Introduction: Building Bodies for Thought

Aja Smith
June, 2023

While academic thinking increasingly shapes itself along the structure of the scientific journal article, compelling steadfast arguments that smoothly steer readers from question to conclusion (Grünfeld 2020), a growing volume of work

pushes back; pushes for thinking, analysis and theory characterised by “openness, attunement, and responsivity” (Throop 2018), that “stays with the trouble” (Haraway 2016) and “acknowledge[s] the uncertainties of interpretations and knowledge-making” (Andersen and Høybye 2021). Rather than argumentative linearity, such work creates “zones of undecidability” (Badiou 2009, 45) – zones where theory stands forth “as a mode of thought that takes place (…) in the middle of attachments and threats, of what lingers and what jumps” (Stewart 2017, 196). But what does such thought and thinking entail in practical terms?

With this thematic thread, we suggest that this kind of theorising and thinking requires another body than the one traditionally trained for academia – a body that is more receptive, more sentient, more response-able. It is no secret that the notion of the body upon which we draw is Merleau-Pontyan. For Merleau-Ponty the body-subject was the zero-point of our engagement with the world (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2012); it embodies our trajectory as historical subjects; frames our thinking through image schematas (Johnson 1990); reflects upon itself as a ‘thing’ in the world and becomes other to itself (Leder 1990). But we are here less concerned with the question of what a body is. Rather, inspired by Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza (1988), the question we are engaging is what a body might be able to do – and what kind of thinking that becomes with such body-doings.

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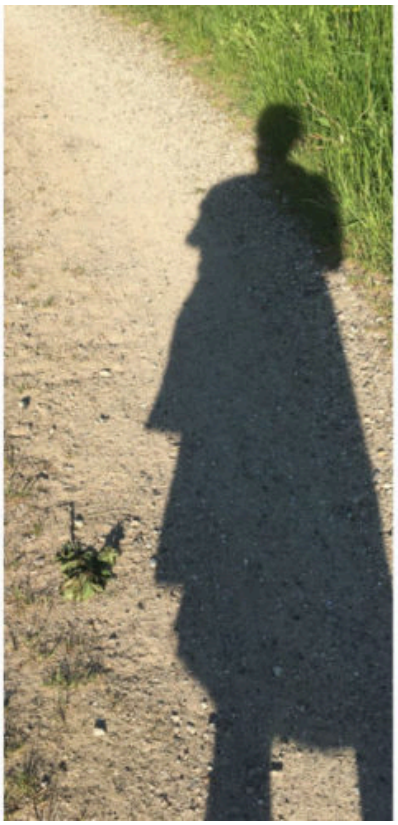
There is no standard body in the texts we feature here, only bodies in the midst of diverse doings; knitting, singing, crowing, imagining, walking on eggshells or dancing with sticks, moved by ghosts, a bug, maelstroms of blood or photosynthesis. These bodies did not at first or at all times feel fine in such doings; all academically trained, most of them anthropologically so, many found themselves cramped with embarrassment when asked or wishing themselves to be more sentient, receptive, response-able in their academic practices. Trying to

sense affective responses to an academic article (cf. Schoeller and Thorgeirsdottir 2019), move with a concept (Dumit 2017) or experiment with attuning to other perspectives than human ones (Myers 2014), is indeed a risky endeavour within many academic communities – it makes you vulnerable to accusations of being unacademic, unscientific, too subjective; too much. No wonder then, that to think other thoughts, we need other kinds of training than those most commonly favour in academia; methodologies that take advantage of rather than shy away from the fact that all activities involve not only intellectual but also affective and bodily engagement (see e.g. Andersen and Høybye 2021; Ballestero & Winthereik 2021; Dumit 2017; Myers 2014; Schoeller & Thorgeirsdottir 2019). The specific methodologies we are interested in here all aim to train bodies for the kinds of thinking that can "defrost" (Mattingly 2019), "sensitize" (Latour 2014) and "enliven" (Guyer 2013) concepts; thinking that moves and flexes in response to the weights, wonders and worries of worlds beyond their own.

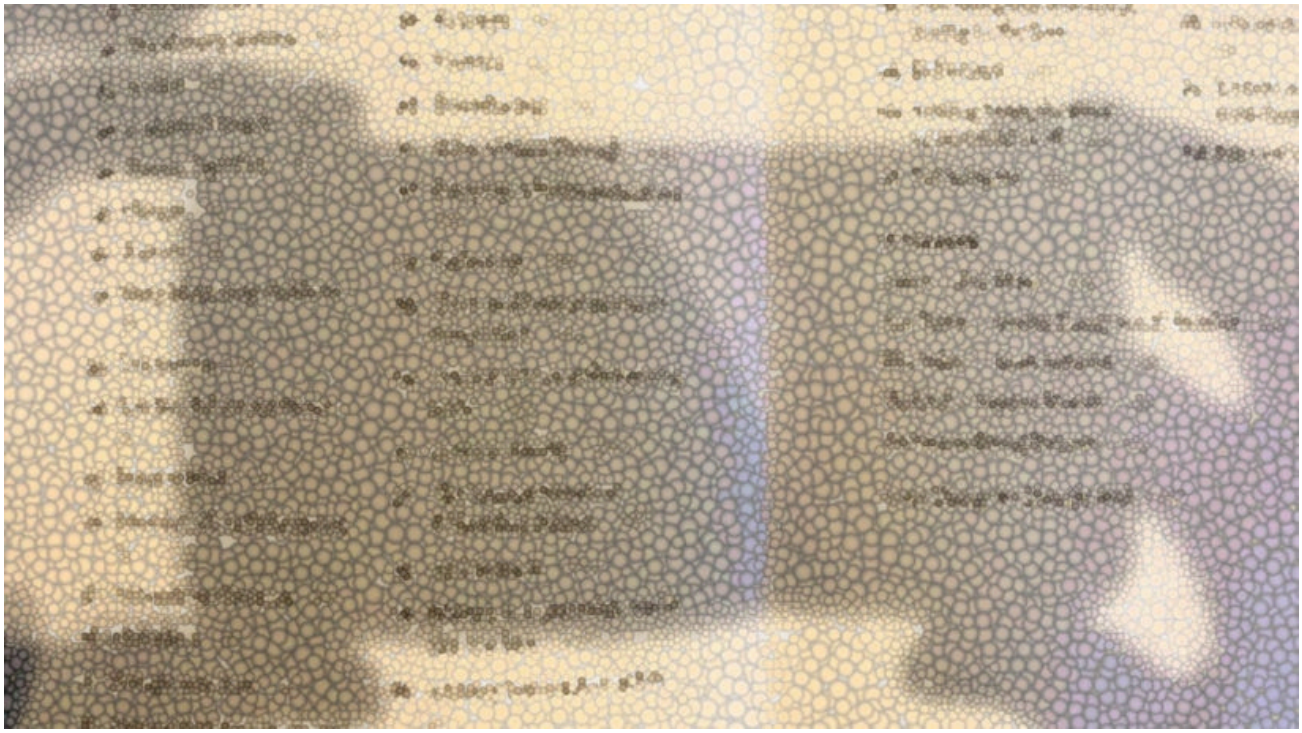


So, what are these methodologies? With the explicit aim of featuring work by

people with varying degrees of academic experience *and* a willingness to experiment with the academic style and genre, the essays in the present thematic thread spring from three workshop-series, we have facilitated the past couple of years: a six-week course for MA anthropology students; a two-day workshop for Ph.D. students from art and design; and a three-day collaborative seminar for anthropologists trained in body-based methodologies. In addition, we have invited a contribution from Sigríður Þorgeirsdóttir, one of the initiators of the program, Training Embodied Critical Thinking – a training in which we ourselves have participated. This training has informed the design of parts of the workshop-series, as has also Berlant and Stewart's writing format *The Hundreds* (2019). In all three workshop-series *hundreds* has served as a template for thinking the complexities, contradictions and questions to which the other bodily-affective methodologies gave rise.

Hundreds is text written in exact hundred-word sections and is based on concrete observations of the worlds of others as well as your own. The format compels you to pay careful attention to every single word; each word counts "one", each "one" is a singularity, each gap between words potentially meaningful. Writing *hundreds* means cultivating, exploring and refining perception as you word by word must ask yourself: Is this *really* what I want to say? Really what I saw? What I heard, sensed, what I thought? Similar to a poem, writing *hundreds* may induce a particular kind of layered and rhythmic writing, which amasses atmospheres and compresses temporality. It is a writing capable of expressing the bodily, compositional and often contradictory nature of life (Stewart 2013). Each new image or sensation evoked by the text, adds not simply another layer but generates "collateral vibrations" (Eisenstein 1949, 66) between the different layers, in turn fostering a "generative instability" that leaves readers with a sense of surplus and contradiction (Willerslev and Suhr 2013, 1; Stewart 2013). But more fundamentally, writing from bodily, affective and material experiences in *hundreds,* pushes the writer to *think* differently; to think along with hesitancy, contradiction and surplus – instead of against them. As such, the built-in capacity for generative instability in the methodologies we employed in all three

workshops, was transferred to us as “thinkable” through *hundred*s.



The three workshop series each had a particular pedagogical ambition: The MA course was designed and taught by Aja Smith to let students experience the embodied nature of all scientific knowledge-making and attune them to the scientific potentials of their affective and bodily capacities. The Ph.D. workshop was co-facilitated by professor Jyoti Mistry, University of Gothenburg, and Anne Line Dalsgård with the main purpose of ‘getting to get the core’ of each project by engaging material objects and through exploratory writing. The three-day collaborative seminar was conceived by the two of us as an exploration of the somatic and affective experience of understanding; of the quality and anatomy of moments when understanding takes shape. Besides these particular ambitions of the workshops, all were more fundamentally developed to foster and further thought by making the body integral to thinking.

Inspired by Claire Petitmengin’s (2016) analysis of the “genesis of an idea” as occurring through three micro gestures, we see a related triad at stake in the design of these workshop series: each involving particular sets of methods for

respectively engaging, exploring and expressing theory. In the MA course, we engaged theory through multispecies approaches (e.g. Myers 2014) and contemplative methods such as "focusing" (Gendlin 1981); explored these engagements through interviews inspired by micro-phenomenology; and advanced engagements and explorations by expressing them in *hundreds* (Berlant & Stewart 2019). In the Ph.D. workshop we used objects to engage already conceived projects, *hundreds* to explore new theoretical insights, and visual or other media to express these insights. The final workshop series was a co-created examination of the concept of "understanding", engaged through contact improvisation, voice-based methods, Body-Mind-centering, eurythmics, trance and guided meditations, explored in collective drawings and scribblings, bodymapping (de Jager et al. 2016), phantasmal writing (Desjarlais 2018) and focusing, and expressed in *hundreds*.

Five different body-maps created as part of workshop series.

Nine of the contributions in this thematic thread figure *hundreds* from the workshops, while one is written in ten sets of *hundreds*. Therefore, the **first section** of the thread introduces the method of **Writing *Hundreds*** as **Exercising Thought**. Here we meet Vanessa Graf's writing where the hundreds serve as a vehicle for ideas; Ida Appel Vardinghus-Nielsen's for whom *hundreds* became a way of exploring and sustaining sensorial experience of otherness; and Katie Stewart's reflections on her and the late Berlant's joint work with *hundreds*, words and writing.

In the **second section**, the four contributors are all in their way in the pursuit of **Destabilising Concepts**: Clara Fuglsbjerg Ebberup reworks her bodily experience of limitation into a concept and method for approaching multispecies and other worlds; Katrine Frank Jørgensen delves bodily into the concept of response-ability and lands with uncertainty as an academic quality; Brendtner unsettles the concept "understanding" by sending it through veins and arteries in a recalibrating dance practice; and in the final piece of this section, Sigríður Þorgeirsdóttir sketches a philosophy that brings bodily and affective experience into concepts and thinking, asking us to think for ourselves.

In the **third section**, **Understanding as Resonance**, the essays explore that which happens when words are approached as sounds; what may thinking be, and with it understanding, if we take the idea of resonance literally? We walk with Mark Tatlow and an old cantata as he interrogates past and present meanings of listening and knowing; we run with Mona Nicolaysen, sensing the hefty heart-beating of staying with the trouble of murder, rape and geopolitics; and we move with Stine Simonsen Puri, as she teaches us how we may, eurythmically, share sounds with crows.

> *Moving with the opaque, with blood, to the music made by a crow or a heartbeat, along our bodily and sensorial limitation, we find ourselves in a sounding landscape where we may stretch our perceptive capacities towards new understandings through the soles of our feet and spectral hauntings, knowing we are always at the mercy of others and other forces than our own, even when we resonate in our own frequency.*

From resonance, we turn in the **fourth section** to three texts that in each their way unsettles traditional ideas of **Whose Thinking** thinking really is. In Joseph Dumit's text, sticks serve as partners in a movement score, mediating somatic experiences of opacity and fostering shared misunderstandings; Robert Desjarlais' text is a chasing of traces of a life once lived and a poetic argument about the spectral dimension of life and death and such spectrality's significance

for anthropology; and in Ida Sofie Matzen's writing, it's the soles of her bare feet and a raging anger that sets thoughts in motion and troubles our thoughts about thinking and theorising.

Not simply exploring what building a body for thought may mean, but actually "trying it on" and writing from such re-built bodies, the essays in this thread keep returning to the "border region where lived experience overflows our knowledge" (Lévi-Strauss in Siegel 1991, 477); where body and affect are part of thinking; where the sense of surplus, contradiction and hesitancy generated by bodily-affective methodologies and formative writing practices are allowed to destabilise concepts, thought and thinking. Moving with the opaque, with blood, to the music made by a crow or a heartbeat, along our bodily and sensorial limitation, we find ourselves in a sounding landscape where we may stretch our perceptive capacities towards new understandings through the soles of our feet and spectral hauntings, knowing we are always at the mercy of others and other forces than our own, even when we resonate in our own frequency. To stay there for a while, at the edge of the sensible, at the limits of the expressible, not knowing exactly the origin of your thinking, requires sustained training (Dalsgård 2018; Smith 2022). Such bodybuilding is indeed hard work, not least because it includes letting go of what each of us took to be 'my body'. It makes us stay somatically with the trouble (Haraway 2016), as raw as it may be, neither pretty nor pleasant (Matzen this tread). Yet it yields the much needed "muscles of response" (Berlant & Stewart 2019, 44) to become, eventually, continually, response-able.

In his generous review of this present introduction, Adolfo Estrella posed the basic yet essential question why "a different mode of thinking" requires a "different kind of body" – a question which inspired us to bring also this, the collective nature of thinking to the fore. Thinking does not end at the skin of any individual body; transpiring as a continual conversation with self, others, writing, the world – "with all the its encountered without quite touching or owning anything" (Stewart, this thread) – it requires relation. In a reflection of and paying respect to the collective nature of thinking, we have chosen to cite central aspects of each of the reviewers' comments in the respective section. We hope that this

openness shall inspire conversations to continue beyond the thread – beyond this present thinking.

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Section One: Writing Hundreds, Exercising Thought

Aja Smith
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Introduction: Writing Hundreds, Exercising Thought

Aja Smith and Anne Line Dalsgård

A text *becomes* when it is read. Its becoming may even be experienced as an event (Rosenblatt 1964). However, the writer may be the one who reads, the reader the one who writes – the reading-writer may be the one who witnesses her own writing and experiences the *becoming* of the text as an event. What then is the role of other readers when they read the reading-writer's text?

When reading the three texts of this, the first section of *Building Bodies for Thought*, the reviewer, Trine Brinkmann, came exactly to such questions about her role as their reader – an uncertainty that was not least caused by the sections' three authors' diverse use of Berlant and Stewart's method and format the *hundreds* (2019). *Hundreds* are texts that are exactly 100 words long – or

multiple sets of 100 words long texts, as Berlant and Stewart's book *The Hundreds* showcases through a compilation of their own *hundreds*. In their work *hundreds* seem to both work as an analytical tool and figure as poetic analysis of the world. But in the hands of other thinkers, the *hundreds* may come to work and figure also in others ways – as is the case in this present section.

As Brinkmann put it some of these *hundreds* seemed illustrative of a mode of embodied thinking "that leans into the indecisive, troublesome, messiness of things". Other *hundreds* rather seemed to serve to order related kinds of messiness – and as such perform as a method for turning unruly experience into rhythm, flow and argument. Others again seem to use the kind of seductive, aesthetic order which the rhythm and flow of *hundreds* induces to embrace and as such, in Brinkmann's words again, stay "truer to mess". We propose that you read these three texts exactly for such diversity; for their heterogeneous assembling of bodies, writing and thinking.

We begin with Vanessa Graf, for whom writing *hundreds* in itself is an activity of thought; her two *hundreds* bear not necessarily any connection or relation to one another, only by virtue of the function they serve as vehicles for the development of ideas. *Hundreds* are, for her, a discernment or thinking-through-writing that draws on the body in a search for an intuitive order of things as she lets "ideas simmer and brew" until they are "ready to be expressed with a word, a phrase, a paragraph" (Graf this thread). Here the body is one that walks, sits, explores a plant, allowing movement-touching-thinking-writing to together create rhythms and spaces for new thoughts.

In Ida Appel Vardinghus-Nielsen essay, she shows how *hundreds* may work as a phenomenological epoché – a suspension of judgement. Sparked by a plant-sensing experiment (Myers 2014) that inspired a sensation of roots emerging from the soles of her feet and deepened by way of a 'focussing' session (Gendlin 1981), the writing *hundreds* further sharpened her sensory perception and increased the attentiveness of her body. Returning to the plant sensing-thinking-writing experiment a second time, it all transpired 'more smoothly', as if her

body's alertness had indeed been strengthened. Here, a body of sensation and intuition, is drawn forth and made noticeable for both writers and readers.

Lastly, in her characteristic subtle style, perhaps with a slight touch of grief, Kathleen Stewart describes how, when writing together with *The Hundreds*' co-author the late Lauren Berlant, "[t]hought was a muscle flexed in the elaboration and fabulation of what was already textured, angled, composited" (Stewart this thread). We hear about leaning into silences, about getting to the precision of the thing and about all that which falls in between. Here, the *hundreds* was a body of thought exercised in the contact between bodies.

When reading across the three texts in this section, you may as Brinkmann did, get as much "a sense of embodied writing", as you get "a sense of bodies that are writing, and of written words turned into bodies". It is as if the three texts bear witness to different states of mind; we are shown snap-shots of ways of thinking, are allowed to finger the very fabric of different thought processes and are in the end left to ponder our own thinking and how it figures in our writing.

In a reflection of and paying respect to the collective nature of thinking, we have chosen to cite central aspects of the reviewers comments in each section. We hope that this openness shall inspire conversations to continue beyond the thread – beyond this present thinking.

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Academic Fictions, Fictitious Academics: Writing in *Hundreds*

Vanessa Graf

> *I met you at the end of days. You said it was cancer, though I thought it might have been the new industrial complex they had built next to your home a few*

years before, but it did not matter and so I sat and said nothing. You told me that you were not scared and I said that I was glad about that. You were climbing a leaf and I saw you crawling, your big bug eyes so scared, so when I reached out to crush you, I tried to be quick: You were the last of your kind.

This *hundreds* (the first *hundreds* I ever wrote), I simply thought of as a story: A self-contained narrative, told in a hundred words. It did not have to follow any other structure, or fit a certain format, nor did it have to fall clearly into any categories. Academic writing? Scientific article? Letter, poetry, literature, fiction? No matter, as long as it did not exceed or fall short of the word count. The instructions left out more than they specified: Do not be concerned with references, they said, don't overthink. Simply choose a situation, an experience, or an encounter, and write.

This is easier said than done, and so my notes app filled with fragments of sentences over the following days, none of them finding an easy connection to the next. The chaos of my notes reflected my preceding days' conversations at the time, about storytelling and speculative fabulation as ways of navigating and imagining the climate crisis. Extinction, ecologies, holobionts, and mushrooms – they all met in the fragments of my notes, a weird and wonderful assemblage of arts (and sciences) of living on a damaged planet (Tsing et al 2017).

The words that came into my head did so without first announcing their presence; they popped up as if out of nothing and I hurried to write them down before they vanished again. I did not think about them or try to make ideas fit a written frame, I did not strive towards coherence, nor did I actively choose a topic. Writing the first draft of my first *hundreds* was subconscious more than anything else, a bodily experience: letting ideas simmer and brew until they were ready to be expressed with a word, a phrase, a paragraph. My first *hundreds* was a condensation of thoughts and concepts exchanged, heard, and discussed in the two previous weeks; an almost spontaneous expression of thought processes that usually run in the back of my mind, unnoticed.

It remained in this unfinished state until a few days later, when I went on a walk and came upon an abandoned lot. It used to house part of a train track, behind a building which is currently a supermarket, and the unused space is now overgrown with wild herbs, littered with cigarette butts and empty beer bottles. I bent down to examine a plant I had not noticed before, and a sentence ran through my head: I met you at the end of days. *I met you at the end of days*, and all the words populating my notes app made sense, *I met you at the end of days*, and the rest of the *hundreds* all but wrote itself.

Since then, I have started to write *hundreds* whenever I need to discern a thought that has quietly been forming in the back of my mind, but so far has eluded any formalisation. Part fiction, part philosophical ideation, the *hundreds* provide me with an opportunity to step outside the tight constraints of academic writing and let my mind run free. They do not have to follow logic, form arguments, or interpret data; rather, they let me follow intuitions in a way that usually only fiction writing allows me to do. Like in that first attempt of writing a *hundreds*, the method acts as a vessel for the ideas, concepts, contexts, and inklings that are brewing in the background, out of focus – articulating what otherwise I could not (yet) have expressed. I see this process when I read back my *hundreds* now: Although they may appear to be ordered, a story neatly contained within itself, the words transport me to times in my research process where I was struggling, searching, questioning.

When I write *hundreds*, I write with a rhythm: There is a certain flow to the words, an intuitive order of things that, again, reminds me much more of fiction than it does of academic writing. Where usually I would write with the mind, ordering and structuring my words, in the *hundreds* (as in fiction), I write with the body. Priorities shift and perspectives are sharpened, nuances are introduced, and shades of gray become discernible. The practice of writing *hundreds* in an academic context exists in an in-between where rules are suspended, and certainties dissolved. They are thinking-through-writing, and as such they open space for discomfort and inquisitive questioning. They are wild and varied and nonsensical and informed, they are everything and nothing and all of them are

different, except for one aspect, of course: They are composed of a hundred words.

> *They thought it was weird when they found it, and everyone they showed it to agreed: How strange, how vast, how infinitely beautiful to be connected to everything and everyone all at once. A team came in to prod it and define it, somebody offered a name and then a tag, but the thing that stuck was nothing like it ever sounded. A man named Paul sat down to draw some dots, filled in the lines, and was left with three shapes. Let's choose this one, they said, that's what it will be, the most secure: Let's call it Cloud.*

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Sustaining the Experience of Difference

Ida Appel Vardinghus-Nielsen

As a budding anthropologist with limited experience of participant observation I began exploring the alertness and range of my senses in my living room. I was guided by Natasha Myers' (2014) text in which she offers entry points to imagining the different sensorial experiences of a plant, an exercise that supposedly helps sharpen sensory perception and increase the attentiveness of your body. And so, I stood in my living room, trying to grow leaves and dig my roots into the ground – meanwhile doubting that I was doing it right. How was I to feel a physical experience that in concrete material terms was not taking place? Nevertheless, I was surprised to feel roots growing from the soles of my feet and became fascinated with how far plant senses may reach.

This exercise was part of a course in my master's degree in which I was also introduced to the Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart's method of writing *hundreds* (2019). Based on this I was asked to try to capture the experience of my

sensorial engagement with plants through the act of writing *hundreds*: exactly one hundred words centred on the affective aspects of this exercise.

> I was a plant. I dipped my root into the tiny underground pool. With uncertainty, I understood that plants have their own sensuousness. So many contact points. A few days later I was looking at some big trees, their leaves were thrown around by the wind. The trunks stood completely still. Is it nice to shake like that? The wind also blew through my hair; we're shaking together, I thought. But do we experience the same? I think about usefulness, function. What do they gain from shaking like this? I don't ask – What do I gain from shaking like this?

Writing *hundreds* drove me back to the experience and made me inquire into it. What stood out was not doubt about whether I was doing the exercise correctly, but a fascination with the sensorial world of plants: I had started noticing trees, acknowledging their individual lives and experiences. This unexpected impact of my bodily engagement with plants only became clear when I began to write about the exercise and couldn't help but include the experience of swaying with trees in the wind.

I was fascinated with this new world yet, at the same time, I realized that I might never come to understand it fully. Dalsgård (2018) describes a similar situation as a moment of *epoché*: a moment of becoming aware of one's body in a way that calls attention to the difference in experience between oneself and the *other.* It is a bodily experience; it comes before any analysis. Actively creating the conditions for such moments to arise requires training, as does the ability to trust them as significant. I had many feelings in the moment of the exercise: doubt, attentiveness, imaginative sensorial impulses, and the smells, sounds, and temperatures of my immediate surroundings. How does your body learn to recognise nuances and patterns within this amalgam of impressions? By writing *hundreds* I noticed how I felt; I thought about what the trees felt and wondered how it was different and similar. It was only when I had to describe my sensory perceptions that I reflected on the extent to which I had tapped into a plant's perspective – and, further, how my sensory dispositions affect how I ask questions

about experience. Guided by what my body might already have known, writing helped me order the experiences and find patterns in cacophonic sensorial impulses. This revealed a gap between experiences. In this sense, writing *hundreds* sustained the subtle feelings of difference and made it possible to interrogate them, leading to new insights about the uniqueness of plant senses and the way my own senses shape and effect knowledge.

Returning anew to the exercise of expanding my senses through engagement with plants and writing, I came to experience and explore the interconnectedness of different beings in a forest:

> *Soft orange warmth and comfortable coolness. I'm at the mercy of the sun and shady entities. I'm grounded, but I can rustle, absorb, grow, and breathe. I'm never alone. Around, in, and on me are the sun, ants, larvae, and birds. The bird aids me by spreading my seeds, but it also has its own agenda. Its nest rests on a branch close to my trunk. And that's okay, it's nice, even though it doesn't serve my purpose in itself. But still, it has everything to do with me. I'm never without the forest. I do not control my connections.*

Experiencing *epoché*-like moments also entails letting the other world challenge your own perception and assumptions (Dalsgård 2018). Exploring connectedness within the forest made me think about my connections. How might I also be at the mercy of something? Although it sparked a search for similarities, this change of perspective upon my own existence came from a feeling of difference. I generally consider my body as bounded and my being as autonomous. Do I feel different from the tree because my idea of personhood blurs some of my connections? These types of questions came more smoothly this time around. My first attempt at writing *hundreds* had filtered out some of my concerns about 'doing it right'. This meant that other sensations could come to the fore.

Constrained by the hundred-word limit, I was forced to be precise and think about how every single word articulated and captured my experience. This process drew out and sustained my feelings of difference and provided an opportunity to notice

these feelings with more attention than was possible during the practice. When repeating the exercise I felt the effects, albeit small: greater calm and an enhanced sensuous attention towards the gaps between experiences. In this way the circular movement between experimenting with the range of my senses and *hundreds* trained my body's alertness and my ability to notice my sensorial predispositions in the moment.

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Flexing a Muscle

Kathleen Stewart

For Lauren and I, working collaboratively, The Hundreds was a mode of being in condensation and drift. A thought exercised by contact. We came to points and moved away again, playing with associations, cutting words to get to the precision of the thing about a birthday cake in a scene or what seemed to be happening in the end-of-shift talk on a city bench, the posturing of tired butts.

Thought was a muscle flexed in the elaboration and fabulation of what was already *textured, angled, composited. We leaned in, extending to catch something still coming from different directions at once in a quiet hotel corridor or the sensation of waiting.*

I became protective of the strange potentia in all worlds.

Lauren demanded a searing empathy for all the human fuck ups.

In the collaboration, there was anxiety, rawness, some pushing –"What do you mean by that? Where are you?" We were a subject's plastic contortions pulled onto a track for a minute and flailing. We held hands, or withheld, in the surprise negative space of contact points, detours, a change in register, a refrain stretching across modes.

Phone calls started with a frank toe poking into the water of the other to feel out the contours and fractals of some world dinging them, the words they were coming up with, the sonorous compositional field they had entered. Through ins and outs we revved up to the threshold into the sharp or the hilarious; the riff of a sentient mind was a heaven built on worldly bits.

Lauren was a race horse chomping at the bit.

I was impassive in an exposure to the noise and wind of what was at hand.

Between us, things muscled through. We flexed lines of response by thinking with rhythms and tones, characters and benches. In between the 'us' and the 'it', between looker and object, minor keys roosted beyond critique's rough handling – not just reason's leftovers, not the imperceptible, insignificant, marginal, micro, or beyond language but the cul de sac of a meanwhile, the fake fundaments of what hardened up for some, the sloppy dissolution of a public memory, a homing, an energetic entrapment or release.

Editing under the warm constraint of one hundred words, we were tight with words and events; they became the material and aesthetic medium of thought. *We built our chops on the incidental or the actuality of a snowflake; we knew we were lucky to be grasping at* things that didn't just add up. A privileged seat at a distant table was not where we wanted to end up.

Pulling into rickety alignment with things, we skirted the edges of what *transed and skewed, the excess in an awkward swipe. We felt the capacities in a gesture still verging, a look lingering for no known reason. We saw the* improvisatory conceptuality *in* a colour or the quality of the sun.

Writing, like any practice of living, became not just a routine act but the tendon of a tendency. We stayed with what couldn't just be explained in a vie for clarity or a vote for face value.

Writing with the nervous system of prolific and shrinking worlds taking place in

fits and starts *was a nimble repositioning, transportive and differently attuned to remnants, the disappearance of a tiny snow bird, the activations and deactivations that hummed in the background of a scene, everything that was wasted in a missed opportunity or a sharp extraction, the prism of things actualized, corrupted or unrequited. We waited for* eddies twisting off an edge; we tried to catch up with what was already mired in a shoulder shrugged.

We wrote for what happened between *the immediate and what gets abstracted.* We w*orked in parallel with each other as readers and with all the its encountered without quite touching or owning anything. We quickened at a passing glance or an* entanglement folding back on itself.

The object of exercised thought was a sounding we learned to make, a glimpse we tried to catch; the lily pad of a quick landing and a bounce in a speculative impersonal world of loss and generativity.

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SECTION TWO: DESTABILISING CONCEPTS

Aja Smith
June, 2023

Introduction: Destabilising Concepts

Aja Smith and Anne Line Dalsgård

Moving from the first section of the thread where *hundreds* performed as much as a method for ordering the messiness of embodied research, as a vehicle for such and the general messiness of ordinary life, in this second section we ask how we may use our bodies and writing to destabilise concepts? Because however much care and attention we pay to every single word and to all *Hundreds* and thousands of them, we cannot escape the limitations set by words. We cannot as Ursula K. Le Guin (1985) proposes simply "unname" colours, things and beings of our worlds; concepts form our thinking whether we want it or not (Brandel & Motta 2021). They are, as such, both resources for and actors in thinking; trafficking each a host of limitations and allowances. But can we not destabilise concepts to experience, say, a colour "as more a presence than a sign, more a force than a code" (Taussig 2009: 7)? Can we not, at the limit of our sensorial abilities, find a zone for making contact with other worlds, a zone for thinking other thoughts?

> *However much care and attention we pay, we cannot escape the limitations set by words.*

This is exactly what Clara Fuglsbjerg Ebberup asks in her essay that opens the section, and in which we meet her standing in her window sill to imagine what it might feel like to be a plant. The following three essays all revolve around related methodologies that set concepts in motion. But it is not only that concepts are made to move, as the reviewer Donata Schöeller experienced, catching herself on the window sill with Ebberup; these are methodologies that set bodies in motion, literally and imaginatively. In the second text, Katrine Frank Jørgensen takes us on micro-phenomenologically inspired exploration of the concept of response-ability (Haraway 2016) – an exploration that leads Jørgensen to embrace the uncertain and indefinite in academic work. Fine Brendtner in her essay moves the concept "understanding" along the maelstrom of blood that gushes inside us all;

Brendtner leads us through arterial and venous qualities and towards fresh thinking about direction, relation and hesitation. Fresh and novel thinking is exactly what Sigríður Þorgeirsdóttir hopes to foster, by bringing thinking and thinkers back in touch with life and living. By employing methods for critical embodied thinking, she shows how we can bring bodily and affective experience into a concept, otherwise most commonly polished clean of such destabilising dimensions.

The experience of reading these four texts together, inspired Schöeller to ponder whether language that may move readers and their bodies "is the mark of a more embodied approach within research". To us, the texts in this section further show that while some concepts stiffen into ontological dumpings (Hastrup 1999), others seem even in themselves to hold a destabilising force. These are concepts that carry calls for action; approaches to thinking that in and of themselves asks us to act: To "defrost" (Mattingly 2020), "sensitise" (Latour 2014), "quicken" (Guyer 2013) or "enliven" (Ballestro and Winterreick 2022) concepts; to experience the "felt sense" (Gendlin 1981; Schoeller and Thorgeirsdottir. 2019) of phenomena, to develop our "response-abilities" and to "stay with the trouble" (Haraway 2016).

In a reflection of and paying respect to the collective nature of thinking, we have chosen to cite central aspects of the reviewers comments in each section. We hope that this openness shall inspire conversations to continue beyond the thread – beyond this present thinking.

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Limitation as Contact

Clara Fuglsbjerg Ebberup

There is a pelargonium houseplant on my windowsill. I move it to stand there

myself. The leaves touch my arm and leave a lemony scent on my skin. Outside a woman walks by – is it silly that I stand here, on a windowsill? Extending towards the sunlight, I hit my forehead against the window and my elbow against the wall. I feel my biology holding me back. It is not comfortable to stand on a windowsill. The white painted wood beneath my feet is cold. It provides no fertile ground for sprouting roots, no foundation for growing, for sensing. Limitation.

The hundred words above, inspired by Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart's concept of *Hundreds* (Berlant & Stewart 2019), is a literary attempt to unfold and understand, an experiment to sense the perspective of a pelargonium houseplant. Both this literary reflection and my sensorial attempts to move closer to the perspective of a plant, however, seemed at first to fail. All I sensed were limitations, frustrations, and constraints. But instead of stopping at the frustrating sense of limitation or trying to transcend these constraints, I want, in this essay, to reflect on what speculative and epistemic potential lies in "staying with the trouble" of limitations (Haraway 2016). What happens if I move along (and not away from or beyond) my methodological, epistemological, and bodily limitations? What might I learn from the challenging encounter with a pelargonium houseplant?

Pelargonium houseplants are one of the large wild South African pelargoniums brought to Europe in the 18th century where, through breeding and cultivation, they eventually came to stand in homes in small pots spreading the scents of rose, mint, or lemon. My pelargonium spreads a scent of lemon every morning when I open the window behind it, yet it has never occurred to me to notice it as anything other than an object. Inspired by Natasha Myers' exercise to cultivate imaginative sensoria (Myers 2014), however, I tried to sense like my pelargonium, to stand on the windowsill as it does and extend towards the sunlight. But I hit my forehead against the window and my elbow against the wall. It was not comfortable to stand on a windowsill like a plant in a pot. I felt limited, and the experiment felt more silly than illuminating, more frustrating than successful. Yet

reading Kathryn Yusoff (2013) alerted me to other possible dimensions of the experience: what if the limitation I experienced could tell me something about being a pelargonium? Could it be that the limitations I sensed resembled the limitations of a plant in a small pot on a cold, north-facing windowsill? The perspective of a pelargonium. On the other hand, can I really sense the world like a houseplant?

Such questioning of our ability to sense, understand, and respond to nonhuman worlds is central for Yusoff. In her work, 'sense' is both bodily sensory experience (*to sense*) and comprehension (*to make sense*), and our ability to sense others is closely related to our capacity for understanding and compassion . Yusoff's interest centres on how we might come to sense and make sense of that which lies just on the edge of the sensible: the 'insensible' . Maybe I experience the sensation of limitation because the pelargonium is 'insensible' to my (human) perception and understanding. The limitations and frustrations I sensed might therefore seem like signs of a failed experiment, yet there is theoretical potential in the 'insensible' and thus in the sensation of limitation. Yusoff asks rhetorically, "could we ever really grasp just how strange other lives are?", not to discourage us from attempting to understand beings beyond ourselves but rather to inspire us to address "the surplus that falls short of sense": that which lies just on the border of our comprehension (*ibid,* 218, 224).

I do not know whether it is my own limitations, an experience resembling that of the plant, or both that shine through in my sensorial and literary experiments to move closer to the perspective of a pelargonium. But does it really matter?

The experience of limitation occurs in the encounter with something. It is an experience I can have because I have a body – a moved and moving body. Without a body I would not sense limitations: hit my forehead against the window or my elbow against the wall. But nor would I be able to come into contact with other bodies. Without body and affect the anthropologist would not be able to sense and in turn understand, care for, or respond to others. I would neither experience limitation nor comprehension in the encounter with a pelargonium houseplant.

Limitation, in this sense, might not be the limitation *of* but rather a vantage point *for* ethnographic insight.

> *The experience of limitation occurs in the encounter with something.*

If I think of limitation as a form of contact zone between bodies and perspectives it becomes clear that limitation does not mean delimitation; it is not a sharp line between self and other, between me and the pelargonium. On the contrary, like Mary Louise Pratt's concept of contact zones, contact zones of limitations are spaces where we "meet, clash, and grapple with each other" (Pratt 2007: 7). They are spaces where bodies and perceptions are unsettled, shaped, and affected by other bodies and perceptions as they tumble into one another in ways that may feel frustrating and silly but simultaneously hold the potential to inspire and excite. These contact zones of limitation hold an epistemological potential, an invitation to address "the edge of the sensible" (Smith 2022), to move along our epistemological and bodily limitations, not to know anything for certain but to allow for some speculative understanding to transpire between our different bodies and perspectives. These, I think, are the troubles and potentials of limitations.

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Engaging Concepts by way of the Body

Katrine Frank Jørgensen

How does a theoretical concept feel? And how does my bodily response to a theoretical concept enliven it and make it available? What does it mean to engage with a theoretical concept in a bodily manner and how can such an engagement

inspire new forms of bodily availabilities? The answers to these questions are neither simple nor unambiguous but these were the questions evoked in me when faced with the task of micro-phenomenologically exploring Donna Haraway's concept of *response-ability* and when later writing *Hundreds* to flesh out my own sense of the concept.

My body is alive. I live with my body. I live in my body. I live as my body. I am my body. I meet the world and others with my body and together we dance. We intertwine and allow ourselves to be influenced, shaped, changed. We are not delimited physical objects, but malleable in the encounter with others, with something else. A cold tile floor, a word. Sometimes I forget, but I will remember that just that feeling is also a part of my lived and living body. A part of the body with which I am and do.

Exploring a theoretical concept micro-phenomenologically entails directing one's attention away from thinking about content and towards how the concept is bodily experienced. Micro-phenomenology has proven that one's understanding of a concept begins in the body and, therefore, we should focus on this bodily response in order to flesh out a concept rather than favoring an essentialized, reified meaning outside of ourselves (Petitmengin, 2016: 30, 35). Approaching the concept of response-ability through micro-phenomenological explorations thus became a way for me to bodily experience this shift in attention by allowing my bodily encounter with the concept to awaken.

When exploring the concept, I remember how I found it hard to feel something at first. I tried to close my eyes and to let the thoughts that appeared in my head float by like clouds, to not let them steer my focus away from my bodily experiencing of the concept. It was difficult, I thought to myself, as I noticed how my body felt awake, but also hesitant. I remember sensing my surroundings clearly, the chair I was sitting on, the distance to the walls around me, and the tile floor my feet were touching. I tried to feel the concept instead of just thinking

about it, and after a while, I began seeing an image of unicellular organisms moving in, between, and around each other in flowing movements, both pushing and pulling; unicellular organisms intra-acting with each other (Barad, 2007: 33). Through this image, I then started to pay even greater attention to how the different elements around me felt and how I might affect them as well. Maybe the tile floor under my feet felt the pressure of my shoes against it? The image made me feel as if I was, just like the unicellular organisms, intra-acting with my surroundings.

I continued to feel both awake and hesitant but, in a way, these co-existing feelings and how they affected my intra-action with my surroundings, began telling me something about the concept and what Haraway may have been suggesting when discussing our responsibilities as multispecies organisms living together.

I take response-ability from Haraway, as it refers to the abilities required to live in and respond to disturbing times in an ethically sound manner. In her view we not only have to sensitise our bodies in order to better grasp our worlds, we must also learn to respond ethically to the situations in which we find ourselves; we need to sharpen our response-abilities and engage ourselves with what seems troubling, letting it unfold and affect us (Haraway, 2016: 1). From this perspective, the world is not outside of ourselves, but is rather created with us and through us.

In my bodily experience of exploring the concept, allowing myself to let go of this essentialized, reified meaning outside of myself required me also to accept or at least move with the uncertainty that came with it. As mentioned, the image of unicellular organisms that appeared before my eyes when trying to feel the concept instead of just thinking about it made me pay even greater attention to my surroundings than I already was. It made me think of my surroundings as elements I was intra-acting with, thus allowing a sense of mutual influence to arise. And meeting my surroundings anew in this way, I started to realise, might be what Haraway is suggesting as the first step in approaching a better and

kinder way of living together as multispecies organisms. Through paying attention to detail, multiplicity can arise, and the world thereby becomes unfixed, and, most importantly, open to change.

> *Leaning into co-existing or even contradictory feelings is exactly what is necessary in order to find a point of balance to speak and act from.*

In my explorations, I felt this need for an attention to detail when attempting to let go of already established ideas and accept the uncertainty that manifested itself, when I started to think of my body as more than just my body. As I was feeling both hesitancy and wakefulness, I had to navigate with detail, which shaped my intra-action with my surroundings and thus how the concept unfolded for me. I remember how I felt a bit annoyed at myself in the situation for not being able to let go of the hesitancy. However, reflecting on it now, those co-existing feelings were highly important in telling me something about the concept of response-ability. I think what Haraway is suggesting, is that it is exactly *through* these bodily responses to my intra-action with my surroundings that I am able to tune in on how I respond in the best way possible. Leaning into co-existing or even contradictory feelings is exactly what is necessary in order to find a point of balance to speak and act from.

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Moving with Blood – An Experiential Anatomy for Thought

Fine Brendtner

This is an invitation. An invitation to feel your fluid body awash in blood as it moves through space. A single blood cell travels from our hearts to our organs,

fingers, toes and back again in under sixty seconds; a maelstrom of vital matter gushing inside us. *How does it feel to relate to a body of blood? How can we use our bodies to understand fieldwork moments that physically affect us? What is revealed when we move while we ponder the things which move us?* These are the questions that my colleague Mette and I explored in a movement workshop we created for the research group *Embodying Academia*.

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It started with nit-picking and blood. Mette and I sat on the floor of her office and hashed out ideas for an upcoming workshop. The research network *Embodying Academia* had asked us to join a co-created workshop series on the concept of "understanding" in a context where bodies become the core tool for academic knowledge making. I was the one doing the nit-picking. Carefully, I hesitated over the word: understanding. There was something irritating about the "standing" part. It rang rigid; deceivingly solid. During the past year I had done ship-based fieldwork at sea, where my body of study had been in constant motion, both figuratively and literally. From a marine point of view, ground is replaced by water, steadfastness by motion and understanding is on the move. To make sense of how the materiality of human bodies doing research at sea matters to natural and social sciences, I playfully drew on my personal dance practice as an epistemological entry point. Approaching embodied states as a form of situated, material and practical knowledge making after Haraway (1988), theory became paired with insights from somatic movement practices, such as the experiential anatomy of Body-Mind Centering (Bainbridge-Cohen 1993). In BMC one learns to fine tune one's somatic perception by visualizing the internal fluids of the body throughout movement exercises. Fluids here mediate the dynamics of flow between rest and mobility and make the dancer present to constant transformation in the flux of alignment. I used this practice to explore the material dimension of embodied research and how it affects analysis at sea, a place where the researcher sways in sync with a seesaw horizon. It let me to ask my share of workshop prompts: What is revealed when we move while we ponder the things which move us? How can we use our bodies to understand fieldwork
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moments that physically affect us?

Mette recalled a time when she had hesitated at one such moment during her work as a medical anthropologist. It was during her research on healing environments in haematological cancer treatments and care, that she suddenly found herself entrusted with a bag of blood platelets next to a patient's bed (Høybye 2013). Standing inside the haematology ward at a Danish university hospital, Mette was told to keep the bag moving until a nurse would be ready to set up an infusion. Blood and practices of blood (sampling, counting, measuring etc.) were central to the everyday on the ward and her fieldnotes and interview transcripts were full of it. Yet, when she felt the life-giving substance, mediated by the plastic pouch moving inside her hands, Mette wondered how to put words to the immediacy, presence and meaning in this embodied experience. How does it feel to relate to a body of blood? This was the fieldwork question that she brought with her. We decided to join our explorations.

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When doing fieldwork, most research eventually comes up against the insistent curiosities of material influences from our environment. Admittedly, blood is not usually one of them. In a dance studio, Mette, I, and other research members workshopped our questions through bodily practice. Participants moved in their own tempo, form, and ability. They investigated our questions, while I shared BMC® prompts to guide them in imagining their felt anatomy:

Let your heart lean into your hand and feel it beating inside your palm.

Breathe into that space behind your sternum.

Imagine breathing into your heart, an organ awash in blood, an organ both tender and strong.

Imagine your heart's rhythm to continue flowing throughout your blood vessels,

into your centre and out into arms, fingers, legs, and toes.
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Arterial blood moving from centre to periphery, venous blood moving from periphery to centre.

Move and feel touch pushing from your body into your surroundings.

Move and feel your surroundings push touch into your body.

Using our bodily senses is one of the most primal and everyday ways to engage with and respond to our surroundings. When we build theory by practicing ethnography, it is as much the outcome of informed scholarship as it is a wording of our physical interrelations. As embodied researchers we are the material that brushes against the world and our bodies form our tools for exploration. Yet, how do we come to access what our bodies know?

When we use BMC as a tool for bodily understanding we re-calibrate our 'somatic modes of attention' (Csordas 1993.). Improvisation, playfulness, and guided awareness allow for spontaneity in thought and observation that go beyond pre-patterned understandings. With this agentive use of somatic attention, we access a movement-based heuristic of body-mind relations and environmental entanglements. Does such a practice not qualify to access the materiality of fieldwork moments that physically move us; to help us think matter with matter, after material feminist thought; to engage an intuitive dimension of bodily knowing in unexpected sites of study?

To practice somatic awareness in movement exercises, such as those coming out of BMC, allows principles and thoughts to emerge out of that practice. We generate these principles and thoughts through our bodily experience of imagination, guided awareness, and intuitive improvisation. When we move as "a fluid body awash in blood", imagination and improvisation allow us a novel way to relate and expand our potential for understanding. We experience our positionality in material ways that open nuanced analyses of for instance directionality. In the workshop, we explored an "arterial quality" that pushes

touch and thought from our body as the centre to the periphery of our environment. Alternatively, we changed our mode of attention to a “venous quality”, one that receives information and traces thoughts as they travel from the periphery to inform our centre. In other words: We leaned into walls, then let walls lean into us. We pushed into the floor, then let the floor push into us. We touched others, then let others touch us. We danced, jumped, lay, listened, leaned. We reflected in *Hundreds (Berlant & Steward 2019)*. One participant wrote:

Bloody ocean – bloody veins

Streams

Leading to extremities.

Stretching out far

And returning to centre.

Renewed. Re-formed

By each breath inside,

Each breath outside.

We dance. We touch. We move into waves.

We sing with voices

Not stoned by fear –

Not alone within our skins.

We really want this

And the castles of the words tremble –

For seconds, even minutes at a time.

Beings. Branches. Grasses.

Winds and fires.

We shed one skin

After the other.

Oceans of blood. Rivers of bones.

We stretch our arms. Stretch them further.

We jump out of standing

And into Under-

Wonder

(C. Lanken)

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A Leap into a Practice of Embodied Thinking

Sigríður Þorgeirsdóttir

This is a photo of myself in front of a picture of "The Thinker". The artwork was one of the pieces that Katrín Ólína did for a philosophical art exhibition, MINISOPHY, which we did together in Reykjavík in 2020. As a parody of Rodin´s emblematic sculpture of philosophical thinking, "The Thinker" is here portrayed

as a skeleton with a parrot´s head, displaying scholarly discourse that has become out of touch, repeating phrases and concepts in a parrotlike manner. Such a thinker is "lost in abstraction".[i] This image of the thinker parodies the cliché-image of scholars who use concepts and theories as if they were playing a game of cards that they have learned to play effectively and self-assuredly, and yet there is a hollow tone to their speech, as if a cultivation of a connection to their own living thinking is somehow missing.

Major schools of contemporary philosophy, be it analytical, phenomenological or feminist/queer philosophy, have emphasised how thinking for oneself is the core of philosophical thinking because philosophy is the type of thinking that is at the same time highly individual and universal. The philosophical in philosophy consists precisely in forging a link between a thought that has a source in the person –the acquired knowledge they possess through experiences, learning, language, and socio-political positionality– and a generalisation of that thought into universal, abstract concepts or general principles that express a problem or describe an actual phenomenon that is theoretically relevant. Scholars and scientists operate in a similar manner insofar they are the source of the questions and the themes they chose to research with the distinct methods of their disciplines, be they empirical, analytical or hermeneutical.

Insofar philosophers have themselves as a source of reflecting topics, issues, phenomena and problems, they are kind of their own laboratory. Philosophical reflections cannot only consist in combining positions, abiding by rules of logical coherence that yield a conclusion, an argument, a thesis. Such a process of philosophical thinking would amount to a mechanical, formalistic conception of it, and it would not accommodate the truly philosophical and scientific which is to shed some new light on a topic and conceptualise something in a fresh way that shows limits of previous positions or discloses new perspectives and potentials of them in order to increase understanding and carry knowledge forward. Innovative thinking has always consisted in unsettling habituated patterns of the logical, making it more logical, and in redefining concepts or inventing new ones.

But something is missing. Like Claire Petitmengin writes, the “scientist´s body” is “at the source of meaning” leading her to develop micro-phenomenology as a methodology to access lived experience through in-depth interviews and as a source of knowledge that is relevant for scientific research (2016). The philosophically thinking subject is neither purely neutral, generic, objective nor is it reducible to its socio-cultural determinants. In order to account for novelty or freshness in philosophical thinking we need to have a concept of a first-person perspective that is both socially situated and individual in thinking. It is embodiment that is the juncture of the social and the personal because each and every body is differentially situated historically, culturally, socially and represents a unique perspective. It is therefore embodied thinking that can account for the unique perspective that is the source of philosophical reflection while at the same time being socio-culturally situated. Embodied thinkers occupy a position of the practice of philosophy that unites an embodied source of thought and the ability to generalise it in abstract terms in accord with the context of philosophical styles or schools out of which they philosophize.

Cognitive sciences confirm that thinking is embodied, embedded, extended and enacted (Schoeller and Thorgeirsdottir 2019). Yet, what implications does that have for the practice of thinking embodied in an individual, non-neutral and contextual way? In the last few decades philosophers have begun to develop practices and methodologies of embodied thinking. These methodologies are still marginal in mainstream schools of Western philosophy. Methodologies of embodied thinking are hence the missing link for it is not enough to know, research, write and talk about the interplay of cognition and affect, mind and body. One also has to take the leap into the practice of embodied thinking by practicing methodologies of embodied thinking.

> *Methods of embodied thinking as well as insights of humanistic psychology contribute to an innovation of the practice of contemplative dimension of philosophical thinking.*

It is a challenge to describe a practice for someone who has not had an experience of it even though this practice is something that has always been part of any thinking that we label as original, creative, to the point, precise, etc. Contemplation has always characterised what we call deep and profound thinking, but it is the new cognitive sciences that have made explicit how embodied thinking as philosophical contemplation functions as a certain experience of thinking. Methods of embodied thinking as well as insights of humanistic psychology contribute to an innovation of the practice of contemplative dimension of philosophical thinking. Methodologies of embodied thinking such as Eugene Gendlin´s "Thinking at the Edge" (Gendlin 2004) and microphenomenological methods envigorate the core of the ability of thinking for oneself, of finding meaning and sense in relation to an experienced world, and not just re-iterate topics of an established discourse. These are methodologies for theorising that approach the body of the researcher as doubly charged: with the potentials for sensitizing itself to the theory it already carries and for returning life to theory. The methodologies of embodied thinking "build the body of theory". The phrase "building the body of theory" is then in the context of embodied critical thinking not a metaphor but points to an actual stretching and thickening of thought and articulation of theory transpiring through methodologies of embodied critical and creative thinking.

Our research project includes a training program for embodied critical thinking. However on a more artistic note, for the MINISOPHY exhibition mentioned at the beginning, Katrín Ólína and I have put together exercises that are meant to evoke embodied reflection about everyday things and phenomena. Here are two of them, one on breathing and another one on something as mundane as an ordinary rock.

An ordinary rock shows you that the mundane can be interesting.

Think a moment: A rock is neither bored nor expects it anything. A rock just is

in the now. Not burdened by the past, nor anxious about the future. The most profound philosophy builds on the simplest of ideas, far simpler than we normally think.

Take a moment: Adopt this rock-solid attitude today. Check if something you may view as plain or uninteresting, like a very ordinary rock, has something important to tell you.

The breathing person suggests that you know that a person's breathing says a lot.

Think a moment: The soul has in philosophy always been associated with breath. All living things breathe and the quality of one's breath is a basic expression of life.

Take a moment: Notice how the other person you are talking to breathes. Fast, slow, agitated or calm? Observe how the breathing and the content of what they are saying are related. Are their thoughts alive? How are their breathing and what they say connected? Breathing with your whole body helps you think more fully.

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Footnoot

[i] Thanks to Anne Sauka for this term of "lost in abstraction".

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Featured image by Clara Fuglsbjerg Ebberup.

Section Three: Understanding as Resonance

Aja Smith
June, 2023

Introduction: Understanding as Resonance

Aja Smith and Anne Line Dalsgård

In this **third section of the thread**, **Understanding as Resonance**, the essays explore that which happens when words are approached as sounds – be it the sounds we may share with a crow, an old cantata or the sound of speedily

throbbing heartbeats, evoking the feel of fearful and much too hasty running. They ask what thinking may be and, with it, understanding, if we take the notion of resonance literally. *Resonance* was the term which Unni Wikan in 1992 famously employed to conceptualise a recognition of sameness in the face of diversity. A recognition which, in order to manifest, demands something of both parties, namely, "an effort at feeling-thought; a willingness to engage with another world, life, or idea; an ability to use one's experience" (ibid, 463). More recently, the sociologist Hartmut Rosa has used the Latin etymology of the word, *re-sound*, to conceptualise resonance as a relationship between subject and world; "between two vibratory bodies whereby the vibration of one body […] stimulates the other to produce *its own frequency*" (2016, 165; italics original). While Wikan focuses on resonance as a yielding into the context of the other, and Rosa approaches resonance as a bodily sustained capacity, neither of them addresses the question of how to acquire (or not to lose) such a capacity.

In this section, knitting, listening to music while walking, and giving form to sounds through movement are ways of vibrating, respectively the pain of tragic rape, the listening of another time and the message from a crow, in one's own frequency. Each writer uses his or her specially tuned capacities to enable experiences of resonance to form in their own bodies, allowing them to approach other bodies with attuned sensitivities. Mark Tatlow has a background as a classically trained musician. His Ph.D. project experiments with the performance of early vocal music and looks at how this repertoire might speak into a world facing a possibly catastrophic future. Mona Nicolaysen's background as a Reggio Emilia-inspired kindergarten teacher draws art and activism into her Ph.D. work, in which she tries to grasp other ways of knowing the world. And besides being an anthropologist, the last writer Stine Puri is trained as a dancer and teacher of eurythmy. They bring these sensibilities into their work and show, each in their way, how their own experience of resonance provides an embodied understanding of phenomena inseparable from an acute sense of responsibility towards a body different from one's own and inherently, always, unknowable. There is no mergence here then between researcher and subject, as the reviewer Çiçek

Ilengiz ponders, but rather texts that in themselves may be experienced as “new vibratory bodies”, as Illengiz so precisely puts it; vibratory textual bodies produced in the in-between of “researcher and the subject of research”.

In a reflection of and paying respect to the collective nature of thinking, we have chosen to cite central aspects of the reviewers comments in each section. We hope that this openness shall inspire conversations to continue beyond the thread – beyond this present thinking.

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Theorising the Then and the Now Through an Old Cantata

Mark Tatlow

In a recent ethnography workshop I decided to explore what kind of thing the performance of an eighteenth-century cantata by George Frideric Handel might be [1]. In his book “Enacting Musical Time” Mariusz Kozak writes: “I propose that an active, bodily engagement with musical sounds offers a window into a pre-linguistic, non-representational significance, which discloses music as a temporal object by retaining the dynamical nature of time.” (2020, 10) He goes on to suggest that this “implicates both the listening body and the musical temporal objects as the co-creators of time.” (*Ibid*.) I decided to use these ideas as the basis for an investigation of the musical sounds of the Handel cantata, as experienced in performance by my listening body.

> *Touching. A finger touches and depresses a key. Flesh against wood. Wood against plastic against metal. Metal against molecules of air… There is sound.*

A piece of music from an earlier time can be considered, almost by definition, to have lost much of its original context. It can no longer be played or heard as it was at the time of its composition. Like an old path, it is now surrounded by what Robert Macfarlane terms the *debris and phenomena* of today (2012, 33). I was interested in finding out how performing the cantata might relate to walking an old path. I therefore chose a path that my body knew well, one that I had walked regularly as an undergraduate student, supposing that if I re-walked it now, I could attend to the debris and phenomena that had accumulated during the intervening years. My experimental programme was simple:

1. Re-walk the walk from outside my college room to the University Library, while

- listening to my body,
- attending to today's debris and phenomena, and
- documenting the experience by taking photos on my iPhone.

2. Once outside the library, write some notes.
3. Return to my room by the same route.

I located the debris and phenomena in the many closed gates and grilles: barriers erected since my undergraduate days. My attention turned to the question of accessibility; who was denied access to the university *then*? who is denied access *now*?

Reading my notes and looking at the photos, I wrote, and later revised, several *hundreds* to help me reflect upon, contextualise, and theorise the experiment. In my mind I placed the bodily experience of playing the cantata accompaniment on

the harpsichord alongside the insights I gained while walking to the library:

> Touching. A finger touches and depresses a key. Flesh against wood. Wood against plastic against metal. Metal against molecules of air… There is sound. More fingers touch more keys… There is music, which touches ears and gets into bodies, and is said to be touching. Mariusz Kozak proposes that music be considered a temporal object. But can sound materialise in this way: appearing, disappearing, and reappearing? Seemingly. If a body is touched, and the touching leaves traces in the memory, something has done the touching. Is this kind of touching encompassed by François Couperin's phrase "L'art de toucher le clavecin?" [2]
>
> Listening. I listen, and I hear music. Now. Today. Viola da gambist Jordi Savall plays "early music;" although he insists he plays only "contemporary music." [3] I listen, and I hear music. Now. Today. But I am touched by music that has been touched by another time, another place, another world. The past. A past that was once present, in which people grappled, as we do, with existential questions. Robert Macfarlane says that we read old paths in the *then*, but walk them in the *now*… surrounded by the *debris and phenomena* of today. Is this how to play earlier music?
>
> Walking. Playing is like walking. I am a playing, walking, listening body. I walk from my old university room to my library desk, re-walking a path I first walked years ago. Then, the path was new to me. It did not reveal its memories, nor exhibit any disturbing debris, or extraneous phenomena. Now, years later, I notice all of them. I'm surrounded by gates, grilles, and barriers constructed then, experienced now. Who was denied access then? Who is denied access now? If playing earlier music is like walking an old path, shouldn't I change how I play, how I touch?

I used two sets of keywords to help me negotiate the shift in time and relate it to the question of access to the cantata today. Starting in 1709 I followed an associative route across the centuries, only to find that in 2022 the keywords had scarcely changed

1709 keywords — war | famine | climate change | refugee crisis | plague

in 1709 mr Handel wrote a cantata about love and separation

we find it in the archive | a monodrama for

reciting | lamenting | improvising | performing

“dear walls | since I now wander around you | in vain

if once you held my Love | hold now my Faith”

which walls | bearing the traces of past togetherness

which storytelling singer | which musicians

wandering | in vain | holding faith | searching solace

was it only mr Handel’s music they sang | and played

from their store of embodied memories

(Eleonora Fabião dreams up programs

she *programs* herself *to act them out*

historiographer and performance artist in one body)

was mr Handel’s cantata first a dream | for us to re-dream | as a program |

is it OK thus to actualise an archival remnant | unsealing a reservoir of tears

once the outpouring of an earlier wanderer | may we

can we follow Robert Macfarlane

along *old ways* | covered with the *debris and phenomena of the present*

catching reflected memories | not representing | but being | delinking

ourselves | as Walter Mignolo suggests | from colonial masters

neither seen nor heard | but still holding us in their grip

This is an archival entry I wandered with, wrestled with, in my studio; closed in by walls—lovingly listening, but cruelly separating—while a screen veiled the precarity of faith in an archival future, in which dreams may perhaps be re-membered, and solace found, despite

pandemic | refugee crisis | climate change | famine | war — keywords 2022

While walking the inescapable realities of their now, Handel and his anonymous poet point to a brighter future; the beauty of the cantata’s words and music

jarring with the harsh realities of its context. We cannot know if poet or composer ever dreamt the story of this cantata, not whether such dreaming may in part have been a nostalgic longing for the peacefulness of Arcadia. When you or I re-dream the story, however, we can choose to engage not with the past, but with the future; and in performing the cantata now, we can encourage the emergence of the very future we dream of.

This workshop experiment suggests that walking through an old eighteenth-century cantata can engage an audience today, if performers develop an awareness of the barriers to its accessibility. If in consequence they adapt their way of touching the audience, they can create a pathway to a brighter future

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Knitting Heartbeats, Crafting Theory

Mona Nicolaysen

In a PhD course at the University of Gothenburg the participants were asked to bring an object from their research. I chose a stitch marker [4] shaped as a heart, and from this *hundreds* were written. The following three sets of *hundreds* and all the other words in this paper are written with ethical struggles. They arise from an artistic practice developed to grasp my field of research. My research explores spaces of aesthetic expressions and utterances for young children in Gaza. Coming to this Ph.D. research from a background as a kindergarten teacher in Norway, it was important to find a path to better understand the context in which this research is positioned. I developed the artistic practice of knitting annual statistics of people being killed by someone from the other side in Palestine and Israel, crafting throws showing each country's loss. Before you continue reading, I invite you to get to know the knitting through the website knittingstatistics.

Hundreds of beating hearts written at the PhD course:

> You know, when you've run so fast that your heart is thumping in your chest and others only see your chest rise and fall. When you've run so fast that you hear with your entire body; your pulse so loud it challenges your blood vessels and becomes a rush in your ears. And if someone puts an ear against your back, they will hear the heartbeats, but not sense the loud rhythmic pounding, the rushing and the thumping. They won't know how this experience of running enters your bodily archives. And then, you're not even scared. You've just been running.
>
> During the kindergarten's annual theme-week about the body, we realized that the boys used a range of words to describe their tissen while the girls simply said tissen. [5] With loud voices, words, laughter, humorous glances, and smiles exposing their teeth, the boys' bodies extended into the room. The girls' bodies folded back, as if into a secret unknown. They looked at the boys, at one another, their smiles inside their mouths. Afterwards we asked them, "If girls' tissen were to have a name of its own what would that be?" "The flower", one girl suggested. "The heart", another one said.

In 2018 The Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Denis Mukwege and Nadia Murad "for their efforts to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict". In February 2019 a young Israeli woman was raped and killed in the Jerusalem forest by a man from Palestine. She was registered in the statistics I craft into my knitting. The database on which I draw, is made by a Jerusalem-based non-profit human rights organization. According to its webpage, it includes statistics on all persons – Palestinians, Israelis and foreign nationals – killed as a result of the armed conflict between Israel and Palestine since the second intifada broke out in September 2000,. Searching for the right kind of stitch marker to represent her and others who might be raped and killed took weeks. When eventually I found it, I had to imagine the number of this kind of killings for the

years to come. I bought forty, and when I got the small, triangle-folded paper bag in my hand, my body spoke through tears.

> The stitch markers cling together. As chains and clusters. Never rows. Never structured or systematized. They tangle, entangle, and untangle. As tiny rhizomatic networks stretching across generations and national borders, as transections of time, as transcending rights, violated by transgressive acts. Hidden but still tensely present in the bodily reservoir as a capacity to feel. To hold back, push forward, hold tight around the line of flight is taxing. She who was lost is marked. In the bodies of the families. In the softness of the forest floor. In the statistics. And the seasons covers the traces that once were.

Knitting the annual statistics into throws for more than four years has become a personal research practice of "staying with the trouble" (Haraway 2016). The ongoing knitting of numbers, ages and stories of victims has created relational networks, entangling information and affective embodied becomings in unexpected ways. The crafting connects questions of time, space and matter with justice. The language of knitting converts hard facts into soft throws. White rows show days without killings. A light-yellow row talks about the loss of a single person. If this person is a child, the stitch marker is green. If it is someone who was raped and killed, the marker is red, shaped as a heart.

Preparing for the course, I struggled with choosing which object to bring. Would it be more political, less ethical, to bring a stitch marker from the blanket of Israel? After all, the occupation of territory in Palestine violates international humanitarian law. Even the UN recognizes this as fact. Would it be disrespectful to the Palestinians' collective frustration and sadness to select an atrocity committed by a Palestinian rather than one from the occupying side? And was this even an act of war? The hesitation made me call a Palestinian Muslim friend to

discuss the choice and he responded by questioning how this rape and killing could be an act of liberation – or even Jihad. In his eyes it was clearly a sexually motivated act. Why should a Palestinian, Muslim or not, rape and kill a girl from Israel, Jew or not? Should this rape and killing then really figure in these statistics, figure in my knitting?

I decided not to bring the marker shaped as a heart to the workshop. Yet somehow this was the object I ended up bringing.

Searching for it (2019), choosing it, using it in knitting, choosing it for a PhD course (2021), talking about it with a Palestinian Muslim friend, deciding not to bring it, deciding to bring it, thinking it was a "dead" object, considering a change of object, keeping the object, pushing myself through the writing (2022-2023).

Working with Hundreds the association with four-year-olds discussing names for their genitals was surprising. It moved me from the question of rape in times of war, to gender questions in everyday life in kindergarten. The marker and Hundreds triggered relational and erratic networks to occur that tied together affective strings of memory (Massumi, 2015). Hundreds created a web of thoughts that were unavailable before the writing session. In the evening, trying to explore the matter further, I sat on the toilet in the bathroom recording the sound of knitting, suddenly hearing the sound of heartbeats.

Despite the wars, children in Gaza still play at the beach, eat ice-cream, navigate traffic in the busy streets, draw helicopters and go to kindergarten. If there is killing or dying happening, there is also ongoing life (Butler 2016). And I keep on walking, knitting, leaning, sitting, reading, talking to my friend, stretching, pulling the shawl over my shoulders. As if the bodily movements will make this essay easier to write, make the messy awareness easier to deal with, or soften the edge of a man raping and killing a young woman in a forest. As if the fear of nourishing potential pro-Israeli readers will evaporate as I navigate body, statistics, and theory through knitting and stitch markers. Despite the cruelty of rape as a weapon in war, I have caught myself thinking of not submitting this

essay. When what was once soft in my hands touches the hardness of the world, a representation of an event may come to count as fact. What do we do when we count atrocities? To submit this essay is to allow this question to stay unanswered.

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The Call of a Crow

Stine Simonsen Puri

> I hear only three things. First the birds singing, then clicking keys, followed by a fly. No wait, I hear something else, I hear a crow. A crow doesn't sing. It tries to speak our language or, tries to teach us to really experience the sound "Craa". That's how it gave itself its names; an English *Crow*, a Danish *Krage*. That crow's so devoted to teaching us the CR sound, that it doesn't want a name for itself, but wants a name together with the other crows trying to teach us to experience this CR sound. Back to the keyboard.

This short text came into being in a state of heightened sense perception. Three days of intensive work with movement, sound, drawing and meditation had left little time for the group of enthusiastic anthropologists to do their normal work of translating experience into concepts. Instead, we were asked to stay with the experience of the present and write in a stream of consciousness on what was around us with the only limitation that we had to stop at 100 words (as proposed by Berlant and Stewart 2019). What the text developing out of that moment revealed to me in words was something primordial about language. Namely that language is first of all sound. Sound shared. With other species. With all that is

around us.

The text was not only born out of the exercises given in the workshop. A six-year part-time training program in eurythmy also fed into it. Through the practice of eurythmy, I learned to attune my body to sounds. Eurythmy is a form of movement developed by Rudolf Steiner, which was meant to bring language into movement. The subtle movements of the larynx that we learn to master through speech was enlarged and brought out as movements of the whole body (Steiner [1924]2019). Out of that developed a system of movements for each sound in the alphabet that enabled you to dance with language. It was envisioned that this could be a way of practicing a mode of thinking with language that takes place in the heart and the body. A mode of thinking that could bring new understandings. Understandings based on a cultivation of an embodied listening that was to grasp, not only the material observable world, but also the immaterial world of various forms of energies central to Steiner's philosophy.

In the workshop titled "Embodying Understanding" we were asked to explore what kind of bodily activity understanding may be. The etymology of "understand" refers to an activity of standing before or in the middle of something. But what is that something which one stands in the middle of? Is it the grappling with language to make sense of experience? As an attempt to investigate words as an experience, I invited the participants to move the word 'understand'. To try to get into the embodied layers of experience and meaning inherent in the concept. "Try to move your body as an S…use your arms, walk as an S, sense the S while moving". You may also try it!

The Danish forSTå, German verSTehen have in common with the English word for understanding the ST-sound. The S movement according to Steiner is bringing something in movement into calmness (Steiner 2019, p. 49). Is brining something that is moving into calmness part of a process of understanding for you? The T in eurythmy raises the arms to capture the space above the head, and then brings the hands with a force to a clearly defined point on your head or body. [6] Do you recognise this movement of bringing something in the space above you down into

yourself as part of a process of understanding? Or does it involve a more upward moving energy?

Towards the end of the workshop, while seated, we each expressed what understanding as a movement in space and time can be. The only guideline being "now speak". With my eyes closed I said the following, here edited down to one hundred words:

When something is true, it exists, not just as an idea. Coming to understanding you have to go down, it can hurt a bit, pulling the muscles as it compounds. It feels like spiralling inwards. Then a release outwards, and there you are: in understanding. At that point understanding is easy, you can feel it. But also difficult. You must hold it, as you need to pass it on. When you understand something, it has to be moved. Not like a stone, more like a gathering of energy – of thoughts, feelings and life. That has settled into a tune.

The crow calls again. I hear new nuances in her sound. Have our alphabet and language managed to capture her sound? I try.

C – I respond to the sound with a force of moving swiftly, as if breaking through a point of resistance, and creating space for the reverberations of that force.

R –I start to make rolling movements with my upper body, as if my body is a wheel first lifting and then turning something over – I continue – it moves forward.

AA – As I get to a long A-sound I sense an opening in my whole being. I open my arms to the world, and that openness transforms into a listening to the world. I breathe.

Words are missing, but I know. I have heard her. Has she heard me? I might even recognise a CRAA force in myself as an ability to forcefully get something through to someone in moving from resistance to resounding release. Should I move it out, share it with someone else? How could I say what I experienced and understood through a language understood by peers? I will try:

Understanding something, let's call it an object, does not just involve thinking but a "tuning into" the object. Capturing its vibrations in such a way that it is grasped as a moving object. Where one can connect with the object through its vibrations that is both movement and sound. Hartmut Rosa (2019) captures the desire for connection through such vibrations in the concept "resonance" but does not unfold its connection to language.

Another way of saying it, limiting my spoken words: words are sounds are movements are shared.

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[1] A cantata is a musical composition normally for one voice with instrumental accompaniment. The text is often a narrative, told in a mixture of musical styles, each chosen to enhance the storytelling.

[2] François Couperin's treatise "L'art de toucher le clavecin" was first published in 1716. The French title is best translated as "The art of playing the harpsichord".

[3] At a Palladium Baroque conference lecture I attended in Malmö in February 2011.

[4] A stitch marker is a small object, often a circle or a pin, used for counting and

remembering while knitting.

[5] Tissen is a vernacular Norwegian term for genitals, generally used when talking to children.

[6] see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xOiGetL9AUI

Section Four: Whose Thinking?

Aja Smith
June, 2023

Introduction: Whose Thinking?

Aja Smith and Anne Line Dalsgård

From the sounds of the third section, we turn in the fourth section to questions about whose thinking thinking really is? We begin by sharing misunderstandings, as Joseph Dumit works us through a score for playing with "the opacity of others to ourselves, and ourselves to others and ourselves" (Dumit this thread). As misunderstandings can be shared, and can be zones for thinking other thoughts, so can the haunting sound of heartbeats that come to a halt, the chasing of ghosts that do not let themselves be found, as when Robert Desjarlais grasps for the distant life of another and shows how theory always haunts both the living and death. In his characteristic poetic style, Desjarlais' spectral theory implicitly phrases the argument that only if we dare live with and write "the fleeting traces and obscure potentialities" (Desjarlais, this thread) of those we study, may we "get it right" and "do justice" to such lives and deaths, as Mette Terp Høyby puts it in her fine review. So, dare to let go of reality as you once knew it, Ida Sofie Matzen implores in the final essay of the thread: open the soles of your feet, and allow the cool moistness of the earth, anger and affect to destabilise what you thought thinking to be, whom you thought was doing the thinking. Here again then, we meet concepts as more than simply words, they "are substantive, material, fleshy and sweaty" (Dumit, this thread); they carry in them approaches to thinking that may allow you to know and express how classic academic thinking is a "walk on eggshells", how a more courageous thinking can at once surrender and straighten its back (Matzen, this thread).

> *Our concept of what we are is itself a proof; it blocks the reception of estranging perceptions.*

Taken together, the essays in this section expound how concepts and theories are forces that compel and allow us to inhabit and explicate the world in particular ways; actors we *have* to take seriously because, willy-nilly, they form part of us as thinkers and doers. Our concept of what we are is itself a proof; it blocks the

reception of estranging perceptions. We call them hauntings, but what are they, if not just unexpected responses we get from elsewhere (Merleau-Ponty 1973,134). Expectation is formed by concepts, and we must let go of them and open to this always present 'more' in a nonconceptual 'quickening' (Guyer 2013). 'Building bodies for thought' may thus mean not only sensitising our bodies and teaching them to be response-able, bear uncertainty, stay with hesitancy; it may also mean expanding our notion of what a body *is*, what a concept does and whose body that does the thinking.

In a reflection of and paying respect to the collective nature of thinking, we have chosen to cite central aspects of the reviewers comments in the relevant sections. We hope that this openness shall inspire conversations to continue beyond the thread – beyond this present thinking.

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Shared Misunderstandings

Joseph Dumit

Clearing up misunderstandings: When we (academics in universities in the US and Western Europe – where I spend perhaps too much of my time), when we *interact*, we often place an extreme emphasis on *understanding* each other, on identifying *points* of misunderstanding, and "*clearing* them up." As if we cannot be properly *sharing presence* with each other if we don't understand each other, (completely?). To say, "I don't understand," is to *ask* already for a clarification. Perhaps we are never sure, but we get *closer* to understanding each other, and this often *relaxes* us a bit, since misunderstanding can be tense.

We are opaque to ourselves. Yet we want to emphasize perspectives, identities, diversities, neurodiversities, histories, differences. If we demand translation,

understandability, this can, as Edouard Glissant proposed, become an imposition of the injustice of transparency. “A person has the right to be opaque to my eyes. That doesn’t stop me from liking that person, working with him, hanging out with him, etc. A racist is someone who refuses what he doesn’t understand. I can accept what I don’t understand. Opacity is a right we must have” (2010). Glissant’s words always cause me to *pause*, hesitate, stumble in moving on from them.

Do you understand what I mean? These italicised words: understanding, interacting, points, sharing, clearing up, closer, relaxes, tense, pause. Are they concepts or metaphors or suggestions or impositions? Working often with improvisers (from performance studies, theatre and dance), I have come to appreciate their emphasis on improvisational games or “scores”, light sets of open-ended instructions that invite conditions for play, interaction, and insight. I became curious to bring these scores into classrooms and conferences, helping us experiment: putting into variation our too-standardized practices of talking in groups. If our ways of doing things have systematically unjust effects, what can change?

> *I have come to appreciate their emphasis on improvisational games or “scores”, light sets of open-ended instructions that invite conditions for play, interaction, and insight.*

If concepts are or can be metaphors, and metaphors are or can be physical, then we can workshop understanding by varying with our communication rituals and habits of understanding. “Practice as research” in performance studies is a recognition that we can learn to understand differently by attentionally practicing, experimenting, with experiencing and reflecting. Use a stick to explore the ground. Without changing what you are “doing”, attend to how you are using hand+ground to explore stick, ground+stick to explore hand, ground+stick+hand to explore shoulder. Each “cut” between “self” and “not-self” is chosen, and also not entirely in control. Attention jumps.

Stick discussion score. Talk to someone for five minutes about understanding. Now share your stick with a different person and move with them+stick for five minutes without talking. Now talk with a different person for five minutes. Now stick-move with another person. In 40 minutes you have talked or moved with six people. Is this more or less comfortable than typical discussion scores where a few people speak at length and others remain silent? Here you listen deeply to another who listens to you, and you move with others while resonating with their attention. Concepts are put into shared movement.

Two-person stick-movement time can be intense. One participant shared being "unprepared and surprised for what approaching and moving would be like, every single time engaging with a new person." Silently agreeing to move together is bodymind attunement within the held space of a workshop. Intimate because movement is shared via the stick for a long(ish) time, yet the distance of the stick and the time limit helped the process feel vulnerable yet safe. "This kind of bodily experienced vulnerability is interestingly not a closing down, a fencing off, but a crisp availability… to be moved, to understand differently than before."

The stick-moving challenges the words just shared with the previous person. If we had just been talking about "agreement as settling into each other's meanings," then moving with the stick questions what "settling" and "into" mean. Each word-concept opens into physical exploration of concept-metaphors. Is slowing down together what we meant by settling, or is stopping, but for how long? If we start circling each other, is this a kind of agreement, or a kind of understanding that doesn't settle? Maybe continuing a conversation for five minutes is an understanding that is different from the understanding that ends a conversation.

Concepts are substantive, material, fleshy and sweaty. Drawing discussion score: end with a big sheet of paper spread on floor with markers. Everyone draws-writes together for seven minutes. *Then* we talk about what we drew. Each change of pace, each pause, each medium, undoes our patterns and our understandings which are too pat. Repeating is iterating, timing, pace, slowness matters. Just as the way we think about anatomy changes how we move, how we

move shapes how we think and discuss. An otherwise academia and world should be experimented with. Drawing then talking changes how we share, and who shares.

Unfolding moments of misunderstanding. Watching Baggs, In My Language beforehand. “I was really inspired by her sharing. I got really stuck with it. How to facilitate the process of conversation and of relating, rather than trying to jump on top with understanding conceptually… How can I relate to the paper through touch… and to the floor through the paper. So I was relating to the paper through movement…” Writing became scratching, stretching. For another, understanding became “really about relating and connecting to another person, whereas up till now I’ve been very much thinking about understanding as going on within me.”

With a little curiosity, almost any word, especially about understanding, can be a site for non-verbal physical together exploration, that disrupts (in often-delightful ways) previous understandings of that word. There is no need to know if the other is “getting it”. They are mis-understanding their own words. Sharing these misunderstandings verbally and non-verbally, serially and divergently, we learn and attune and mis-attune together. This opens yet deeper questions of the ways we use language, the multi-layered reasons why we are communicating with the persons in front of us, in this moment, at this conference, this zoom session, in this career.

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No Ghost to Him

Robert Desjarlais

Preface. The words that follow stem from my participation in a workshop organised by Aja Smith and Anne Line Dalsgård, held in Denmark in 2021, geared

toward embodied reflections on the concept and phenomena of understanding. The text relates to an ongoing project, in which I am trying to understand the life and death of Abdelkader Bennahar, a man from the Oran region of Algeria who died on the outskirts of Paris, France, in October 1961, during a violent clash between French police and Algerian men and women protesting French colonial rule. My writing on Bennahar's life is based primarily on scant traces found in state archives and historical records. With each mark of tracing, grafting, I am conjuring the spectral absence-presence of someone I know only through remnant traces. The theoretical considerations that guide this approach are altogether spectral, in that I am drawing from fleeting traces and obscure potentialities in trying to grasp the distant life of another. This spectral theory – altogether faint, fragile, obscure and intangible, sensed at times with a body, through hesitant words and images – might make possible an alliance between the living and the dead, in which a relation is sustained. Then again, aren't all theories spectral in form and haunting effect? Theories are like ghostly apparitions. They haunt the living – and the dead – in moments even of non-haunting.

The spectral trace of this other life is with me now, around and about my body. It's in the words I write, images perceived, in the lands and terrains visited, archives in life and death. He is (not)there. It's as if I have summoned a nonghost through the conjuring rites of writing and recalling. Write about a past life and revive the spirit of a life, just barely.

His name impresses on my thought within a fog of phantasmal possibilities. As I come closer to him his shade comes closer to me. It's just a shade, shadow of what remains. There is no evident body to him, actual or virtual.

There is no ghost to him. No ghostly revenant haunting the living, as far as I can tell. There is no vital ghost for me, faint scribe of his life and death. A spectral visitant might appear for others, any surviving sons or daughters, nephews, heirs to a trace who might recall his voice in life. Or a killer who saw his face as he lay

dying and the look in those dimming eyes remains still in an annihilator's aging dreams or the dim dusk before sleep.

That is not my haunting. The haunting is another. For me he is unghosted. Any apparitions of him are vague, distant, endlessly spectral. This is not a well-formed revenant. No haunting, haunted phantomality to him. No weight or density at all to this apparition. He is scarcely there, in an altogether scarce way. Think of a ghost that never appears in a mirror, never slams a door or rattles a painting, and then take away the slight palpable sense of that ghost and you're left with the idea of a ghostless spectre. What kind of appearance is this, if any? Can it even be called an appearance? What kind of phenomenology is required in tending to such faint, scarcely-there, scarcely perceived emergences in thought, script, or phantasmal imagining? A spectral phenomenology is called for, perhaps, one attentive to shifting apparitions in life death, cast and perceived in a spectral light (see Desjarlais and Habrih 2022).

> *What kind of phenomenology is required in tending to faint, scarcely-there, scarcely perceived emergences in thought, script, or phantasmal imagining?*

If there is a need and necessity to live amongst spectres in postcolonial times, within a politics of haunting, memory, and justice – as Derrida has called for in *Specters of Marx*, "this being with specters would be also, not only but also a politics of memory, of heritage and generations," to "live otherwise" and "more justly" – then I, like others, have been trying to learn to live with ghosts, "in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, the companionship, in the commerce without commerce of ghosts" (Derrida 1994:xvii-xviii). Yet what enigmatic commerce and companionship this is. With the being with spectres apparent here, there is not much being to the spectres. His is a ghostless spectre, hovering about the chambers of these words. Less ghost than spectre, opaque. There is something spectral in this nonappearance and nonpresence as I stumble over trace fragments. As I write of him, think on him, there is an ever-so-faint haunting trace and apparitional appearance of his post-life presence, which is not there. A

few absent features, remnant qualities adhere to the spectre of him now, like the shadow of a faint trace. Just the words I write and their afterlife echoes.

Negative hauntology, trace effect, unghosted nonbeing marks the wavering appearance of something never quite there; once there, long ago; oblique, obscure, diffuse. No direct sense impression of him. No voice direct or mute. He never speaks. Silence, only. Traces of his life and death emit signs, within a vague, spectral semiology, but he himself does not sign, directly. There are no messages from the dead. No look of him toward me. Still, there is a regard, faint and spectral, if conjured only.

No sentience but the spectre of sentience.

With the spectrality of the dead there is often the sense of a remnant spirit or trace afterlife wandering about, restless, far from any fixed dwelling. Here there is a faint and remote sense of a wandering restless trace-presence of a life, and the blunt absence of such wandering.

While all along there is only his name to go by, a few post-life details, a few images. I cannot say I know him, or who he was. Nor can I correspond directly. But still, in writing about him, it feels like I am writing to him and for him. With such a distant, absent correspondence, it’s as though I am waiting to receive words or a gesture in response, which will never come.

The spectral force of him is watching, a force recalled, summoned, not present. He is observant, looking on. He demands something of me – to get the story right, get him right, more justly. I have a responsibility toward him. Care and duty toward the dead; the weight and authority of the dead.

He is (not)watching me. He is watched by me. I do not speak to him, directly. I write about him. Revive the conjured spectre of him.

If anything, I am haunted by the non-haunting.

How might one relate to a dead man? Can we align ourselves too closely with

traces of a past life? Can such an affinity bring a life closer to sheer absence?

He is scarcely not there.

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Bare Feet Anger

Ida Sofie Matzen

Is anger a good point of departure for approaching theory? To consider this question, I string together a barefoot walk, a divorce, awareness of body sensations and Glissant's (2010) notion of opacity – all to consider the seeming soundness and lucidity of rational knowledge as opposed to more immediate somatic sensations. In outrage or other shock-like conditions, we – at least momentarily – lose grip of what we thought reality was; a destabilisation that potentially allows for the not-yet-manifest.

During early summer 2021, a group of anthropologists with different praxis-approaches to bodily knowledge were gathered for a workshop dedicated to exploring what *understanding* might mean if we sidestep our usual favouring of intellectual knowledge.

Besides being anthropologists, people worked with dance, voice-work, hypno- and body therapy, creative writing and the like. One exercise got us together in groups of three; one blindfolded, guided by the other two. When my turn, I was not only blindfolded but also chose to be barefoot, inviting in a whole battery of impressions: an acute intensity while opening up the soles of my feet to leaves, earth and ants, smell of horse and human, the density of bodies and a surge of gratitude to the kind folks leading me so attentively.

Later we were invited to write texts with a one-hundred-word constraint guided

by anthropologist Kathleen Stewart. One of mine turned out like this:

'Why' is like a wide-open closure, either soliciting an answer that stands, definite and disappointing, or calling forth a silence, a non-responsive assertion able only to leak into thin air. The mind's constant readiness to find patterns in any kind of glimpse, landmark or encounter, in pebbles thrown on the concrete in front of the mall, in the bundle-like feathers of a decaying swallow on the barn floor, in the sentences dropped in space, here, by two people passing by. Could we only stop editing the world and worlds within us, allowing them the right to be opaque, hesitating, tender?

I guess my attempt was to express an intangible longing for a more mind-free letting be, *as it is*, not retreating too quickly, if at all, into what I *think about* experience and other such layers of definitory settlements. To listen compositionally, non-interfering, pausing – for a second *letting go* and giving in to modes that are not fettered by or limited to this smaller unit called me. Could this be a viable way of arriving within more open-ended and collective (though not universal) forms of thinking and knowing? Because if rational knowledge is what we can obtain through reason and cognitive assessments of the phenomena of reality brought into us through our senses, then what to do with all the "extra" – the sensorial, primordial-like and spontaneous displays and ephemeral stuff that also characterises lived life, including academic practices? Isn't the mind clean openness from the outset, that is, *before* we begin to pin down reality? I long for (conceptual) elsewheres and elseworkings, closer to the present.

This is where I arrive at anger. It feels as if I wrote the above 100s from some kind of future-memory stored in my somatic-sensory system. Amidst a divorce and a prolonged break-up with academia, my body gives into a long rejected yet persistent rage against any kind of assertiveness based on proposed rational knowledge. "You're too sensitive", such reasoning says, as it fixates and separates stuff from itself in its pursuit of self-preservation. My anger knows that pure

rational reasoning (lifted up as the great ideal we should all try to achieve) is self-righteous, judgemental, almost narcissistic in its unwillingness to accept other kinds of perceptive faculties than its own mind-based logics. Jungian therapist and feminist thinker Sylvia Perera writes about "the defensive fear inherent in hierarchical, [progress-oriented], heroic consciousness that turns from the flow of change and its own split-off ""infantile" impulses'" (1981: 30). Raging like a four-year-old, I realise how sick I am of walking on eggshells of contrived explanations to the countless whys of existence.

My anger is vibrating vigorously, brisk and draining, both personal and more archetypical in the sense that it is targeted towards the linear, the masculine, not gender-wise, but in both men and women, in *us*. Anger has the potential to straighten the back; it offers a candid quality to boundary-settings and fuels determination. One can go into war on anger; we *do* go into war on anger.

> *To face dissonance is indeed unsettling, but I suggest that to surrender into the psychic-somatic level of the basic hurt, a semi-controlled regression into what also is, may lead to a radical reorganisation of the world.*

Perhaps my anger is spurring me into the same manoeuvre I am so critical of; in my longing to connect with a world beyond – and still intimate with – my own being, haven't I maintained to separate hierarchical logos modes from the infinite sensorial, dense and messy (somatic) realms? I stamp my bare feet even harder at the eggshells. I don't want to fight against my rage any longer. My alarmed instincts squirm as I resolve to give up. The nervous system shudders, anger and anxiety are kindred spirits; the potency of fury is too overwhelming. And beneath? Sheer fright, loneliness, sorrow – an infinite abyss, it seems. Giving into anger, allowing it to toil within me and not (for at least a moment) projecting it out or acting from it, I let go of reality as I know it. To face dissonance is indeed unsettling, but I suggest that to surrender into the psychic-somatic level of the basic hurt, a semi-controlled regression into what also *is*, may lead to a radical reorganisation of the world – and hence how we understand it.

With anger as a somatic entry point into such radical state of immediate unreality, there are no handles, not a container to hold together normal concepts, to make them coherent – and out of trouble. Staying (somatically) with the trouble (cf. Haraway 2016) is raw, not pretty or pleasant, but a claim to the right to opacity. Recognising difference, to paraphrase Glissant (2010), does not mean understanding otherness by making it transparent through, say, linear argumentation, persuasive expositions and other forms of violence (against bodies, nature, Earth, against others and selves). How to accept the unintelligibility and confusion that often characterise cross-cultural (and inter- and intrapersonal or even interspecies) communication? To be right – or to be in relation? How to straighten the back *and* surrender into the chaotic order of the body, not an imposed order, but an allowing one (Perera 1981: 26). And possibly giving in into a more compassionate perspective not conditioned by pursuits of stabilising?

Padmasambhava, an 8th century Buddhist master, said on the difference between perspective and conduct: “Though the view should be as vast as the sky, keep your conduct as fine as barley flour”. According to Tibetan teacher Urgyen Tulku (2000: 81), this means to not confuse an open mind with an accepting and noncommittal conduct: “you can be as unbiased, as impartial, as vast, immense, and unlimited as the sky (…) But one’s behaviour should be as careful as possible in discriminating what is beneficial or harmful – as fine as barley flour” (*ibid*.). In one’s behaviour, it *is* necessary to accept and reject. If anger can mobilise action, manifest a mandate to build up or tear down, how to still be available with a view, a perspective (more) wide-open, not defining, not defiling the relational between, among and within us? How to build concepts that are relational before righteous, opaque above coherent and yet as fine as barley flour?

With as much consciousness as we can muster, dialoguing with the more immediate, overwhelming and hazy sides as well as with the clearer and more logical ones, any (personal and conceptual) crises may open up new parts of ourselves and the worlds while being neither right nor wrong. With bare feet and with anger, I straighten and stumble, my mind vaster.

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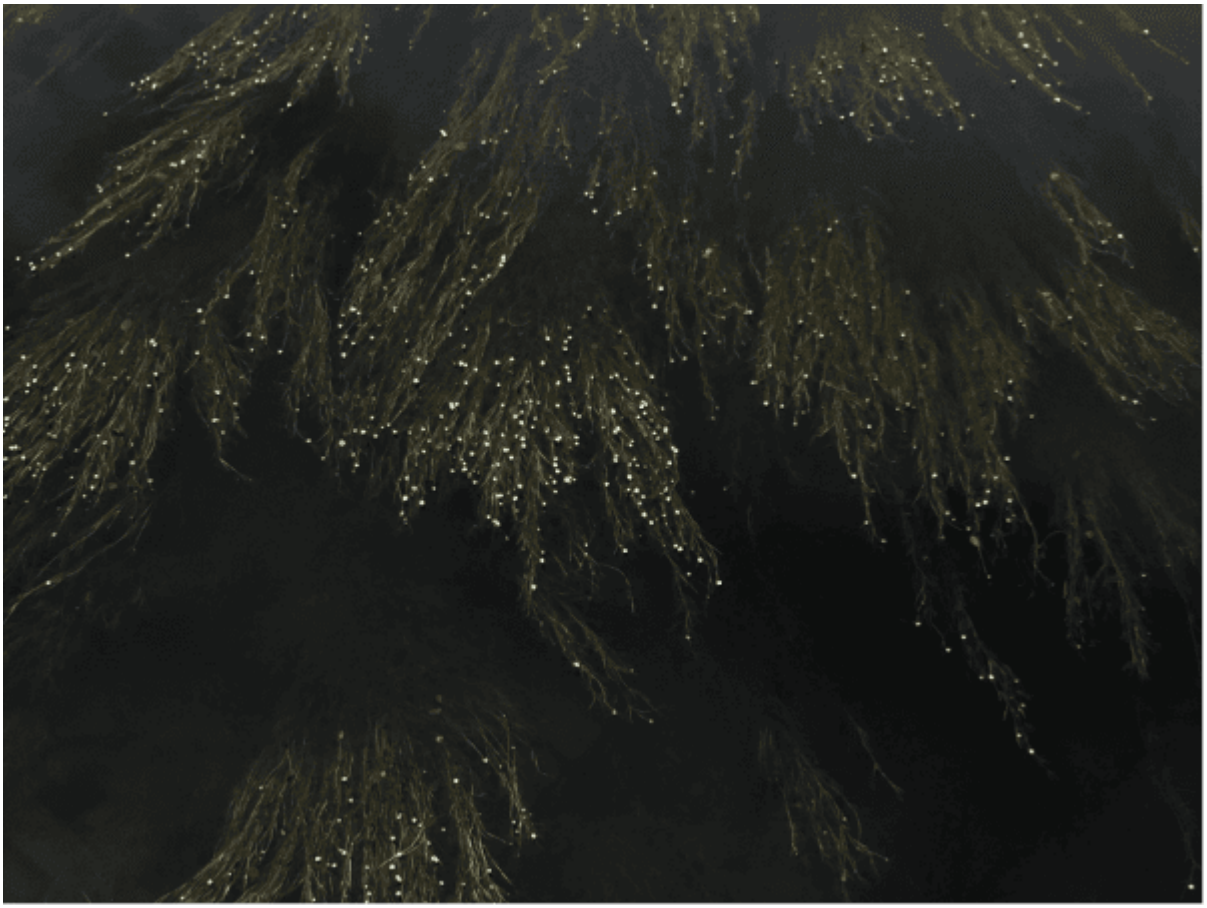
Building Bodies for Thought: The Podcast

Ian M. Cook
June, 2023



Allegra Editor Ian podcasts together with Thread guest editors Aja Smith & Anne Line Dalsgård as they explore Building Bodies For Thought a thread in which theorising and thinking is undertaken by bodies that are more receptive, more sentient, more response-able.

In the podcast you will hear *hundreds* written and read in the following order by:
Ida Appel Vardinghus-Nielsen

Vanessa Graf
Fine Brendtner
Katrine Frank Jørgensen
Clara Fuglsbjerg Ebberup
Mark Tatlow
Joseph Dumit
Mona Nicolaysen
Stine Simonsen Puri
Ida Sofie Matzen
Mona Nicolaysen

Call for reviewers: Books on mobilities and migration!

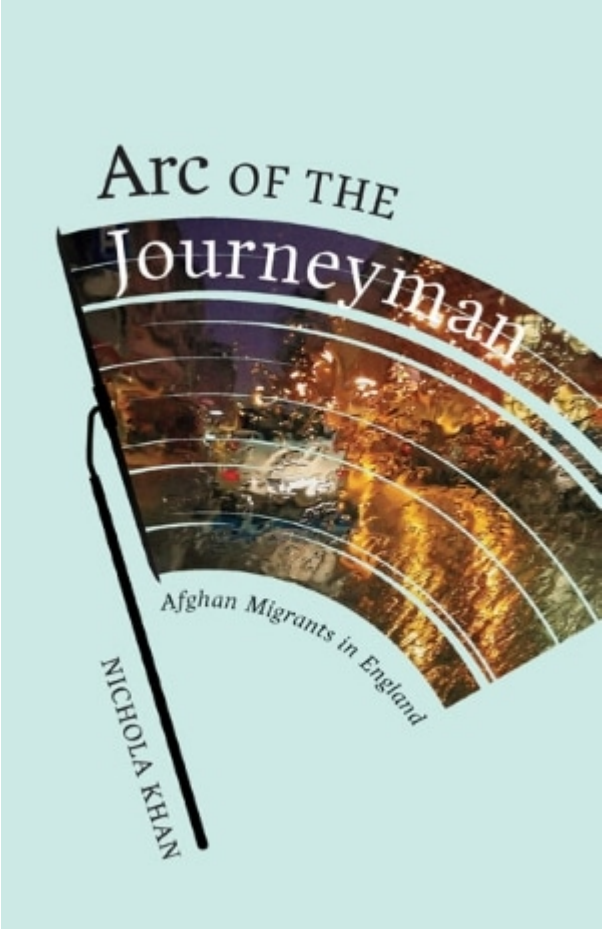
Allegra
June, 2023

The past decade has been increasingly marked by the movement of bodies across political borders. Whether fleeing violence or working within new labor regimes, diasporic communities have sought livelihoods outside of their native land and become major social groups within and across states. Anthropological works responding to migration have abounded, exploring not only migrants' encounters with physical borders, but also the metaphorical borders that emerge within their new homes. We've chosen the following reads as some of the best explorations of peoples' movement, particularly in relation to belonging and citizenship, refugee education, as well as the waiting, hope, or disappointment that can mark transitional livelihoods. If you are interested in reviewing one of these books, get in touch with us!

How to Proceed:

As we receive many requests for reviews, please send an email to reviews@allegralaboratory.net indicating which book you would like to review, your postal address, and 2-3 sentences explaining why you should be reviewing the book. Please explain how the book relates to your own research or interests. We will get back to you once we have selected the reviewers.

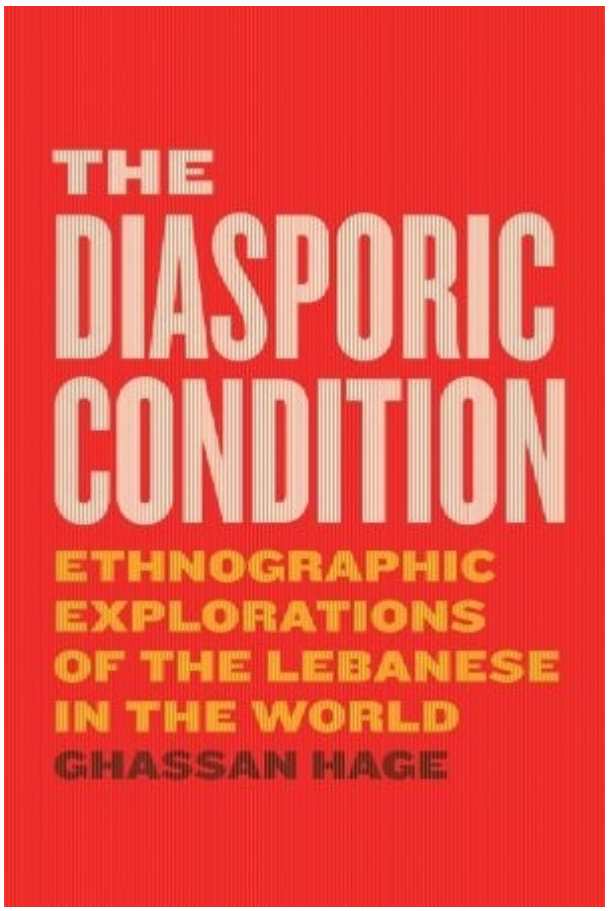
Khan, Nichola. Arc of the journeyman: Afghan migrants in England. U of Minnesota Press, 2021.



Forty years of continuous war and conflict have made Afghans the largest refugee group in the world. In this first full-scale ethnography of Afghan migrants in England, Nichola Khan examines the imprint of violence, displacement, kinship obligations, and mobility on the lives and work of Pashtun journeyman taxi drivers in Britain.

Ghassan Hage.. The Diasporic Condition: Ethnographic

Explorations of the Lebanese in the World. Chicago press. Dec 2021



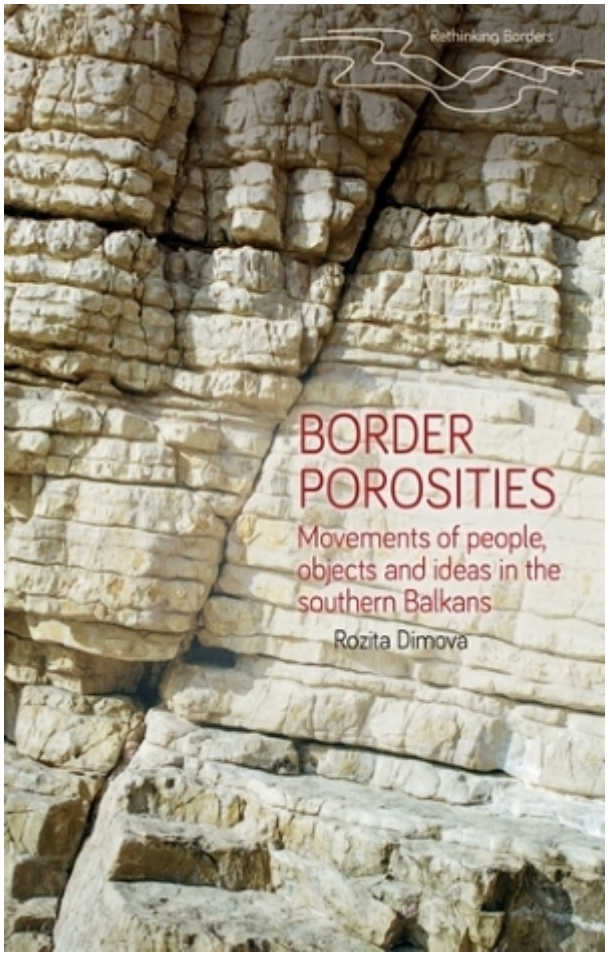
Bridging the gap between migration studies and the anthropological tradition, Ghassan Hage illustrates that transnationality and its attendant cultural consequences are not necessarily at odds with classic theory.

In *The Diasporic Condition*, Ghassan Hage engages with the diasporic Lebanese community as a shared lifeworld, defining a common cultural milieu that transcends spatial and temporal distance—a collective mode of being here termed the "diasporic condition." Encompassing a complicated transnational terrain, Hage's long-term ethnography takes us from Mehj and Jalleh in Lebanon to Europe, Australia, South America, and North America, analyzing how Lebanese migrants and their families have established themselves in their new homes while remaining socially, economically, and politically related to Lebanon and to each other.

At the heart of *The Diasporic Condition* lies a critical anthropological question: How does the study of a particular sociocultural phenomenon expand our

knowledge of modes of existing in the world? As Hage establishes what he terms the “lenticular condition,” he breaks down the boundaries between “us” and “them,” “here” and “there,” showing that this convergent mode of existence increasingly defines everyone’s everyday life.

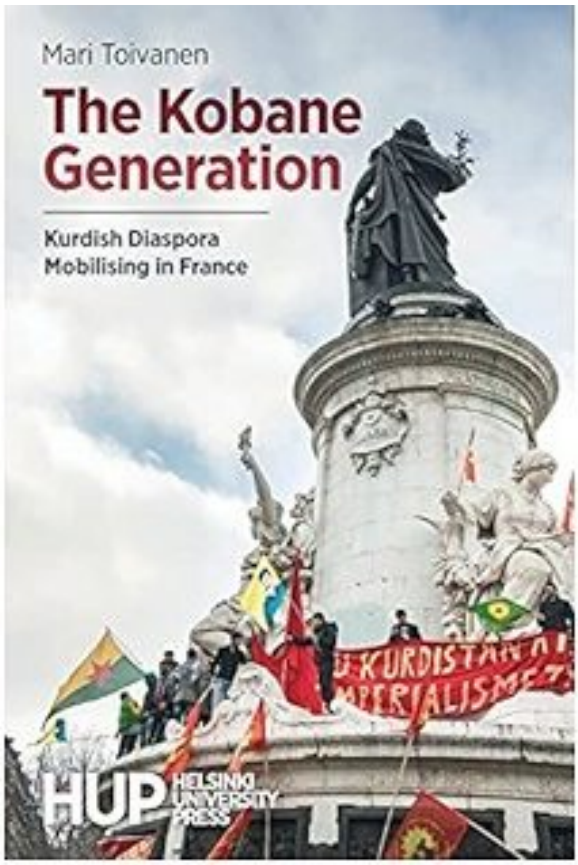
Rozita Dimova (2021) Border porosities. Movements of people, objects, and ideas in the southern Balkans, Manchester UP



This innovative book documents border porosities that have developed and persisted between Greece and North Macedonia over different temporalities and at different localities. By drawing on geology’s approaches to studying porosity, Dimova argues that similar to rocks and minerals that only appear solid and impermeable, seemingly impenetrable borders are inevitably traversed by different forms of passage.

The rich ethnographic case studies, from the history of railroads in the southern Balkans, border town beauty tourism, child refugees during the Greek Civil War, mining and environmental activism, and the urban renovation project in Skopje, show that the political borders between states do not only restrict or regulate the

movement of people and things, but are also always permeable in ways that exceed state governmentality.



Mari Toivanen (2021) [The Kobane Generation. Kurdish Diaspora Mobilising in France](), [Helsinki UP]().

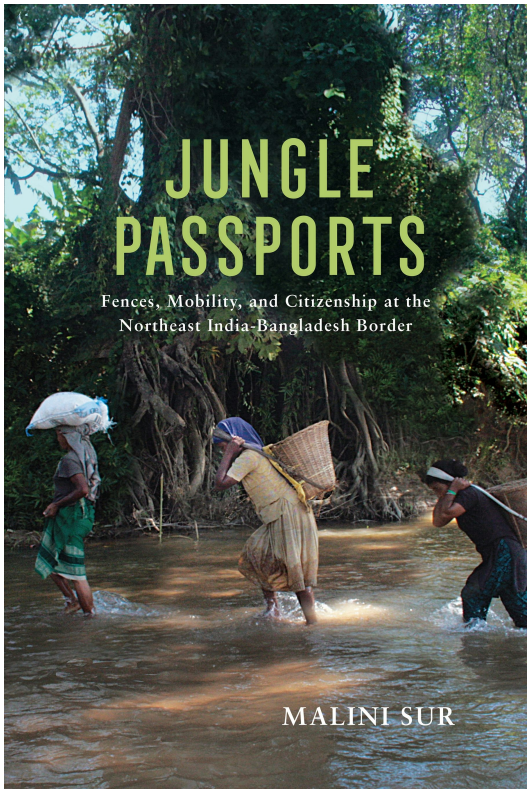
A small Kurdish city located in northern Syria, Kobane, became symbolically significant when ISIS laid siege to the city between September 2014 and January 2015. This pivotal moment in the fight against ISIS threw the international spotlight on the Kurds. *The Kobane Generation* analyses how Kurdish diaspora communities mobilised in France after the breakout of the Syrian civil war and political unrest in Turkey and Iraq in the 2010s. Tens of thousands of people, mostly but not exclusively diaspora Kurds, demonstrated in major European capitals, expressed their solidarity with Kobane, and engaged in transnational political activism towards Kurdistan.

In this book, Mari Toivanen discusses a series of critical events that led to different forms of transnational participation towards Kurdistan. The focus of this

book is particularly on how diaspora mobilisations became visible among the second generation, the descendants of Kurdish migrants. The book addresses important questions, such as why second-generation members felt the need to mobilise and what kind of transnational participation this led to. How did the transnational participation and political activism of the second generation differ from that of their parents, and is such activism simply diasporic or also related to more global changes in political activism?

The Kobane Generation offers important insights on the generational dynamics of political mobilisations and their significance to understanding diaspora contributions. More broadly, it sheds light on second-generation political activism beyond the diaspora context, analysing it in relation to global transformations in political subjectivities.

Malini Sur. 2021. Jungle Passports: Fences, Mobility, and Citizenship at the Northeast India-Bangladesh Border. Pennsylvania University press.

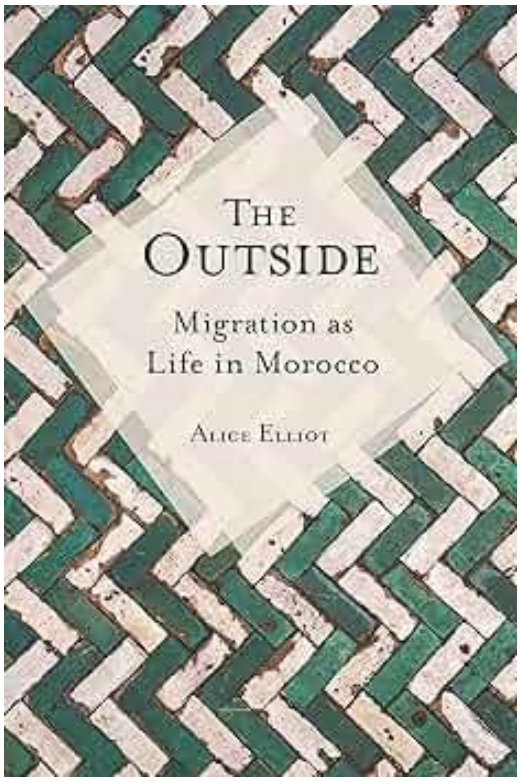


Since the nineteenth century, a succession of states has classified the inhabitants of what are now the borderlands of Northeast India and Bangladesh as Muslim "frontier peasants," "savage mountaineers," and Christian "ethnic minorities," suspecting them to be disloyal subjects, spies, and traitors. In *Jungle Passports* Malini Sur follows the struggles of these people to secure shifting land, gain access to rice harvests, and smuggle the cattle and garments upon which their livelihoods depend against a background of violence, scarcity, and India's construction of one of the world's longest and most highly militarized border fences.

Jungle Passports recasts established notions of citizenship and mobility along violent borders. Sur shows how the division of sovereignties and distinct regimes of mobility and citizenship push undocumented people to undertake perilous journeys across previously unrecognized borders every day. Paying close attention to the forces that shape the life-worlds of deportees, refugees, farmers, smugglers, migrants, bureaucrats, lawyers, clergy, and border troops, she reveals how reciprocity and kinship and the enforcement of state violence, illegality, and

border infrastructures shape the margins of life and death. Combining years of ethnographic and archival fieldwork, her thoughtful and evocative book is a poignant testament to the force of life in our era of closed borders, insularity, and "illegal migration."

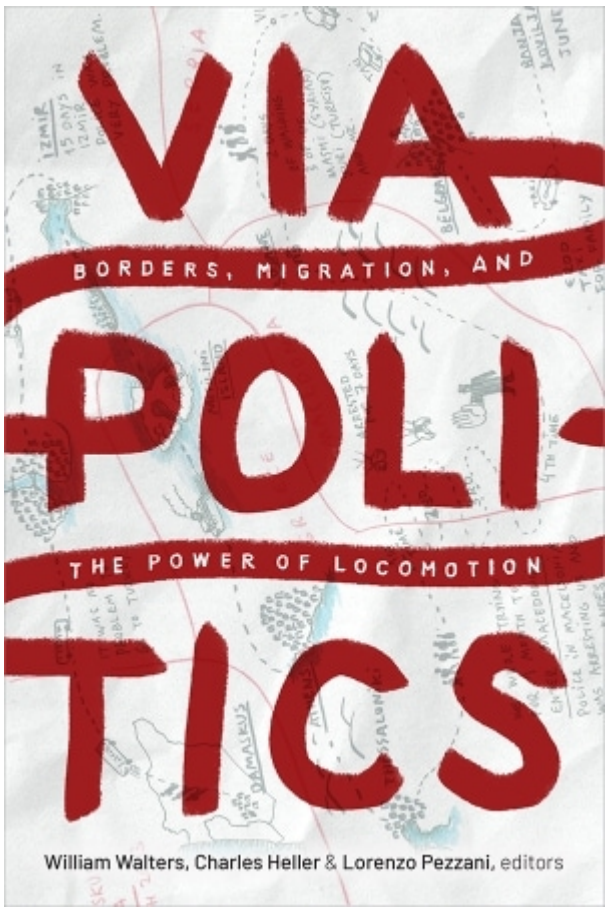
Alice Elliott (2021) The Outside. Migration as Life in Morocco. Indiana University Press.



What does migration look like from the inside out? In The Outside, Alice Elliot decenters conventional approaches to migration by focusing on places of departure rather than arrival and rethinks migration from the perspective of those who have not (yet) left. Through an intimate ethnography of towns and villages notorious in Morocco for their striking emigration to "the outside," Elliot traces the powerful ways migration permeates life: as brutal bureaucratic machinery administering hope and despair, as intimate force crisscrossing kinship relations and bonds of love and care, as imaginative horizon of the self and of the future. Challenging dominant understandings of migration and their deadly consequences by centering non-migrants' sharp theorizations and intimate experiences of "the outside," Elliot recasts migration as a deeply relational entity, and attends to the ethnographic, conceptual, and political imagination required by the constitutive relationship between migration and life.

William Walters, Charles Heller, Lorenzo Pezzani.

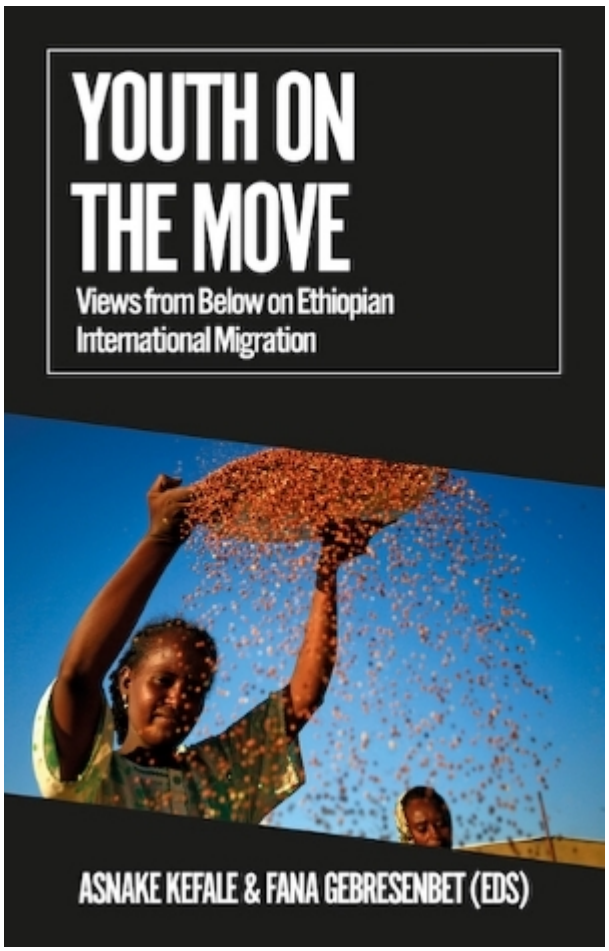
Viapolitics: Borders, Migration, and the Power of Locomotion. Duke press. Feb 2022.



Vehicles, their infrastructures, and the environments they traverse are fundamental to the movement of migrants and states' attempts to govern them. This volume's contributors use the concept of viapolitics to name and foreground this contested entanglement and examine the politics of migration and bordering across a range of sites. They show how these elements constitute a key site of knowledge and struggle in migratory processes and offer a privileged vantage point from which to interrogate practices of mobility and systems of control in their deeper histories and wider geographic connections. This transdisciplinary group of scholars explores a set of empirically rich and diverse cases: from the Spanish and European authorities' attempts to control migrants' entire trajectories to infrastructures of escort of Indonesian labor migrants; from deportation train cars in the 1920s United States to contemporary stowaways at sea; from illegalized migrants walking across treacherous Alpine mountain passes to aerial geographies of deportation. Throughout, *Viapolitics* interrogates anew the phenomenon called "migration," questioning how different forms of contentious mobility are experienced, policed, and contested.

Kefale, Asnake and Fana Gebresenbet, eds. (2021) Youth

on the Move: Views from Below on Ethiopian International Migration. Hurst, August 2021.

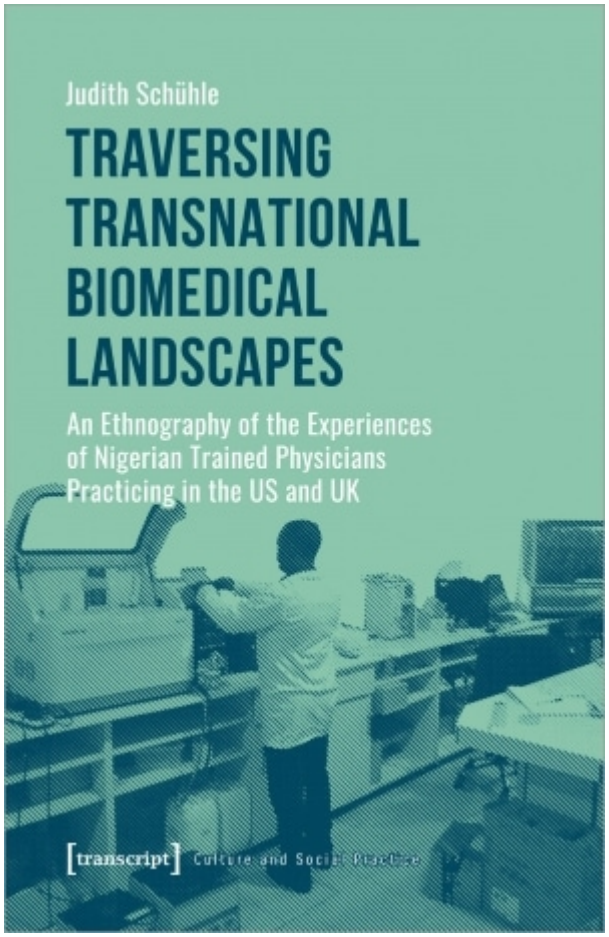


At a time when policies are increasingly against it, international migration has become the subject of great public and academic attention. This book departs from the dominant approach of studying international migration at macro level, and from the perspective of destination countries. The contributors here seek to do more than 'scratch the surface' of the migration process, by foregrounding the voices and views of Ethiopian youth–potential migrants and returnees–and of their sending communities.

The volume focuses on the perspective and agency of these young people, both potential migrants and returnees, to better understand migration decision-making, experiences and outcomes. It brings together rarely documented cases of young men and women from several communities across Ethiopia, migrating to the Gulf and South Africa. Explaining the agency of local actors–prospective migrants, brokers and sending families–*Youth on the Move* illuminates the pervasive, persistent failure of state attempts to regulate migration. Moreover, it examines the financing of migration and the sharing of remittances, within a culturally situated moral economy. While accounts centred on economics and political violence are important, the contributors demonstrate compellingly that these factors alone cannot provide a full understanding of migration's complexity,

nor of its social realities.

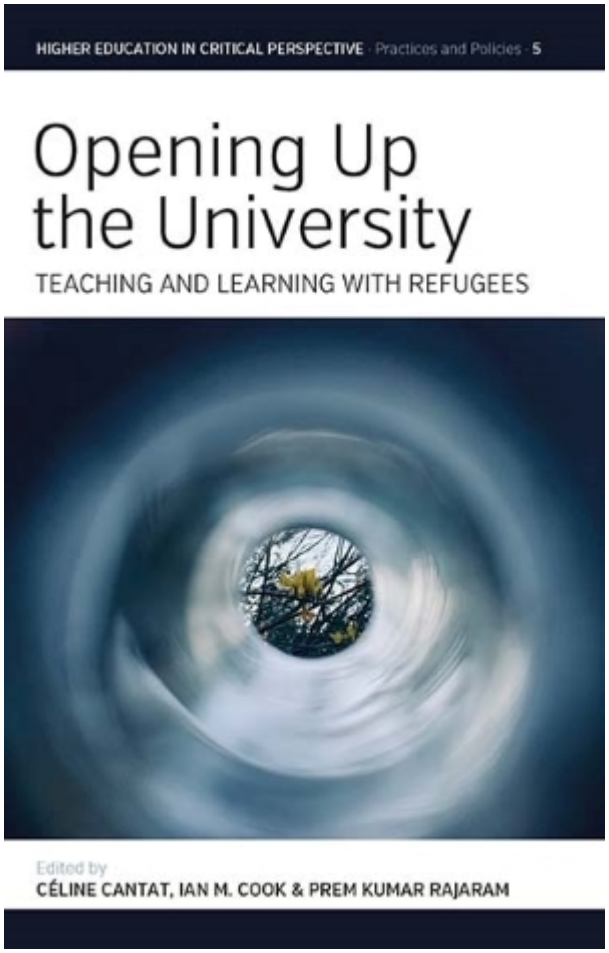
Judith Schühle (2020) Traversing Transnational Biomedical Landscapes. An Ethnography of the Experiences of Nigerian Trained Physicians Practicing in the US and UK. Transcript



In the age of globalization, the transnational dimension of sciences like medicine seems to be given. However, the agents connecting different parts of this transnational biomedical landscape have yet to receive their due attention. Situated at the intersection of contemporary debates as well as theories of medical anthropology and migration in the 21st century, this book explores the experiences of Nigerian trained physicians who migrated to the US and the UK within the last 40 years. By drawing on individual professional life stories, Judith Schühle illuminates how these physicians disconnect from and (re)connect to diverse local social and biomedical contexts, becoming established abroad while at the same time trying to influence health care services in Nigeria through transnational endeavors.

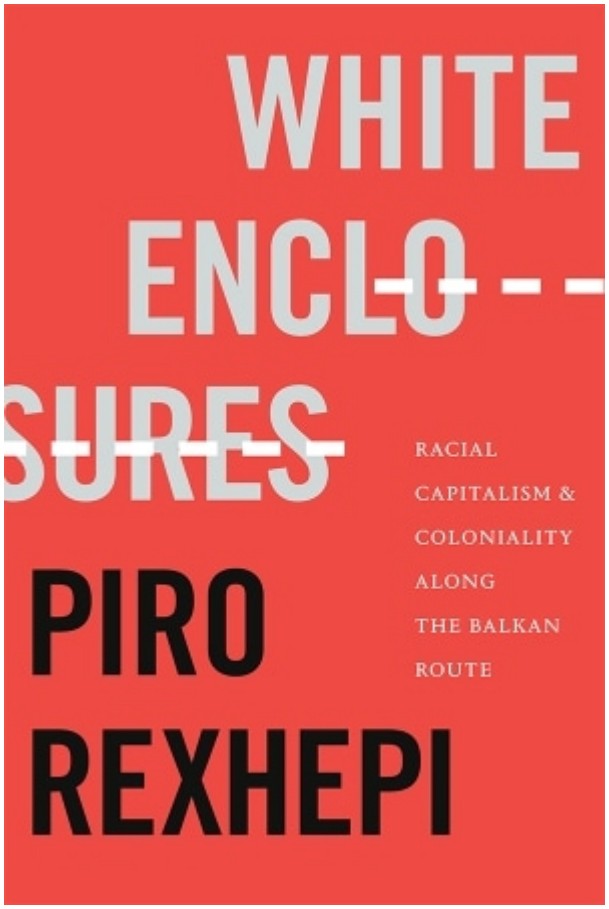
Opening Up the University: Teaching and Learning with Refugees. Edited by Céline Cantat, Ian M. Cook, and Prem

Kumar Rajaram. 2022. Berghahn.



Through a series of empirically and theoretically informed reflections, *Opening Up the University* offers insights into the process of setting up and running programs that cater to displaced students. Including contributions from educators, administrators, practitioners, and students, this expansive collected volume aims to inspire and question those who are considering creating their own interventions, speaking to policy makers and university administrators on specific points relating to the access and success of refugees in higher education, and suggests concrete avenues for further action within existing academic structures.

Piro Rexhepi. 2022. White Enclosures: Racial Capitalism and Coloniality along the Balkan Route. Duke University Press



For all its history of intersecting empires, the Balkans has been rarely framed as a global site of race and coloniality. This, as Piro Rexhepi argues in *White Enclosures* is not surprising, given the perception of the Balkans as colorblind and raceless, a project that spans post-Ottoman racial formations, transverses Socialist modernity and is negotiated anew in the process of postsocialist Euro-Atlantic integration. Connecting severed colonial histories from the vantage point of body politic, Rexhepi turns to the borderland zones of the Balkans to trace past and present geopolitical attempts of walling whiteness. From efforts to straighten the sexualities of post-Ottoman Muslim subjects, to Yugoslav nonaligned solidarities between Muslims of the second and third world, to Roma displacement and contemporary emergence of refugee carceral technologies along the Balkan Route, Rexhepi points not only to the epistemic erasures that maintain the fantasy of whiteness but also to the disruption emanating from the solidarities between queer- and transpeople that fold the Balkans back into global efforts to resist the politics of racial capitalism.

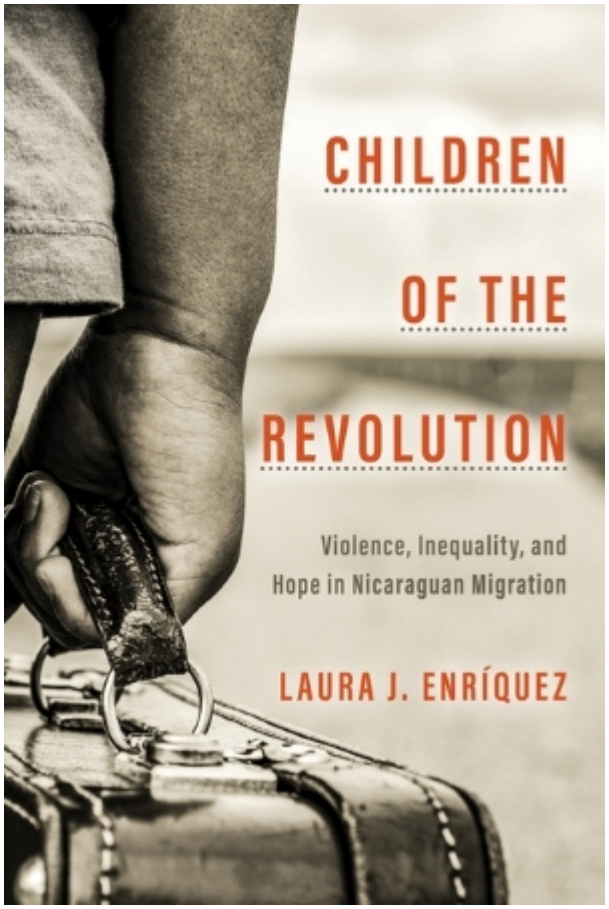
Julia Caroline Morris. 2023. Asylum and Extraction in the Republic of Nauru. Cornell University Press.

Asylum and Extraction in the Republic of Nauru provides an extraordinary glimpse into the remote and difficult-to-access island of Nauru, exploring the realities of Nauru's offshore asylum arrangement and its impact on islanders, workforces, and migrant populations. Drawing on extensive fieldwork in Nauru,

Australia, and Geneva, as well as a deep dive into the British Phosphate Commission archives, Julia Caroline Morris charts the island's colonial connection to phosphate through to a new industrial sector in asylum. She explores how this extractive industry is peopled by an ever-shifting cast of refugee lawyers, social workers, clinicians, policy makers, and academics globally and how the very structures of Nauru's colonial phosphate industry and the legacy of the "phosphateer" era made it easy for a new human extractive sector to take root on the island.

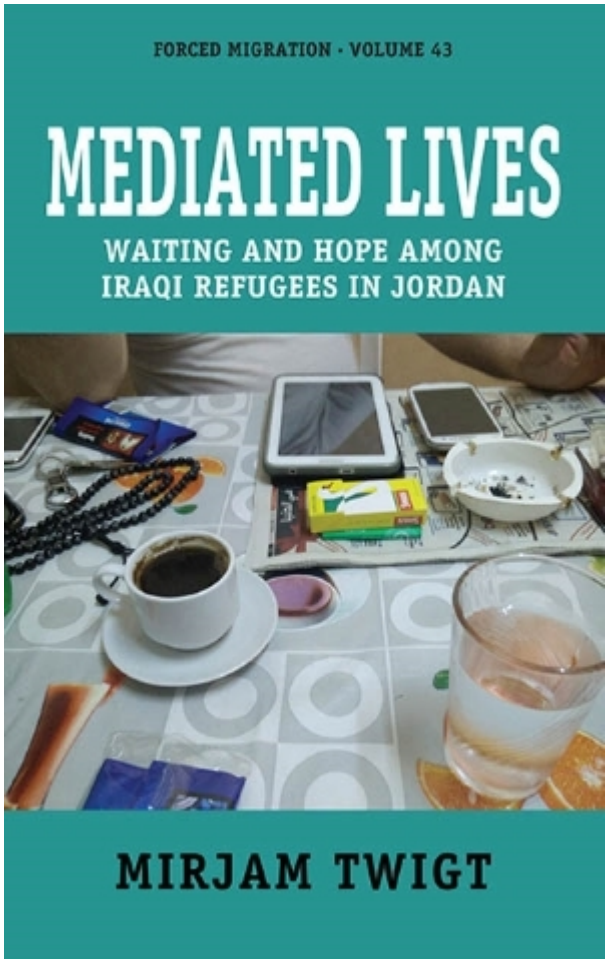
By detailing the making of and social life of Nauru's asylum system, Morris shows the institutional fabric, discourses, and rhetoric that inform the governance of migration around the world. As similar practices of offshoring and outsourcing asylum have become popular worldwide, they are enabled by the mobile labor and expertise of transnational refugee industry workers who carry out the necessary daily operations. *Asylum and Extraction in the Republic of Nauru* goes behind the scenes to shed light on the everyday running of the offshore asylum industry in Nauru and uncover what really happens underneath the headlines. Morris illuminates how refugee rights activism and #RefugeesWelcome-style movements are caught up in the hardening of border enforcement operations worldwide, calling for freedom of movement that goes beyond adjudicating hierarchies of suffering.

Laura J. Enriquez. 2022. Children of the Revolution: Violence, Inequality, and Hope in Nicaraguan Migration. Stanford University Press.



Andrea, Silvia, Ana, and Pamela were impoverished youth when the Sandinista revolution took hold in Nicaragua in 1979. Against the backdrop of a war and economic crisis, the revolution gave them hope of a better future — if not for themselves, then for their children. But, when it became clear that their hopes were in vain, they chose to emigrate. *Children of the Revolution* tells these four women's stories up to their adulthood in Italy. Laura J. Enríquez's compassionate account highlights the particularities of each woman's narrative, and shows how their lives were shaped by social factors such as their class, gender, race, ethnicity, and immigration status. These factors limited the options available to them, even as the women challenged the structures and violence surrounding them. By extending the story to include the children, and now grandchildren, of the four women, Enríquez demonstrates how their work abroad provided opportunities for their families that they themselves never had. Hence, these stories reveal that even when a revolution fails to fundamentally transform a society in a lasting way, seeds of change may yet take hold.

Mirjam Twigt. 2022. Mediated Lives: Waiting and Hope Among Iraqi Refugees in Jordan. Berghahn.



Using the example of Iraqi refugees in Jordan's capital of Amman, this book describes how information and communication technologies (ICTs) play out in the everyday experiences of urban refugees, geographically located in the Global South, and shows how interactions between online and offline spaces are key for making sense of the humanitarian regime, for carving out a sense of home and for sustaining hope. This book paints a humanizing account of making do amid legal marginalization, prolonged insecurity, and the proliferation of digital technologies.

Featured image by Alexander Dodd (courtesy of pexels.com)

Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Anti-Boycott Laws?

Darryl Li
June, 2023

Anthropologists are often quick to decry the law as a fig leaf for the exercise of raw political or economic power. Yet when holding bureaucratic sinecures, anthropologists' daily practices of obedience to authority and official rules are typical of the professional-managerial class. As an attorney among anthropologists, I occasionally encounter colleagues' folk understandings of law in the form of deference: "well of course x is illegal because <awkward pause> but of course you would know better, since I Am Not A Lawyer."

Anthropologists are thus no less susceptible than others to the use of legalese to obscure, mislead, or browbeat. A case in point are recent messages sent by the American Anthropological Association (AAA) to all members concerning the proposed resolution to boycott Israeli academic institutions. Most notable was a one-page document headlined "Points to Consider for our Association" disseminated just days before voting started this week. Notwithstanding the duty of the AAA's executive board and staff to act as neutral stewards of the Association's democratic processes, these messages are aimed squarely at

spreading fear that adopting the boycott would damage the AAA.

Most striking is the claim that if the boycott passes, the AAA would "be significantly restricted in the choice of cities where future Annual and Section Meetings can be located, decreasing the affordability of participation for members." Citing advice from the AAA's lawyer, the leadership claims that 22 U.S. states have passed laws that "specifically ban contracts with entities who wish to contract with the state or its subdivisions, such as publicly operated convention centers, unless the entities certify that they do not advocate or subscribe to a boycott of Israel or its institutions." The cities cited as examples are Atlanta, San Francisco, Detroit, Phoenix, "among many others."

> *In a field like anthropology where jobs with decent pay are ever scarcer, the prospect of already outrageous membership and conference fees going up further is enough to give anyone pause.*

AAA annual meetings are usually held in privately owned hotels and convention centers, which are unaffected by these laws. The argument seems to be that once publicly owned facilities in some states are off the table, the end result will be fewer choices in meeting locations and thus higher costs. In a field like anthropology where jobs with decent pay are ever scarcer, the prospect of already outrageous membership and conference fees going up further is enough to give anyone pause.

Thankfully, the AAA leadership's argument is baseless fear mongering masquerading as legal advice.

At issue here are laws responding to the rise of Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) tactics in support of Palestinian liberation. These measures – whose passage has been a key domestic policy goal of the American Zionist movement over the past decade – now serve as templates for proposed legislation in the service of other right-wing causes, such as the fossil fuel and firearms industries. Most courts reviewing these laws have struck them down as unconstitutional, but

others have upheld them thanks to the current reactionary lurch in the federal judiciary.

The AAA leadership somehow manages to misrepresent these repressive and anti-democratic laws as more sweeping than they actually are.

What the Anti-Boycott Laws Do and Don't Do

Laws targeting BDS activity fall into two broad categories. Some preclude state pension funds from investing in companies that boycott Israel. Others prevent state governments from contracting with entities that boycott Israel. There is a vigorous debate over whether these actions should count as a restriction on freedom of speech. But there has not been any dispute over the scope of these actions: situations where the government is spending money.

When the AAA rents out a publicly owned convention center, this is an altogether different situation. Here, the government is *receiving* money from a private entity seeking a service that is offered to the public at large. Anti-BDS public contracting laws simply do not apply here, for several reasons.

> *Thankfully, the AAA leadership's argument is baseless fear mongering masquerading as legal advice.*

First, the AAA leadership relies on a strained reading of the text of anti-BDS laws. Since they mentioned Phoenix, let's take a look at Arizona's statute, whose wording is typical. The provision declares that a "public entity may not enter into a contract … with a company to acquire or dispose of services" if that company boycotts Israel. How could this apply to the scenario of the AAA renting a public convention center? The state is clearly not contracting to "acquire" a service, so the only alternative is that it is contracting to "dispose" of a service. If this sounds not very intuitive to you, you're certainly not alone. But in a lawyer's hands, language is like a prisoner: if you torture it enough, you can make it say anything.

Second, the AAA leadership reads anti-boycott provisions without any regard for

their statutory context. Again, let's look at states mentioned in the AAA leadership's own document. California's anti-BDS law explicitly declares its intent "to ensure that *taxpayer funds are not used* to do business with" companies boycotting Israel. Georgia's is in the part of the code "relating to general authority, duties, and procedure *relative to state purchasing*." Arizona's anti-BDS law is located in a section of the legislative code governing the "handling of public funds." Michigan's anti-BDS law is part of a provision governing how the state department of management and budget does procurement contracts. In all these instances, the context is the same: public contracts, in the common sense meaning of situations where the government is hiring an outside vendor.

Third, the AAA leadership disregards how these state governments interpret and implement their own anti-BDS laws. State governments regularly post contract templates online, which have been duly updated to include anti-BDS provisions. But for those same states, public facilities rental contract templates *do not* include anti-BDS requirements. To take the AAA leadership's own examples once again, see Arizona (vendor contract vs. facility rental contract); California (vendor contract vs. facility rental contract); Georgia (vendor contract vs. facility rental contract); Michigan (vendor contract vs. facility rental contract). If the AAA leadership's interpretation of these laws were correct, it looks like the states that passed them did not get the memo, so to speak.

Of course one might wonder if it is nonetheless appropriate for lawyers advising clients to warn them of risks, even remote ones. After all, law is always shifting, governments violate their own laws all the time, and the future can never be predicted with absolute certainty. But the AAA leadership's position exudes no such humility; quite the opposite, it presents its interpretation of the law as unambiguously correct and describes the loss of access to public facilities in these states as a "likely impact" of passing the resolution. It advocates not for caution, but for cowardice.

> *Just as anti-BDS laws serve as an alibi for the AAA leadership's cowardice, proponents of these laws enjoy plausible deniability for any "mistaken"*

interpretations.

Bullying in the Shadow of the Law

The AAA leadership's interpretation of state anti-BDS laws is not merely wrongheaded. Its public dissemination to the Association's nearly 12,000 members is also harmful in spreading misinformation about the scope of these already very dangerous laws and possibly even setting the stage for further repression down the line.

It is noteworthy that leading advocates of anti-BDS laws have themselves never publicly offered such an alarmingly broad interpretation. Instead, they claim to take as their model anti-discrimination measures such as the federal executive order requiring contractors to refrain from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. While this comparison is misleading and offensive, it is a sign of how keen Zionist organizations have been to persuade skeptics of the laws' relatively modest scope in order to survive judicial scrutiny.

Does this mean we should now expect architects of anti-BDS legislation to come out and correct the AAA leadership's misinterpretation of these laws? Don't hold your breath. After all, such overzealous misreadings only enhance the laws' chilling effect, which is exactly what many Zionist organizations want. Just as anti-BDS laws serve as an alibi for the AAA leadership's cowardice, proponents of these laws enjoy plausible deniability for any "mistaken" interpretations. And if anti-BDS laws ultimately survive judicial review and become normalized, it is not inconceivable that today's absurd legal theory might just become tomorrow's modest legislative proposal.

Featured Image by Montecruz Foto, courtesy of Montecruz Foto

Subtractions and Accumulations

Alessio Mazzaro
June, 2023

The following curated collection of fragments outlines two main strategies used over the last ten years in the creation of contemporary artworks to memorialise events: subtraction and accumulation. On one side, the text investigates the potential of absence, of removal, as an agent of fair, respectful and inclusive representation in memorials for current crisis such as Covid-19 and the Fukushima disaster, on the other, it discusses accumulation by linking together different moments of memorialisation, as an attempt to represent as many people as possible affected by an event.

The risk with materialising and fixing in a monument a single narration is that one “authority” could end up imposing their memory onto a diverse group of people.

Therefore, in writing about memorialisation, I feel it's important to deploy an essay structure where the reader has a certain agency in the argument. The fragments are not elements linked by cause and effect in the assembly line of a linear thought. I want to give readers the space to reflect, to inhabit interstitial spaces linking ideas and writing. Each fragment in this collection can also work as a stand alone piece and the readers need not read them one after another.

(x – 1)

Making room, removing matter to represent

The artist Carla Levine invites a group of people to dig on a hill in Malibu to contain people's grief. It's August 2021. As she tells the magazine Hyperallergic , she is responding to the Covid-19 pandemic, the deaths from police violence and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests (Stromberg 2021). The excavation and the invitation continues for a week. A collective effort where the participants try to relieve the weight they carry inside, creating a space for their weight in the physical world outside of one's body.

It's 2016, the 52-year-long war between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Colombian government ends with a peace treaty in which FARC agrees to turn its military equipment over to the US government. After the weapons are melted down, they becomes part of three monuments to those killed during the war. The chosen locations for the monuments are the New York United Nations Headquarters, La Habana -where the peace negotiations were held- and Bogotá. The artist Doris Salcedo who is in charge of the Colombian monument, designs Fragmentos, a 5,000 square-foot walk-through installation that opens its door in 2018. The pavement of grey tiles on which visitors walk is made of the melted weapons—rifles, pistols and grenade launchers—mixed with steel, and shaped by women who were abused by soldiers, paramilitaries, and guerrillas during the war. Salcedo invites the survivors to

hammer the melted weapons in a cathartic action, imprinting their memory on matter.

It's 2014, Jonas Dahlberg, a Swedish artist educated as an architect, wins the competition to build a monument to the victims of the *July 22 attacks* that in 2011 killed 77 people in Oslo and the island of Utøya in Norway. Memory Wound, Utøya Memorial is a wound that removes, like a slice from a cake, a physical section of the island to create a channel.

September 2011, two cavities open to the public in New York: two voids designed by the architects Michael Arad and Peter Walker are where the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center once resided. They remember the absence, they memorialise September 11th.

(x – 2)

Cutting the line

"… during Passover you are instructed to remove drops of wine before drinking it to lessen your pleasure. Each drop removed represents a tragedy that befell those who went before you"

(Offill, 2020: 132).

Phone of the wind is a phone booth in Otsuchi, a coastal town northeast of Tokyo, where survivors of the 2011 Fukushima disaster can use an old disconnected rotary phone to call dead relatives and friends. It's mourning, one person at time, the lost connection with the loved ones. The dead come into representation as an absence rather than a presence. Their loss is memorialised through the impossibility of functioning. The phone isn't connected to any line.

(x – 3)

A statue without a shape

In her 2017 intervention *The Battle Is Joined*, the Trinidadian and American artist Karyn

Olivier enacted a semantic change. Instead of asking how a monument can represent everyone's experience, she asked how it can reflect it. Olivier covered a monument at Vernon Park in Philadelphia, the *Battle of Germantown Memorial* (Frank Miles Day, 1903), with an acrylic encasement that turned it into a giant mirror: through reflection, the people approaching it and the neighbourhood surrounding it became the monument itself. As Karyn Olivier said in her artist statement for this project, "my reinterpretation of the Battle of Germantown Memorial will ask the monument to serve as a conductor of sorts. It will transport, transmit, express, and literally reflect the landscape, people, and activities that surround it. We will be reminded that this memorial can be an instrument and we, too, are instruments -the keepers and protectors of the monument, and in that role, sometimes we become the very monument itself" (Olivier 2017).

(y +1)

In living memorials: more than one voice

The *Zip Code Memory Project* (ZCMP) is a community project initiated in 2021 and co-directed by professors Marianne Hirsch and Diana Taylor. It focuses on the Zip Code area around Columbia University in New York, and attempts to memorialise the radical, non-equal effects and losses, due to Covid-19. The ZCMP held two roundtables on Reparative Memory. In the first one, different public memorials around the world were presented and the architect Mabel O. Wilson illustrated the concept of creating an ongoing memorial about an event and the

need of understanding the long-term effects of Covid-19 prior to memorialising the victims. These reflections were based on her *Memorial to Enslaved Laborers* (2020) in Charlottesville that honours the 4-5,000 people enslaved by the University of Virginia between 1817 and 1865. It is a circular ring of local grey granite, with a diameter of 24 meters, which varies in height and has an opening in the middle section so the visitors can walk in. It sits in the garden of the University, similar to a giant necklace, embracing the visitors with a polyphony: a cloud of 889 engraved names of enslaved people and horizontal carved marks – like wounds from a whip – for the slaves without a recorded name. In Wilson's project, the stone remains ready to accommodate missing names of enslaved people as they are recovered by historians. Furthermore, the installation has become a site of gathering and demonstration for the University's students and staff.

In #quererNOver, Chilean artist María José Contreras Lorenzini's participatory collective performance from 2013, 1,210 volunteers were invited to take part in a commemoration in Santiago of the 1,210 *detenidos desaparecidos*, the prisoners that "disappeared" under the Pinochet regime. The performance that took place one day before the 40th anniversary of the 11th September 1973 Coup, consisted of volunteers laying down for 11 minutes in a 2 km line, from the government building – built by the military force during the dictatorship – to Placa Italia, one of the main squares of the city. Contreras Lorenzini described how the action was a response to political amnesia in Chile (Second roundtable on Reparative Memory, March 2022).

In Mexican artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's project for the 2012 Habana Biennale, *Last Breath*, he started from the question "How do you remember somebody who is the voice of Cuba?" He asked the singer Omara Portuondo of Buena Vista Social Club to breathe into a paper bag. He then stored the air she had exhaled and used a machine for assisted breathing to inflate and deflate the paper bag. A living memorial to safeguard Portundo's breathing even when she has died, "a machine that tries to remember her" according to Lozano-Hemmer (Second roundtable on Reparative Memory, March 2022).

(y + 2)

A personal attempt at accumulation

In 2017, during an art residency in Paris at Citè Internationale des Arts, I created walls covered in salt, a dedicated and symbolic space where the private memory of Moroccan Jews who emigrated to Paris between 1950 and 1980 was activated and shared. In this space, I invited seven witnesses – one for each day of the week – to sit in front of me and reply to three questions as a way to share their memories with me and an audience composed of relatives, members of the Jewish Sephardi community, artists, and people interested in performance or postcolonial studies. It was a living archive that evolved with the gradual accumulation of spoken stories and the connections between these stories, performed by the participants (Mazzaro 2022).

In order to document this performance, every day I proposed to a different spectator to record what was important for them, using whatever recording equipment they had to hand. Later, I edited all these filmic fragments of the performance in the documentary *5 vues sur 5 témoignages* (5 views on 5 testimonies) and have shown it in different venues across France, Morocco and Canada to trigger memories and collect new stories. In particular, I went looking for the voices I felt were missing in Paris: Jewish women, Berbers, Moroccan Muslims, and the Moroccan Jew returnees. Most of the new testimonies generated by the projections were filmed and edited in two following videos, *Shukran* (recorded in Casablanca) and *La voix feminine* (recorded in in Montreal). The two new videos maintained a reflexive and recursive relationship with the documentary of the Parisian performance and they were an attempt to expand its narratives, hosting as many voices as possible to depict the different views and experiences on Moroccan Jewish migration.

(y + 3)

Databases for polyphonic global mourning

In July 2021, I was wondering if the monument(s) to the victims of Covid-19 would be virtual spaces to represent what was a global loss. Building on the lack of physicality that constitutes virtual reality, I imagined designers already thinking of a platform for global mourning to represent and freeze the absence of human beings. Not the materiality of the stone, but a globally shared online memorial where the users could have the possibility to write personal narratives to commemorate a loss, giving a polyphonic approach to the representation of the pandemic victims, connecting sorrows and experiences around the world. However, perhaps in this memorial we would not need words, but breaths. Air entering and exiting the lungs of those who have survived their loved ones. Its sound as it flows over the nostrils and it is blown out of the mouth vibrating on the lips. A (sound) breathing memorial for those who can no longer breathe. A database, a space where you can connect and record the sound of yourself breathing.

(y + 4) or (x – 4)

A gathering becomes possible

The void – given by the subtraction of the dominant narrative – can be filled with a polyphony, like the silence with protest.

While I am writing the second draft of this text at a distance of one year from the first, I came across a paper Julie Beth Napolin wrote during the Covid-19 pandemic and defined as “a sonic ensemble” and as “a piece of writing that is, by necessity, aleatory” (2020: 43). I encountered in her piece the same urgency and sensibility for a peculiar form of writing that animated me in starting this article

and I’m wondering if the condition in which the pandemic put us was the cause. Confined at home wihin a disruption of “normal life” we may have found the strength and desire to try inventing more open-ended and archipelagic ways of representing our thoughts, going against a normative and chronological order. Modelling our thinking not on a line that advances from point A to point B, but on resonances, which propagates space in waves, which are reflected and refracted.

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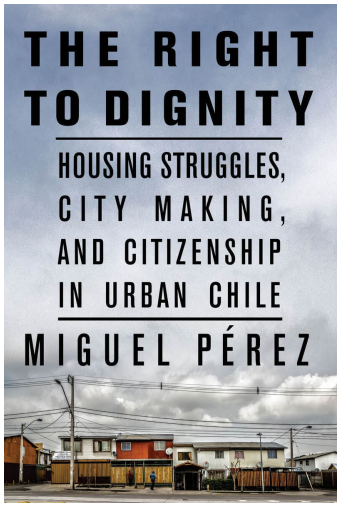
Featured image by Mari Saito

The right to dignity: Housing struggles, city-making, and citizenship in urban Chile

Indrajit Roy
June, 2023



How do poor people in the burgeoning cities of the Global South assert their right to housing and to the city? How do they constitute themselves, and demand to be recognised as, ethical-political subjects? How do they generate new political horizons? These are some of the questions addressed by anthropologist Miguel Perez in his debut monograph *The right to dignity: Housing struggles, city-making, and citizenship in urban Chile*. The book is a historical and ethnographic exploration of the *Movimiento de Pobladores en Lucha*, an urban social movement demanding housing rights for the poor on the periphery of the sprawling Chilean capital of Santiago. Perez's well-researched account of the movement and its protagonists is sympathetic, but never hagiographic. This deeply-informed work enriches our understanding of the struggles for salvaging and reinventing citizenship from the debris of social ruin wrought by the neoliberal dictatorship to which the Chilean people were subjected for nearly two decades.

> *Together the chapters in each of these two parts provoke us to reflect critically on the imaginations of citizenship amidst the inequalities spawned by neoliberalism, for which Chile is of course the poster-child.*

The two parts into which the book is divided help readers navigate the twists and turns in the collective action (Part 1) undertaken by the *pobladores,* as Chile's urban poor call themselves, and their political subjectivity as dignified subject-citizens (Part 2). Together the chapters in each of these two parts provoke us to reflect critically on the imaginations of citizenship amidst the inequalities spawned by neoliberalism, for which Chile is of course the poster-child. Against views dominant on the left as well as the right, the book is a timely reminder that poor people's engagements with welfare programs in neoliberal regimes can generate unanticipated and unintended mobilisations.

Chapter 1 introduces the context of the study and provides a flavour of its

intellectual and conceptual moorings: Perez helpfully clarifies his disinterest in "determining whether housing protests in neoliberal Chile lead to subversive social movements" and refuses to "affirm or deny the existence of the *pobladores* as revolutionary collective actors" (page 17)- approaches that promise an inductive rather than a reductive analysis in the chapters to follow. Chapter 2 situates the *Movimento de Pobladores* in the context of a Chile that was rapidly urbanising since the 1930s, leading to an explosion of a housing crisis in the periphery of its capital and efforts by subsequent governments to mitigate against this crisis by offering (but not always delivering) home ownership. Chapter 3 critically reflects on the "waiting" induced by the offer of home ownership and pushes back against criticisms that waiting demobilised the *pobladores*.

> *Perez illustrates the ways in which deploying the vocabulary of dignity allows pabladores to "constitute themselves as ethical subjects capable of addressing rights-based claims to the state".*

Chapter 4 explores the contested meanings associated with the description of the urban poor as *pobladores*, embraced by the urban poor and their movement, but shunned by the bureaucracy as leftist. Chapter 5 elaborates the "politics of effort" among the movement activists- "a system of rights distribution grounded on narratives of personal and collective effort through which the urban poor legitimise their political membership and, as a result, their capacity to demand rights (e.g. to housing, to the city, to stay put)" (p. 123). Chapter 6 distils the insights from the previous chapters to reflect on the activists' understanding of housing as a means to ensure *la vida digna*, a life with dignity- a decent society "whose institutions," to borrow from Avishai Margalit (1996), "do not humiliate people". In critical conversation with ethnographic explorations of (un-)dignified citizenship (Cleaveland, 2005; Han, 2012; Hashemi, 2020; and Nuitjen, 2013), Perez illustrates the ways in which deploying the vocabulary of dignity allows pabladores to "constitute themselves as ethical subjects capable of addressing rights-based claims to the state".

The concluding chapter reflects on the 2019 *estadillo social*, the social uprising across Chile: one of the highlights of the uprising was the renaming of Santiago's most important public square as *Plaza de la Dignidad*, suggesting the term's widespread resonance well beyond a single social movement. The protestors coined the motto *hasta que la dignidad se haga costumbre* ("until dignity becomes custom", the title of Perez' concluding chapter) to demand a new constitution that would secure social rights and replace the neoliberal constitution imposed on Chileans by General Pinochet's military dictatorship. The book closes on the hopeful spark generated by the results of the October 2020 plebiscite in which Chileans voted to have their constitution rewritten by a constitutional convention. The subsequent rejection of a progressive constitution proved a painful reminder that the struggle for a life of dignity was indeed akin to a horizon- ever shifting, offering direction, seemingly within reach but never quite. In this respect, the language of "political horizon" frequently deployed throughout the book could not have been more apt.

The analysis presented in the *Right to dignity* prompts further avenues of fruitful research. One such area is the perceived tension between universal and differentiated conceptions of citizenship. While the distinction between the two is sometimes overemphasised, might it be possible to think of these as *modalities of expressing* claims, rather than *conceptions of membership* in the political community? What might be the perception of racial/ ethnic minorities among the *pobladores* on this question? Poor people are not, after all, a homogenous category and are often acutely aware of their internal heterogeneity. Pretending that these do not exist does more harm than good to the cause of creating a unified political subject. Perez himself Perhaps future work can illuminate not only the tensions but also the complementarities between universal and differentiated understandings of citizenship and modalities of claiming it.

The hopefulness that informs *The Right to dignity* might appear quaint, hopelessly naïve, to many observers. As fear, anxiety, hatred and disappointment threaten to engulf us, it is easy to lose sight of the possibilities offered by hope. And yet, as I have argued elsewhere (Roy, 2023; Roy et al, 2022) hope remains stubbornly

persistent, defying hatred and fear, renewing imaginations of democratic citizenship. Perez's masterfully crafted work is a useful reminder of the persistence of such hope. It illustrates the recent trend towards "anthropologies of the good" against the reaction to what Sherry Ortner (2016) has called "dark anthropology" which appears so attractive to social scientists. This of course is only one reason for it to be widely read, debated, and celebrated.

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Featured image by Paulo Slachevsky, courtesy of Flickr.com.

Give a Hand To the Fallen, as Long as You Are Standing: Earthquake Disaster Relief among Afghans

Alexander Ephrussi
June, 2023

Mullah Yaqub appeared in the doorway of his Quranic school, and smiled when he saw me, shaking my hand firmly. He looked tall in his long dark-blue felted coat, wearing a black knitted cap on his head, with a silver beard, white and grey in places, and piercing light-blue eyes behind heavy eyelids.

We sat down in the little bare room that served as his office and he poured me a cup of tea. I told him that I had heard about the earthquake relief fundraising by Afghans in Istanbul, and that he was said to have organized it. He nodded and smiled, then stayed silent for an instant as if expecting another question. "In these moments, helping is not a choice, but indeed a moral duty," he finally said. I agreed with him, but pointed out that not everyone could always heed a moral duty, there were material restrictions too.

"Take the path like virtuous men, and give a hand to the fallen as long as you are standing," he said, smiled and added "Do you know the poet Sa'adi?"

The Quake

On February 6th 2023, at 4:17 in the morning, the earth shook in southern Turkey and northwestern Syria leading to widespread destruction on a scale unknown in decades. Later that same day, at 13:24 the earth shook again, toppling already damaged buildings and previously intact ones, burying thousands under rubbles.

This was the most destructive earthquake in the history of the Turkish Republic. Together the two quakes are estimated to have led to the loss of over 55,000 lives and have left a further 1,5 million homeless, practically wiping out entire cities. The entire nation entered a period of mourning that affected all spheres of public life. Schools and universities ceased their teaching, theatres closed, music was no longer heard. Volunteers in their thousands searched for ways to reach the affected areas, while it felt like all eyes were riveted on the affected areas. Public displays of mourning and condolences were ubiquitous, displayed on billboards, metros and buses across the country.

The earthquake and the humanitarian situation that ensued, beyond being a seismic disaster, bears a deeply political component since the very day it struck. After over 20 years of taxes consecrated explicitly to earthquake disaster prevention and of norms and regulations concerning the construction of new buildings, the extent of the devastation and the belated state response has been perceived by many as an utter failure on the part of the ruling government by a large segment of the population—not least in the areas most severely affected by the quake.

Migration Contention

Equally contentious in political debates in the lead up to the election has been the question of migration. Turkey is the country that hosts the largest population of refugees worldwide, particularly from Syria and Afghanistan, 3,7 million according to the UNHCR. There is no consensus however on the number of

Afghans dwelling in Turkey. Turkey plays a key role in the EU's migration policy, as a large part of people hoping to reach the EU pass through Turkey before attempting to cross to Greece or Bulgaria. Particularly since 2016 and the signature of the 'EU-Turkey deal', the EU has been 'outsourcing' the task of border patrolling to Turkey in exchange for large sums of money, paving the path to border pushbacks, which, beyond frequently violating international law, have cost the lives of thousands in recent years (Reliefweb, 2022).

Across the political spectrum of Turkey, migration is a contentious topic. The largest opposition party has been vocal about the issue, arguing that the large number of migrants in the country is yet another aspect of the AKP's failure in its 20 years of rule. It has promised to take a harsh stance on migration if it should come to power in May 2023, and to increase the 'repatriations' of migrants especially to Syria. The ruling AKP has also stepped up its deportation policy, particularly since June 2022—a date which most Afghans I spoke to remember as the beginning of far more frequent and violent arrests.

It is in this context that the Afghan population, among other migrant groups, have been struggling in their effort to remain in Istanbul, where most of them reside, and in Turkey at large. Legalisation of their stay through a residence permit or asylum in Turkey is extremely difficult and very rare for Afghans who have arrived since 2013, date at which the UNHCR suspended all third-country resettlements of Afghans. This means that most Afghans in Turkey today have no papers that could spare them deportation if apprehended by the police. Contrary to the widespread media and even academic portrayals of Turkey as a merely a country of transit for migrants on their way to Europe—a portrayal that perhaps speaks more about Eurocentric biases in these domains than of migrants' own intents—many Afghans in Istanbul do not consider Europe the necessary next step in their migratory journey (İçduygu & Yükseker, 2010). Some Afghans have set up civil society organisations, '*dernek*' in Turkish, which are recognised by the state, and which to some extent play a mediating role between the Afghan population and the state.

Efforts among Afghans to avoid apprehension and deportation do not limit themselves to legal statuses and documents, a domain to which they in any case have very limited access, but also goes through a variety of linguistic, and embodied practices, as well as drawing on material culture deployed in specific instances to navigate the gaze of onlookers onto them.

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, among Afghans in Istanbul as in all other circles, conversations invariably revolved around the recent disaster. Five days after the quake, I was invited to the house of Esmatullah, a man of certain renown in Afghan circles, working as a sarāf—involved in the business of sending remittances back to Afghanistan or Iran for other Afghans in Turkey. Accompanied by his nephew Atiq, I crossed the Bosphorus by ferry and we made our way up to Esmatullah's house in a quiet street of the Ataköy neighbourhood of Istanbul. It is there that I first found out about the Afghan fundraising for the earthquake relief efforts. Esmatullah greeted us as we entered, hugging us both. He was wearing his light grey pirāhan tunban (Afghan dress), and smiled widely as he let us in. He seated us in the kitchen-sitting room at the far end of the apartment. He brewed some green tea, as was his habit, and exchanged some news with Atiq in Uzbeki language before switching to Farsi for my benefit.

He sat down with the thermos kettle and spoke of the earthquake.

"We raised a lot of money," he said, "almost 200 thousand lira." I asked him how they had gone about it, and he said that he and some others had set up a WhatsApp group and had sent messages around.

"Inside of the Afghan community?" I asked.

"Of course—all Afghans," he said, sitting very straight in his seat.

He explained that they had contacted the Göç Idaresi (the 'Presidency of Migration Management') and asked them what was needed in terms of materials,

in the areas worst hit by the earthquake. They had received a list, including tents, tarps and blankets, which they had bought, and then organised cars to drive it all down to the affected areas.

Esmatullah pulled out his phone and showed us a picture of a tall man with grey hair, a beard, and a little knitted hat, standing before a van with its open sliding door revealing piles of wrapped goods, and another picture with a row of men standing before piled up bags, with the same bearded man among them.

I returned to Esmatullah's house a week later, curious to find out more about the fundraising.

"Tell me more about the collection of money for the earthquake area," I asked. "Have you heard anything more about it, did it all arrive?"

"Yes," he nodded importantly. "It arrived. We must have collected over 2 lakh lira [two hundred thousand lira], maybe".

I nodded, impressed. He carried on, explaining the importance of raising this money, and underlining the special bond between Turkey and Afghanistan, a point I had heard him make on several previous occasions.

"At the time of the founding of the Turkish republic, the first country to recognize Turkey was Afghanistan! We were the first to recognize it as a country. At the time Afghanistan was so far ahead, people from Europe would come and admire its infrastructures."

"It is important that Afghans help today, at the time of the earthquake. Mardom khubi kona, digrān khubi mibina, mardom badi kona, badi mibina—People do good, the good will be seen, people do bad, the bad will be seen," he declared.

He explained how help from those with the fewest means was the most valuable. "In Afghanistan, in Faryāb where we are from, people lined up, bringing all they had [following the earthquake in Turkey]. Some people brought chicken, sheep, or their jewellery, all to send to Turkey. You see, this is what having morals is. Here

in Turkey, we had 1200 [Afghan] people who signed up to go to Hatay [one of the Turkish cities the most severely hit by the quake] to help. We spoke to the göç idaresi [the 'Presidency of Migration Management'], and they said that they didn't have the means to send all these people there. If they were already struggling to house the people who lost their homes, they could not house more people. Still 200 or 300 people went, workers, to help."

"From Afghanistan, 270 people came to help the rescue efforts too," he continued with an air of pride. "And 36 doctors came, good doctors, freshly trained. When they arrived, they had no means, I mean no SIM cards for instance. We, with the dernek, [civil society organization] provided this for them."

Refugee in Times of Trouble

The border region between Turkey and Syria, the area most devastated by the earthquake, also hosts a substantial Syrian population—an estimated twelve percent in some areas. The highly politically charged themes of earthquake (mis)management and of migration collided tragically in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake as accusations of Syrians plundering collapsed houses widely circulated on social media platforms and in news reports. Investigations by researchers from GAR (Turkey's migration research association) have shown that there is little evidence pointing to the fact that theft in the ruins was perpetrated particularly by Syrian refugees as alleged, but rather that these instances arose among many different groups having lost basic amenities along with their houses. Beyond this, it is suspected that organised criminal bands drove into the earthquake stricken area for theft on a bigger scale, though there is no evidence pointing to these having been organised by Syrians. In severely damaged cities like Kahramanmaraş, the Syrian refugee population is known to have actively joined the rescue effort. However, in the context of the earthquake, the term "refugee" has widely become associated with plunder and more generally, with an aggravating factor in an already highly strained environment.

Though the case I am describing is by no means unique, efforts to fundraise within migrant circles for earthquake relief have not figured in press coverage, or in public discourse. I was therefore all the more interested to speak to organisers of this fundraising initiative. I was put in contact with Hekmatullah who, I was told, had been crucial in organising this financial support.

We sat down at a table with comfortably padded seats on the third floor of a small café in the Üsküdar neighbourhood of Istanbul with a view over the Bosphorus. A group of four young women with pastel coloured headscarves sat at the table behind us, and two men in smart office clothing a little further down. Hekmatullah looked at me. I introduced myself again, and told him about my research and my interests—he jotted something down on his phone—finally asking him specifically about the earthquake relief efforts. How did it all come about?

"We saw what had happened and knew that we had to do something. This earthquake is not a personal matter; it is a matter that affects everyone. There is a man called Maula Yaqub, he has a madrasa [Quranic school] and heads a dernek, [civil society organization]. He called me on the 3rd day of the earthquake and said 'Ustād,'—he calls me ustād [the Persian word for 'teacher'] because I was a teacher for a while in Afghanistan—he said 'Ustād, we need to do something together, to help.' We made a list of contacts, and said that we were collecting money. Within 30 hours we had collected 132,000 lira."

"Who were the people who donated?" I asked him.

"People we knew, we just sent a message around to our contacts."

"And I guess a big part of them do not have a kimlik [Turkish ID card], right?"

He raised his eyebrows, "Ninety-five percent of them don't. They have barely any money, and what they have they send to their families in Afghanistan."

He thought about the numbers for an instant—was it 132 thousand or 134 thousand?—then checked his phone, confirmed 132 and returned to his story. "Next we went to the masul-e amniat-e göç idaresi, [the security office of the 'Presidency of Migration Management'], and asked them what they needed—do you need clothes, jackets, hats, warm food, what do you need? They said you can either donate this money to AFAD [Turkey's disaster management authority], or you can buy things yourself, and said that they mainly needed blankets."

"We went to buy blankets," he continued, "but they were all sold out. So we went to Zeytinburnu [a neighbourhood of Istanbul home to many Afghans], and walked from place to place, and collected blankets, and diapers for children. We went back to the göç idaresi [the 'Presidency of Migration Management'] with all of the supplies and they organized the car, to transport this to the earthquake zone."

Hekmatullah's gaze drifted out of the window and over the sea to the European side of Istanbul. "It's a human duty, in the end," he said as he returned to this side, "I don't know what their religion is, I did not ask you what your religion is, because it doesn't matter, they have a right to help as much as anyone else, right?"

Several points of interest arise from these discussions, which merit highlighting. "*This earthquake is not a personal matter; it is a matter that affects everyone.*" The manner in which Hekmatullah explains the impetus to help, is one which universalizes this duty—it is underlined as a moral or civic duty for all, not as an act of generosity that merits gratitude. Described as a collective duty, it hints at an instance of bridging an otherwise firm social divide. Particularly in the context of the vociferous media reporting and social media commentary of migrant presence as an active hindrance to disaster relief, this act of fundraising seems to defy the crassly drawn borders between inside community and 'foreign body'—a divide, which Afghans materialises itself in innumerable contexts on a daily basis, from exploitative labour conditions, to access to medical care, but also wheedles

itself into the intimacy of interpersonal relations.

The social divide between the national community and ‘foreigners’ obviously does not evaporate despite this bridging act—particularly in this tense pre-election. However, statements like that of Esmatullah attempt to mediate this tension between ‘local’ and ‘other’ by framing it as a link between national communities highlighting a historical solidarity, rather than a question of migration—one more chapter in a historic bond in a geopolitical relationship.

Hekmatullah’s explanation however highlights a more universal impetus to help. He actively refutes a sectarian reading of this Afghan support, by underlining the irrelevance of my religious affiliation or that of the receivers of this aid. Similarly to Maula Yaqub, he mobilises a language of rights and obligations that are, in his view, universal. How can we understand this universal call to solidarity? Anthropological studies of humanitarianisms invite us to think of the variety of spheres in which solidarity is conceived to take place (Mittermaier, 2014). Studies of vernacular and Muslim humanitarianism(s) have critically reflected on the the widespread association of (good) humanitarianism as necessarily associated with principles such as impartiality, secularism, and apolitical action (McNevin & Missbach, 2018; McNevin, 2020). These perspectives choose to instead focus on the diversity of ontologies that inform humanitarian action (Iqbal, 2022). They bring to light the fact that aid is not always conceived as an action that remains within the confines of a social interaction between two actors—a donor and a receiver—in a supposedly apolitical interaction. This conceptual and analytical shift also permits to look at this action on the part of Afghans in Turkey in a way that does not attempt to dissociate the political, performative or affective character of aid from a ‘truer essence’ which would be that of altruistic and non-utilitarian generosity, and rather understand this action within the highly politicized context of Afghan lives in Turkey.

In this way, the choice of going through the Göç İdaresi for their financial support becomes all the more significant. The Göç İdaresi, officially translated as the “Presidency of Migration Management” is the state’s office in charge of

migration, which, beyond deciding on the attribution of residence permits and asylum protection is itself in charge of the detention facilities and the subsequent deportation of migrants—it is thus not related to disaster management. Afghans being one of the most frequently deported national groups, approaching the authority in charge of this very deportation strikes me as a meaningful and symbolic act. Far from insinuating a utilitarian motivation for this action, I would argue that it is a moment in which this community's understanding of the political nature of their presence in Turkey and the political nature of disaster relief work crystallises itself into an action. In an instance in which visibility and invisibility of the community can mean the difference between deportation or continued presence, choosing to act in this precise moment, and selecting this institution, is a political and performative act—one which holds a potential to momentarily challenge the relation between this group and the wider Turkish society by way of its gate-keeping institution.

The act of fundraising in this particular context cannot be said to hold a fixed or singular meaning. It does not change the material and legal condition of those who participated, nor does it set out to do so. The performative character of this action is perhaps less oriented towards the potential external onlookers—who in any case were few, as the action remained unpublished—than to the community itself. It momentarily challenges the boundary between migrants and non-migrants, and thereby to how people may relate to the space, which they inhabit, a space in which legal means are used to make migrants feel temporary and deportable.

Conclusion

In a context where legal means to ensure an enduring stay are almost entirely out of reach, other forms of assertion become all the more important. This case of a group of young Afghan workers, raising money for a national emergency is one of a number of material, discursive and embodied practices through which the 'community' draws in an effort to negotiate its relationship to its social and political environment. By including themselves discursively among those who are

in the universal moral obligation to attend to the earthquake's victim's rights to help, Afghan 'migrants' include themselves within a certain civic contract and question the citizen non-citizen divide .

I would like to suggest that the way to understand this action of post-earthquake solidarity on the part of a group of Afghans should be located in wider practices of giving in Afghan diasporic networks. It should be conceived as less of a unidirectional instance of giving—as charity is often conceived—but rather as part of a network of solidarity whose importance materializes time and time again in the instances in which the role of helper and helped have been known to rapidly reverse. Far from pointing to a culturally essentialist understanding of generosity as a timeless essence in Afghan practices, I suggest understanding this act of solidarity as an instance of complex deliberation not least emanating from a context of over forty years of violent conflict and displacement.

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Workshop rationale

What is the role of researchers in articulating critique in a time of heightened political, social, economic and environmental upheaval? What kind of critique is

necessary, possible, and useful in our current times, when the very idea of critical thinking seems threatened by authoritarian, illiberal power and post-truth politics? As such, we ask: What are the moral implications of a social science that remains mostly concerned with critique? What are the limitations of such a framing outside the walls of academia? What alternatives do we have? Linked to this conceptual preoccupation is a practical one. In a time when critical perspectives are often not welcomed by institutionalised power, ethnographers face ever more difficulties in gaining and maintaining access to legal and governance institutions. What does increasing institutional closing down mean for political and legal anthropology as a field of research, but also of practice? Brought together, these ethical and methodological dynamics in many ways reflect the balancing act between pragmatism and utopianism we also witness in our interlocutors' experiences. These experiences, which chart a delicate track between utopia and dejection can serve as a yardstick for our own reflexive practice, beyond the intellectual double impasse of cynicism and relativism. As such, we encourage participants to reflect on the positionality of political and legal anthropologists as researchers-in-the-world and, through this, on the future of research on legal and political processes.

PROGRAMME

8.30-9.00: Welcome + Coffee

9.00-9.15: Opening statement

9.15-10.45: Panel 1

Discussants: Julie Billaud (Geneva Graduate Institute) and Agathe Mora (University of Sussex)

- Rafael Carrano Lelis (Geneva Graduate Institute): *Embodiments of Global South and North Narratives on Sexuality at the United Nations Human*

Rights Council.

- *Samuel Shapiro (Laval University): Of What Is a Political Anthropology of Institutions Critical? How Is It Complementary?*

10.45-11.00: Coffee break

11.00-12.30: Panel 2 [ONLINE]

Discussant: Lieselotte Viaene (University Carlos III de Madrid)

- Sepalika Welikala (The Open University of Sri Lanka): *Protests, positionality and critique: reflections from a native anthropologist.*

12.30-13.30: Lunch break

13.30-15.00: Panel 3

Discussant: Jane Cowan (University of Sussex)

- Ali Huseyinoglu (Trakya University): *Human rights of minorities in Europe and critical thinking about the positionality of researcher: Greece as a case study.*
- Deniz Duru (Lund University): *Problematising the Politics of Recognition of Alevis on Conviviality in Burgaz Island, Istanbul: Fixing ambiguity, losing heterogeneity.*

15.00-15.15: Coffee break

15.15-17.00: Panel 4

Discussant: Matthew Canfield (Leiden University)

- Pedro Rocha Lima (University of Manchester): *Humanitarian secrets: negotiating disclosure, studying 'up' and 'sideways'.*
- Noah Walker-Crawford (University College London): *From critique to*

engagement: Anthropology between legal and political practice.

17.00-18.00: Roundtable – Critique, Political Practice, Anthropology

Discussant: Agathe Mora

- Jane Cowan (University of Sussex)
- Matthew Canfield (Leiden University)
- Lieselotte Viaene (University Carlos III de Madrid)