careers but because the publications are, [as the collective mentioned above insists](#), "labors of love." They are committed to pushing discussions about the politics of infrastructure and the boundaries of what counts as legitimate scholarship within their scholarly communities, including in some cases bringing research to broader audiences. And they are committed to doing this on an open-access basis, scraping together funds from whomever they can – academic institutions and departments, libraries, or (less often) governments and other funding bodies – to make it happen. Why? Because the scholar-publishers behind these projects believe that what they do is a worthwhile contribution to their scholarly communities and to the public at large. And what do they get in return? They usually don't receive much credit within the academic star system for working on these publications. And the work they publish doesn't always get the readership it deserves, because they don't have the time or resources to secure that level of attention. What they do get is a sense of scholarly integrity – along with a healthy dose of burnout that comes from the ongoing technical, financial, time, and labor pressures they face.

They are committed to pushing discussions about the politics of infrastructure and the boundaries of what counts as legitimate scholarship.

What was clear to me in the [feasibility study](#) that came out of this research is that these journals aren't asking for help to scale up in size or to tap into the prestige economy that characterizes so much of scholarly publishing. They know all too well that growing too fast or too large [has its own limitations](#): more work

adhering to stringent reporting procedures, more standardized content, less experimentation, and less autonomy. What these publications really want is to be able to continue doing what they do well: focusing on creative and sometimes niche content, without having to worry excessively about the financial, technical, or bureaucratic issues often involved in running a publication. What they want, in Herman's analysis, is a [mutual aid network](#) that allows them to share knowledge and costs, but also helps forge a common voice to articulate the quality and rigor of the work they do: amplifying their work without compromising their independence.

> *What these publications really want is to be able to continue doing what they do well.*

Interestingly, there appears to be growing momentum for supporting this scholar-led Diamond OA publishing sector. The Cooperate for Open (C4O) report coincided with the publication of another report and subsequent [action plan](#) by cOAlition S in Europe (the architects of the [Plan S](#) mandate). The tone of these two reports feels very different, though. Where cOAlition S refers to the need for efficiency, standards, and capacity-building, the C4O report invokes a community of practice, room to experiment, and preserving autonomy. While cOAlition S is working to scale up and professionalize Diamond OA publishing, Libraria and the as yet diffuse group of scholar-led publications that they have assembled are most interested in "exploring mutuality". Because, according to Herman, while these publications all faced similar challenges and occupied similar spaces in their scholarly worlds, there was little in the way of formal connections between them to enable cooperation.

Making common cause

This brings us full circle to that Community Convenor job posting. The next phase of the C4O initiative begins right now. In the coming months, I (yep, I got the job!) will be working with these scholar-led publications to see if we can find ways to build some connections that will outlive my involvement in the project. What

kind of connections? I'm not sure yet, but there are plenty of ideas to build on coming out of the feasibility study: from building discussion platforms that allow for greater peer-to-peer sharing, to expert-led information sessions dealing with everything from DOIs to managing the risks of open licenses. There might even be an appetite for a collective funding model down the line, which could match bundles of publications with mission-aligned funders so they gain some of the benefits of a bigger collective without trading away their autonomy or the bases of support they have already cultivated.

Re-evaluating scholarship based not on prestige or privilege, but on the quality and generativity of the work itself, is crucial.

I would say that the sky's the limit, but given the timeline and the resources at hand, that's not true. What is true is that supporting and encouraging bibliodiversity is worth our efforts. It's true that a challenge to the competitive and extractive business model of publishing in favor of collegiality and justice is desirable for many. And it's also true that re-evaluating scholarship based not on prestige or privilege, but on the quality and generativity of the work itself, is crucial. This is what the scholar-led OA publishing model stands for. And its proponents know that if these publications are going to succeed in the future, they will need to make common cause.

Featured image by Ank Kumar, courtesy of Flickr.com.

"You hurt our monuments, you hurt our heroes, you go to jail for ten years": Contested histories at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021

Stefan Ecks
September, 2022

Minutes before Trump told his supporters to march on the US Capitol and to "fight like hell," he reminded them of a "little law" against attacking national monuments: "You hurt our monuments, you hurt our heroes, you go to jail for ten

years." This is Trump's executive order on protecting US monuments of June 2020. Why did Trump talk about jail sentences for monument attacks in the same speech that incited a mob attack on one of the nation's most important monuments?

The US are in the midst of a war over how to remember US history. Remembrance of January 6 is the most recent battle in this war. How the event should be called is already fought over. Democrats and their supporters call it an "attack," a "riot," an "insurrection," and an "attempted coup." They see the events as unequivocally bad. Trump supporters are more ambiguous. Some still call it a "patriotic" demonstration or a "tour" of the Capitol. Some agree that these were "riots," but deny that they amounted to an "insurrection." Some agree that these were violent riots but deny that the rioters were Trump supporters. Instead, left-wing agitators and FBI operatives staged the attack to discredit Trump.

The US are in the midst of a war over how to remember US history. Remembrance of January 6 is the most recent battle in this war.

Six people died during or as a result of the attack. 140 police officers were violently assaulted. The Department of Justice started the largest investigation in its history. By mid-2022, more than 800 people had been identified and charged with crimes, dozens have been convicted to prison sentences. Most of the attackers were charged with unlawful entry into, or violence at, a restricted government building; others have been charged with obstruction of an official proceeding; a few have been charged for seditious conspiracy.

The court charges do not explain what motivated the attackers. Did they want to attack democracy and the peaceful transfer of power? Did they want to defend democracy and the lawful transfer of power? Was this an assault on Congress as an institution? Was it a smear campaign against Trump? An assault on the Capitol as the symbolic seat of government? An attack on the electoral process? An attempted assault on specific individuals, such as Vice President Mike Pence? An

attack on members of Congress who rejected Trump's stolen election narrative?

To understand what happened on January 6, we need to understand the war over how to remember US history. Both sides interpret January 6 within different historical frames. Those against Trump see January 6 as continuous with attacks on American democracy, right-wing politics, and white supremacy. In turn, many Trump supporters see the march on the Capitol as a patriotic re-enactment of 1776 and the struggle for Independence. Since announcing his candidacy, Trump had pledged to "drain the swamp," to attack a corrupt Washington elite and restore America to "the people." To some of Trump's supporters, attacking the Capitol as a symbol of the "swamp" made sense.

Speaking from the Capitol in January 2022 to mark the first anniversary of the attack, President Biden rejected the claim that the "deadly assault" on "this sacred place" was a patriotic uprising like 1776. It was a lie "that the mob who sought to impose their will through violence are the nation's true patriots. Is that what you thought when you looked at the mob ransacking the Capitol, destroying property, literally defecating in the hallways, rifling through desks of senators and representatives, hunting down members of congress? Patriots? Not in my view."

In June 2022, Bennie Thompson, the Chairman of the National Commission to Investigate the January 6 Attack on the United States Capitol Complex, opened the public hearings with a series of historical framings. Thompson argued that justifications of the attack were similar to justifications of slavery. He described January 6 as an attack on American democracy, similar to British troops burning down the Capitol in 1814. He reminded the audience that the Civil War was a war against the United States, and that the oath to defend the US Constitution against attacks "both foreign and domestic" originates in the Civil War. In the Civil War, the domestic attackers were soldiers of the Confederate South. In 2021, the domestic attackers were the Trump supporters. The 2021 attackers were like Confederates fighting for white supremacy.

In his speech on January 6, Trump placed the stolen election within a history of

"Radical Left" attacks on US monuments.

Trump pushes a very different narrative. The true American patriots were the people who marched on the Capitol. They were fighting for fair elections. The stolen election of 2020 was another episode in a long history of injustice against America's "great patriots." In a January 6 tweet, Trump said that "these are the things and events that when a sacred landslide election victory is so unceremoniously & viciously stripped away from great patriots who have been badly & unfairly treated for so long." Trump convinced his supporters that the presidency was stolen from him. A third of all Americans, and two thirds of Republican voters, believe in the Big Lie.

In his speech on January 6, Trump placed the stolen election within a history of "Radical Left" attacks on US monuments. Both were "egregious assaults on our democracy," and both had to be fought against. Trump reminded his supporters of the widespread unrests in 2020. Hundreds of monuments had been destroyed in these attacks. National monuments in honor of Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln had been targeted by leftist "cancel culture." Trump assured the crowd that "we will not take the name off the Washington Monument." He claimed that "they wanted to get rid of Jefferson Memorial, either take it down or just put somebody else in there." Trump said that "they'll knock out Lincoln, too … they'll been taking his statue down." "They" are an unpatriotic conspiracy of Democrats, Black Lives Matter, Marxists and Anarchists.

In May 2020, George Floyd, a 46-year-old African American, was killed by police officers in Minneapolis. When videos of Floyd's murder went viral, protests erupted across the US and in sixty countries worldwide. During the protests, hundreds of historic monuments were defaced, destroyed, or removed. Monuments to Confederate history were the top targets. In 2020, over a hundred Confederate monuments were demolished. Statues of founding fathers such as Thomas Jefferson and George Washington were attacked for their histories of slave ownership.

To quell the attacks, Trump signed the *Executive Order on Protecting American Monuments, Memorials, and Statues and Combating Recent Criminal Violence* in June 2020. The order countered "a sustained assault on the life and property of civilians, law enforcement officers, government property, and revered American monuments such as the Lincoln Memorial." The attackers were driven by extremist ideologies of "Marxism" and "Anarchy." The extremists had a "desire to indiscriminately destroy anything that honors our past and to erase from the public mind any suggestion that our past may be worth honoring, cherishing, remembering, or understanding." The order states that "my administration will not allow violent mobs incited by a radical fringe to become the arbiters of the aspects of our history that can be celebrated in public spaces." To defend monuments was to "defend the fundamental truth that America is good, her people are virtuous, and that justice prevails."

Trump's Independence Day speech 2020 at Mount Rushmore also centered on monument attacks. Trump described the 2020 protests as "a merciless campaign to wipe out our history, defame our heroes, erase our values, and indoctrinate our children." Attacks on historic monuments were attacks on "our country, and all of its values, history, and culture." Destroying monuments amounted to a treasonous attack on American democracy: "Make no mistake: this left-wing cultural revolution is designed to overthrow the American Revolution." The people who attack national monuments in the name of racial justice were, in fact, attacking the foundations of racial justice: "They would tear down the principles that propelled the abolition of slavery in America."

> *Attacks on historic monuments were attacks on "our country, and all of its values, history, and culture." Destroying monuments amounted to a treasonous attack on American democracy.*

The war over how to tell US history shifted to monuments in 2015, when a white supremacist killed nine African Americans in a church in Charleston, Louisiana. These racist murders accelerated the removal of Confederate statues across the

South. In response to these removals, right-wing activists organized to defend the monuments. Trying to stop the removal of a statue of Confederate General Lee at Charlottesville, Virginia, far-right groups arrived for the "Unite the Right" rally August 2017. At a torch-lit march, the right-wingers shouted "You will not replace us," "Jews will not displace us," and "White Lives Matter." The Charlottesville rally enacted the Great Replacement theory, which holds that leftist elites are systematically undermining whites in favour of non-white races. The protesters articulated an existential connection between Confederate statues and the white race: destroying these statues was the same as destroying white people. The next day, right-wingers congregated around Lee's monument, large groups of counter-protesters gathered around them. One of the right-wingers rammed his car into a group of counter protesters, killing one and injuring 35. After Charlottesville, Trump defended the right-wingers: "You also had people that were very fine people, on both sides." Most of the people at the rally were good citizens who just wanted to defend a cherished monument. American heritage should not be removed, history should not be rewritten: "Many of those people were there to protest the taking down of the statue of Robert E. Lee … I wonder, is it George Washington next week? And is it Thomas Jefferson the week after. You know, you really do have to ask yourself, where does it stop?"

The flags waived on January 6 abounded with historical references. Many commentators picked up on Civil War iconography, some are even seeing a "new Civil War" on the horizon. But references to American Independence dominated. "We the People" banners quoted the first line of the US Constitution. The "Betsy Ross" flag, with 13 stars for the first US states, glorifies the nation in its original form. The motto "Don't tread on me" with the rattlesnake features on several Revolutionary flags: the "Culpeper Minutemen," the "Gadsen," and the "South Carolina Navy." The "Three Percenters" flag represents an extremist group who claim that it only took three percent of the American population to kick out the British in 1776, meaning that a handful of armed patriots are capable of overthrowing a tyrannical government.

Many attackers thought they were repeating the American Revolution.

Attackers later explained that they wanted to defend the country and their democratic ideals just like the founders had done in 1776. The attack on the Capitol became the re-enactment of the war of the American Revolution. The protesters shouted "1776!"; "Defend the Constitution!"; and "We are the People! Fuck the political class!" The rioters chanted "Whose house? Our house!" as if this was the rightful repossession of a building belonging to the people. They shouted "Take the Capitol!" and "Freedom!" Attackers said that January 6 was "a great day for America" because people were "taking back power." The events were an expression of the "American spirit." Many attackers thought they were repeating the American Revolution. One of them said that "1776 was the year that we gained our Independence from England. So we chant '1776' because it reminds us of revolting against our government."

The organizers of the January 6 rally, Women for America First (WFAF), also claimed they were staging a patriotic defense of American democracy. After the riot, WFAF affirmed Trump's reading of history, that the stolen election was continuous with a long history of injustice against patriots. Left-wingers were to blame for establishing violent monument attacks as a routine form of politics: "Unfortunately, for months the left and the mainstream media told the American people that violence was an acceptable political tool. They were wrong. It is not." The "violence" were the monument attacks and civil protests after George Floyd's murder. In June 2022, Trump repeated this point in a statement against the January 6 investigations: "They are desperate to change the narrative of a failing nation, without even making mention of the havoc and death caused by the Radical Left just months earlier."

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To Trump's opponents, the storm on the Capitol was an attack on American

democracy. To Trump's supporters, the storm was a defense of American democracy. Both sides anchor their narratives in US history. Both sides see the Capitol attack in relation to other monument attacks. Those against Trump highlight that the attack was a desecration of a national symbol of democracy. Those for Trump say that they were trying to repossess the building for the American people, to whom it rightfully belonged.

But the Trump camp remains deeply split over what happened. Some still deny that there was violence because true Republicans would never behave this way. Some say that this was a "hoax" staged by Leftists. Some compare the rioting at the Capitol to the Black Lives Matter protests, to argue that January 6 was just a minor incident that the Left is blowing out of proportion. In the same vein, they accuse the Democrats of willful forgetfulness of the "Radical Left" violence that came before. These ambiguities spring from Trump's incongruent framing. Encouraging an attack on the Capitol in order to defend American democracy was bound to end in paradox. Trump's narrative up to January 6 was that monuments are attacked by the radical left and defended by patriots. That democracy could be defended by assaulting Capitol police officers, destroying property, and defecating in the hallways is incongruous with the framing of the attack as a patriotic act. The Capitol attack revealed Trump and his supporters as the political extremists. The "cultural revolution designed to overthrow the American Revolution" was instigated by Trump, not by the left.

Trump used to be a good storyteller. The Big Lie is a good story, good enough to make 2,500 people believe that the US President had authorized them to storm the Capitol. But that fighting at the Capitol would be equal to fighting for Independence in 1776 reveals a deep ignorance of history on Trump's side. The Deadly Lie, that attacking the Capitol would legitimately win Trump a second term as president, is a bad story. January 6 was an attack on American democracy, and it is vital that Trump's historical framing of the event does come to be as widely accepted as the Big Lie. In his executive order on protecting US monuments of June 2020, Trump said he would "not allow violent mobs incited by a radical fringe to become the arbiters of the aspects of our history." After the

Capitol attack, Americans should not allow anti-democratic right-wingers to become the arbiters of US history.

Feature image by Tyler Merbler, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Sister Parks: North American Coloniality and the Monarch Butterfly

Columba González-Duarte
September, 2022

Monarch migration and the making of North America

At the end of each summer, the northern prairies and Great Lakes regions of North America host a new generation of monarch butterflies. After their last metamorphosis in late fall, the butterflies travel over 4,000km to what we now call Mexico. In their warmer winter habitat, they form colossal raindrop-shaped clusters of thousands of butterflies suspended from a single tree species, the oyamel. Monarchs there enter a semi-dormant state for four months, surviving on little food. Each subsequent migratory generation performs this heroic feat without directly 'learning' the route from their progenitors. Despite their iconic standing across other North American insects, monarchs today are threatened by decline. Conservation scientists continue to debate the specific reasons for their reduced population; however, what is certain is that monarchs lack the healthy

interconnected continental habitat they need to thrive in large numbers.

My multispecies ethnography with the monarch reveals interconnected geographies of colonial dispossession that threaten both human and monarch lives. Two examples of human and monarch displacements occurring in 'sister' national parks created to protect monarch habitat, show how Indigenous groups' ways of relating to the monarch in these sites – and beyond the confines of national parks – may contain keys to a better set of environmental ethics for the continent. This multispecies lens carefully engages with Indigenous ecological practices in their current complexity. It re-visits the idea of 'North America' as a multispecies spatiality that urgently needs to repair the overlapping violence towards Indigenous populations and other earth beings.

What is certain is that monarchs lack the healthy interconnected continental habitat they need.

A band without a land

The monarch butterfly breeds in northern North American prairie habitat, relying on a single host plant popularly known as milkweed. The insect lays eggs on it, feeds from it as caterpillar, and often hangs off of it as a pupa enclosed in a cocoon, until it ecloses – or emerges as a young butterfly – and migrates in the fall. The monarch's original prairie habitat is today aptly referred to as the 'Corn Belt', having been appropriated from the area's Indigenous peoples. The dystopic agri*business* (rather than agri*culture*) landscape, which cuts across the Canada-US border, is now primarily a pesticide and herbicide-saturated corn monocrop. Chemicals originally developed for war economies are now entrenched in our food and trade systems, affecting the host plant of the monarch.

Chemicals originally developed for war economies are now entrenched in our food and trade systems.

This monocrop landscape is also built on displacements of humans, specifically the dispossession of this region's First Nations who share Anishinaabe ancestry. With European settlement, these groups were relocated far away from their original territories to more confined areas ('reserves'), or in some cases made landless – as was the case of Point Pelee's Caldwell band, a Chippewa- and Pottawatomi-origin group that traditionally migrated seasonally, sharing ecological niches and migratory patterns with the monarch. That band's displacement disrupted its longstanding relationships with the prairie and lower savannah habitat, and undermined its relational ecological knowledge systems which historically nurtured an abundance of insects, including monarchs (Betasamosake Simpson 2019).

Monarchs, threatened not only by agribusiness but also climate change and habitat loss, are today under 'protection' measures across North America. In Canada, its conservation epicenter is Point Pelee National Park. A peninsula on Lake Erie (one of the four Great Lakes), and a Canada-US border crossing, Pelee's specific ecology and land formation is a magnet for multitudes of birds and butterflies. It also attracts flocks of tourists seeking to explore the 'tip of Canada' and watch the monarch's fall migration. Sharing this peninsular home with the monarch historically were the Chippewa and Potawatomi Indigenous people.

Some of Pelee's Indigenous residents left to fight settler encroachment in the 1700s. Others left to participate in the War of 1812, the outcomes of which defined the current Canada-US border. In 1918, the remaining Caldwell band members were expelled to create a National Park. At the time, it was one of the first conservation parks in the country. Today, it is Canada's smallest and most biologically diverse.

Jane Peters (pseudonym), a First Nations woman appointed chronicler for the Caldwell Band, recalls these displacements vividly. Her family lived at Pelee before their eviction. Her account, however, begins much earlier, in the late eighteenth century. *My family's ancestors battled with Chief Pontiac*, she shares. In 1763, Chief Pontiac organized an inter-tribal rebellion that managed to lay

siege t the British army in present-day Detroit (south of Pelee) for six months. Pelee became a strategic point in this struggle. Band members assaulted British ships and successfully halted a rescue mission aiming to end the siege. The Indigenous victory, however, was short-lived. The uprising was eventually suffocated, and by 1792, the Mckee Treaty endowed Pelee to the English Crown that officially designated it a Crown Naval Reserve. According to Pelee's First Nations, this designation occurred without their consultation.

Upon return, they were allowed to live in Pelee as renters – while surveyors often labeled them as trespassers – and were forced to fight in the War of 1812. *Forced to choose between two evils*, in the words of Dylan (pseudonym), a young band member and fellow community chronicler. Here he refers to the choice between the British, for whom his people fought, and the rivaling Americans. He continues: *We took up arms, and if we had had retreated right along with the British troops, we would all be looking at the Americans today.* The Caldwell Band's name is a tribute to this military intervention, which was led by a British commander of that last name – *We would have different borders,* he maintains*.*

Both Dylan and Jane emphasize the violence inflicted on their people across centuries, but also their people's agency. They stress how their people were responsible for creating Pelee's current Canadian border even when a National border challenged their seasonal movement across the Great Lakes. Just as Pelee is a summer destination for monarchs, then, it was also one for humans. Dylan pointed out to a woven art piece hanging from the wall. The textile narrated the story of the region: humans in canoes, turtles, birds and monarchs passing through. Sharing the abundancy, *gifted by the water*, he commented.

> *Just as Pelee is a summer destination for monarchs, then, it was also one for humans.*

When Dylan and Jane's people were forced to leave their ancestral summer home, they did not do so without resistance. In protest of its conservation status, they re-occupied Pelee in 1920 but were ultimately evicted and left landless for the

next 100 years. – *The Mounties [Canadian police] went in and burned out our homes, took my family out and left us without formal recognition nor a land endowment,* Jane tells me.

However, as the surrounding corn monocrop economy encircled Pelee, the park has faced significant challenges in protecting the monarch's habitat. Ironically, an area that seeks to protect the monarch also hosts one of the key drivers of its decline: agribusiness with its destructive effects on the butterfly's host milkweed.

Meanwhile, the Caldwell band has also struggled to retain a home. They remained landless until 2020 (Forester 2020), when they resettled in the park's vicinity. This was the culmination of over one hundred years of resistance to settler colonial land dispossession. It is too early to say how monarchs will figure into their evolving livelihoods, but band members are not kin to the region's now dominant agribusiness model. Indeed, one of the reasons that resettlement took so long was that it was opposed by local farm owners, who claimed to 'fear' the re-introduction of Indigenous agricultural methods which could allegedly lead to 'spills' of the weeds and insects that the monocrop model seeks to eradicate.

Band members are not kin to the region's now dominant agribusiness model.

A land of correspondences

At the other end of the monarch's 4,000km journey, in the Michoacán region of what we now call Mexico, lies Pelee's 'sister' park: the UNESCO Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve, where the monarchs overwinter. This is also the ancestral home of the Mazahua and Otomí[*] groups, who like the Caldwell band have faced dispossessions linked to colonialism and conservation. These groups have likely lived with the monarch since precolonial times, but were exiled to the high mountains during the Spanish occupation. This displacement interrupted longstanding land-use practices and traditions and deepened competition for

resources. Despite this, communities still practice ancestral land management techniques. These are based on a model of sustainable agroforestry involving a corn-based mixed cropping system in the lower hills, complemented by a communal forest in the upper hills where residents collect forest products, hunt, and engage in ritual activities.

This area received protected designation according to UNESCO's conservation precepts in 1980 after the monarch migration was pieced together by a joint Canadian and Mexican research team. The group, which was mainly composed of volunteer workers, tagged monarch wings over 25 years and tracked the tagged butterflies to central Mexico. Driven by the discovery of the migratory pattern, the park was initially designed to protect monarchs during their overwinter season. It was later expanded to cover more forest habitat with a permanent hunting and agroforestry ban. Much as conquest and occupation introduced new borders, the creation of the UNESCO reserve imposed a new set of boundaries in this ethnoterritory. The park design posits 'people-free' cores and buffer zones which allow some activities. Unlike in Pelee, communities did not lose land ownership, but their interconnected corn *milpa* (artisanal corn gardens) and forestry systems were disrupted since they could no longer collect resources from or hunt in the upper forest. Forest and agricultural livelihood losses have only been partially offset by tourism revenues from conservation, and the reserve has faced significant resistance from the communities.

In contrast with the view of conservation scientists that saw the monarch as an insect that needed special protection, my interlocutors in the monarch forest describe how they see the monarch as 'enveloped in' (*envuelta en*) the *milpa* agriculture and as part of a ritualized landscape. The monarch is seen and treated as part of the forest and social life, and not only as a 'trinational' insect. The ritual practices of communities engage the monarch as one species in a human-forest-corn tapestry of mutual reciprocity across the lower and upper hills. For example, they perform rituals in the upper hills to petition rain for a good corn harvest downhill. Indigenous relational practices and knowledges also see the monarch as a 'correspondent' between different worlds, including between the living and the

dead. Carrying the deceased's souls, monarchs arrive to the reserve's upper forest each year during the Day of the Dead celebrations (Nov. 2-3).

The park design posits 'people-free' cores and buffer zones which allow some activities.

Four months after the Day of the Dead, the departure of the monarchs marks the beginning of the corn harvest season. In this way, monarch migration cycles are coordinated with the artisanal corn harvest and its associated rituals. Even while conservation and political economic changes have increased the importance of livelihood activities other than small scale farming, the *milpa* remains the central axis of ritual, social, and economic life. It is also connected with the monarch. In some regions of Michoacán, the monarch is called a 'harvester' (*cosechadora*). This image of a 'harvester' insect intertwined with human practices across the upper and lower hills stands in stark contrast with the conservation vision of a human-free monarch 'core' and peopled 'buffer'. Yet, conservation is not the only threat to the millenary agricultural and ritual *milpa* model. Local land management practices also run up against new il/licit economies that have recently expanded into the oyamel forest. These include avocado plantations to satisfy growing demand, which are enabled by illegal logging. Reserve restrictions have contradictorily increased vulnerability to this habitat destruction. With less community presence in the 'core zone,' illegal activities have been allowed to flourish (Gonzalez-Duarte 2021).

Carrying the deceased's souls, monarchs arrive to the reserve's upper forest each year during the Day of the Dead celebrations.

As in Pelee, the people of this reserve have resisted dispossession. Initially, they hotly contested the Western speciesist vision that prioritized the conservation of a single insect at the expense of other animals and humans. Yet, today, the monarch is mobilized as part of a strategy to achieve greater self-management of their territory and to fight 'il/licit' practices. Indigenous groups are advancing self-

government and struggling for direct budgetary control and customary law similar to that of the Indigenous Chiapas or Cherán. Parallelly, there is a resurgence of forms of community-led organization to take *care* of the monarch forest through community watch and the revitalization of *milpa* agri*culture*.

Inspired by the Mazahua and Otomi political achievements and the Caldwell band's recent land restitution, I pose that caring for this butterfly means addressing the longstanding coloniality underpinning today's 'North America' (Saldaña-Portillo 2016), and which is, unfortunately, perpetuated by conservation practice. Despite these interconnected displacements across North and South, Indigenous groups across the continent continue to fight to retain and reconfigure significant ties with their land. Their struggles and achievements may provide much needed refugia for both monarchs and humans.

[*] There are local and used variations of the names of these groups in their languages, for Mazahuas, Jñatrjo/Jñatjo/Jñato, and for Otomies, Nya-Nyu/Hñähñu/Nyot'o.

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Photographs provided by the author.
Point Pelee image and Monarch drawings: archival.

When Nothing Fits

Annika Benz
September, 2022

Disclaimer: All people mentioned were able to choose how they want to appear in this text. They chose to appear by their clear name and/or activist alias. They were also able to comment on a draft version.

Activist at home anthropology

About seven months into my fieldwork with German activists from the movement *Extinction Rebellion Germany*, I faced a personal crisis. It was not my first crisis in my young academic career: ethnography is a continuation of overlapping liminal periods of time and space. This crisis, however, will stay with me for longer, which is why I choose to write about it.

I started my PhD in 2021 as a young, white, female anthropologist interested in tackling issues of political importance. Many of my fellow colleagues from anthropology had committed their PhD fieldwork to a place, people, or topic that they had engaged with before. I was instead driven by my understanding of ethical research. I set out to find people that were willing to not only tolerate my presence as an observing bystander but to actively share their doubts and hopes with me, from the conception of my project to its eventual publication, and to address with me the inherent power relations in researching with others (Trundle 2018). For practical and ethical reasons, I chose to conduct anthropology at home (Pulido 2008). Researching in close proximity to my participants allows me to involve them in academic processes beyond fieldwork and enables me to engage with my field as an activist outside of my academic work. Anthropology at home is not yet common in Germany. Upon telling others about my intention to "only" conduct fieldwork in my home country, I was faced with concerned looks. Some felt that I was throwing away my "cultural expertise" from prolonged time spent in Taiwan. Others talked to me about how they felt alienated from the work of their supervising professors when they chose to research at home.

> *I set out to find people that were willing to actively share their doubts and hopes with me.*

For all my life, I have been an active member of civil society. My engagement with issues larger than myself continued at university and in my job at an NGO, writing about the state of human rights in the Philippines. When searching for a field, I knew I wanted to use my time to support something that I believe in. I ended up going to an open meeting of my local group of *Extinction Rebellion* rebels in

Cologne. I vividly remember the strange situation of feeling at home in a place where you have never been before. I was attracted by the emotional diligence with which people interacted with each other. Shortly after, I entered my at-home, activist field. Since then, it has been a constant dance across the fault lines of the strange and the familiar, the here and there, and the close and the distant. As an ethnographer, I am meant to fully submit myself to the experience of living a different life. As a researcher, I am meant to keep an analytical distance. As an activist, I am meant to stand in solidarity with my fellow rebels. As a young woman in academia, I am only meant to be political in ways my discipline sees fit. Like most anthropologists, I constantly occupy conflicting positions.

I was attracted by the emotional diligence with which people interacted with each other.

I turned to conversations and texts to find answers on how to deal with the chaotic positionalities in my personal life, my field, and academia at large. I underwent a voluntary ethical clearance process with the outcome to "watch my distance" for the sake of theoretical analysis and a healthy work-life balance. I read the late David Graeber's work within the anti-globalization movement (Graeber 2009) and Marianne Maeckelbergh's perspectives on researching radical movements ethically from within (Maeckelbergh 2016). From their texts, I took away the continuous need to reflect on my shifting positionalities and to live and research by the understanding of ethics within my field.

Like most anthropologists, I constantly occupy conflicting positions.

At first, I was interested in how different groups of rebels interacted with each other inside the decentral movement, how information travelled, and how consensus decisions were reached. *Extinction Rebellion* is a movement that aims to reflect on its actions in cycles of mediation and learning. There, I felt like I could put my often-so-abstract ethnographic observations into practice. Over time, I understood that my form of collaboration is based on the solidarity with

the struggles me and my fellow rebels find ourselves in. Many voices in anthropology are critical towards "going native" in the field for they fear the lack of distance and objectivity in constructing scientific knowledge. I had already started my fieldwork as a "native", sharing core values with my participants, but also with a fresh perspective on a movement that I had not been a part of before my fieldwork. Since then, I learned that "going native" is a process of deep relationality and offers a new set of possibilities and precautions to participant observation. My knowledge production in the field is influenced by relations beyond my academic work in which I am often no longer recognizable as an ethnographer. It requires an alertness to the responsibilities this form of closeness brings when writing about others.

Spirituality as political (research) practice in Germany

After six months in the field, I took part in a training on the roots of the movement. Linda and Michael were freshly trained *DNA* trainers and explained the origins of the ideas *Extinction Rebellion* was built on in the UK. When *Extinction Rebellion* came to Germany in late 2018, the movement was heavily influenced by groups from the political left. Just now, several collectives and measures are emerging within the movement that aim to "reincorporate" the *DNA* into a political activism that mostly relates to everyday political events. *DNA*, essentially who we are as a movement, is a highly contested term within my field. It connects to *Extinction Rebellion*'s list of principles and values that structure the movement's everyday organization and political actions as guidelines on how to engage with each other as a community (Extinction Rebellion UK 2022). These principles simultaneously show the ambition of the movement to challenge individual and collective values in society (remark by Michael, 26.05.2022). Linda and Michael guided our group through different exercises. They spoke of the American Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s, of Mahatma Gandhi's salt march, and of other thinkers from Buddhism, Hinduism, and natural philosophy such as Joanna Macy as inspirations for the movement. In short exercises, we reflected on where we see the principles in our own movement contexts, and how to further implement strategies of communication and practice to enhance the presence of

our *DNA* among us.

My perspective onto the movement of which I had been a part of for several months shifted. These eclectic, spiritual roots had then been rarely talked about. Still, I felt like I had been feeling and practicing them for longer. I started to look through my field diary. I wrote about feeling alienated by the openly lived emotional force of my fellow rebels, when people shared their feelings around environmental catastrophes which they had heard about on the news. Now, I know that interpersonal practices of care in the form of speaking and listening are central to the activist's understanding of political practice. I wrote about sensing connection to others in our everyday rituals of "checking in" before our meetings, where people share their state of being and reflect on our ways of working together. Now, this speaks to our crafting of a common vision of change across generations and backgrounds, and on the importance of (un)learning.

What I had so far only understood as "affect", a common concept to approach research on activism, was also part of a German political spirituality, a highly debated contestation of how the rebels, as part of a German society, relate to one another and what values they see as important for living a political life. I was hesitant. It was already difficult to explain that my mode of doing research was both at home *and* activist. Although spirituality is a classical topic in anthropology, spirituality as a mode of doing research and a way of knowing one's field is only slowly gaining recognition in anthropological debates (Palmer 2021). Many German anthropologists and activists alike view the practice of spirituality as opposite to the professional and the political – they view it as hyper-personal and separated from rational thought.

> *What I had so far only understood as "affect" was also part of a German political spirituality.*

Inti and I had met during my first meeting with the rebels in Cologne. As a medical information specialist, she was cautious towards my method of doing fieldwork, a mode of research that she was then only scarcely familiar with. Inti

and I did not share much overlap in our active areas within the movement: Inti had been heavily involved in the public relations team of *Extinction Rebellion* for two and a half years, and I had just started off my fieldwork getting to know different regional assemblies. After a few months in our local group meetings, Inti and I conducted a partner exercise together in a meeting break. Another rebel instructed us that we could apply pressure to the head, the legs, the back, and arms of our partner, while they stand on the grass with their eyes closed. Inti and I, through this exercise of connection, slowly started to form a friendship. We share interests not only in activism, but also in the arts, in animals, and in academia. From then on, we met outside of activist contexts and slowly got to know each other.

She paused and then told me to write for a future generation of activists.

We sat together on a Sunday evening in my small apartment in Cologne, shortly after my *DNA* training, and drank a bottle of wine that I had gotten to celebrate Inti's 40th birthday. I didn't take any notes that evening and am now recounting from memory. I told Inti about my newly found fascination with the underlying spiritual nature of the movement and its troubles to implement these roots in Germany. I considered to change my research focus to the practice of this eclectic, political spirituality that underpins *Extinction Rebellion*'s actions, but I was hesitant because I wondered if it would be helpful to the movement in any way. She asked me if the people I research with wanted me to write something helpful. I awkwardly reminded her that she was also one of those people. She paused and then told me to write for a future generation of activists. To write on a topic that the generations to come will have to deal with.

A Crisis of Categorization

My personal crisis is a crisis of knowing through ways that are not seen as "academic" or "activist" in Germany; of knowing through ways, which both, my fellow rebels and I lack words to describe, only to resort to the loaded term of "spirituality" as anything non-material. Anthropology has long been perceptive to

the crisis of categorization, of how to work around the ethnographic feeling when nothing fits what you have known before. Categorization entails an intrinsic violence that is at the centre of how we read, teach, research, and write within the discipline. We think extensively about how to talk about the people we research with, to not forcefully push other people's lives into tight academic concepts. We practice closeness to feel categorization alongside those we study. Then we distance ourselves from our fields to analyse its embeddedness. Knowledge based on fieldwork does not fit into neat categories and therefore we understand the struggles of our participants that are themselves trying to make sense of messy lives within unseen but often felt structures of power. Within *Extinction Rebellion Germany*, these structures of power are, to me, the processes of marginalization of ideas and practices that are not easily recognizable as "political". Within anthropology, these structures of power are sustaining perceptions of knowing through distance and materiality, aiming to make ethnographic fieldwork a more tangible practice.

The freedom to cultivate situated rebellious and utopian practices and ways of thinking is needed to make another world possible.

In her 2021 essay "The reluctant native", Yasmeen Arif makes the case for an epistemic disobedience in anthropological research. She claims that as researchers, our positionality is perceived through our names and modes of fieldwork, described and evaluated in our texts and bibliographies. If we call ourselves a political anthropologist, an activist scholar, a "native" anthropologist, we are expected to follow certain themes of work, certain texts, certain arguments. I argue from her text that if we hand the intrinsic compassion of an epistemic freedom to our participants and simply get to know life alongside them, we should also extend it to our fellow thinkers and writers and to ourselves. Epistemic freedom entails, so Arif, an emancipation of terminology, of ways of doing things and making sense of things, and of the freedom and right to be who we are and speak from our own vantage points, without being told what is right or wrong, political or unpolitical, rational or spiritual. The freedom to cultivate

situated rebellious and utopian practices and ways of thinking is needed to make another world possible. It will for sure be something that generations of activists and anthropologists to come will have to deal with.

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please use your discretion to adjust your hope

Špela Drnovšek Zorko
September, 2022

any day or part day that the individual sees their child in person in the UK counts as a day

on which they see their child in the UK
is certainly one way to say
that one day is a day too many.

when I say the words Ljubljana airport you must picture a modest vestibule.
you must picture the young woman sitting erect on the single bench in a winter coat
a regal nod for the uniformed man who hands her a paper
and you must know that I do not listen when she murmurs into her phone
no mama for the last time
for the last time mama
they said that if I cross it will be ten years before I can
you must picture the queue moving
and the way I can no longer listen.

affective stickiness.
become your own border guard.
apply within!

the individual will have a place to live in the UK
if they have a home, holiday home, or temporary retreat in the UK, or other
accommodation
that they can live in when they are in the UK
is certainly one way to say
fuck you.

a model citizen is someone who worries about tax even when there is no tax to pay.
you must picture me saying, that's British for you.
needing to pay tax would be quite a nice problem to have
for this model non-citizen
stuck in the wrong queue at Ljubljana airport
and only the wailing baby dares to say that we are never getting out of here.

one day soon, now.

it's about the way that
the individual will have a country tie for a tax year
if the UK is the country in which they were present at midnight
is not about the bloody tax

it's about the way that
that is certainly one way to see

her feet kick up snow as she dances,
and the bell strikes midnight
and she is happy
in the snow with her kicking feet,
but not where she is meant to be,
happy elsewhere
she fails the test.

Commentary:

"When people ask me what I've been doing for the past year of immobility, I say: hoarding scraps of border lore, overheard, overread, overthought. This is less found poetry than scrounged from travels both thwarted and realised, some of them mine, some not; a series of mid-crises bordering encounters layered on top of existing psychic grooves, leavened with austerity and anxiety and the almost fairytale-like prose of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs' statutory residence test (in matters of residency, a fairytale is always only one step away from a nightmare). It came at a time when few other words were coming, let alone words that could have worked its many incommensurabilities into the form of an academic argument." – Zorko

Featured image by author

Smith Commits a Crime

Paul Antick
September, 2022

Smith and Willing is a Paul Antick project. For more information about Smith and Willing, see: [Smith & Willing](#)

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Hello, *Allegra Lab* editorial collective here. Have you watched the film? No? Then watch it before reading on. Have you watched it now? Good. Then we want to tell you about a new initiative *at Allegra Lab.* We are experimenting in publishing [care reviews](#) of multimodal work accompanying the pieces we publish. Why do we

do this? Because multimodal scholarship should also be reviewed, but we also recognise that different modes of scholarship require different types of review. So this is what we're trying, and here is the review:

The 21 st -century flaneur as a suspect?
by Juli Székely

Smith commits a crime is a tale of an everyday man trying to find his way – not in life, but – in space. This space looks essentially urban (the film begins with the image of an urban (re)development site and ends with a scene showing an office building complex), but open roads and nature also make their appearances. Within these locations, with a pleasant minimalist approach, we observe Smith mainly walking. However, during the 28-minutes-long film he occasionally also makes a few breaks: he sometimes stops for looking around, touching surfaces and checking found objects. For a while, it is as if Smith was looking for the "right" spot, which impression also becomes underlined when, at around twelve minutes into the film, he does a graffiti: "Smith commits a crime". But does this self-referential joke indeed refer to the crime in question? On the one hand, this text melts into the many other – legal and illegal – messages Smith discovers during his journey, such as graffitis, advertisements and warnings, but on the other, it also seems to have a much more profound implication for the walking practices of Smith in general.

In contrast to Walter Benjamin's figure of the flaneur who strolls within the strange and unfamiliar settings of the modern city, here Smith finds himself in late capitalism repeatedly bumping into fences, locks and caution signs. He gets involved in absurd and annoying situations, and although the scenes sometimes feel a bit repetitive (especially in the second half of the film), we also sense the absurdity and annoyance mediated through these barriers. Smith' experiences of (closed-off) space are often carefully reinforced by the various elements of his surroundings: while a roundabout sign almost ridicules his act of going in circles (is he lost?), the cemetery literally stands for reaching the end of a road (is there indeed a danger of death as one of the signs later suggests?). From this

perspective, Smith seems to maneuver within a labyrinth of permissions and (rather) prohibitions, which he inevitably breaks. We are only at the 30th second of the film, when Smith climbs over a bridge, but soon enough we also witness him taking undesignated routes and ignoring caution signs. Walking – as Michel de Certeau argued in *The Practice of Everyday Life* – becomes an act of resistance (the ultimate crime?) challenging the spatial order inscribed on the city by larger power structures.

These actions are carefully recorded by the camera, which much like a CCTV, always shows Smith from a fixed angle. The film, thus, consists of the various recordings of this "surveillance" camera, which at certain points are interspersed with a black screen (although its function is not very clear). Nevertheless, for a moment, the camera becomes also unveiled when we see its image on the glass surface of a building, with Smith standing behind it. Does Smith hold a mirror in front of surveillance society?

All in all, *Smith commits a crime* is a story about the connection between space, power and resistance, from which perspective, the road sign of "passing place" simultaneously refers to the necessity and impossibility to truly discover these strange sites of the 21st century without breaking rules.

Juli Székely has an academic background in literature, art history and sociology. Currently she is an assistant professor at the Department of Sociology at ELTE in Budapest. Her research interests lie primarily in the relationship of art and city, with a special emphasis on public art, (in)tangible heritage and memory politics in urban space.